

# Australians at War Film Archive

## Bertram Long (Bob) - Transcript of interview

**Date of interview: 2nd October 2003**

<http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/668>

### Tape 1

00:30 **Okay Bob where were you born and raised?**

I was born in England, in Middlesex and I arrived in Australia possibly between six months and twelve months, and went straight to a farm in Narembreen, about two hundred, two hundred fifteen K's [kilometres] east of Perth and stayed there until I was

01:00 about six years old.

**What are you early childhood memories of growing up in Narembreen?**

Memories of Narembreen are fairly vague ...

**Sorry I need to stop there Bob.**

Right I was born in Middlesex, England and arrived in Australia probably between six months old and twelve months old, and went straight

01:30 to a farm at Narembreen, which is about two hundred, two hundred and fifty kilometres east of Perth. And memories of the farm are fairly vague, being so young, but I do remember some pertinent things I suppose that happened, like the giant willy-willies that used to go through, particularly when they were burning off.

02:00 It was extremely high, they were, the height of the willy-willies was absolutely amazing. Other things in my memory was a willy-willy going through the house and knocking out windows. The cat made a dash for the door but didn't make it and it had a two inch tail from that time on.

02:30 I remember that well because a visitor there put a cigarette paper on the tail, on the stub. At another time my father wanted to see how much water was in the dam. He took the kitchen table and plugged all the cracks up with clay and floated it out on the dam and found the depth of the water. Apart from that there's very little that I can

03:00 relate to the farming days.

**Did you have any brothers and sisters at that age?**

No, no I was just on my own.

**Did your parents talk about why they'd immigrated to Australia?**

My father had been in Australia prior to World War I, as a farmer. He joined up with AIF [Australian Imperial Force] and went to France as a gunner and

03:30 then went back to his home in England and married and then came out here again to farm.

**Why had he been in Australia prior to World War I?**

Well, I think he might have been a bit of a black sheep and I don't really know. He died at a quite early age so I never really got to know him.

**How did your father pass away?**

He was killed in an accident. A truck

04:00 passing his car was loaded with forty-four gallon drums and one of them fell off and came through the soft top of the car. He lingered for a few days but only about two or three days.

**It sounds like a terrible accident.**

Yes, I was about eight years old at the time.

**And were you still living in Narembeen?**

No, no we left Narembeen - I would have

04:30 been six years old. We stayed in Hay Street, Perth for a day or two before catching the mail steamer Largs Bay for a trip England. And my brother was born in England while we were there, and then we returned on the same ship, and this was Depression time.

**Why had you gone back to**

05:00 **England on this trip?**

I don't really, but I feel possibly that they wanted the next son born in England for some unusual reason - that's the only thing I can think of.

**British passport.**

British passport, yes I suppose.

**So how long were you in England before you returned to Australia.**

Only about six months.

05:30 He was quite young. Peter was quite young when we got back to Australia, and we lived in West Swan. And my father was doing some cattle sales work for a while just before he was killed. But it was all very, very short because I think everything happened

06:00 in one year. We returned here, he was killed, and I went to the West Swan School. And then my mother and Peter left to do whatever arrangements they had to do and I was left with friends and went to the Karisham School.

**Where had they gone, to make what arrangements?**

Well that's very vague. I just didn't know. But the arrangements for the funeral and things like that

06:30 I presume. I think she had a little bit of money and I'm not sure of this, but I understand she lent this money to somebody to lift the mortgage on their house and we stayed with them, this was later in Bayswater. I do recall coming to Bayswater on the train and a

07:00 horse and cart waiting for us. And we went out the end of Collier Road and off on a sand track for about a quarter of a mile, half a mile something like that and that's where we stayed, and I started school at the Bayswater School from there.

**That would be what suburb now Bob?**

It's quite near the, quite near the

07:30 Morley Shopping Centre.

**And that was just a bush land and sand track?**

It was bush land, sand track, yes.

**And what kind of accommodation did you have there?**

A very, very old house, weatherboard and iron. And my mother must have had a room there - that's also pretty vague in my memory. I didn't stay there very long actually, and I was sent to

08:00 Murray Street, Bayswater, with other friends. I went to Bayswater School from there.

**Can I just ask you quickly whereabouts your father was buried?**

Karrakatta Cemetery but I have actually never seen the grave in all those years.

**Have you taken steps to find it through the ...?**

No I haven't, no I haven't done anything of that no.

08:30 **So you haven't initiated anything?**

No, no nothing at all. I should do that.

**It's on your 'Gunna List'.**

It's on my 'Gunna List', yes, yes.

**So you were just entering school at ... Sorry what was the name of the school?**

Bayswater, yes. I started at Bayswater. That was my third school, no my fourth school actually. I started at Balworth Street School, but that was a very brief, a month

09:00 or something. And so I started at my fourth school, Bayswater, at the age of about eight, I suppose. Briefly there and then we had a shift to Gosnells, where I started at the Gosnells School at Second Grade.

**You would have been older than other second graders, is that right?**

Yes I would have been yes.

**Do you remember what that was like being the oldest in the class?**

09:30 It didn't worry me, it didn't concern me. I don't think we bothered about ages too much. It was very, very difficult swapping from school to school, swapping teachers plus I'd had no preliminary teaching at all. It was straight off the deep end as you might say.

**And what kind of a pupil were you?**

Oh, only average, only average, struggling.

10:00 **Troublemaker?**

Oh no, no. Actually there was a lack of troublemakers in those days. It's not like now.

**And why was that?**

Oh, I think discipline was pretty, perhaps harsh is not the right word but it was there. Whereas nowadays it seems to be lacking, and I think in the newspaper there's quite a theme going on as to whether they should bring back

10:30 the cane or not?

**And what do you think?**

Oh, I think a certain amount of it is necessary but not like the old, not like the old days when you got sixers.

**How often would you be disciplined with sixers?**

Oh not very often, that was the extreme, really the extreme.

**What was discipline or punishment like in the classroom on a regular basis?**

Well it was, it was fairly ordinary,

11:00 fairly easy going because most of the pupils as I said, they weren't troublemakers and the teachers, the teachers were in charge properly, really in charge and you knew it.

**So you listened.**

You listened, yes exactly.

**How long did you continue through school?**

Only to six standard, six

11:30 standard and I left to start work.

**And what was happening in your family life through your final years at school?**

Lots of things happened. We were at Gosnells and then we were back in Bayswater. My mother remarried and we lived in North Fremantle very, very temporarily. Then Inglewood.

12:00 Where I went back to the Bayswater School. Then my stepfather started to build a house out in Collier Road, again off in the sand, in a different, to the south and not the north. And that was a weatherboard and iron house. No lining in it, no ceilings but we moved in. Hand pump in the backyard for water and

12:30 they weren't too bad a years, I quite enjoyed those years. We had a huge lake at the back of us which never dried up. Progress, now of course the freeway runs through there. It's been drained and filled in and everything like that. But I quite enjoyed those, those years.

**What kind of things did you do at the lake?**

Oh we built canoes

13:00 out of, you know, pieces of corrugated iron flattened out and tar off the roads. I think most of my age group did things like that.

**So how many kids would amass down at the lake to go canoeing?**

Well mother had another three children so I've got two brothers, two more brothers and a sister. Just without any help

13:30 we could be quite active on the lake with canoes. But we did, we got visitors but we were really in the back blocks and you didn't get very many people passing through.

**What other siblings did you have?**

The next child was Jack, then there was Mary and then there was Ted. They're all still alive but my brother Peter

14:00 died some years ago with a massive heart attack – about five or six years ago.

**So he lived a fairly full life I imagine in that time?**

Yes, oh yes, yes he did indeed, yes.

**And what was home life like, just, you know the kind of rules of the house?**

There again I think parents had control over the kids and you didn't step out of line.

14:30 There was no inclination really to step out of line. You did your chores – watering the fruit trees by bucket from the hand pump, and later on of course a windmill and a tank improved the things.

**What kind of fruit trees did you grow?**

Oh we had peach and plum, apricot, that was one of the favourites the apricot

15:00 and lemon, orange. Just a small little holding.

**Did your mum make preserves?**

No, I think she was just flat out just holding her own with the conditions that prevailed. You know building the house. We would spend weekends when they accumulated a bit of money, we'd buy some plasterboard and put that up

15:30 in the ceiling first of course, and then the walls. So I think she was flat out without going down that avenue.

**And you had a good relationship with your stepfather?**

Oh yes, yes quite a good relationship, yeah never any worries there at all.

**What kind of work was he in?**

He was a sawyer and wooden box maker and worked in Fremantle of all places. It was quite a chore.

16:00 During the wintertime he would leave in the dark and get home in the dark.

**How did he get to work?**

By train. He walked a mile to the station down here in Bayswater, and then go by train and then walk home at night. Summertime wasn't so bad.

**Yeah longer days, a bit more daylight.**

Mm, more daylight, yeah.

**What kind of food**

16:30 **did your mum put on the table during those years? They would have been the Depression years?**

They were, yeah Depression years and just after Depression years it was still fairly tough going. Vegetables were relatively cheap of course, and she was quite a good cook so there was always, always ample food and fruit off the trees. We were quite successful with that.

17:00 Local people grew watermelons in season and so, yeah, we did all right.

**Did you ever enjoy a roast?**

Oh yes, she had a wood stove and always had a roast at least once a week.

**That's pretty good going during those years.**

Yes, it was pretty good going. He was a good provider and

17:30 he used to buy himself one bottle of beer on a Friday night.

**That sounds like a fairly healthy ration.**

Quite a frugal ration.

**Healthy for the liver maybe but not healthy for the appetite.**

Yes.

**How aware were you of the looming war during those years?**

The lead up to the War? Well I'd started ...

18:00 When I was fourteen I applied for a job and got an interview down at Subiaco and was accepted as a Junior Warehouse Assistant. A boy on a bike virtually.

**What kind of warehouse was it?**

Furniture requisites, upholstery requisites – covers and springs and tacks and nails and all that

18:30 type of thing. Following that, I was there for a few years, '39 of course, the war broke out. I was eighteen on the day war broke out, third of September.

**Oh we should probably go into a bit more detail about those four years you were there, between the age of fourteen and eighteen Bob.**

A bit more detail?

**Yeah, what kind of responsibilities did you have in the warehouse?**

Not very much as a lad.

19:00 I was mostly light deliveries on a bicycle. I didn't have anything to do with the purchasing or anything like that. Moving the stock, unloading the stock, opening boxes, bails and things like that were my duties. And of course the boy on the bike bit, delivering light stuff.

**What kind of a**

19:30 **bicycle did you own?**

Well, I didn't own one at all at the time, they provided one and it was, I think in those days they would have called it a grid, that was the common name for a pretty dilapidated old bike.

**Why grid?**

I don't know. I don't know where that arrived from but that was a popular phrase with young people. They'd say, "Lend us your grid for a while."

20:00 **So she wasn't too flash hey?**

It wasn't flash at all no.

**And did you have a good relationship with your boss?**

Yes, yes they were quite nice people, yeah they were nice people.

**How much were you paid?**

I started on twelve and six a week, which was a dollar twenty-five in our money now of course. And eventually over the years I think I might have got to

20:30 possibly seventeen and sixpence – a dollar seventy-five a week.

**How was that spent?**

When I was getting the twelve and six I would give ten shillings to Mum, and I think I always banked a shilling and squandered the balance.

**And what would you squander the balance on?**

Oh well, at that stage of course I wasn't

21:00 with the lads of the village going out to dances or anything, it was early days. Possibly buying things like, maybe save up for a new shirt or a tie or a pair of shoes, something like that. Very little scope for buying trinkets or luxuries.

**How did you dress for work?**

When I first started I was still in

21:30 in shorts of course. And that was rather odd when we got the letter that said I was to come for an interview. My mother had to scratch around and find some, some suitable clothes. And I had a shirt but I borrowed one of my stepfather's ties, borrowed his pair of shoes and off I went.

22:00 **Were they a good fit?**

They fitted only just.

**Was it a tough interview?**

Oh no, no quite a simple, quite a simple interview, yes.

**What happened during the interview?**

Oh I was just asked the questions, you know, why I chose to apply for a warehouse job and I did my best to tell that my mother had thought I should be in

22:30 in the bank, or in the post office, or in a warehouse, and so that happened. Apart from that they wanted to know the religion, they were very churchy people.

**Did you qualify?**

Oh yes, I qualified yes, and started the very next day as a matter of fact.

**Did your family visit church regularly Sundays?**

No, we were a mile and a half from the

23:00 nearest church excepting the Salvation Army Church. There was one out there on a hill, an old weatherboard church that was burnt down quite a lot of years later.

**So what did you tell your prospective boss during the interview when he asked you about religion?**

Well I just said I was C of E [Church of England] and that suited them because they were, they were strict Church of England people, so

23:30 that was all right, it went down okay, yeah.

**So during those years you were getting into your teens and starting to hang out with the lads and developing new interests?**

Yes, that's right. Dancing, I like dancing and two or three of us used to get together and go to the dances, and of course at that stage getting towards seventeen and eighteen

24:00 the bottle of beer on the dance night was the order of the day and yeah that brings back lots of strange memories.

**Can we go into a few of those?**

Oh yes. If you remember there used to be a lot of hedges around in those days, those conifer type hedges, and we would hide our

24:30 bottles of beer in that. We'd take so many paces from the driveway along and then push the bottle of beer in so that you'd know where to come out and pick it up.

**Is this at the dance hall or at home?**

No, this would be close to the dance hall. You could usually find some house with a hedge in it. I suppose there were a lot of bottles of beer that were lost that way too.

**So what, where would you buy your bottle**

25:00 **of beer and what beer did you drink?**

A bottle of beer was one and threepence and you could buy a bottle of beer for one and tuppence if you went into the Alhambra Bars in Perth, so sometimes we'd finish up there. And strangely enough I can recall, although I looked so young, I was the older looking of the group and of

25:30 course I was pushed into going, making the purchase. I never ever got questioned or anything.

**What was the legal age for drinking at that time?**

Twenty-one, twenty-one years of age.

**So you still had a few years to go really didn't you?**

Oh yes, yes that's right.

**Did you visit pubs at all for a draught or ...?**

No, no I don't think so. A bit later on after we were in the militia

26:00 I do recall going into a pub once every now and again, but of course once we were in uniform they didn't worry us.

**What did they have in those days the six o'clock swill or ...?**

No it was nine o'clock in Perth, six o'clock was Melbourne times yeah, but nine o'clock here.

**Do you recall seeing all the fellows heading up to the pub who were of age for**

26:30 **the nine o'clock swill after work?**

Yes it was, it was fairly popular, but of course we were very sparsely populated here in Bayswater, it wasn't like some of the more populated suburbs. Where we were out here it was all bush excepting for two or three buildings around. Very sparsely populated. So

27:00 from a local point of view I didn't see a lot of that.

**What was the nearest local?**

It was Bayswater, just down here but of course it's been built on and improved. The main bar in Bayswater was oh, half as big as this room, years ago, but of course quite big now.

**So the appearance of the building's changed quite a bit?**

Yes although the

27:30 original part is still there, accommodation things like that is, is still there. Probably on the Heritage List I would think.

**Where did you go to dances?**

Oh, main one was Maylands, the next suburb down, on Friday nights. We used to go to a dance at Gilford on Saturday nights.

**What venues did you visit in**

28:00 **Maylands and Gilford for the dances?**

The Maylands Town Hall as it used to be, it's now a library, was the venue. And up at Gilford I think it's called a Centenary Hall. Just exactly what that is I don't know. Whether it's the Town Hall of Gilford ... Still standing, they're both still standing.

**And how**

28:30 **popular were the dance on Friday night?**

Pardon?

**How popular were the dances?**

Very, yeah very popular mm.

**Do you recall dancing with the young ladies?**

Oh yes, we got around a bit. But everything was, it was very proper in those days. We used to go into the dance with a three piece suit on

29:00 and the girls all had long frocks and ... No it was very, very proper.

**And was anyone in trouble after slipping outside for a bottle of beer in the hedge?**

Oh no, we used to do it quite successfully I suppose you'd say.

**So the local police weren't on to you?**

No they didn't worry us very

29:30 much, no.

**What were the popular dances and tunes at the time?**

Oh, we used to go to mainly old time dances and then some of them had half and half, fifty/fifty I think they called it. Tunes I couldn't remember now but the old time dances like Maxina and the polkas, barn dances, the waltz.

**Did you have a girlfriend?**

30:00 No, not at that stage no.

**Any of your mates dating anyone?**

No, not really. This is prior to being, becoming say eighteen years of age. I don't think anyone had a steady girlfriend. We used to know some and meet them at the dance but no, there wasn't any steady girlfriends amongst our little group.

**So by**

30:30 **this time you must have been aware of the looming war?**

Yes, yes. It was about 1940, 1940. I supposed I would have been nineteen I think. But a mate and I joined the 28th Battalion Militia Infantry Battalion. And went into camp

31:00 in 1941.

**Can I just ask you what sort of conversations or discussions you had about the war with your mates and with your family before you decided to enlist?**

The young people, seventeen, eighteen, I don't think they really knew too ... Well they didn't, they didn't know what to expect. It was all

31:30 the possibility of a great adventure. They'd never been beyond the suburbs of Perth and to get away even to the eastern states was quite an adventure. When we mixed with the older fellows, who were many, many married men, their attitude was quite different. But of course that was quite a bit later and the Japanese had come into the war,

32:00 and they were genuinely concerned about the possibilities of the Japanese getting to Australia and concerned for their wives and families.

**Were you going to the pictures and seeing the newsreels and listening to the radio?**

Oh yes, when we could afford it. But as I say, the money was pretty tight with us young people.

32:30 We did see newsreels of the fighting in France before the capitulating there and, and Dunkirk happened. And the bombing of Britain. But not a lot, we were sort of engaged with, with doing our army thing more than anything else and while

33:00 we were in that camp in 1941, three of us applied to join the AIF and we were given a release on the condition that we went into the First Armoured Division, Headquarters Company Signals.

**Can I just go back for a moment Bob and ask you about the kind of training you got in the militia?**

Yes it

33:30 was basic training of course. We were issued with a uniform, rifle, a webby pack, a haversack and stuff like that. Mainly learning to march slope arms, order arms, present arms, all that type of thing. And as we were signallers

34:00 we had to learn telephone, heliograph, Lucas lamps, army telescopes. All these things were of course hopelessly outdated really, they were First World War stuff. Signal flags. We had to send, send off with the signal flags and Morse code, the signal flags. Terribly outdated stuff.

34:30 **Did you have a personal interest in being a Signaller or were you delegated the role?**

Well, as my friend who I joined up with, his brother was a Signaller in the 2/16th Battalion and it appealed to him so I said alright well I'll go along with that. But we had no previous training on anything, Morse code or signalling of any kind.

**And whereabouts**

35:00 **was your militia training held?**

At the camps. It was Melville, Melville was just bush of course. They had a number of camps there. While we were in camp there was also the 16th Battalion Cameron Highlanders were in camp, the 11th Battalion and the 28th. I was in the 28th.

35:30 Night Parades, there were in Lord Street in Perth or East Perth, but that's long gone now.

**What was the daily routine in the camp?**

Reveille. They'd bring around a hot cup of tea or coffee for you. The usual, you know, shave, ablutions,

36:00 parade at eight o'clock with your rifle cleaned and all, all shaved, etcetera. They would then, they'd march you around the bullring - slope arms and order arms. Get somebody out to give the orders who was not accustomed to giving orders and that would be a bit

36:30 of a mess but ... After a while we did a mock defence at, what's the name, Sorrento, the suburb of Sorrento here. Yeah and it was all sand hills in those days and we got in placements there and the guns were firing over our heads and out to sea,

37:00 and that was about the ...

**That sounds like a fairly large exercise?**

Yeah it was quite an exercise.

**So you set up a mock line of defence and ...**



Yes. And as Signallers of course, our job was to man telephones at different points along the sand hills under tarpaulins or ground sheets

37:30 or whatever with our telephone linked to the next telephone and the next one. One of the things that happened during that camp was a bit of modern equipment arrived, a Ten Line Universal Call Exchange arrived, but we weren't allowed to touch it even. But anyway we duly ...

**What was the**

38:00 **outcome of that equipment arriving?**

Well it was to be a headquarters, we were Headquarters Company and Headquarters Company would have had that Ten Line Universal Call and that meant it was ten, there were ten lines that came into it

38:30 from other companies, from the companies. We did have our own cable laying truck and cable laying teams so they would lay the cables and we would connect the telephones and in turn we would be connected to the exchange.

**But you never got your hands on it?**

We never saw it, no, no. We were discharged

39:00 from there and gave our gear back and then we were called up to the AIF to Claremont Showgrounds.

**So how were you called up?**

Oh just a call up notification you know that had report at such and such a time at the Claremont Showgrounds for a medical and injections and issue of clothing, etcetera.

**And were there**

39:30 **there quite a few arrivals that day?**

Yes, we finished up a group of about thirty. In the ultimate the group, the troop was sixty-five in all, but at the beginning there was about thirty of us and we went through all the usual induction stuff, and went to Norborne Camp where we first contacted our Sergeant

40:00 and he went into Norborne and bought thirty broom sticks so that we could learn to slope arms and march and all that kind of thing ...

**Without shooting yourselves?**

Well there was no firearms, absolutely nothing. My old rifle that I had in the 28th Battalion had 1915 stamped on it and that was a

40:30 terrible rifle.

**What kind of rifle was that?**

303, Enfield .303 Rifle.

**Why was it a terrible rifle?**

Oh the barrel was, it had had it, you know, it was worn out, the barrel was worn out.

**The rifling inside the barrel?**

Yeah, yeah. I used to get into to minor difficulties with officers because the barrel was so bad but the Sergeant would come to my rescue and say he can't

41:00 clean it, it just won't clean.

**So what kind of altercations did you have with your officers about your rifle?**

Oh they would... Inspection of the rifles, you know, the barrel, they would inspect and if it was a different officer he would call the Sergeant up with the intention of putting that man on report. But the Sergeant

41:30 would come to my rescue and say that that rifle just will not do any better than that.

**You just got a dud?**

Yeah I got a dud. It'd been out of the trenches I think.

## Tape 2

00:33 **So Bob when you were leaving Claremont what time frame are we talking about before you**

**arrived in Norborne?**

Oh only just one day's travel.

**And were you given any other opportunity to go home and see family or pack any of your possessions?**

No I don't think so. We, we would have had weekend end leave while we were at Claremont and that would have been sufficient to do any arranging

01:00 like that. We knew that the move to Norborne was imminent, and it was all done in the one day.

**And what were you issued with before arriving at Norborne?**

At Claremont we were issued with Service dress uniform, giggle suit and hats, webbing, underclothes,

01:30 had injections when we were there and all that type of thing, so we were complete for the trip to Norborne. Kit bags, haversacks.

**Sorry ah what's a giggle suit?**

That was a khaki linen, no cotton, cotton khaki

02:00 trousers and jacket which were shapeless things just for you know, just for general knocking about, just for general usage when you were not using your ST uniform.

**And they were a bit of a joke were they?**

Oh, they were a joke that's why they were called a giggle suit because they were absolutely shapeless thing - I think they just have one size for everybody.

02:30 **So how were you transported to Norborne?**

By train. Then we marched from the train into Norborne Camp. There briefly we put on a guard once, it was long enough to put on a guard. Not a long time there and then we were... Long enough for our Sergeant to get these thirty broomsticks

03:00 of course and give us training with those. Then we were marched into Norborne with all our gear, got the train on our line of course, the three foot six line was the only one in those days to Kalgoorlie. And transferred to the Transcontinental train at Parks

03:30 or Parkson wherever it is. We were quite fortunate, it was a fairly reasonable trip. We had an observation car that all the chairs and things had been taken out of, but it was quite comfortable.

**Better than a cattle truck?**

Better than the cattle trucks that we have. Later on it was all cattle trucks, yes.

04:00 Went across the, the continent, went into Adelaide, changed to another train there to go to Melbourne. Changed again there to go to Seymour, still in Victoria of course.

**How long did each of those changeovers take?**

Not long for the actual changeover, it was getting across the continent that took a long time of course.

04:30 Our longest trip wasn't that trip but we did take ten days on one trip to get across.

**How did you spend that time? What did you do to kill time?**

Oh, I think somebody might have produced a pack of cards and some dice and, and at the stops of course, when the train was changing engines perhaps or taking water it's surprising how quickly the pennies'd come out and the two-up would be started.

05:00 **Did you try your hand at the two-up?**

No, not at that stage. I was never very lucky at two-up in the few dabbles that I did have at it.

**Did they burn a hole in your pocket did they?**

Definitely, yes.

**So very little time spent in Adelaide and Melbourne on your way to Seymour?**

Very little, very little. No opportunity to see the place, although we may have been in Adelaide for a, I can't recall whether

05:30 it was that trip or not but it was fairly quick, the changeover into another train and then onto Melbourne, Spencer Street Station, another train to Seymour and then we were at camp in Old Seymour Camp.

**I should just interrupt and ask you what impression Melbourne made on you. You were saying earlier that Perth was still bush.**

In Melbourne ... We actually ...

06:00 My mate and I we got out of the train that had just pulled in and we went across Spencer Street to the other side and we were utterly amazed at the number of people and the pace that they were moving. I can remember being stuck up against a window and looking at all these people, but we eventually got out of that of course, but I do recall it was amazing how busy they were,

06:30 whereas Perth was still a sleepy hollow. Yes very, very apparent, very apparent.

**People would still that today.**

Well, I think we've caught up a lot, we've caught up a lot but it was very, very different.

**And the way people were dressed, any different?**

Oh, I didn't notice that. No I didn't notice anything about the difference of dress. There probably was but ...

07:00 There again I don't suppose it was all that different because I do know people here who used to go to Melbourne to buy fashion clothes. I knew a couple of them that did trips over, which was quite an adventure. There's no aeroplanes in those days, of course, they used to go by train or else by boat.

**They must have been quite well off folks?**

07:30 Yes, yes oh big business, big business.

**And you had dealings with them while you were in the warehouse?**

No, not really. I got to know them, I suppose you'd say socially through other people just in passing and they sort of let you know how important they are by relating all these

08:00 trips that they do.

**Well alright look shall we get back to Seymour?**

Yes, Seymour. We were in camp at Old Seymour in tents. There was some buildings there and the facilities for training signalmen were reasonably good and we did quite a bit of training there for a brief time. Remember this is all happening in 1941, and of course

08:30 we were due to go to the Middle East and we received our sea kits and if there was any pre-embarkation leave that would have been had, and we were already to go when the Japanese came into the war and bombed Pearl Harbor. That was what the 7th of December,

09:00 something like that. And that stopped our little gallop, we were no longer going to the Middle East. We had to change camps. The usual militia unit that had that Old Seymour Camp they were called up and they needed their camp so we went out further, about another five or six miles and they made a new camp at a place called Rokeby,

09:30 where we spent a bit of time there. Things were a bit...anyhow I suppose because suddenly the Japanese coming into the war ...

**What was your reaction?**

My reaction? Oh, I was disappointed that we didn't get our boat trip, but as I've said before, for the young people,

10:00 the eighteen, nineteen, twenty year olds it was an adventure. But the older married men, of which we had a few, they were the ones that were concerned about the situation more so than us.

**Were you worried that the war was getting a bit close to home?**

No, I don't think it worried us too much - not at that stage, a bit later yes.

10:30 After we'd been at Rokeby for some time we had a couple of listening posts there - one was in a dug out and one was in a tent on the top of one of the minor mountains for any sudden situation that occurred that people needed to be mobilised. We had to listen twenty-four

11:00 hours a day on shifts of three people to a shift, three people to the twenty-four hours. And then later we, we went to New South Wales.

**Before we move on I'll just do a bit of housekeeping here Bob. What was your daily routine at Rokeby? Was this the first time you'd been in tent lines?**

Oh no, no we'd been always in tents.

**What about in Norborne, were you in tents?**

- 11:30 Tents in Norborne, tents in Claremont, tents, in tents everywhere. Daily routine? Well I seemed to be getting a lot of night shift and during the day I'd snatch a bit of sleep of course. Parades were at a minimum because we had been fairly well drilled I suppose, in the normal
- 12:00 small arms stuff. Being mechanised, people we weren't issued with 303 rifles – they being too cumbersome for trucks. So at that stage we didn't have any firearms at all that I can remember. So parades... Instruction, they did have a big marquee
- 12:30 and instruction was going on there continuously, bearing in my mind that we'd only be, what would there be, two or three hundred of us I suppose. There was not an enormous amount of men. At the time the despatch writers had Royal Enfield motorbikes. They were replaced with Harley Davidsons. And
- 13:00 we then ... Some in trucks and some of us by train went to New South Wales and we finished up at Narrabri, Gunnedah and up as far as the Queensland border. And looking back on it I think that this was probably the Brisbane Line, which you may have heard of, it was a defence line.
- 13:30 An imaginary defence line that they were going to hold or try to hold if the Japanese invaded Australia.

**I have seen maps with the Rising Sun and that defence line.**

Yes so I think that we ... At that time all our regiments had General Grant tanks and General Stewart tanks from America, and they were exercising on the black soil plains and up as far as the Queensland border.

- 14:00 And I feel that you know, had the Japanese come down we would have been there to, to try and hold that, that Brisbane Line.

**So by this stage Japan had bombed the northwest and ...?**

Yes, they were in New Guinea and they were coming over the Owen Stanleys of course, and they were just stopped, I think it might have been as close as thirty miles out of Port Moresby.

- 14:30 And of course then the Battle of the Coral Sea happened and stopped the Japanese from coming further down or getting around to Port Moresby, and then it would have been a quick hop down to, to the Queensland towns. Although it seems that ... A lot of research has been done and they still maintain that at that
- 15:00 stage the Japanese had no plan to actually invade Australia.

**What do you think of that statement?**

I think that their lines of communication were being stretched and stretched from Japan down. But I think that it probably would have been a battle of opportunity. If the opportunity had been there that they certainly would have come.

- 15:30 **Well you know they were heading in our direction and they had been bombing our shores.**

Yes that's right.

**So it would indicate to me that they were going to invade.**

Yes, yes that's right. Yes opportunity I think, or lack of opportunity, stopped them.

**What was your reaction to the news that the northwest and Darwin had been bombed and that subs were in Sydney Harbour?**

We didn't hear of it. It was not general knowledge.

- 16:00 Of the few that did get through I think they squashed the information in the newspapers. I have friends who were in Darwin at the time and they were bombed but they, the information didn't get through to us so everything, everything was very, very suppressed. Like the first information that was
- 16:30 available to the newspaper was that there were about less than fifty people killed in Darwin, in the initial raid when in fact they don't know the figure but they consider it could be five, eight hundred even. Very cosmopolitan place of course, and they probably didn't have accurate records of population. I should imagine there'd be a lot of
- 17:00 odd visitors coming from Timor and places like that. So it was a pretty vague business, but we didn't have any information.

**And the general public or civilians were in the dark too were they?**

I think so, yeah I'm pretty sure they were in the dark too. Well it's been stated that the Prime Minister at the time, who was that, there was

- 17:30 Curtin I think, said that it had to be suppressed.

**So what was your daily routine at this point?**

Daily routine. We had to learn to exist in the open - no tents here of course. We did have some, some trucks and vehicles. There were armoured

18:00 cars but not enough shelter for people to sleep in. Some were sleeping under the trucks on the ground. An extra ground sheet was issued so you had one on the ground and one over you. And there wasn't a lot to do actually. We had a mobile sig office, signal office which was always busy with three shifts of people on that.

18:30 They were connected by line to different headquarters. But as wireless operators, which I was in, there wasn't a great deal to do.

**So what did you do?**

No doubt we found something to do. I can't recall actually. I did learn to drive there and got my army licence.

19:00 And then a short while later we were back on the train again, on the flattops, we had to drive the trucks and tanks onto the flattops and back across to Western Australia again.

**Just before we move on, Bob what was your exact position at that time? Were you just somewhere near the New South Wales, Queensland Border?**

Yes Gunnedah, Narrabri and up as far

19:30 as the Queensland border. Moree, Moree was the highest that they got to, I think.

**And you moved from, through a few different positions there did you?**

Yes. A friend of mine and myself we were selected as General Robertson's signallers and we had to go on

20:00 this vehicle which had two wireless sets in the back of it, and I had one and my friend had the other one. And if there was a mock battle going on opposing tanks, I would be on one side and he would be on the other side, so that the messages that came through we were able to supply the General with the information as to how the battle was going.

20:30 That probably wouldn't have taken up more than a couple of weeks I suppose.

**And where were those mock battles staged?**

On the black soil plains from out west, west of Gunnedah and Narrabri and south of Moree.

**Were they full scale exercises?**

Oh yes, very in depth stuff with the tanks and all that kind

21:00 of thing. Armoured cars, both sizes of tanks involved.

**What sort of tanks were they are what number were they?**

The main battle tank was the General Grant, as we called it here. It did have another name. I think they just called it the M3 in the United States. It was a thirty-two ton

21:30 tank and had a thirty-seven millimetre gun and a smaller gun as well. I did work the radio from the turret of one for some time. That was again, probably a couple of weeks, so these little jobs that came up filled in the time.

**What size crew did they have in them?**

Pardon?

**What**

22:00 **sort, how many were in them, how many crew?**

Driver, sig, three, four in the Grants.

**So there's driver, sig ...**

And the sergeant or officer in charge and there must, I think there was a loader too, a loader for the gun.

**So you were actually a Signal Operator or Signaller?**

22:30 **inside the tank and not a Wireless Operator?**

Wireless Operator.

**Can you describe the inside of the General Grant for us?**

Oh well, I mainly was in the turret part of it and it's pretty restricted there. You have to watch out for the recoil of the gun of course. Very heavy casting, the turret itself. Down below,

23:00 I'm a bit vague on it now, but there's not a lot of room anyway. They had ...

**So the four crew were below you?**

Yeah. They had a radial engine, a radial engine like an aeroplane, a petrol engine. I think they used to standby with a

23:30 fire extinguisher every time they were started. But that's not unusual for... I think some of the aircraft they used to standby with a fire extinguisher too.

**Just in case they ignited?**

Yeah, yeah.

**That's pretty reassuring isn't it?**

Yes.

**So you moved then to... from New South Wales**

24:00 **you moved back to Victoria?**

No we came to... We entrained, to use an army term, at Gunnedah I think, onto flat-tops, tanks, scout cars, armoured cars, trucks and we went to Tocumwal and then through to South Australia and back to Western Australia and that trip took

24:30 ten days.

**It sounds quite a different journey than aboard the train?**

Oh yeah, yeah that was hard going. Yeah, hard tucker too.

**What sort of tucker?**

Oh, what ever you could get. Oh they did have stations along the way where there had the soya stoves and were cooking up stews for the troops as the train pulled in.

25:00 Yeah, the most renowned one was Port Augusta, Port Augusta. We always reckoned that they cooked the same camel up that walked from Darwin. It was terrible.

**A bit chewy eh?**

Oh yes. Anyway we came across and... We were an advance party for our particular group and we were on a

25:30 farming property at Morawa, briefly. Yes I can remember. And another friend of mine was there and the Major asked if anybody could cook because we didn't have a cook, and he said, "Oh he'd give it a go," and he dobbed me in to give it a go with him. I don't know how they got fed, I can't recall too much of that.

26:00 **So what kind of a camp did you have set up at Morawa?**

There was no camp, it was just sleeping under the trees with your blankets and I think there might have been one of those stoves there, you know those boiler things there, but it was very, very primitive.

**And during the convoy over how were you sleeping?**

Sleeping in the trucks, yeah, oh yes, just getting,

26:30 grabbing enough sleep. My vehicle was what you would call a Ford, what's that big Ford utility thing?

**Like a pick up truck?**

Yes, yes it had enormous wheels on it and a soft top. We'd grab a bit of sleep inside that or get in the back. Yeah pretty rough going.

**And how**

27:00 **long were you in Morawa for?**

Probably a month of more, it might have been six weeks. During that time cooks caught up with us and they, pioneers caught up with us and they dug latrines and got the thing on the road as you might say. They even had a wet canteen in Morawa where you could, if you could get in there,

27:30 the two or three miles, you could get a Lady Blamey for sixpence and that was well used.

**What was Lady Blamey slang for?**

A Lady Blamey is a beer bottle cut off. I've got one here.

**I've heard something about this. How were they cut open?**

You get a string, or some of them got a wire, but we used a

28:00 string soaked in petrol, you tie it around the area that you want to break it off and soak it in petrol, light and then as soon as it's expended the petrol you put it in cold water and it snaps around that area. And then you file it down with whatever you can use to file it down with, even a piece of rock or if you're lucky enough to have anything

28:30 better than that, yeah.

**And then you had essentially a very big mug?**

You had a very big mug and as time went on they got bigger and bigger so that they were cutting the neck off about that far down.

**Just big enough to refill them?**

Oh yes, yes. Yes, so out of your bottle of beer you got about three quarters of a bottle of beer in a fill for sixpence.

**Sounds like good value.**

29:00 Oh, it was excellent value, yeah.

**So you were knocking back a few then?**

Oh yes, we'd go in occasionally, you know get a jeep or something and go in and have one or two. That was sufficient.

**And what was your role there? What was the purpose of being in Morawa?**

Well we went there as an advance

29:30 party, probably because with the wireless group we didn't have any real pressing job. The signal office people did of course. They had exchanges, phones, full of phones and all that type of thing which was essentially the main communications.

30:00 They were connected to Perth and in turn connected to the eastern states by line. And of course the less traffic on the air the less likelihood of being picked up by the enemy as being a busy station. So I guess that they wanted to do everything that they possibly could by line, which happened. So we were... I did a little bit of message delivery. I used to go to the Tank Transporters at least once

30:30 a day in the truck taking messages back and forth. Then we moved on, moved across to a far better campsite and a more established camp in, out at Minanu, which of course is on the way to Geraldton. Our groups of, of

31:00 squadrons, of tanks were distributed around about there and armoured cars also. The reason for this sudden dash to Western Australia was because there was a Japanese convoy coming down, they knew it was coming down the coast and they thought it was going to attack Western Australia.

31:30 Actually they ran into an enormous cyclone which scattered them and they never ever regrouped again for whatever reason I don't know, but that was the reason for us being there. And of course it was only a matter of months, a few months after that the threat was, was considered off

32:00 to Australian attack, or attack on Australia I should say, and we were starting to be disbanded. And eventually we came down to Perth and I was in a camp out here at Bellevue. And that was where we finally selected to go here and there and,

32:30 and myself and quite a number of others went back to Victoria, to Bonegilla Camp where we, for retraining.

**Is this something you'd elected to do or were you nominated ...?**

No we were, we were selected for it, yes.

**So what kind of training had you been selected for then?**

Well it was a matter of going through the preliminaries again. We

33:00 reckoned the bloke in charge there we reckoned was the Mad Major.

**Who was that?**

Oh, I can't remember the name. He was a First World War man, and of course he reckoned that we should be trained for trench warfare. So there were all kinds of, all kinds of nasty things that he used to ... Gas attacks and we went through, through tear gas there and other gases,

33:30 not actually to inhale of course, they were careful to do that but then they did show different gases – the mustard and the phosgene and different things. And we had to go through the tear gas without any masks or any protection on. Quite nasty.

**What was your reaction or the symptoms?**

Oh you howled your eyes out.

34:00 **How long did the symptoms last?**

Oh, I suppose it was, you know, a few hours after you'd feel discomfort but I guess in half an hour or so you know, you're back to reasonably normal. But fortunately we didn't stay there very long. A Major Israel called there and he wanted volunteers for

34:30 Z Special Unit. And he said I can't tell you anymore than that but you'll be doing some unusual things. So he got a lot of volunteers. And we travelled from there to Fraser Island, Fraser Commando School.

**How many volunteers went to Fraser Island?**

From the time I was there, and the two groups that were sent away from there I would say

35:00 oh it could have been as many as twenty.

**How many put there hand up with you when you heard that you'd be doing some unusual things?**

Ah one, two, three, four, about five of us, yeah. Five of us. We were all accepted and ah

35:30 all five of us are still alive too, yeah.

**So what happened when you arrived at Fraser Island Bob?**

Well before we arrived at Fraser Island we arrived at Urangan, of course the little village there with a jetty and there was an officer there and he said, "Righto you guys there's your transport, it's called the Alatna. If you can push it off the mud you can

36:00 travel to Fraser Island and start your training." So we got into the water, knee deep in mud, chucked our gear aboard and pushed her off and got the, got her going.

**Were you kind of wondering what you might have volunteered for?**

Oh definitely, definitely at that stage.

**Did the boat look sea worthy?**

Oh yes, quite a nice little boat. Yeah, quite a nice little boat. She was lost in the China Sea later,

36:30 she ran out of fuel. And I think one of the destroyers tried to tow her and it wasn't successful and she sunk. But anyway we got over to the Island and reported in there. Saw a few fellows there that we had seen previously. Put into tent lines, put into a group. I think our group was called

37:00 R8. Training groups of oh, say twelve people at a time.

**How were you met or greeted when you arrived? Any better than the way you were farewelled?**

No, no, no just, up the sandhill you guys, and somebody must have met us but I can't recall,

37:30 but we were given some tents to move into and we did that and then we started on the eight week course. And the eight week course, I've still got a syllabus somewhere, physical training, map reading, demolition, small arms instruction, medical instruction,

38:00 how to stitch somebody up you know if he's got a gaping wound, and how to give him a quarter grain of morphia. And of course signalling, horse riding, packing pack horses, folboating. Yeah, there was quite a range of stuff.

**Well I should just ask you here what were the names of the other five blokes that you arrived there with?**

38:30 Burnie Palmer, he lives in Bayswater, Roy Campbell lives in Brentwood, one of those places out there. Bill, Bill, no Bill Clapsal didn't make it, no that's right he was turned down on medical grounds. No, there must have been only four of us got in there. Jack

39:00 Flinders and Reg Taylor. Reg Taylor's dead, Jack Flinders is dead and the other three of us are still okay, yeah.

**And how close a mates were you at this time when you arrived at Fraser Island?**

Pretty close. We'd been soldiering on for what two years, over two years together. Oh, Jim Nichols is



another one too, Jimmy Nichols, yeah.

39:30 Jimmy's gone he, he didn't make it. Yes.

**So you guys were what twenty years old when you arrived there for training?**

Yeah, I suppose I would have been twenty. Some of them would have been a bit younger, some might have been a little bit older but all around that twenty age.

**This must have been a twenty year old's dream to be on this island learning all of this special training with the Z boys?**

Yeah I guess so, I guess you could say that. Like a boys annual ...

40:00 Yeah it was very interesting and challenging. Yes, there were a couple of things there that were very challenging.

**And how long were you there?**

Eight weeks.

40:30 **Was there any kind of acclimatisation or initial briefing when you arrived?**

No, I think that in the main they knew we were old soldiers and you just get shown your tents and then the next morning you'd probably be given a run down by a Sergeant or Warrant Officer

41:00 as to what your syllabus was and you get ... The Officer or Sergeant or Warrant Officer Instructor knows when he's got to pick you up so you, you're at ten o'clock, right you mob, demolition. Eleven o'clock, right, PT [Physical Training]. So everything sort of worked like clock work.

## Tape 3

00:30 **Just before we get onto some of the most challenging elements of your time on Fraser Island I just want to ask you a couple of little questions that I thought about when I was sitting behind the camera. When you found out that Pearl Harbor was bombed was that an enormous surprise?**

Yes, it was a surprise. I can remember the day quite vividly. We were at Old Seymour Camp and

01:00 we were paraded and the CO [Commanding Officer] gave us a talk on it, and I can remember some of his words were that the Japanese made this dastardly, sneaky attack on, and he really, he really put in sort of very devastating words

01:30 on Pearl Harbor. So yes, I think it shook everybody at that particular moment and of course more so the older fellows than us young blokes who were in it for the ride and the enjoyment and the adventure.

**There's been some interesting comments from some folk that we've talked to over the last month or so about the HMAS Sydney when it went down off the coast of Carnarvon.**

02:00 **Some people are suggesting that it might have actually been hit by the Japanese.**

Yes, I have read that, several times I've read that. There was a Japanese submarine and it's ... There's writings on it that it circumnavigated Australia and they were on their way back to Japan around about that time, although in fact they hadn't come into the war so it's, it's

02:30 problematical.

**I was just wondering if you managed to talk about it with any of your Z Force mates?**

No, no I haven't. I've only read articles on it, several articles that have been written on it, about the possibility.

**You mentioned something also earlier as part of your training with signals. What is a heliograph?**

A heliograph is mirrors.

03:00 They have a set up, a tripod or something like that, it has a mirror on it which has got an axis so that it catches the sun and you can key it at the back. So you flick it onto the sun and off the sun. And of course, you first of all have got to focus on the chap you want to send it to who might be

03:30 a mile away or more. And having done that you can start sending Morse by heliograph, by mirror virtually.

**Do you both have to have a heliograph?**

Yes. And very often a telescope too so that if he's at a very great distance you can pick up his signal. And the same telescopes were used with the Aldus lamp,

04:00 and that was a hand held lamp that you had a sight on the top and you pull the trigger. Very primitive. I bet there's something in the museum of that kind of stuff by now.

**It just sounds extremely involved.**

Yes, yes.

**Apart from that it can't be good as far as security's concerned because everyone can see it.**

No, that was the big trouble of course, and the flags because you know you've

04:30 really got to stand up there and wave your arms about with the flags. Yes, very outdated, very outdated the whole lot.

**Was it difficult to learn that whole process of Morse code and heliograph and ...?**

Ah yes, yes it's a slow thing. Morse is a slow thing to come to you and then it's like a second language and it's automatic. I can take up a key now and send a message.

05:00 It's like riding a bicycle they reckon.

**I also wanted to find out why you originally made the decision to join the army because there are other services that you could have joined?**

I suppose it was my friend, his brother being in the 16th, and he said, "Well I'm going to try and get my brother to claim me so I'm going to join the army." And it just seemed quite natural that I'd

05:30 go with him, and that's the way it happened.

**Fair enough. So now fast forwarding back to where Julian [Interviewer] left off. When you were training on Fraser Island what was the most challenging thing about the training?**

The most challenging individual thing or just generally?

**For you what did you find the most challenging?**

Ah I suppose

06:00 folboating.

**What is that?**

Big canoes, seventeen foot canoes, two man canoes. They're made up and a skin pulled over them so they're a lot of frames and rails and they all fit together and the skin pulls over them. That was probably one of the, of the most ...

06:30 yeah scary.

**Was it hard to put it together?**

No, no it wasn't hard putting it together it was just going out at night time with no moon and told to, to meet a motor boat out at the boy in anchorage off the Mary River in Queensland. And they gave us a compass bearing

07:00 to go on, and this fellow and I, we got into awful trouble because we didn't allow for the four knot tide.

**Sorry the ...?**

The four knot tide taking us out to sea. So we never got out to sea, we came in on a little island. So we knew we were Australian, we realised the four knot tide. So we changed direction but we didn't ever find that motorboat.

07:30 **So what was the penalty for not finding the boat?**

Oh, you just didn't get selected for a nautical operation - I guess that was it anyway, yes. But the biggest worry that night was the sharks and porpoises fighting.

**Really?**

Yes, they were coming out of the sea and slapping down. I wasn't familiar with it at all

08:00 but the other bloke had apparently done it before and I said, "What the hell's that noise?" And he said, "Oh it's just the sharks and porpoises fighting." Yeah jumping out of the water and slapping back.

**I didn't know there was a battle on between the porpoises and the sharks?**

Apparently there is.

**Well you wouldn't want to get caught in the middle of that.**

No, no a flimsy canoe wouldn't want to get caught with them.

**What were the facilities like at Fraser?**

08:30 Oh pretty basic. To all intents excepting cook house which was from memory rough timber construction, iron roof, soya stoves, pretty basic and the cooks and general duties people,

09:00 they were very good, they used to put up good meals for us.

**What sort of meals?**

Well, in the morning you'd get porridge or something like that and there'd be bread and jam, and of course those were the days when you got, as the army used to call it 'goldfish' for breakfast - that was a

09:30 a fish of some sort. Goldfish, asparagus from Tasmania, apple jelly from Tasmania, powdered egg. Not all that appetising but if you'd hungry it's not bad tucker.

**Well it sounds like they're not actually feeding you too badly?**

Oh no, no it was good.

10:00 **How often would you get a meal?**

Oh, we had the regular three meals.

**What time would you get up in the morning and what time would you hit the sack?**

Oh, I suppose it would be six, five-thirty, six in the morning and the generator would go off at ten o'clock so you were expected to be in bed by that time.

**So that's a pretty long day?**

It is a long day yes.

10:30 **So what was the exhaustion like in regards to the ...?**

You'd sleep well, extremely well. It was, some of the things were heavy going. The signalling was light going and the medical was easy. You sat in a marquee or tent or something like that and got instruction on how to do these things, and what sulphur was for and different things, and how to stitch

11:00 up and all that kind of thing, for anybody who'd been injured. PT of course was tough, in deep sand. We used to have wrestling rings. They were made of... I can't recall what they were made of, I think they might have been made of old tyres, and you had this sandpit

11:30 and you wrestled the other bloke in the sandpit. And of course the Warrant Officer would be watching over and saying alright get his eyes, get his eyes and we'd be all perspiring like mad, and of course you'd get somebody's eye and go like that, because often we had eyelids with very little skin left on them. So it was tough.

12:00 And it had to be dinkum to do what you wanted to, do what you had to do I suppose.

**How much more intense was this training than other training that you've found in the past?**

Oh much, much more, yes, oh yes. Twice the training plus I'd say. And of course, a different type of training. There was no parading with sloped arms or anything

12:30 like that but nevertheless it was a busy, busy day and you went from sweating in the bull ring wrestling to swimming and you know, you'd do your syllabus, riding one day and how to pack horses. Demolition, blowing things up and... Very challenging. And most of the people that

13:00 that I know said they wouldn't have missed it for the world, yes a great challenge.

**What were you told about interrogation?**

If we were captured? Not to get captured. That's why we had the cyanide pill.

**Tell me about the cyanide pill?**

Well it was a little latex thing about as big as a large postage stamp with the tablet

13:30 between the two layers of latex. So you could put it in your mouth quite safely but once you bit on it I think it was three, three seconds or three minutes whatever, it was pretty quick.

**That's a pretty alarming piece of equipment to get issued with?**

Yes some people didn't like it. I've read different articles

14:00 on different peoples approach when they were issued it. Some immediately threw it away, some

destroyed it. They wouldn't, perhaps for religious reasons they wouldn't take their own life. I kept mine for quite a long time.

**Where would you keep it?**

Well I suppose in the pocket of a shirt of something like that, but

14:30 you'd have to have it pretty handy wouldn't you?

**Well yes indeed. Ah well, you'd know. But were you told ... I mean there is always a chance that you would be interrogated and you know captured, was there any training that you got on that level apart from just well hey here's the pill don't get caught?**

I think it was just here's the pill.

15:00 After all if they didn't want you to use the pill they'd have given you some pretty thorough instruction on the possibilities of interrogation but I don't recall any.

**How about teaching you to interrogate POWs [Prisoners of War]?**

No, it didn't come to our field as Wireless Operators. Possibly, you see there were other people going through different classes of

15:30 eight or twelve people, going through all the time, so possibly with some of those, yes interrogation, small arms people.

**I'm just wondering if they're preparing you like psychologically for ... I mean even though you're a Wireless Operator you can still get captured, you now you can still get interrogated, you still might have to ask you know, some guy some questions if you're the only one left so I'm just wondering if they're preparing psychologically for**

16:00 **any thing that you might ...?**

I don't recall, I don't recall it. We were flat out doing all our courses and keeping to the syllabus. There didn't appear to be any extra things beyond that point.

**How about interesting pieces of equipment? Were you issued with other pieces of equipment such as you've just mentioned this suicide tablet. Were there any other strange things you were issued with as part of essentials?**

Yeah,

16:30 the well rod pistol which was, at the time, it was a thirty-two millimetre single shot pistol silenced, and all you would hear was just a click, and that was issued to us. I had one but I never ever used it but it was ... If you were in close to an enemy

17:00 I suppose, and you wanted to get a guard out of the way or something you could press that fairly close range and all they would hear was a click and he'd be shot. Since then of course they have updated that. I don't know whether I should be saying that.

**Are you still interested in that side of things?**

17:30 Oh, a bit rubs off now and again. Yeah, they had silence stings too, the nine millimetre machine pistol sort of thing, machine gun, sub machine gun. They were silenced, but there again they weren't all that good because as you can imagine,

18:00 the thing firing and going back and then firing again there is a lot of mechanical clapper even though you don't hear the report. Our wireless sets were rather marvellous, with a hand generator and a tripod that you sat on, so you had to have one person winding the hand generator while the other operator was doing the key work.

**Was this really**

18:30 **new for its time?**

Yes, yes it was very much advanced I feel. Much more advanced. The range and everything and the power that it could put out was vastly different from the other stuff. Even the tanks sets they were pretty good, but even this was much, much better. I had no trouble getting back from Borneo to Darwin at all,

19:00 absolutely no trouble with a very, very basic piece of wire as an aerial.

**What made these particular wirelesses so good?**

I suppose yeah, it's just research that ... They'd come up with this thing. The generator I suppose would be the greatest asset because it was possibly producing more than any battery or

19:30 dry cell could produce, so yeah, it was a pretty remarkable piece of equipment actually.

**Did you make any real close mates when you were training on Fraser Island?**

Yes, yes. I was with, I came in with several mates of course and we stayed together fairly well, and there were others too

20:00 that I got quite friendly with. That's one of the things that was noticeable – if you had a good mate you didn't go in on the same party as him, on the same job, for the simple reason you know, if you saw him hit you might go to his rescue and that's what they didn't want. You had to be sort of individual.

20:30 So therefore, in my team of four, there was a Major who was out above my rank. There was a Malay Sergeant who I knew but only just casually. And there was a Bren gunner instructor who I knew but there again casually and myself. So you wouldn't feel

21:00 perhaps inclined to put yourself in a dangerous position to go to one of their, one of them that might be in trouble.

**But that's got to give you a bit of a bit of an uneasy feeling though to know that you know if you get hit and something happens to you out on the field ...?**

Oh yeah, well that's part and parcel of the deal of course. You know, if the whole lot of us thought, oh poor

21:30 old Jack he's been hit and all rushed over there and we all got hit that cancels out the job. So it's possibly a ruthless attitude but they run a pretty ruthless ship.

**Indeed. And so what would happen if ... So you're in groups of four are you?**

Well our aeroplanes used to have four

22:00 parachutists in.

**What happens if you really don't get on with one of the people in your group?**

Well it didn't matter much because we were all separate. I operated on my own. But there again I could sort of explain gradually as we get to the aeroplane part of the deal.

**Okay. Well let's move on from... You've completed your training**

22:30 **unless there's something else about the training that you'd like to share with us?**

Yes, well it's worth relating. We were sent to Mount Martha, out of Melbourne, and at that stage of the game we were going to be landed on an unknown destination, it turned out to be Borneo, by submarine and folboat or inflatable. So we were

23:00 sent down there where we had to simulate a submarine landing from Port Philip Bay. And the inflatables were loaded with kerosene tins full of sand that were wrapped in Hessian, and then ropes so that they wouldn't make any noise. And these were loaded into the inflatable and they had outboard motors to bring them ashore and some of us would be listening

23:30 on shore to see if we could hear their motors or hear their paddling. And then when they came ashore we'd cart the stuff up this cliff at Dromana, to the top of the cliff and then do it again the next night. And of course that idea was changed after we'd done a few night exercises and we were

24:00 sent off to Richmond Air Base to do the parachute course, which we did.

**How did you find that?**

I didn't mind going out of aeroplanes but I didn't like going on the, what do they call it, the high wire thing, you know the ... You'd jump out of a tower on a pulley and of course you're looking down and you can relate to this height of thirty

24:30 or forty feet or whatever it is, and it's does something to your mind – I shouldn't do that, I know I shouldn't do that. But once you get up in the aeroplane you look out, you don't even look at the horizon, you look up into the sky and there's no feeling of height so it's much easier.

**How long were they training you with the**

25:00 **parachuting?**

Very quickly, about, about two or three weeks and you did your seven jumps, one every day for seven days and you're out of there.

**They just throw you out of the plane a few times and send you on your merry way?**

Yeah DC-3s we did our training in, DC-3s. And the first run was a... The plane was loaded with say

25:30 X amount of potential parachuters, twenty or something. They'd do one trip around and one would parachute out. He'd go around again and another one would parachute out and they would build it up to

the ultimate when the whole lot went out one after the other quickly. The first jump I did I landed okay, and as

26:00 I was waiting for the second trip around and I knew the chap coming out and his parachute half developed and then it collapsed and half developed again, just half a parachute and then it collapsed again, and we were watching him and thinking if he's lucky it'll develop near the ground and he'll land all right and

26:30 he did. Yes that was our first experience of something that could have been quite nasty.

**Nasty.**

The night before our first jump a fellow got killed and that was going through the camp like wild fire.

**Were accidents are common phenomena?**

Oh yes, I think you would say

27:00 they were. We didn't have a great deal to do with the Parachute Regiment that was there. Our people didn't have any problems, but I would say where they're making a business of it with a thousand men or however many of the men were in the Parachute Battalion or Regiment, there would be knees and ankles and stuff like that continuously.

**Yuck.**

27:30 **So at what point do you actually realise that you're going to Borneo, that being your mysterious destination?**

We weren't told until we had done our training, our two jumps out of the Liberator bomber at Leyburn in Queensland. The first team, the advance party of eight had gone,

28:00 and we were two weeks behind them and we were told just before we got on the plane. And then we flew to Darwin for a night. They were there to pick us up, take us back, make sure we never contacted anybody. Next morning we were on the plane again to Morotai. One night there.

28:30 **Were you being able to sort of ...?**

Oh we could mingle at Morotai, yeah we mingled with their own people up there.

**What was the base like at Morotai?**

Very jungley, very wet and very busy, yeah well they had a good hold there.

**Very busy doing what?**

Oh busy with aeroplanes coming in and out, and of course, they were holding a perimeter there so the Yanks had to

29:00 have a team up this perimeter line because the Japs had the other end of the Island. And they reckon when they had this picture show going the Japs used to watch it at the back of the screen and our fellows used to watch it at the front of the screen.

**It sounds like quite a bizarre situation.**

Yes. Next day it was on to Mindoro Island.

**What did you think of the climate over there because it would been quite**

29:30 **sticky?**

Oh yes, very, very sticky because it was on almost sea level, not high ground like we had in Borneo. We had some beautiful weather in Borneo. At Mindoro Island we arrived there... It must be imminent.

**Can we just have a bit of a pause for a second.**

30:00 **We were just talking about your arrival at Mindoro Island?**

Oh yes, that's right we arrived at Mindoro Island, yes. And we received a message there, quite a long message that had been sent by the Advance Party in Borneo back to Darwin, back to Melbourne and then back to us.

30:30 **This is all via wireless?**

Yes, completely unintelligible. There wasn't a thing in it that we could pick up. Major Carter came to us two wireless operators and said, "Can you make anything of it?" And there was only one little phrase there of the words that made sense and that was "not come in". All the rest of the page was complete garble.

31:00 **Well how does that happen?**

Cipher. The bloke in ciphering had made a mess of it. And so he called us together and said, "If anybody wants to drop out they can do so because of this only piece of the message we can read, but," he said, "I'm going in

31:30 with those of you who wish to come in with me tomorrow morning, three o'clock." And everybody went.

**Sorry, going in where?**

That was the drop in to Borneo, Central Borneo. We had a little religious service in a tent and that's always stuck in my memory as most strange because we had a parson they found from somewhere.

32:00 And we had Roman Catholics, Church of England, Methodists and Mohammedans, Muslims all in one little group. And I thought how strange, the eight of us there of so many different beliefs and yet we're all sort of in the one direction at the moment.

32:30 Yeah, it was something that stuck in my memory. Anyway we took off at three o'clock and I had a sleep and when I woke up I could, I looked out the window and it was just becoming daylight and I saw this big mountain, it was Mount Kinabalu which they said on their charts was, was

33:00 nine thousand odd feet and they were flying at ten thousand odd feet and it was going up and up and up. So eventually it was established it was thirteen thousand odd feet. But it could have been a dangerous thing, but of course their radar would have told them in time. So that was the morning we, we dropped in.

**Why did you actually have to drop in at that time,**

33:30 **could you not wait for another message and send a message back and say well we stuffed up the last one tell us again?**

I suppose we could have done but Major Carter decided he was going in and that was it. And as it happened when we landed we realised that they couldn't handle the cipher and the

34:00 wireless operator was a 'nerve operator'. I'm talking in wireless operator terms now aren't I?

**Yeah, I want you to tell me all about it. We love all those wireless operator terms.**

Yeah, well a 'nerve sender' is someone who's hand is vibrating before he touches the key and he was... I knew him, I knew him well and I knew

34:30 he was a nerve sender but I didn't think he would be that bad as to mess it all up. But when we landed there we found that there was three of them out of the party of seven, no it would only be six, out of a party of six, three of them were working on the cipher trying to get their message across. And anyway ...

**Why that many?**

35:00 Well bluntly, obviously, the wireless operator wasn't able to do it so he, he told Tom Harrison, the Major, that you know, he was just not having success. And Tom threw his lot in with it and he got one of the other blokes too. But when we landed our Major asked me

35:30 would I stay behind and try and fix up their radio contact and then come along later on with him. They were gone the next morning a hundred miles away. So it never happened, I never caught up with them.

**Sorry, just taking you back a little bit. How did you land, did you actually jump out of the plane?**

Yes. They have like a child's slide to the camera

36:00 hatch. The camera hatch is at the back of the plane and this slide, you just jump in the slide and let yourself go and watch you don't hit your head on the way out. Yes, we were supposed to jump at a thousand feet but they couldn't get down because of the cloud so we jumped at three thousand feet. And when I got out I looked for the others. I couldn't see

36:30 the immediate one in front of me. I don't know where he got to and I certainly couldn't see the fellow behind me or I couldn't see the Bren gun's own parachute but I did see our Major going through the cloud flat out with a whole lot of panels of his parachute all broken. And I thought, oh well Bill's gone, he won't recover from that lot.

37:00 But as it happened he landed in a swamp and he, he was all right.

**Because that's got to be a sort of a hit and miss actually jumping out of a plane?**

Well, they used to give us parachutes that had done a hundred jumps already and been pensioned off. So and they knew they weren't getting them back again of course, so they used to give us the ones that were tired. And Bill was sixteen stone and his was

37:30 very tired. Anyway there were some signals sent after that little lot and in future it was brand new nylon

parachutes.

**Well so it should be it you're going to risk your life into a situation like that the least they can do is provide a decent parachute.**

Yes.

**You said the Bren gun has its own parachute?**

Yes.

**How do you find it?**

Oh well, it was up to the Bren gunner to

38:00 hang about and try and find it, which he did. And I was number two on the Bren but I was a long, long away from him. He was blowing his whistle to try and attract my attention to go his way but ... Actually I didn't see him that day. I didn't see him that day and it was about in the 1950's, 1950's, years and years later

38:30 that he came into my shop and said, "Where the hell did you get to when I was blowing me lungs out with that whistle?" Yeah.

**That's pretty funny.**

Yeah it was, it was a conspiracy.

**How would you find each other because I'm assuming that there's like maybe a kilometre that you could spread over?**

Yeah, longer than that actually. From three thousand feet we were well dispersed. I,

39:00 I saw Bill go through the cloud and I approached the cloud and went through it and when I came out the other side the sun was shining and I looked down and it looked like there was a paddock of stumps, tree stumps and a river. And I didn't want to land in the river and I didn't want to land in the tree stumps either so I slid the parachute to one way

39:30 and eventually landed on the bank and all these tree stumps were in fact little tufts of dark green rushes so they wouldn't have been dangerous. And I was close to the Long House actually and there was a team of locals that came out to greet me.

**Sorry, Long House?**

Yes, the village Long House, the village yeah.

40:00 Their houses are built and they keep building, extending. I've never seen the longest one there but somebody said the longest one was a quarter of a mile long. That's a long house.

**So you were actually landing quite close to a village at this stage?**

I was yes.

**And what did you think of the locals?**

40:30 Very, very primitive. They were about the most primitive people on Earth I suppose.

**It must have been a bit of a culture shock?**

Yes it was. Oh we managed it alright you know. They were brown skinned people and some of them had bark jackets and bark lap-lap things. The girls just wore a little thing around there, nothing else, and ears

41:00 pierced and earrings hanging down here. But they were good workers.

**Were they happy to see you?**

Oh yes delighted. Apparently there was a bit of scepticism when the advanced party landed. They didn't know what we could do about these Japanese people that were being a damn nuisance there, but

41:30 they, they landed with a Bren gun and they gave them a demonstration of what the Bren could do and that convinced them that oh these guys are going to be alright. So yeah, we were okay.

## Tape 4

00:48 **You said that the Japanese were a bit of a damn nuisance. It seems like a bit of an understatement but what had you heard about the Japanese up until this point?**



- 01:00 Nothing, nothing until we went in there, of course. But at that time some of the fellows gleaned quite a bit of information as to what had been happening. The Japanese had been through most of the areas but now they were on the borders of the country.
- 01:30 They had, in some instances, taken some of the Chief's children to be educated down on the coast, which didn't go down at all well of course. They had metered out a bit of punishment here and there which... And of course the main thing was that everything that the people inland used to enjoy,
- 02:00 purchase of material and perhaps a shot gun or something like that, had completely dried up. They were barely able to get enough food, rice etcetera. Because the Japanese were demanding that rice be sent down so each village had to contribute so much to be sent down to keep the Japanese going.
- 02:30 And they would send parties up inland with porters to collect whatever rice was available. And of course with the coming of the 'Ants', as we were called, 'Semut' means ant in Malaya, this all started to change gradually much to the delight
- 03:00 of the local people.

**How were the Japanese policing this required rice collection?**

They would send, not necessarily their own people but a couple or two or three of Malay or whatever people who were in their pay to oversee the porters and

- 03:30 send a group of porters into cart the rice out. I didn't have very much to do with that. Being a wireless operator I was more or less on some mountain top receiving and sending, coding and decoding, was my lot in life.

**With the village that you landed next to is that where you actually set up base?**

I set up

- 04:00 base there for a very short period of time, perhaps a couple of weeks. Pretty difficult to put a time frame on these things now looking back on it. I did work from there. I was sleeping in a jungle hammock half way up this mountain and operating from a very, very small shelter, just enough to shelter
- 04:30 the wireless set and, and the hand generator. Each evening a couple of the locals would come up the muddy leech infested track and they would wind the generator for me, for an hour or a couple of hours, however long it took to send and receive. And then the next morning I'd decode and send off to the boss
- 05:00 and he'd send me more stuff back and I'd encode it and send it away that night.

**How would you know when to send or when to receive?**

Oh, we had a time schedule to send messages to. I can't recall exactly but I know it was just after dark because they use to come up with their torches, their dammar flaming torches to light their

- 05:30 way up, and their rolled cigarettes and impress upon me that I had to have one.

**And what were they like?**

Very strong, yeah and very crude and about as big as a large cigar.

**It doesn't sound good at all.**

I don't think it was really good, no.

**Can you tell me about some of the codes**

- 06:00 **that you'd have to employ as part of your job?**

Yes, you've probably heard of the One Time Pad. No? That was the main one because that's an unbreakable one, still unbreakable. And it's, it's all to do with numbers and subtraction. So you get a number from a code

- 06:30 book which has a phrase next to each number and whichever phrase you want to put down you select that number and you put it in a transcription book and you take that number from their number in the transcription book and you send the result. So that you're never ever sending the same numbers twice for the same thing. It gets a bit involved.

**It sounds like**

- 07:00 **you have to have a bit of a mathematical brain really to decipher some of these codes.**

Oh yes I suppose it's something you do or you don't do. Bearing in mind of course, that I'd had a lot of training - I'd had two or three years in signals and they recruited signalmen from a wide area. Some of the signalman they trained thought they would

- 07:30 have recruited would perhaps, battalion sigs or regiment sigs or anything like that which were only required to do simple codes and ten words a minute. I'd had a lot of training with divisional stuff so in consequence I'd been trained better and had a better knowledge of it.
- 08:00 **What was the hardest part about interpreting code under the circumstance and conditions you were living in?**
- The hardest part would have been the fact that you haven't got a table as such, it's only a bamboo thing you know, and you've got to have somewhere to put your work and open your books up and
- 08:30 go through that process. Possibly the hardest part that I ever found was the fact that when I landed I had signal pads and ciphers and crystals all stacked around me, and eventually I got to the stage where I'd used the signal pads and we'd been asking
- 09:00 for more and nothing arrived so I turned it over and used the other side. Still nothing arrived when I finished that. So I went back to the original side, because it was all in pencil and as you know pencil sort of fades after a while. So I went back to the original side and wrote across and after I'd finished that lot some more arrived. And that was probably
- 09:30 the most desperate part of deciphering. Yes.
- That's really difficult.**
- Yes, I was looking at some trees with white bark in the finish.
- What's it actually like to sleep in a jungle hammock?**
- They're quite comfortable. Although you advise people not to sleep in
- 10:00 curved mattress and things like that but they're quite comfortable, and of course they have the flywire on all the sides and a roof over the top, a waterproof roof over the top. The only thing, if you get caught it's a bit nasty but I don't remember hearing of anybody getting caught.
- What's getting caught?**
- Well it means the enemy catching
- 10:30 you, you know, and before you can get out of the thing. But I know when they were in practising back on Fraser Island someone might go through the hammock lines and turn them over so that you're up in your lid and you can't get out of the darn thing.
- How about animals, did you ...?**
- I didn't see a lot of animals. Monkeys, yeah plenty of monkeys, yeah.
- 11:00 They come through in the colonies of monkeys, you know, there might be several hundred swinging through the trees, yeah, but they're not an every day occurrence. No I didn't see a lot of animals. No doubt they're there. They talk about the bears and they talk about the elephants from British North Borneo, which I wasn't
- 11:30 ever in at any time. Pigmy elephants, of course the orang-utan. One of our fellows said he met an orang-utan but I never saw one.
- You sound pretty happy about that?**
- Yes.
- Can you tell me a bit about some of the bugs that you'd see, like you mentioned leeches before. Could you explain some of the difficulties with those sorts of creatures?**
- Leeches yeah.
- 12:00 Yes, up in the jungle tracks the leeches are ... It makes you wonder how they survive because you know when we, when we had to change from one place to another we would de-leech every night and take all our clothes off and we'd get them off each others backs and they get into all kinds of nasty parts too. But if
- 12:30 they break off it was a bit like the Kangaroo ticks, you put a bit of heat on them, a cigarette or something like that and ... Salt of course, they don't like, but salt is very, very hard to get in Borneo - very hard to get. Leeches were the main thing. I don't think I had anything else that worried us. They reckon that the
- 13:00 villages, their roofs are full of all kinds of critters and creatures but I never seen them.
- You never saw any sort of snakes or rats or ...?**
- No, I didn't see any snakes at all. I suppose they're up there, bound to be. Didn't see any snakes.
- You were pretty lucky.**

13:30 **So the plan is at this stage that you're in virtually the same area that you landed and you're staying there for what you think is a short period of time to send and receive and then meet up with the group?**

No.

**No?**

No, no.

**What's happening?**

14:00 Several things. First of all there were two American planes shot down in the area. Well, one they parachuted out off and the other one, the navy one, they rode it into a paddy field and there were survivors from both. And the natives passed them from one village to the other until they got really

14:30 inland and they looked after them there. Oh, several sort of things came up from that. The Wireless Air gunner on the army plane was about the fittest of the whole lot of them at that stage, and he came to help me from time to time. He wasn't at

15:00 Bario which was my first wireless station, which was very brief. Then I went further south even more mountainous area and it entailed climbing up an almost vertical cliff face which had timbers, rough bush timbers placed

15:30 at intervals all the way up and stakes put in the ground to hold it, and that's how we got to the top. And I was there for quite a while at that wireless station. It was very clear on the top and I had extremely good reception from Darwin up there. And Dan Hilorick, the American, he came along to help me while I was there. We still keep in touch with

16:00 Dan Hilorick. He lives in Frenswood, Texas.

**Can you tell me why you had to move around so much?**

Well, in the first instance, that first move to Pamain where this steep incline was, was to get a better spot because the other one I was operating from, actually in the jungle and trying to get a little bit

16:30 of antenna up above the jungle trees. And it was terribly muddy and dirty and leech infested. So it was mainly to get a better site that, and that was a better site.

**How do you go about finding a better site?**

Well, somebody had found it for me actually. I don't remember who, who would have

17:00 found it but somebody did and advised me to go there and it was excellent. Later, quite a bit later, when we'd sort of stabilised things a bit and had another drop of stores and there was an imminent drop of reinforcements

17:30 I packed up, got about ten or twenty porters and we went over the big dividing range of six or seven thousand feet and down the other side into what was then Dutch territory, Dutch Borneo, now Kalimantan. And I had a brief wireless station at one of the villages there. And

18:00 then the next day we, we walked to where the Major CO was, was living. And I had a little hut there, I'd better call it a hut not a sulap, a little hut there, and we set up a wireless station

18:30 there with a very, very large bamboo pole in the paddy field and the wire put on that and we transmitted from there for some time.

**Sorry, how does that work? You had a whole length of bamboo that's attached to a hut in the middle of rice field?**

No, the bamboo pole was in the rice field and our hut was on the

19:00 land and we had the wire coming from the top of the bamboo into the hut. And at that same time, all around about that time there were things happening. I, the Major gave me a message to transmit asking could a light aircraft land on,

19:30 on a bamboo-made strip. These bamboos were all opened up and laid flat and of course he got his reply saying yes it's possible that they could come in from Tarakan with an Auster aircraft. The point being to fly these Americans who were, some of them were at death's door.

**Sorry, what had happened to the Americans?**

The Americans that had, their planes had crashed.

20:00 The two B-24's which had... One army, one navy and they were in a pretty bad way, some of them.

**Was it because of injuries they'd ...?**

Yes, yeah partly injuries and partly undernourished and they'd got tropical ulcers, and some of the ulcers they just dig deeper and deeper and deeper into your flesh. So

20:30 that was all happening at the time. The bamboo, the local natives were cutting the bamboo and opening them up and laying them on this piece of flat ground near my wireless hut and ...

**How would they secure the bamboo?**

Little pegs made of, made of bamboo with a notch in them so they skewered them. I think they were skewered on the ends and two in the centre.

21:00 It's in the book, there's a picture of it there. And there was a drop of reinforcements due and I arrived at this new location where the bamboo strip was being built at about the time the reinforcements came in. From that time on we were sort of relatively established. Prior to

21:30 that it was thought that, it was thought that we'd been captured and working under duress because they couldn't understand why the wireless operator had changed.

**What do you mean had changed?**

Well, the original one who wasn't doing too well, the nerve sender, they could recognise his sending and then suddenly without any explanation another sender came on, and

22:00 and back at base they were suspicious that we'd been captured and were working under duress, and it was a Japanese operator. So that held up quite a lot of stores coming in for a, probably a month or more.

**Is that the only way you could actually make sure that the drops were going to happen as far as stores were concerned, through the wireless?**

Through the wireless, yes.

**How would that process work from start to finish?**

22:30 In what way?

**Would you receive a message, a location?**

Oh yes, we would receive a message saying that three, three Liberators would be coming in and give us a date. And I can remember them coming in. I can remember the sound of the engines because I also had a Eureka, Eureka Rebecca.

23:00 A Eureka is a little transmitter that you set up with an antenna on it and as soon as the plane was within range, like perhaps five miles, ten miles away it comes on their radar screen and if they're not heading for you the blimp is big on one side and little on the other so they have to turn a bit

23:30 and when they get both the blimps the same they know they're heading for me. And then soon as I reckon they should drop I press the button and they drop. And usually estimate out a bit so that the speed of the Storepedoes coming down will increase and we were usually pretty right.

**What sort of things would**

24:00 **you receive?**

In the early days we were getting a lot of firearms because the boss man was mad keen to arm all the natives which he did. .303 rifles and a few Brens, Owen, Owen submachine guns.

24:30 There was another one too, what was its name? Sten, an Austen submachine guns, ammunition, a bit of food, bit of medical supplies ... That's in the main that's what would have come in.

**How did the natives take to learning artillery?**

A good question.

25:00 Some of them were excellent and some of them were dangerous, yeah. Oh, it bought them ahead centuries. They were with blowpipes, of course. They all had, not all of them, the warriors for want of a better term, had blowpipes. But to get into this sophisticated stuff like

25:30 submachine guns was putting them way, way ahead of their time. We had a couple of free drops too, I must mention that. A free drop. A Beaufighter came over and he was so low I could see the guy kicking the stuff out of the door. It was a free drop. They dropped out a hundred tins, a hundred, seven pound

26:00 tins of American Spam [spiced ham]. And we never got one, they all burst on hitting the ground. So we complained bitterly and the next day they came over and dropped out a hundred tins of sardines. We got ninety-nine of those.

**When you say a free drop is that ...?**

Without any parachute or anything, yeah.

26:30 No parachute, no stores parachute.

**That could be quite dangerous.**

If you're in the way, yeah lethal if you're in the way.

**It's madness, to get killed by a can of Spam. A Z Force operative suddenly gets knocked out by ...**

Yeah, that would be insulting wouldn't it?

**Yeah it would be very insulting. Were there any occasions when some of the locals were killed by some of the**

27:00 **operations that you had?**

Not in drops I don't think. When they were ... An interesting, an interesting bit was that when Major Harrison got the information that they could fly in he ordered a whole lot of shovels and spades and

27:30 mattocks and tools generally, and they dropped them in but the natives thought they were, they didn't like them at all so they went back to there parings and any other primitive tools they had.

**They didn't like ...?**

Didn't appreciate the sophistication of... Guns yes, they were alright, but shovels and spades and hoes, they weren't a bit impressed.

28:00 **Did you manage to pick up any of the language while you were there?**

Ah yes...That was one of the things I missed out on saying in the syllabus in Malay. Yes we had to be able to, well we hoped to be able to speak a certain amount of Malay. One of the rather unusual things was that us Australians were being taught to speak Malayan by a Scotsman. So we still don't know whether our

28:30 Malay has a Scots accent. Quite possibly.

**What sort of things was it important to sort of learn how to converse about?**

Oh food, any Japs around, you know, food - 'adenase iamtelor', that's eggs. Ask whether you could get

29:00 any eggs. Chooks eggs are about that big up there. And they would in turn might of conversed with us of course for medical reasons, you know many of them had lots of terrible bloody sores.

**Tropical ulcers?**

Yes, in the main.

**What were the medical facilities like there? I mean you know what could you ...?**

What could we do for them?

29:30 Actually one of the people, Jack Tedray from South Australia, he was medical, he was with the original drop. We had a doctor with us. In the other plane there was a doctor but he was a hundred miles from us. So Jack Tedray did a lot of work, a lot of good with his medical stuff

30:00 going around. And he did hundreds of miles. And that's one of the reasons I think that we were accepted so well. We had another medical fellow come in. Just prior to that they dropped in some medical supplies and I had a medical case full of gear but some of it I understood and some of it I didn't.

30:30 And I was, I held the medical parade for two years. Can you imagine me administering the care?

**Can you tell me about the medical parade then?**

Oh, that was a strange thing. Yeah, they would come from everywhere to line up and, "I have a sacaraputuan, have a

31:00 sacaraputuan!" And you'd give them an aspro or you know, if they had badly chaffed legs you would give them sulphur ointment or something like that.

**Where would some of these injuries come from?**

Oh, all kinds of things. Mainly their legs is from being in the water and then out and then in the water again constantly, you get the cracked skin.

31:30 Oh but injuries, one fellow busted his leg open with a paring and, he knew he was going to die. They're fatalistic in that way, you know they get something like that, oh well, that's it, finish. I'll roll over. But our guys patched him up.

32:00 But of one of my friends from Mildura, he was down the track a bit you know, a couple of days walk from me on his own like most people were and he used to hold a sick parade and he had, and he said, I

had acquired three glass jars – one was green, one was red and one was blue.

32:30 And as they approached he'd say, "Well what's wrong with you today?" "Oh, I have a sacraputuan," you know sick stomach. He'd say, "Oh well better have one out of the blue." So he'd give them one out of the blue and some time later... And there was this particular lady came along and she said she had a headache and so he said, "Oh I'd

33:00 better get you one out of the green hadn't I?" So he give her one and she said, "Why have they all got the same writing on them?" All aspro.

**He was trying to do a ah ...?**

Oh, yes he was a [(UNCLEAR)] doctor, yeah. Trying to be... Well I suppose he was trying to be helpful. He had nothing else other than aspro.

**Doing the best he could.**

33:30 Yeah.

**How far apart were all the people that you knew? Because it sounds like you were pretty much by yourself and you've mentioned your mate there who was pretty much by himself.**

I was two days from where the boss was and three days from, at least three days from where this chap from Mildura

34:00 was. All the rest of them would be five days, a week. Quite widely separated, quite widely separated.

**How would you know how far these blokes were and where they were?**

I didn't know, I didn't know where they were. Because most of the internal work was by runners coming back to the boss and he in

34:30 turn would send the runners back to the operative. But it didn't come through me because my wireless work was only from my boss back to Darwin and Darwin back to me so I didn't know where any of them were, which was probably a good thing. And they didn't even know where the other one was. They used to write to each other. And they had a code.

35:00 Anyone who was a Private to a Sergeant used their initial and a number, the number one to five, they could use any of those numbers, so Bob Griffiths could use G1 or G2 or whatever. Warrant Officers and Officers they had the rest up to nine,

35:30 or it might have been the other way around I just can't recall, but that was their way of communicating. So if you suddenly got a message from G7, right now who the heck's that? Oh yes, I know. Because there was so few of us it didn't get involved. When we'd get reinforcements of course it got a bit out of hand.

**What happened when the reinforcements came along?**

Well they were under the

36:00 impression that they'd be working as a unit and of course the boss told them that wasn't on at all, they'd be working individually. And they were spread out in different areas. At that stage on the second lot of reinforcements the workload was getting so heavy for me

36:30 that he, he assigned one of the reinforcements to help in the encoding and decoding. About that time the Austers would have come in and flown the Americans out, the sick ones, the sickest first of course. And eventually Dan Hilorick, the Wireless Air Gunner who was helping me he appealed to his people

37:00 to stay where he was, he liked the work. But they said no, you come home. I suppose technically they couldn't afford to leave him in there. It wasn't his job and they could have been in all kinds of trouble if he'd got killed – with family there would have been a great outcry. So that was the last of them, he was the last to go out.

**So did you go and have a look at the trial run**

37:30 **of the bamboo airstrip?**

I was right there. Yes, I saw the first plane come in and the second. Yes, Sir Fred Chaney was the second, he was the second pilot in. And of course, the problem was that it had been built too short. They'd built what was it, eighty feet? Eighty feet, I think. Harrison had got a figure out of the air somewhere I

38:00 think and he'd built it eighty feet long and it was too short. The first one in ran off into the mud at the end, and of course the second one in he, he had to skid off sideways off the strip to save hitting the plane in front of him. Anyway they went, they were still building the strip.

38:30 They were there overnight these two pilots. They dragged Fred Chaney's plane out of the mud and got some bamboo and some signal wire and bound up the wheels so he that he could fly out at the first

opportunity. And we invited him to have some of our tea that night

39:00 and he said, "I got to the door and," he said, "I could smell this horrible smell, like a wet dog." He couldn't eat it, couldn't get into our surlap. So he always used to tell Mavis his wife that we kept him alive with bananas.

**What was some of the food there like?**

Oh very ordinary, very ordinary.

39:30 **I mean did you manage to ...?**

Buffalo meat and tough as old boots and monkey meat that was stringy as blazes. But we survived on boiled rice mainly.

**So you kind of left the buffalo and the monkeys to the natives?**

Oh no, we tried it. We lost weight too.

**Lost weight because you couldn't ...?**

You couldn't get enough out of,

40:00 out of the food that was available I reckon, yeah.

**How about getting water and liquids?**

Water? Yes, well there was a little creek running past where we were. Up on the very high areas, like the top of the mountains you could drink out of the little rivulets that were running down because it was totally in mist

40:30 all the time. And it was all moist up there and it was mountain streams, quite safe. But once you got down on the flats you had to boil everything, you had to boil everything. You know, my two cook boys used to make sure that it was boiled, yeah, a nine year old and an eleven year old.

**So what did you give them for being your cook boys?**

Well we used to pay them.

41:00 Not that they valued the money because they couldn't do anything with the money - you know, Straits dollars and Dutch guilders were the go. They couldn't buy anything with it. They'd much rather you gave them some thing, but we didn't have anything to give them really. We had some needles, sewing needles and I used to get five eggs for a needle -

41:30 that seemed to be the going rate. Or a bunch of bananas for a needle or something like that. Or fifty cents for a bunch of bananas.

**It's amazing that there was a currency in needles.**

Oh yes, oh very valuable needles, oh yes my word.

## Tape 5

00:36 **Bob, can you tell us the story behind the Kelabit tribe?**

Yes, yes the story is that originally many years ago, probably in the 1800s, when explorers first got to that particular territory up there in the highlands, that they managed to ask the people who they were

01:00 and what they were called or where they were from? And they said "Palabid". And those, those adventurous people who were up there took it as Kelabit and so they've been Kelabits ever since. But the native fellow was trying to get through to them that he came from the village of Palabid. They have a lot of villages up there,

01:30 Pa this and Pa that. What it means I don't know. Something in their local dialect I suppose.

**Do you remember your first encounter with them?**

Yes, they were there to greet me as I landed. They know how to shake hands, that's about the depth of their occasion with the western world.

02:00 So I shook hands with everybody and, and they carried my gear and water bottle and a whole lot of other stuff to the long house.

**So they were expecting you?**

Yes, yes they knew the drop was imminent because of the information from the advance party.

**Who was in the advance party that had notified them that you were going to drop in?**

It would have been Major Tom Harrison, he was,

02:30 he was in charge of that particular group, the advance party.

**Who was your party Leader?**

Toby Carter, a New Zealander. New Zealander in the British Army.

**What can you tell me about Toby Carter?**

Not very much. I didn't soldier on with Toby at all. We landed at this Bario village, the Kelabit country and

03:00 there was four in our plane and four in the other plane. Our plane was headed by Major Bill Sochon and the other plane was headed by Major Toby Carter, he was the overall Commanding Officer. My only contact with Toby really was... and the travelling up there by plane on the occasions when we were on the ground,

03:30 and when we got there within an hour he asked me would I try to straighten out the wireless traffic for the advance party and the next morning he was gone with all the rest of them of course. And so therefore I haven't much information on Toby other than he was an absolute gentleman. Some of the others were less.

04:00 As a matter of fact there's a lot of harsh words being said about Tom Harrison.

**Why's that?**

Oh his, his ego was so large that he didn't get on with people, he had to be the be all and end all of everything. He didn't do the right thing with medical supplies and food for the fellows in the field.

04:30 He stock piled it. We didn't know why but we figure now, or shortly after the war, was the reason that he stock piled it was so that he could exist in there for several months after the war was over. He had, he had a theory and he used to say that Borneo should be under the

05:00 one, one ruling, British of course, he was a British Officer, instead of being cut up into Dutch and British North Borneo, Sarawak pieces, Brunei. And that was his theme and he had this idea apparently of staying back afterwards and commanding the situation from in there.

05:30 But he didn't have anywhere near enough clout of course, being a common major. So that was the story on the leading lights of the Sixteen as we were called, the original Sixteen. Major Sochon was quite a nice fellow.

**What can you tell me about him?**

Not very much, not very much.

**Same answer.**

Same answer.

06:00 He was a British Officer. Had a position in Singapore as Chief of Police or Kuching as Chief of Police or something like that. But very, very hazy. He was on our plane of course but you couldn't converse or anything like that in those bombers, they make too much noise.

**What do you mean?**

Engine noise.

**Oh inside those bombers?**

Yeah, engine noise.

06:30 **So when you awoke the others had left and you were their alone was that basically your existence, your solitary existence with the local ...?**

Yes, for two or three weeks, mm two or three weeks.

**What was it like being left alone with the local people?**

It was a brand new experience and you didn't know what to, what was coming next. As a matter fact I had these two fellows who used to

07:00 come up and wind up the generator while I used to transmit in the evenings, and one afternoon they came up there and they were admiring my carbine, Yankee carbine and pistol and things like that, and they got through to me in Malay, which I wasn't very good at, they got through to me the fact that if you get hit by one of those



07:30 bullets you don't necessarily die but with their little arrows, and they got one out, and they said prick a finger and you're dead. So they were telling me something I think.

**They were keeping you in line you reckon?**

I reckon, I reckon.

**What was the trust like between you for those few weeks?**

Oh there was no problem, absolutely no problem. As a matter of fact when I got the

08:00 signal from Tom Harrison to move from Bario to Pamain I went down to the village with all the gear that night and they were going to supply porters the next day, to go to the new location and they put on a dancing thing. Now this is one of the most primitive villages in the world I would say. Everything is dark, there's no lighting,

08:30 there's not even a candle in their existence in those days. A little fire which is on a piece of rock, because you daren't put on the rest of the long house because it's all timber and bamboo and stuff, a little fire flickering there and from back in the shadows came this dancing girl - with all the sort of snakey contortions that they can do. I thought it was

09:00 quite good. They were giving me a send off I think.

**And where was your accommodation? Was it in the long house with the rest of the tribe there?**

Oh yes, I slept in the long house, yes. The long houses are divided into, a wall usually right down the middle length ways. And the bigger half is for the general eating and any other chores that have to be done - cutting up meat or

09:30 sifting rice or whatever they do. And the other smaller part was for the families - husbands and wives and children. The unmarried bucks of the village they slept in the big section. And I slept there, there was no problem. And the next morning we were saddled up. Most of the porters were women - they carry

10:00 pretty good loads and I guess the men were wanted in the fields, in the rice paddies. And we walked all day to get to this new location.

**Just before we move there, I don't suppose they were particularly modest people?**

No, not modest at all, no. The girls used to wear a little thingy around there and that's all. The breasts were bare and earrings

10:30 way down of course, as I've said.

**The send of you were given it sounds like an erotic dance?**

Yeah, yeah that's what, exact word, I would say an erotic dance yes.

**Were you wondering where things might lead?**

Oh no, too bloody exhausted. After coming down that hill ...

**What was their custom when it came to male female relations or taking a bride?**

11:00 Well I'm not in depth in that field but I know they did segregate the young men in sleeping quarters from the other families. I do believe that it still exists and I think it was in the press just recently something about it, you know a prospective, a prospective couple had to come up with some

11:30 gifts. The bridegroom's family have to find a couple of pigs and half a dozen WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s and like that, to buy her.

**And you were short of those?**

I didn't have any.

**So what was the next location you moved onto Bob?**

The next location was further south and that was the village of Pamain. As I said they have a lot of

12:00 Par, Parlabid, Pamain, Parkabak.

**How did Pamain compare to the ...?**

Very similar type of people - well almost identical people. Located on higher ground which was an advantage - it was fairly free of leeches around the long house. And particularly up on our high perch we had no trouble with that at all.

12:30 **And you were brought back together with some of the Z Force men here?**

No only Dan Ellerick, the Yank. No, I never saw anybody there from our party at all. Dan and I were there for several weeks. And during that time our water used to be carried up to us in those big bamboos, like big tubes. That was our own

13:00 supply of water. And we had a little fire out the front that went day and night with racks over it made of wood and meat, stringy meat across the racks so it was smoked continuously to keep any vermin away. And that we would boil up. Nowadays you would boil it for twenty-four hours and then hurl it out the backdoor but we didn't.

13:30 Apart from that it was good up there, it was a nice, nice area - cleared spot. On that particular time the weather was good too, for most of the time - it used to rain at night. But Dan and I decided one day that we'd go down, the long climb down, to have a swim. A river came through there and at one section of the river it was like a,

14:00 a big swimming pool, where the water tumbled in one end and filled this big rock area up and then tumbled out the other end. So anyway Dan and I went down and I said I'll go and have a look at the long house and see if anybody's around. And Dan went down to the pool and I went to the long house and I went up the log, they have a log with bits cut out of it that you can step up there,

14:30 had a look inside and nobody there at all. So I came down and we peeled off everything and we got into the water and it was icy cold, absolutely icy cold. We'd no sooner got in than a young fellow appeared and he showed us how they, they did their swimming. Which was very much like the Australian crawl, but a bit more like a windmill. And he swam up and down

15:00 a couple of times, and we'd had enough, it was to damn cold. Anyway Dan and I were heading out this long rock formation that led out of the pool when all of a sudden we looked up to the top there and there's half a dozen belles of the village looking down upon us, and they all had their water carriers so we assumed immediately that the village had run out of water exactly at that moment.

15:30 But anyway there was no alternative but to get out and get our clothes on.

**So they caught you with your pants down?**

We did, we did, we got caught with our pants down, yeah. They reckoned they'd run out of water but we reckoned otherwise.

**And were they laughing or ...?**

No they're very polite people but they were having a very good look.

**Just natural ...**

Curiosity, natural curiosity. Have these

16:00 white, pale looking creatures got the same equipment as our big, darker brethren.

**What were your official responsibilities while you were here?**

Just the radio again. Yes, we would receive any incoming stuff on that, on any particular night. Decode it in the morning.

16:30 We would have a runner probably arrive, not necessarily every day but every so often about midday. He would have more messages for us to encode and we'd give him the decoded ones and he'd take it back to the boss. And they're pretty cunning too - they used to ask for payment both ends. Anyway then, yeah the process

17:00 would go on, we would encode that during the latter part of the day and go on and transmit it during the evening. That went on and on and on, that was our life.

**And you were working in Semut One?**

Semut One yes.

**And what was the objective of that operation?**

Originally Semut was supposed to be one operation. They envisaged we would all be together and go

17:30 out from, from there but after it happened that ah, they split it into three so there was Semut One, Two and Three. Actually I came in as Semut Two but asked to swap over, I did and became Semut One.

**And the overall objective was to gather intelligence?**

That's the main thing yes. Not to go into the fight unless we were forced to but to gather intelligence and

18:00 send it back to Darwin, which of course sent it onto Melbourne and gave it to those who needed to know.

**Do you recall any interesting pieces of information that you ciphered or decoded?**

Enciphered? Yes, I do remember one quite interesting piece of information. It was that our boss sent this message over to me and it read that he had three

18:30 nice clean geisha girls, could he swap it for Major, Major Jenkins – Major Jenkins passed away about two or three years ago. And the reply came back, “We consider Major Jenkins is worth five so no deal.”

**So I take it he wasn't rated as that valuable?**

I don't know, it was a bit of a joke for officers only I suppose,

19:00 but of course it came to me because I was the only that could cipher it.

**What about you know, important intelligence of the time?**

Oh yes, there were bits and pieces. We used to call for raids, air raids on different places. And sometimes you could hear some bombing going on from miles and miles away. We sent one message out telling them that we had a find, three Japanese

19:30 seaplanes and presumably something was done about that. But a lot of this went out but you never heard much result. I guess we didn't need to know the result. They did their best and that was good enough.

**So relaying possible targets was the general nature of ...?**

Yes, yes, yeah that's right. And General Baber had his headquarters in British North

20:00 Borneo. We had a party close to there who was reporting on everything they did, everything they could see. They had a wireless operator with them so he would operate his mobile set and come back to me and then I would pass it on to the boss and he'd, and whatever he saw fit he'd pass it back to, to Army Headquarters.

20:30 **How long were you contributing to this intelligence before, did you go on later into offensive work the Japanese?**

Ah yes. We'd been in there about two or three months by the time the, [(UNCLEAR)] wasn't it, landed at Tarakan. Yeah, they took Tarakan and that's how the Auster

21:00 aircraft came into the thing. They couldn't come from miles away at Morotai but they were able to come from Tarakan, the island of Tarakan. Once it was taken and consolidated and Austers were unloaded there they could fly the hundred and fifty miles or whatever it was into us. There was another little catch to that too.

21:30 They only carried enough fuel to get in there so if they got half way, if the weather closed in too badly they used to turn around and go back. If the weather was clear they'd come the rest of the way. Didn't have any mishaps on the trips but it was very dicey because the weather comes up in twenty minutes. But once they got over the half way they knew they were committed, they had to make the journey then.

22:00 But yes, you asked me intelligence and going onto the offensive. We did, our parties in the field went onto the offensive in different areas.

**What events in regard to the intelligence you were gathering led to you going onto the offensive?**

Well, it wouldn't have been so much

22:30 the information that I was dealing with but it would have been more the information that the outstations were dealing with and coming back to Tom Harrison with the information and he would give the okay to go. One of the fellows took the little town and port of Lawas in the North. Another

23:00 Jack Tedray and his team called for, for a bombing of a place to the east of us and I thing the Kittyhawks came in and shot that place up and got rid of the Japs and then he took the town. And then he continued to harass the Japs all the way up the river. They were going up the river in their craft and

23:30 he kept harassing them all the way up. Interesting stories. You know, something that he would tell and he knows step by step.

**Who was that sorry?**

A bloke named Jack Tedray in South Australia.

**Oh okay, hopefully the Archive will get onto him.**

I have told them to get a hold of Jack.

**So how were you feeling about leaving your position and going onto the offensive?**

It didn't

24:00 make any difference to me because all, I was sort of headquarters and we were getting drops of arms and some food and training a few guerrillas.

**Can I just ask you about that, training the guerrillas? I think Denise [interviewer] asked you earlier how they took to the gun but how did you actually train them to use the weapons?**

Oh they were pretty hopeless but

24:30 we'd get them all lined up and, and then put them one by one down on a mound to shoot the 303 rifle for arguments sake, and they were pretty hopeless. It was just out of their world altogether to look down a sight and point the thing and hope to hit. The surprising one of the whole lot was our youngest cook boy.

25:00 He was supposed to be about nine years old, according to a missionary that we met, and I was with a fellow at the time and I said, "Oh give him a rifle," and he said, "Do you reckon so, he's only a little fellow?" And I said, "Oh yeah he'll be all right." So he was the best shot of the lot of them. But I guess in the main it was the bulk of having all these guys, maybe twenty guys there,

25:30 and all of a sudden rifles are going off right, left and indifferent ... If they didn't hit much it didn't matter, they made a lot of noise, the enemy knew somebody was onto them and they either scrambled out of it or, or they got hit.

**Did you learn anything from them in return about surviving in the jungle or ...?**

The natives?

**Yeah.**

Well not really because they looked after us all the time. You know if

26:00 we wanted anything in the way of food - they used to bring me bananas every week and pawpaws and I could buy a few eggs from some, one of the girls in the village would come over. So we really were at our job all the time and not learning too much about the terrain or anything else, or survival.

26:30 I suppose they reckoned we were pretty good, they couldn't teach us anything. You know, when the first party went in they dropped down at Bario and when they got down there they were asked whether they were gods or humans, so you know, that was the sort of attitude.

**And I suppose they said they were gods did they?**

I don't know.

27:00 **What did the locals think of the Japanese?**

They had very good reason to dislike the Japanese for many reasons. The Japs had, I understand, had taken a number of their sons, to take them to the coast and teach them Japanese ways in schools down there. I still write to a fellow who was eleven years old

27:30 at the time. He was on the coast and he eventually became a Chief Inspector of Police. He's a bit of a mixture. He's got a Chinese name but I think he's got some Malay in his background too. I've never met him but he was eleven years old and he said that he

28:00 had to go to school in Lawas and learn Japanese and he said we'd daren't step out of line or we'd be thrashed. He said you'd get to the door of the school and you'd bow and then go to your seat. Everything was regimentated. But apart from the sons being taken to the coast, the Japanese did some very cruel things to them and

28:30 beat them. You know when you read the books of different people who were there you realise how wrong their attitude was, by assuming they were the master race and this type of thing. Of course the other part about it too was the demand for food and they had to send food either by porters or down the rivers to

29:00 support the Japanese and starve themselves. So all in all you know, they weren't a bit impressed with the Japs.

**Did you witness any of those atrocities yourself?**

No. No.

**And yet these tribes were headhunting tribes is that right?**

Yes. They had been headhunting tribes. Actually the British had practically wiped it out. Sarawak and British North Borneo, not by,

29:30 not by force but by mediating with them, reasoning with them, probably making gifts and things like that and telling them that was wrong. A typical village like Bario, you could start a session on the rice wine and then an hour later

30:00 they'd be singing hymns and smoking cigars. You know, they were hardly, hardly domesticated.

**I understand there was a bounty on Japanese heads there? We have a visitor.**

30:30 **I was just asking you about headhunting and the bounty?**

Oh yes, that's right. It had been not necessarily completely wiped out but under control I believe, this is going back before World War II of course, and I wouldn't know first hand, I believe it was outlawed. They still had a lot of heads, a lot of old evidence of course.

31:00 And then yes ...

**I've spoken to veterans who've said that they were in parties which were paying Japanese, I mean the natives bounties for ...?**

Yes, I can't remember whether it was five dollars a head or something like that. I know that this fellow from Mildura, Bob Griffiths, when he was about

31:30 a day, day and a half from me, he had a fellow come in with a bark container and tipped out three Japanese heads on his table. He said, "I got a hell of a surprise and told him to wrap them up and take them to the big two and he'd give him some money for them." So I didn't see any of this, this is, I believe this is what happened.

**You were fortunate to not have seen any of those transactions.**

32:00 **Yes.**

**When did you enter into the offensive with the Japanese?**

I think it was probably June when Bob Pinkerton went down to Lawas and took Lawas. Jack Tedray, about the same time Malinau. Because we didn't go

32:30 west, we didn't go west towards where Toby Carter was working and Bill Sochon. And there was really no, no need to go south very much, although one of the fellows did go south on a sort of a round trip and back again. But it would have been around June that, that the Semuts generally and particularly Semut One went on the offensive.

33:00 **What encounters did you have on the offensive?**

Well, I was never involved in it of course, as I say I'm back there at headquarters on the radio. But people like Jack Tedray would be able to relate that, but I do know that he called for an air bombing of Malinau because I

33:30 sent the message through. And that did happen and he took control there and then he followed these Japanese up the river harassing them all the way. And on one of his little forays the Japanese set a trap for him. They had a little hut on the side of the river and a pair of binoculars were sitting on it. So he asked his head boy, "Do you think you can go and snatch

34:00 those binoculars?" And the head lad went through there and just about had his hand on the binoculars when they open fire on him and he lost the top of his little finger. And of course Jack said, "No trouble at all, being a tailor as I was, I sewed him up." Yeah, a fact.

**You mentioned before you were bartering with needles?**

Oh yes, yeah

34:30 very popular thing needles.

**You were in good supply of needles were you?**

We did happen to have quite a few needles. I don't know how we came by them or where they came from.

**'Housewife Kits' is that what they called them?**

Yeah that was, 'Housewife Kits' yes. I don't know whether we had Housewife Kits then. A lot of things we didn't have in, in the days of Z. We didn't have tin helmets or gas masks, respirators, packs,

35:00 that was all put in a kit store, in kit bags all in a kit store and never to be seen again in most cases.

**And so you weren't too interested in sewing?**

No, no. No we liked new stuff.

**And did the locals use the needles for their intended purpose?**

Oh yes, yes they're very clever. That's one of their baskets up there.

**Oh right okay. That's really ornate.**

Mm, but finer work than

- 35:30 that they do too, very fine work. They seem to find threads and natural threads I suppose and vines or something that they colour with different things and then sew them into quite ornate jackets. Yeah, they're pretty good.

**What kind of implements were they using before you introduced them to needles?**

Well, I reckon they would have known needles and had needles,

- 36:00 but they would have got lost or broken or something like that. And of course this was one of their main things that they didn't like the Japanese because there was no new needles or bits of cloth or metal to make things out of, coming through. Nothing, just cut completely off. Fishing nets. Fishing nets, they used to throw them in the river and they all rotted away. So nothing was getting through
- 36:30 and they didn't like that, they couldn't understand I suppose, why it was so, and it was all right when the white fellows were there so the white fellows had better come back.

**Were there any anxious moments when you were decoding and sending messages?**

No, we had a bit of an anxious moment for about a couple of weeks

- 37:00 there but that was five hundred Japanese coming from the west coast through and there seemed to be a likelihood that they were coming to our valley and this was very late in the game. The war was over actually. And this five hundred that started off from the east, from the west rather, from the west somewhere, they were being whittled down
- 37:30 through starvation and pestilence and shots from odd people. But there was still three hundred odd of them and they were getting fairly close to our area, and they weren't sure whether they were going to continue on into British North Borneo or come our way and it looked as they might come our way. So I was training a few troops but it would have been futile
- 38:00 effort against three hundred and fifty or so Japanese. But just at that stage, that was, that was mid-October, in mid-October and we were being told we would have to get out and so two of us took off and some how or a rather we missed the
- 38:30 three hundred Japanese. The following day two more took off, because we'd had a bit of a congregation. The war was long over and we were congregating at the headquarters and going out in bits and pieces. Some were going out the other way towards Tarakan, towards east, and we were going north.

**How were you going out?**

Walking.

**What kind of distance did you have**

- 39:00 **to travel?**

A hundred miles I suppose as the crow flies. Up and down hills. Up and down, across rivers and things like that. Probably two hundred miles.

**What length journey was that in time?**

Normally it took about ten days when it was pretty bad. I think it took us about seven days. The flooding wasn't too bad. But the day after we got out, well we weren't out we were just past where the Japanese were,

- 39:30 I think we stayed one night and we could see some camp fires and the locals said that's Japanese there. So we moved on the next day. We had twenty-five Javanese soldiers with us. And the next day, quite unknown to us until much later, the next two tried to get past and they went headlong into the Japanese,
- 40:00 so there was a bit of a confrontation went on there for a while. And our two blokes had to retreat back to the old headquarters. Fortunately at that stage Tom Harrison who was out on [(UNCLEAR)] was coming back in with a party and a Japanese interpreter and he eventually got there and got them to surrender.
- 40:30 But their leader, Captain, it escapes me now, he was hanged for his bit, what he had to do with it.

**He was later prosecuted?**

Yeah, yeah.

**So this fighting was taking place after the war had ended?**

Oh yes, yes. They'd come through from the

- 41:00 west and as they came through they'd be sacking villages and shooting up people, you know quite a ruthless mob. Until they got to that point where they were convinced that the Emperor wanted them to surrender and they did.

**They sound ruthless.**

Yeah. Well a mate of mine, who's dead and gone now, he was one of them that went back,

- 41:30 who tried to get out and got their way blocked. He was one of the two people that brought the three hundred out and he said they were quite ruthless to each other. If there was one sick one they'd dump him on the ground and kick the daylight out of him. And Ray said, "I had a hand in that so I made them carry him all the way." And at one stage they wouldn't go across a river so
- 42:00 he put a few shots over their heads.

## Tape 6

- 00:35 **Bob do you know how forces such as Z Force were convincing the Japanese that the Emperor did want them to surrender because they were pretty forthright in the fact that they really didn't want to?**

Yes very much so, but they're fanatical people - I don't suppose they are so much these days, but in those days

- 01:00 you know, the Emperor was almighty and whatever said that's what they did. Why this Captain Fujimo didn't comply or he didn't believe that they would ever, possibly he didn't believe that they would ever surrender and he kept on fighting.

**How did forces such as Z Force convince**

- 01:30 **the Japanese that they Emperor wanted them to surrender?**

Good question. I suppose it was... Envoys and interpreters seem to come largely into it. Visiting the places, visiting the main towns like Kuching and Miri and the little villages like Lawas. I can't

- 02:00 see any other way - it must have been by personal touch because their radio stuff would have broken down probably.

**Well that's what I was thinking.**

Yes.

**Apart from that I was also thinking that in your particular drop there weren't any translators or negotiators as part of that.**

No. No.

**Would they have come along a little bit later?**

We had one Lieutenant Colonel whatever, he's in the book.

- 02:30 He was a Japanese linguist I suppose. Leach, Lieutenant Colonel Leach? Yes, it could have been right. Yes, he was instrumental in going up through one of our areas and probably doing some good.
- 03:00 But there again I rather doubt whether our Caucasian people would approach any of the Japanese to tell them the war was over because they'd get shot. So I guess in the main, it had to be Japanese people themselves who were fluent in English as interpreters going with some of our parties. It would have been mainly from the coast, not from our point of view of inland -
- 03:30 we were just a by-product more or less you know sitting inland. But I think it would have been from the coastal areas in the main. You see they had quite a big compound of Japanese on Labuan Island fairly quickly. They would have been there for three months, four months before we got out. So they probably sorted them out and found
- 04:00 any useful people among them to act as envoys and interpreters.

**How aware were you of other operations that were going around in Borneo?**

Not at all. No, I knew that naturally that I was Semut Two and then I was Semut One so that was straight forward. At that stage I

- 04:30 probably didn't even know that Semut Three had broken away to become a separate identity. But definitely nothing of Jack Sue's people, not a bit.

**Did it surprise you the amount that Z Force was actually involved in Borneo in the war?**

Yes, yes it did. Not so much AGAS and Semut but when you come to consider Platypus

05:00 with their ten or twelve operations, you know, I think it went right up to Platypus Ten or Platypus Twelve – they were very busy on the east coast. So that was surprising. But they were very unfortunate they lost quite a few people there. Have you, I don't suppose you've got any Platypus people? I don't know whether there's any left.

**We haven't found any Platypus' yet.**

Haven't you?

**No.**

05:30 **Was there any information that was filtering through in relation to the Sandakan death marches around the time you were there?**

No, nothing was coming through to us which was I suppose in a way a pity because we were only a hundred miles away.

06:00 But then with our small team could we have done anything anyway? AGAS worked much closer and I don't know whether they... I don't think they were aware it was going on until the latter stages and then it was all too late then.

**Do you think that there was an opportunity to do something?**

Well, from what I've read about Operation, the possible Operation Kingfisher,

06:30 I do think that something should have been done. Obviously the excuse that there was no aeroplanes was a bit of a lame one, because we had six Liberators and three of those were lost and we had apparently another three replaced very quickly, so that was a bit of a lame excuse. It was for generals, wasn't it, for generals to decide.

07:00 But I think it was a pity they didn't go ahead with the battalion in there.

**Were you surprised to hear about the Sandakan death marches when you finally did?**

Yes. Oh yes. I've read quite a bit about Changi and

07:30 I've seen part of it up there in Singapore. You know, restored bits and things like that. But terrible atrocities. I don't think any of us thought that they could be so inhuman. So I think everybody had their degree of surprise, anger and

08:00 all those things. And there are people in my lot that would never forgive the Japanese, never. They have no ambition to go there and many of them won't buy any Japanese stuff – they won't have a Japanese car.

**Can you remember when you actually heard about Sandakan? I'm just wondering because**

08:30 **it was covered up for quite some time and I'm just wondering if you heard about it through Z Force?**

No it wouldn't have been, it wouldn't have been made public and we wouldn't have heard anything about it it ... After the, when the war finished which was August, I didn't get out of Central Borneo until the end of October and by that time

09:00 the unit had started to disintegrate. And when we got back to Morotai, as some of the fellows would tell you, there was nobody there. All the officers and staff and people had all got a trip home and the English officers had probably gone back to England and the New Zealand officers had gone back to New Zealand.

09:30 It seemed to have collapsed. We got to Melbourne and there was a little bit of a show there still existing. But for that reason in itself there was no chance of getting any information such as Sandakan – no.

**This just relates back to Julian's last tape.**

10:00 **You were talking about headhunters. What was actually in your understanding ... Where's the anthropology behind the headhunting? I'm just wondering how that works. Is it like a prize trophy?**

Yes. Yes apparently going way back, according to what I've read, a groom had to prove himself

10:30 and the best way he could do that is to go very quietly to a neighbouring village and get some unsuspecting person's head and take it back, and he was considered a worthy husband to be. So I think that's where it started. And of course they hang them in baskets and the rats and other vermin

11:00 eat all the flesh away and then they put them over a smoky fire. It doesn't actually shrink, I mean it just simply means it's a skull and it's smoked.

**Did you ever see any of that going on?**

No, no. I have seen the skulls but I didn't see any of the process.



**How would they keep the skulls?**

Well it seemed to me that they were hanged in these little

11:30 baskets from what I could see – excepting the one that was on our flagpole.

**How did you get a head on your flagpole?**

I don't know how it came there.

**It just seems a bit odd. What was there an Australian flag with a head hanging on it?**

No, no it was the Japanese flag with a head hanging on it.

**Scary. A Japanese head obviously?**

Yes.

**What was the policy as far**

12:00 **as taking notes or taking pictures and having a diary was concerned?**

We were not supposed to take diaries, we were not supposed to take cameras or make notes – excepting of course a wireless operator had to do it all his life but apart from that. There were people, quite a number of them, that had diaries and they have referred to them. In my book there, there's different ones who referred to his diary.

12:30 Photographs were pretty rare. I didn't actually see any cameras amongst the troops. The air force used to take photographs of course, and they did take some after the war when a couple of Austers flew in with some visitors. There were a couple of good photographs – good photographs

13:00 of the bamboo airstrip too. Yeah, quite good – big photographs of that which I had framed.

**Oh that's good. We'll need to extract a couple of photographs of you later. So you were out there for six or eight months?**

Actually I think I might have been there seven months altogether.

**And how did it become apparent to**

13:30 **you that you were going to be leaving?**

Well it's amazing you know, how quickly the message got through. Even all the natives knew that the war was over. We had an instance where just after the war, just after the war we had a fellow who was from

14:00 the coast, and I've got an idea he might have been a police boy at one stage. Anyway he was from the coast and he was very handy, he knew little engines and he used to work on our Briggs and Stratton engines – because we'd become quite sophisticated by this time and had motors dropped in and batteries dropped in, and he used to work on the motors. And it must have been a day or two

14:30 after we got the message that the war was over and he was missing and so was half the parachute. And I told my lads, the local people and they somehow transmitted it on. Now don't ask me how, I just don't know. But they caught him two villages away and brought him back. So it's

15:00 amazing how they get this message. They reckon there's drums or something, but I never heard any.

**Sorry, what's the significance of half a parachute?**

Well, of no significance, it was just stolen and we had to keep a check on most of the stuff. It was probably somebody's sleeping gear – we used them as a sheet, blanket and everything else

15:30 of course. And one was missing so we knew when he was missing it had gone with him.

**So what did you think about the atom bomb being dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki?**

Well, looking back on it now, and for years now I've been of the opinion that it probably saved a lot of

16:00 lives. There was a million, there's said to be a million people under arms in Japan at that time, a million people. And one of the flyers that I know, he said there was more people lost in Tokyo in the fires than there was in the atomic bombs. Because the Yanks would come over when the wind was

16:30 in the right direction and fire the city and it would just blow on and on. And one of them said that they tried to save themselves by getting in the canals and the rivers but the rivers and canals boiled. I don't know whether that's true but I have heard that.

**I don't know how true that is either. There's sort of a bit of mythology that goes along**

17:00 **with it?**

Yes, yes I think so.

**It's sort of like our version of propaganda maybe, the allies propaganda.**

Yeah, it could be.

**How did the information filter through to you that an atomic bomb had been dropped and did you really understand what had gone on?**

No, no we didn't understand. We would have got a message no doubt, a message from headquarters because they ...

17:30 Our people were very smartly off the mark not to, not to kill anymore Japanese, to stop immediately – there was no war on and you've got to stop. Only fire if you're being fired upon you know, and get out of the way if you can. That was very, very apparent in that message coming through.

**Were Z Force actually adhering to that**

18:00 **instruction?**

Where they could. Yes, I think most of them were adhering to the instruction because we were all sort of gradually making our way out and home over a period of what, eight or nine weeks or something like that, you know gradually. And the only Japanese that were hostile was this Fujinoti, and of course

18:30 our blokes did fire back at him but they retreated because there was only a handful of them and I think there was one British Officer, one Australian Sergeant and one New Zealand Officer so they were pretty thinly spread. Oh I think that was the only incident.

19:00 **So did things get busier for you after the end of the war?**

No it slacked off, oh yes slacked off.

**How did your jobs change?**

Oh, I was still on the radio as it were you know, but the traffic just wasn't coming through, we just didn't get the amount of traffic through. So...

19:30 Oh we let our hair down a bit when we knew we were going out. As a matter of fact we got a message saying that, this would have been about September, end of September saying that two Austers were coming in and that two of us were to make ourselves ready and get aboard, to be flown out to Labuan. And about a week after that we got another message

20:00 saying that there was only one Auster aircraft left serviceable and it was, it was not RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force] policy to fly one aircraft over such dangerous country so you have to walk out.

**You're joking?**

Yeah, that's right. So we busied ourselves because there was a lot of stuff there, a lot of ordnance that had to be got rid of, it was too dangerous to leave hanging around.

20:30 There was phosphorous bombs and stuff like that. You know, it would have been terrible if some of the locals had got it and chucked it on their fires or something.

**So what did you do in order to take care of that?**

We put it in a container and let the lot go up. Yeah, got rid of it all.

**With how much of a perimeter?**

Oh it wasn't, it wasn't that big a

21:00 lot but it would have been a quarter of a mile or maybe half a mile from the nearest housing.

**Were there any other tidying up tasks that you can remember you did?**

Not much. Partaking of a couple of bottles of whisky.

**Where did the whisky come from?**

Oh, they must have dropped it in or something.

**Oh that was nice of them.**

The Austers might have brought it in, I don't know. Yeah, that was one night. And ah ...

21:30 Oh we installed a Chinese Surgical Dresser as the local doctor in a little hut. Yes, that was interesting.

**Why was it interesting?**

Because it was... I'd was advised, seeing as I'd been crook, I was advised to have a needle, an injection, and he was going to give me an injection

22:00 so I went down there ... I think he knew what he was doing alright. But this mate of mine was standing by with his forty-five in his hand. So I think to this day if I'd have keeled over that would have been the finish of the Surgical Dresser.

**Gosh not a good way to practice medicine. You'd want to get it right.**

22:30 Yeah.

**What can you tell me about the last day you spent in the village?**

Actually I was quite a way from the village. At this stage I was nowhere near the main village. I would have been a quarter of a mile away. Harrison and I used to... Harrison used to come on the air and he'd fire a couple of shots and we'd

23:00 come on the walkie-talkie and he'd tell me what he wanted to do or what he wanted. But that was far enough away you know, a quarter of a mile, half a kilometre something like that. I was there by the side of the bamboo airstrip usually with a couple of fellows. Different ones came through, wireless operators, and then they went into the field. But the last days,

23:30 I do recall the last day we sold our tablecloth. It's funny the things that stick in your memory isn't it? We had a bamboo table and we had this bit of red and white check, that should have hanging on somebody's window I suppose, and I think we sold it for five eggs. Yeah, our tablecloth.

**At least you got**

24:00 **something out of the tablecloth.**

Yeah.

**Was it sad to be leaving?**

Oh yes, yes it was very sad, yeah. And my youngest cook boy... We were to leave that morning and I walked out of the, we'd had a big hut built, and the little old hut was the cook boy's hut,

24:30 and they knew we were leaving. Smokey and I walked out of the hut ready to go and I looked through the bamboo slats of the little hut and here's this little fellow, his brown eyes and tears running down his face. Oh I thought, oh my goodness what will I do now? And I

25:00 said, "Seray do you want to come with us?" He was out in a bound. "Riyong do you want to come with us?" And anyway off they went home and we waited for them and he came back and he said, "My Mum says I can go but only to the coast, she wants me back." So that's what happened. He carried my rifle all the way to the coast.

25:30 **Wow.**

Sad mm.

**That's quite a lovely story though.**

Mm, mm, yes. It's a pity I've never made contact with them again, you know it's a different world and it's all lost and gone.

**Well the world's changed a lot since those times anyway.**

Yeah, yeah. And they would have, they would have been in, they were in Kalimantan of course and they would have been what is now Indonesian

26:00 territory, so likely they wouldn't have been so friendly.

**Yes it's interesting how the borders have changed in that region so violently over a such a short period of time.**

Mm.

**So have you flown to Labuan at this point, because you didn't have to walk did you?**

Yes.

**You did have to walk out of there?**

Oh yes, we had to walk, yes.

**How far did you have to walk then?**

26:30 **I, as I said before about a hundred miles as the crow flies I suppose. But up and down the hills, across rivers and things like that. Possible a hundred fifty, two hundred miles. One of**

**our fellows, he was an Oxford Don as a matter fact from England, and he wrote in his memoirs that he thought that the local people in Borneo**

27:00 **went to the top of every hill and that was part of their track, go to the top of the hill and have a look down and see what's around and then go down. Find another hill to go to the top of, and it was a bit like that. Yes oh, terrible journey, terrible.**

**How long did it take you?**

I think it took us seven days and we were going constantly from daylight until dark, constantly.

**Well how did you feel about**

27:30 **your, well your service the army basically refusing to come and pick you up when they'd dropped you in there in the first place?**

As I said, the whole thing was collapsing in a heap wasn't it and there was very little that could be done about it. The aeroplanes of course belonged to the air force and they'd apparently had so many little bingles and crashes and things like that,

28:00 they only had one left.

**It just does seem a bit bizarre. I mean regardless of the fact that the wheels were falling off army they should still be responsible for getting their people out.**

You'd think so but most of them had to walk out, there was very few of them got a ride, very few. Even, even the officers they all walked out, and Harrison himself he walked out and he walked back

28:30 in again and walked out again. So you know if the top man can't get a ride there's not much chance of us.

**So what happened when you actually arrived at Labuan?**

I was delayed actually, I'd had malaria and my knees had packed up and they left me at Lawas for a couple of days and when I got ready to travel

29:00 they took me over on a boat.

**Before we get to that what were they doing with you as far as malaria was concerned? Did you go to a hospital?**

No, no I just took, took the, oh what, Atebrin yes.

**You'd been on Atebrin before?**

Oh been on Atebrin for months yes, yes but sometimes it seems to get through the Atebrin protection. So I took some more Atebrin and the rest of course -

29:30 a couple of days rest and my knees started to work again and I, I got on this little boat and went over.

**To Labuan?**

Labuan yeah.

**So what was on Labuan at that stage?**

There was an AGH, Army General Hospital, Nine Div Headquarters, the air force had a very big strip there. There was the

30:00 Japanese compound and the balance of the Island was sort of as is, you might say. We had a small camp there. Just looking back on parade days we used to have a count of heads you know in the morning, there was no real parade but they'd take it in turns, the Sergeants and the Warrant Officers take in turns to call the roll.

30:30 There would have been maybe twenty, there might have been twenty-five of us. And nothing exceptional about that, you know, we swam and went to the pictures and just settled down to unthreatened life.

**Where were most of the, you said a group of about twenty-five, where were they from?**

31:00 Some were from Semut One, some would have been from AGAS and there probably, yeah there would have been some from Semut Two and Semut Three. Yes that would have been the main, the main members there.

**So you were all Z then?**

Oh yes, yes.

**Did you manage to pass a few stories amongst you?**

31:30 Oh yes, I guess we did swap a few but I don't know we swapped a lot you know we, we didn't compare

notes or... Maybe it was our training that we didn't talk about it. And many, many things I didn't know until I started to get onto these people about writing their story and then it came back to me their story.

32:00 Yes nothing spectacular about Labuan and then we were on the ...

**Was it good to get back to civilisation though?**

It was a bit of a let down really.

**Why was that?**

Well you felt... While you were doing the job you felt an urgency and a need to be doing something and suddenly you realise it's all over

32:30 and that life is gone. Particularly for the younger people, I stress this again, because they were probably like me a boy on a pushbike when they joined up. And the older men they were probably very glad because they could get back to families and wives and things like that. But to us there was a sort of a vacuum, a gap, a loss -

33:00 where do we go from here? Very, very real and a lot of people say that, they felt all at sea, they didn't know where they were going to settle down to. So yeah we just simply muddled along and ...

**And how did you get out of Labuan?**

The Manoora, the Manoora, was a troop

33:30 ship, you know all the decks had been, bunks had been put in tiers and layers and decks and what have you. We came back on the Manoora to Brisbane.

**What was that journey like?**

Oh very ordinary. Other than... The worst part of it is that I had to stay down below on the deck, I was in charge of the deck, and I'm

34:00 not a good sailor at the best of times, and I was looking out these portholes every morning and then you'd see the ocean and then the sky and then the ocean, and it would give me quite a queer feeling.

**How did you get this job of being in charge of a deck?**

I think all the Warrant Officers got a part of a deal to look after a certain amount of the deck, of the decking.

**So what does that entail?**

Well you had to stay down there

34:30 until all the Captain and all his people, army officers and anybody else who was in the top echelon came down and inspected each deck. They would come down and walk right around and make sure all the beds were made properly, the blankets were folded properly. And if they weren't of course the poor old WO [Warrant Officer] would get a rocket I suppose.

35:00 But they weren't that strict as long as it was clean and they could see that there was no dirt or refuse or anything like that. And most of them were old soldiers by that time and knew what to do.

**So they were pretty easy to patrol?**

Mm.

**So arriving back in Brisbane what happens then?**

Train to Sydney

35:30 and then straight on to Albury and to Melbourne, all in a very short time. They issued a blanket, that's right they issued a blanket at Brisbane to keep us warm on the two day train journey. I suppose it was two days, maybe a bit more.

**Is this a troop train?**

Yes, yes a troop train.

**So I'm thinking maybe it's not too comfortable.**

They're not too comfortable, no.

36:00 No, if I remember correctly it was just a dog box thing.

**Dog box?**

Yeah, the little compartments like we used to have here years ago that sit eight or something like that, well of course the army put twelve in.

**How much were you looking forward to getting back home?**

Yeah, we were breaking our necks to get home,

36:30 which is only natural I suppose, only to realise that once you're there, once you've got there you're still all at sea because your family, your brothers and sisters have grown up. They're employed in their jobs, they're busy, they're doing things and, of course I was still in the army until '46, March, April

37:00 '46 or something. But it's certainly a sense of loss and trying to fit yourself into a different capacity altogether. Particularly after being in, if you were in the normal show where you're regimentated all the time it mightn't have been so bad but when you were in a show like Z where there was a lot of freedom

37:30 you do feel different, a different attitude getting back to private life, even getting back to normal army life. Although I must say, it was not difficult really because we reported in the morning and we were sent home with a leave pass and reported in the next morning until they found me a job.

**Oh that's good, I mean how**

38:00 **did the army actually take care of you?**

They eventually found me a job ....

**Oh that scared me ... So if we can just go that one again. How did the army treat you as far as finding you something to do?**

Yes, oh it was quite good, but I was out of my depth of course hopelessly as, in the Western Command Sig Office.

38:30 They were very sophisticated with their teleprints and teletypes and stuff like that which I had, knew nothing whatsoever about, or what a keyboard was or anything.

**Sorry, what was the actual job?**

I was second in command of the Signal Office. It's a bit of a joke really isn't it? But all I had to do was come in and go into my office and there was a graph

39:00 on the board, I'd fill that in, go to the teletype and say, "Are you there Adelaide?" And he come back and say, "Yes I am, good morning," and that was the extent of it. Yeah it was, you know, the war had slowed down to nothing.

**That sounds like one of the most ludicrous jobs I've ever heard.**

Yes. More so because I didn't know what I was doing most of the time anyway.

39:30 But there was a good staff there and of course they carried the day and didn't need me.

**Where was this?**

Western Command, Western, the Barracks in, at Francis Street, Perth.

**So it was just a job that evolved like teletex, like you know information coming through, early fax machine kind of situation?**

Yeah, yeah teletypes, they were all connected to every State you know, through lines.

40:00 And the office people had them too and I had one in my little office. A bit of a waste really.

**So how did some of the other regular army blokes treat Z men?**

There was always a little bit of...Hard to

40:30 say you know... We had a few loud mouths, one way and another, and they didn't do us any good. And in that respect some of the army guys reckoned we were show ponies and stuff like that. But there was nothing in depth, no, just a little bit, I blame these few loud mouths.

**Show ponies?**

41:00 **Nothing could be further from the truth.**

Yeah.

**All the other army blokes really had to complain about was ongoing bully beef.**

Oh yes.

**You had sort of more extreme situations.**

The different ways of cooking bully beef, yeah.

**Did you manage to keep up contact with some of the other Z men when you came back?**

It would have been

41:30 1946, the 18th of, the 19th, the 19th of December 1946. We had an association started here so we were in touch with possibly up to fifty people, and that is still surviving until this day. And as I say, if we get ten at a meeting now we're doing ...

## Tape 7

00:31 **What were you about to mention in regard to Garden Island Bob?**

On Garden Island Day we have a little parade and a wreath laying at the Memorial. We may get twelve or fifteen members on those occasions, but that's about as much as we can

01:00 ever expect to get.

**I believe there's actually a memorial to Z Force up there in Borneo?**

I think there is, yes Mount Kinabalu I think there's a little memorial garden or something.

**Is there in Refuge Bay, Pittwater or ...?**

Something like that, yeah. I think Toby Carter, the overall leader of Semut Parties, I think

01:30 he had something to do with the establishment of it because he was a geologist in the oil industry up there – pre-war and post war as well.

**Have you ever had any interest in getting back there?**

No. I got as far as Singapore. And Jack Tredray went back to Borneo briefly. Flew into where we landed. It's changed, changed drastically. He brought

02:00 photographs – I've still got a photograph somewhere there. But it's changed so much you know, you couldn't recognise an original thing.

**A lot of jungle being cleared?**

Yes, yes and more sophisticated housing. And I understand they've got a little sawmill there, probably some sort of motor power, you know some kind of engine I suppose, you know, or a diesel or something like that to provide timber for

02:30 the locality.

**You just mentioned the oil fields. How critical have you been of Blamey's decision to abort the Kingfisher and go in for the oil?**

I don't know very much about it, and of course it's only in recent years, well recent years, I say twenty years or so, that the subject has been brought up. It was very concealed or undisclosed

03:00 or whatever you like. But I know the fellows in the battalion were breaking their necks to go in as a battalion and it would have been a wonderful opportunity for them and they would have undoubtedly been a success and I think it's a shame that it didn't go ahead. But it's the powers that were at the time

03:30 didn't agree.

**What did you think of McArthur's command in the South?**

I don't know very much about him. Very dogmatic and all that type of thing. My friend Dan Ellerick and his wife from Texas they reckon he was the worst commander that ever was. They had absolutely no

04:00 time for him at all. What they based it all on I don't really no. It was only the latter part of his career that I thought he was too warlike, too hostile, too pushy. When he wanted to go into China and he wanted to use atomic bombs they got rid of him very quickly. So I,

04:30 I don't know. I'd have my reservations about a fellow like that. But I think he was, as has been said, he was a real show pony too.

**He and Blamey not a good couple?**

Not a good combination no, no.

**Has the secrecy regarding your service with the Z Force over the years, you know influenced or had an affect on your**

05:00 **personal and private life, Bob?**

Oh, I don't think so, no I don't think so. I think people soon forgot about the war and they weren't interested. And to this day you can go out on the street and ask them whether they've heard of Z Special Unit and not a clue. So it doesn't worry us. So I don't think...We

05:30 complied by the Secrecy Act, you know, not to publish stuff for a certain number of years. Whether it held water or not there seems some doubt now. It seems, and I've read this, the Australian establishment never had a Secrecy Act that you had to comply by. But Britain does of course and we were an offshoot of SOE [Special Operations Executive]

06:00 in Britain, so whether it applied to us or not is a debatable fact. Anyway most of us didn't have the need or inclination to divulge any secrets if there were any.

**Did you swear an oath?**

We signed a document I think, in Batman Avenue, saying that we wouldn't divulge any of the secrets for a period of time,

06:30 but it's very hazy now, that was '45, yeah Christmas '45, we just got back for the, we just got back to Melbourne for the 'Carols by Candlelight', yeah. I remember that well, there were three of us. And we were wandering along there, it was cold as charity and suddenly the bloke in the middle of us collapsed

07:00 to the ground in a heap and he had a real bad attack of malaria, yes.

**How about yourself, did you come down with malaria?**

Yes.

**How and when were you affected by malaria Bob?**

I had a slight attack at Lawas, after I'd finished the walk out. It laid me out for a while

07:30 but I dosed myself up with Atebrin and that was okay. Kept on the Atebrin, was home here and I thought I'll have to chuck this Atebrin business in and get the treatment and I did. I was shaking all over and went to Hollywood Hospital and by the time I got there and they'd got a sample I'd chucked a negative. Got back

08:00 to Perth about a week later. Yeah, about a week later I'd been off the Atebrin and I knew it was coming on that morning and my stepfather bought me, took me to hospital in the ute and I got to just this corner here because there was a shop there and he went in to buy

08:30 something and from that point onwards I was unconscious for two days. And when I came to, the bloke next door to me in hospital he said, "You're an unsociable bastard, you haven't spoken to me for two days." But they cured me I think.

**So no further relapses or ...?**

Oh, you've always got it there I reckon, you've always got it. Every winter I get aches and sometimes

09:00 I get fevers and I know I've got to get onto antibiotics. So there's some residue there I reckon, that stays there for the rest of your life. I've asked the medical people that and they don't give you an answer. They don't say no you won't get it or yes you've still got it, they just don't answer.

**Which is as good as a yes really isn't it?**

It's as good as a yes, mm.

**How was your health while you were in the jungles in Borneo.**

I was,

09:30 I was pretty good, yeah, I was pretty good. But of course the lack of food saps your energies. Over seven months you can really come down. I was eleven stone seven the last time I weighed myself and when I got out I was about seven stone I suppose. And my normal weight was nine and a half. I think I was nine stone three when I joined up - about your fighting weight.

10:00 **You must have been pretty light when you came out of there?**

Yeah, yeah pretty light.

**So do you have much knowledge at all of the, sorry was it the Jaywick?**

The Jaywick? Ah no, only from what I've read and talking to Arthur, but he'll give you a good run down on Jaywick.

**Right this is tomorrow I think.**

Arthur Jones.

10:30 **Oh great.**



Yeah, he was one of the paddlers that went in to limpet the ships. So you know, he can give you the account from go to woe, all the way around the top of the Australia to pot shot and the broken drive shaft and got it welded up and off they went. Every detail of it.

**What was it like coming down from, I suppose, the highs of**

**11:00 being in Borneo with the Z Force to regular civilian life?**

Quite, quite a shock, yeah. Seeing as you're so, well sort of not that young but we were inexperienced, very inexperienced as eighteen, nineteen year olds and suddenly we're into things that we never imagined we'd get into. A mate of mine,

11:30 he was a bit younger than me, and he was in charge of a tank, a twenty thousand dollar tank, a twenty thousand pound tank, you know. Just out of the realms of possibility you'd reckon, and likewise young fellows going into the air force in charge of a fighter aeroplane. Suddenly you're back and you think well where do I go

12:00 from here? Do I go back on my bike and peddle around Subiaco in Perth. So it is quite a let down until you find direction again. There were other people, I know mates of mine that are still around, that knew what they were going to do, they knew they had firm jobs and their jobs were being kept for them and they fitted back in.

12:30 Mind you, not without a few disgruntled people moving sideways to provide their job back for them, but still they deserved it.

**Did you spend much time looking for direction?**

No, no I didn't. I applied for a course which never came up, in electrical refrigeration but it never

13:00 transpired. I went back to the warehouse where I'd been before and they said, "Well we're going ahead, as soon as the supply and the stuff comes in, becomes available, we'll go ahead and you'll be Sales Manager." It was a toffee sounding job wasn't it? But that's only a little show.

13:30 And I settled into that but I always had some other ambition. And I think they knew that I had itchy feet so they offered me a partnership. So I bought a quarter share of it for a thousand pounds, two thousand dollars. And that was reasonably successful. I was quite satisfied

14:00 to continue on with that. It would have been about 19, early 1950s. And mid-1950s we took another partner in who became a quarter shareholder like myself and two of the other partners combined and had a share between them. And then about 1951

14:30 this latest partner that came in decided to buy the whole show, and of course the other partners were all agreeable to selling to him so I had no option but to sell too.

**So you were against the idea?**

Yes, I was against the idea because I thought my course is not going to come up it's 1960, 1959,

15:00 I think it was actually. It's years after the war's over, the course is obviously not going to come up, I'm settling into this, I understand it and it's my life's work. All of a sudden I'm getting a good wage and all of a sudden I'm out again. So I bought this building up here and started ... It was a grocer shop there, we had the

15:30 grocer shop let and I started a hardware in one of the other premises. Not very successful.

**At what stage had you met Marge and got married?**

'46 I suppose. We got married in '48, '47, '48. I'm like most men I don't know anything about dates.

16:00 I can remember her birthday but it's taken me fifty years to remember it.

**Do you remember it today?**

Twenty-second of September, yes.

**She'll be pleased with you. How did you guys meet?**

Well, she had the corner shop up here and that's probably how I first would have met her and got going to dances with the crew from Bayswater,

16:30 and went from that onwards. I started to build this house in probably '48, '49, put the stumps in, because it was a timber frame house, the bricks have put around since. We moved in before 1950

17:00 to an unfinished house and have been building it ever since. You never stop.

**There's quite a spread out the back too.**

Yeah. Yeah, well we own the offices up there of course, and then this block and much later we bought

the house next door, which gives us the three quarters of an acre, the three buildings on.

**And you let the place out next door**

17:30 **do you?**

Yes, oh yes.

**And like the open land out the back has that been a market garden in the past?**

No, no actually these blocks all go back to our back fence and that block goes back to that back fence too, so there's three blocks that go right down to the end of the yard there. But we leave that space up there because it's parking for visitors, for the lawyers. And sometimes you know, you can get

18:00 as many as five or six cars up there on a real busy day.

**I just thought that given the store was a grocery store you might have grown vegies out there?**

No, no. No not a great gardener, not any green thumbs or fingers.

**And what about the family that you and Marge have had together?**

Yes, they're all, they're all all right. Fred's with Telstra, Kevin's with

18:30 Betts and Betts, Geoff is retired, his wife still works as an accountant. The girls have done alright, they're all secure in their own homes so ...

**How many children did you have Bob?**

Seven.

**That's a pretty big field.**

Yeah, yeah, no television in those days.

**And how many grandchildren do you have?**

Twelve. Twelve

19:00 grandchildren, two great grandchildren. It makes you feel terribly old.

**And you're the head of the family?**

Yes, yes Petron.

**And have you passed on many of your wartime experiences to your family?**

Oh, they will have that book but I doubt whether they've read it. As a matter of fact I haven't read that book would you believe.

**Well there's a contribution from a number of people**

19:30 **in there.**

Yeah, but I've read the transcripts and the original documents so many times before going to being printed. They give you printouts. Check this for mistakes and you check it through and you correct it and you send it back to them and another bally proof comes in. Check this for sequences and all that... Even so

20:00 you still find you've made mistakes.

**Do you want to give the book a plug?**

Oh yes, yes.

**Can you reach it?**

Yes ...

**You'll have to hold it up sort of. Just don't hold it in front of your face that's all, just hold it sort of up here or something and ...**

Yeah, well that's the book on 'Operation Semut One' which

20:30 we have diagonally across there. And of course, just before it was going to print I asked the different contributors for a name for it and one of them come up with 'Z Special Unit's Secret War' and another one came up with 'Soldiering with the Headhunters of Borneo'. So to satisfy

21:00 three ways I put the three different titles on there. But ...The first print sold right out completely and was sold by many of the bookshops in New South Wales and Melbourne principally, South Australia to some extent and quite a bit here. But more recently than that I

21:30 have an agent here and he's selling them and I sell them for here. Twenty-seven dollars a copy, posted anywhere in Australia for that amount which is cheap for books for today.

**Definitely.**

Terribly expensive a lot of books.

**I imagine it would be a lot of work compiling and publishing a book of this kind?**

It takes a lot of years, a lot of years. But there again I

22:00 only did it in dribs and drabs as I found time. I might put it down for a month and then get it back again and go through it. Something might arrive from one of the fellows so I fitted them in in sequence that they went into the field or their... It starts with Lieutenant Edmeades and goes on. But in the main it's as they came into the field

22:30 so they come into the book. And photographs are there and maps of each of their travels. It was a tedious thing but I'm glad I did it.

**I'm sure it's been a satisfying process.**

Mm my word yes. I just got a letter today in fact from a fellow in New South Wales

23:00 and he's looking for support to write something on Borneo, but I don't know exactly what, but he wants our support, you know, our backing sort of, not financially but just moral backing.

**A bit of an endorsement?**

Yes. And he said, "I'm just getting your book down from the shelves so I can re-read it." So it's surprising how far afield it is.

**And what was this fellow's background?**

Doctor, Doctor Smith, but I don't know,

23:30 I don't know where he fits into the army establishment.

**So you'll have to follow that up I suppose.**

I will, yes.

**What, I'm just interested in what Anzac Day's come to mean to you following your service?**

Oh we parade every Anzac Day and I think it's

24:00 terrific. A lot of people, well not a lot of people but some people will say you're glorifying war or something like that, but there's not an Anzac Day goes by that I don't think quite a bit of the fellows that we lost, and I think it gives you a day for reflection. More so than the Garden Island and

24:30 wreath laying day. Anzac Day is a day for reflection. The mate I was joined up with he was atomised in it - B24 crash, and he's got no known grave you know, and that doesn't, it doesn't worry me to any great degree but it's always, I'm always conscious of it and I think of him on Anzac Day and others

25:00 that we lost.

**What do you say to those people who think that Anzac Day glorifies war?**

Well, I think that they're being petty and ridiculous and... Maybe they've got an axe to grind in trying to stop wars, overcome the necessity of wars. It's a terrible waste of,

25:30 waste of a thing. You know you read these books about the waste of property and... I'm just reading the North African Campaign. The amount of stuff that was blown to bits and people. It's a terrible thing but I think one of the Greek philosophers said that he who seeks peace let him prepare for war.

26:00 So you know it's with us and I don't think there's anything's going to change that.

**No it doesn't appear that way when you look at the horizon.**

Yeah, yeah.

**Do you march on Anzac Day?**

Oh yes, yes. Yes, I am the President here at the moment.

**With which branch of the RSL [Returned and Services League]?**

No just the Z Special Units Association of

26:30 WA. [Western Australia]

**Do you have an affiliation with the RSL as well?**

Oh yes, yes we do, we are affiliated with our address – name and address of the President and Secretary comes out in all their, the copies of their, their booklet, yeah.

**Do you have much to do with it apart from ...?**

No, no not a lot, not a lot. It becomes... We did have a branch here in Bayswater. I joined

27:00 it and it ... As a matter of fact I joined the RSL two or three times but time and things like that, you know, you sort of drift away from it, and now our local branch here finished up, wound up its affairs. The nearest one I think is the Bedford, Bedford Morley RSL. A couple of the... Our

27:30 Secretary and our Treasurer are both members there and I've often thought about it.

**What do you think of younger people marching in the Anzac Day Parade?**

I think it's wonderful, yes particularly, particularly the cadets, the young people and I'm happy to see the girls, the girls marching in the Cadets and in the Reserves and Permanent

28:00 Forces and things like that, it's great.

**There's been several wars that Australia's participated in since your wartime service. What, as a return serviceman what do you hope that young Australians can take from your experiences with regards to future conflicts?**

From our

28:30 findings it's a bit of a difficult thing isn't it? I often think of when I was a young person and World War I was twenty-five years old and we heard nothing about it whatsoever you know, and there was nothing, nothing

29:00 to pass on as it were. The technology changes so much that our findings and our... At one stage they were using that book as a training manual but now I doubt it. The technology that was in that book and the technology that they've got today, you know, it's so vastly superior. Morse code is

29:30 out now even. How they pass the information I don't know. But it's, yes, it's a question that I don't really know the answer to that one.

**Are there any lessons in war?**

30:00 Not to do it. Yes, diplomacy by all means if at all possible, which of course makes you wonder whether they've done the right thing with this last lot.

**Well since your service there's been several wars - Korea, Vietnam and then these recent conflicts.**

Yes, yes.

**What does it ...?**

It all points to the direction that we're never going to be free of them doesn't it?

30:30 **It does I guess.**

Yeah.

**I just want to move away maybe from the subject of war and ask you about what you learned as a Wireless Operator and how that perhaps led to any hobbies of yours post war?**

Strangely enough I didn't get interested, reinterested in radio until

31:00 about ten years ago and then it was quite by accident. As a matter of fact it was because of the book. Some of the sales of the books were going to all kinds of people and they said that, oh you should have a radio. And I thought why do I want a radio?

**You've got a telephone.**

But anyway I do a little bit of... I've got a little bit of equipment, it's very, very ordinary equipment and you've got to have the

31:30 conditions exactly right to be able to get to the other side of Australia, and it only happens very rarely.

**Do you spend much time on the CB [Citizens Band]?**

No, no. Half an hour at night that's about all. Maybe ten minutes in the morning talking to some of the fellows going to work.

**Fellows that you speak to regularly or ...?**

Oh yes, I speak to them regularly, yes. Most of them belong to a club of

32:00 sorts. So we belong to the Overland Radio Club and it supports the Flying Doctor and so we have a luncheon once a month and have a raffle and all proceeds go to the Flying Doctor. We don't pay any subs and nothing's taken out for our purposes so we usually manage to send about a thousand dollars a year to the Flying Doctor, which we've done over the past four or

32:30 five years.

**That would be appreciated I think.**

Oh yes, they give us a very nice letter, quite a little citation saying how thankful they are.

**And how long have you been a member of the club?**

Oh, it would be seven or eight years I suppose.

**Has CB radio use slowed down or quietened down?**

Yes quite a lot. First of all it was computers,

33:00 it still is computers largely too, but also we feel that other things people communicate with – fax machines and mobile phones all taking a bit away from it. Oh yes it's quite different over the last ten years, quite different. It was a flourishing thing, particularly when you could get to the other side of Australia fairly readily,

33:30 this is when conditions of course are different, people were eager to make contact with you and send you a card saying you know, "This is my card. I'm Overland Radio," or I'm somebody else and, "Please send me a card back." All that's gone now.

**Do you communicate readily with mobile phones or emails?**

Oh no, I have nothing practically to do with emails. Fred

34:00 does but ... I've got a whole lot of email addresses there but I rarely get in touch with them. It's a matter of time you know. At my age I'm reluctant to waste any time on things like that that don't produce some satisfaction.

**You'd rather hear the voice at the end of the line?**

I'd rather hear their voices. But even that I take in moderation too.

34:30 There's too many other things to be done.

**How's your time best spent these days Bob?**

Well a good question. I never have too much spare time with... I do most of the, like all the washing. Marge can't wash or she can't vacuum clean. Many of those jobs I do them all. A little

35:00 bit of gardening but I do get one of the boys to do the mowing because we've got a fair expanse as you can see. But every day there seems to be just enough day. And of course we do have more visits to doctors these days. Marge goes once a fortnight and myself once a month or something like that. And she goes to the toe cutter occasionally and so it

35:30 all takes time.

**How long have you been caring for Marge like this?**

Oh since 1980, in varying degrees. Of course she is not improving, she's not as agile as she was in 1980 of course.

**Can I ask what Marge's condition is?**

She's got, she's got an artificial leg.

**Oh right.**

And knee joint. Yeah, and it's on the right hand side and the left hand side,

36:00 the hip joint out of socket. So this leg moves up and this one moves down with the weight of the artificial leg so it means walking is very difficult.

**So it's just as well you know how to pick up and iron ...?**

Oh no, I draw the line there. No, no irons. If they don't like their washing pegged on the line

36:30 with the wind to straighten it out then too bad.

**Yeah it's alright isn't it, you just hang it up and it comes off the line no creases. I don't think I have any further questions for you today Bob. But if there's anything else you'd like to you**

**know comment on for us before we thank you for speaking with us.**

I don't know, I must have a think about that I suppose.

**Hang on Denise might have something to ask.**

37:00 **What was your biggest fear while you were in Borneo?**

Oh, like a lot of young people, most young people, I don't think we realised, foolishly we didn't realise. It was like jumping out of aeroplanes you know,

37:30 as my friend from England said, "It's nothing to jump out of an aeroplane, it's what's down there that might hurt," when his friends say he was very brave jumping out of an aeroplane. But I don't think we'd had enough front line experience, for the want of a better term, to be cautious even.

38:00 **Would you do it again?**

Yes, yes as a matter of fact the local skydivers asked them to go up with them, some years ago now but I had a young family at the time and I declined. Yes, I think it's something I don't regret, no I don't regret at all. It was

38:30 quite a wonderful experience really - particularly in the SOA [Special Operations Australia].

**Well thanks Bob for telling us about your adventures in Borneo and sharing some of your other life experiences with us.**

Thank you.

**We'll call it a day.**

Yes thank you.

**Cheers.**

**INTERVIEW ENDS**