

Australians at War Film Archive

Ian Wall (Icca) - Transcript of interview

Date of interview: 30th September 2003

<http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/674>

Tape 1

00:35 **We're recording now Ian, now if I could get you to explain to us your introduction starting from where you were born and where you grew up.**

Very well, I was born in a private hospital in North Fitzroy. The family home at that time was in North Carlton. I attended Leigh Street State School for the primary section

01:00 of my education and then went to the Collingwood Technical School. In later years I went to the Sir William Anglo [?] School where I did a diploma course in Public Health. Then from there I got employment and I became enlisted in the AIF [Australian Imperial Force] in 1941. I

01:30 became a prisoner of war in 1942 on the capitulation of Singapore. I was discharged in 1945, demob [demobilised] and re-enlisted in the CMF [Citizens Military Force] in 1949. Enlisted in the interim army in 1951, transferred to the Australian regular army in 1953 and remained there including

02:00 a posting in Vietnam and was discharged from the services in 1975. From there I became a Health Inspector with the Melbourne City Council and shortly afterwards with the Environment Protection Authority. I completely retired from work because of war caused injuries in the early 1980s. I think it was about 1984 or 85. I became

02:30 totally and permanently incapacitated with war caused injuries and am still in that way. I, in my retirement life, I have been occupied. I took on assisting ex-service persons and war-caused widows and helped them with pensions and

03:00 advocacy and things of that nature and I'm still doing that today.

Fantastic, that's great. Now what I will start off is trying to get an understanding of your pre-war life before the Second World War that is. Could you tell us about your parents, your mother and father?

Yes, my father was a World War I veteran. He got severely wounded lost one eye and was completely deaf. He eventually died

03:30 with lung cancer and he had a [(UNCLEAR)] ulcer that ate most of his ear away. Apparently they didn't know exactly how to treat that at that stage. My mother was a country girl from the western district and she was a housewife for the whole of her life. My father worked at the Melbourne Harbour Trust and later at the, as they called it then, the Postmaster General's department,

04:00 PMG. He was a brick-layer and he was actually a carpenter but he did some brick-laying in making manholes and things of that nature with the PMG. I think he died, in the mid, when I say I think he died I know he died in the mid 1950's. My mother died not long afterwards.

What's their background? Are they from a religious

04:30 **and ethnic background?**

Okay, so they, my mother was a Methodist. She was brought up at a small town called Wemen in the western district. They were farmers and in the wood industry. My grandfather was a bullock wagon driver and he used to car timber or trees out of the forest to the sawmills.

05:00 My mother in her youth, gained employment by being a cook and housemaid at other farms. And that was their working life. When they got married in 1915, I think at 14 or 15 then she became a housewife and remained so. My father, I've already given the details of his employment.

05:30 He was, his mother and father, my great grandfather and grandmother they came out from Ireland and remained here and so Dad was of course from Irish decent and he was a Catholic. So that's the background to Mum and Dad.

How did the Depression affect your family's lifestyle?

Yes we were luckier than most. Dad had

- 06:00 employment a fortnight on and a fortnight off. Nevertheless we were still badly affected but as I say in hindsight we were probably better off than quite a lot of people. So at least he had a fortnight, a fortnight's wages in every month so that helped.

What did you mother do to get by?

You see I don't think she did anything special.

- 06:30 She didn't get employment or anything of that nature. She just maintained the house as it was. So a housewife for the whole of that period. No I don't think she had employment outside of the house.

Can you please tell us how the Depression affected you?

Okay, yes,

- 07:00 I had no boots to wear most of the time. My clothes were mainly hand me downs from my brother and apart from that I didn't realise what was going on at the stage of the game. What was I, around 8 to 10 something like that. So, no, I don't think,
- 07:30 it didn't affect me a great deal to think of. I suppose it did in a way because my mother being a country girl knew how to cook the cheaper cuts of meat and things of that nature and we lived reasonably well as I can remember it. One thing did affect me during the polio
- 08:00 crisis. They closed down my school, Leigh Street State School and we received some education by correspondence but all the kids were just about out of school and things of that nature was fairly drastic as far as I can recall. So that's about as far as I can go there. We spent most of the time
- 08:30 just being confined to the house and things of that nature or the immediate vicinity and all the kids in the area were about the same.

Tell us what you did for entertainment during the Depression years?

We never did anything but family entertainment for the whole of the period. Kids in those days used to play in the streets. We played

- 09:00 football with paper footballs. The usual things, tip cat, kick the tin, hidey [hide and seek] and all those sort of things we used to entertain ourselves by playing games out in the street. Cricket against a light pole something of that nature. And yes that was the way we filled in our time. Later on we had what we called trucks. They were little pushcarts and things of that nature.
- 09:30 Dad built me one and couple of kids up the street had one and we used to race around the streets in these things. Of course, in those days, the traffic wasn't anywhere near what it is now and we were able to do so in the streets with reasonable safety. So that's the way we spent out time.

Did you have brothers and sisters?

Yes I had an elder brother and an elder sister, both deceased.

Tell us about them?

- 10:00 Alright, my brother he went to the Collingwood Tech, School, I followed there later on and became, he went into engineering and then later on got a job with the Harbour Trust. He eventually became a whitegoods salesman and he died last year. So, at the age of 86.
- 10:30 He never joined the services. He was in reserved occupation as a fitter and turner. My sister, she was in the clothing industry for all of her working life and she died about 4 years ago in Portland and was buried up there. Portland, Western Victoria.
- 11:00 Not much else to tell about my sister. She married a fellow who was also a reserved occupation as a car parts storeman and he also never enlisted in the services because he was on reserved occupation but he's also deceased
- 11:30 and that's that.

Did you have a fairly religious upbringing?

Not so strict, I had a religious upbringing in the Methodist Church but my preference, my mate two doors up was a Catholic and I used to attend church with him quite a bit because I was more interested in the Catholic religion than the Methodist religion. Not for any particular reason, I think it was just because he

- 12:00 was a Catholic and he was my mate. Yes, and that was the way and not only that my father was also Catholic so that had some influence as well. But it wasn't strict but it was voluntary and regular.

How did your parents encourage religion with you?

Well originally they took me down to the, of course they went to church too and they took

12:30 me down to, I don't know what they call it now, the junior classes where they taught stories from the Bible and things of this nature and the church was only two blocks away from my house so I was able to walk down there and walk back myself. So it was virtually a do-it-yourself job. So nothing outstanding there.

13:00 **Your mother was Methodist you said?**

Yes.

How did you see things from having two different religions?

It made no difference. There was never any conflict or anything like that in our house because of religion. They were just a working family and they worked together as such.

13:30 There was never any religious conflict whatsoever.

Now if I may go back to the Depression years and your father, and your relationship with your father, did he talk much about the war?

Not a great deal. Anzac Days and things like that yes. As a matter of fact

14:00 when I was very, still walking, I accompanied him on Anzac Day marches a couple of times and I enjoyed that very much and Anzac Day was Dad's, belonged to Dad. No, he didn't talk a great deal about it. He was in 8th Battalion and served in France. He was badly wounded and repatriated home

14:30 in 1916. And discharged medically unfit because he lost an eye, he was shot through the head. He lost an eye and was completely deaf in the left ear and that later he became totally deaf bi-laterally. So, yes, he was in a bad way, that way. He never, Dad was an independent sort of a fellow.

15:00 He never bothered with the Repatriation Department at all. In fact he used to buy his own glass eyes, the prothesis of his eyes. He'd go into town and buy his own glass eyes and never ever applied for a pension or anything like that, a disability pension. They automatically gave him a small pension when he was discharged but I think that was with him

15:30 for years and years and years. My wife, Valda, took him down to get him an increase in pension at one stage of the game and that was when he became very, very sick with this ulcer and known now as a basal cell carcinoma. Which ate away his ear and half of his face and he was like that and entered into hospital and he got

16:00 lung cancer and that eventually took his life. Cause he was a smoker. So that was Dad.

Did he drink as well?

Yes, he had the drink. Saturdays was his speciality. He had quite a few on Saturdays. Very often when I was younger

16:30 he'd take me to the football. We'd assemble at the Royal Oak Hotel in Nicholson Street, Fitzroy and Frank Gill one of the Carlton footballers had a furniture van and he used to pick a crowd up and take them up to the football match and what not and I went with him a few time. I had a bit of difficulty seeing over the heads of other but I managed to squirm my way down to the fence and watch

17:00 the Carlton Football Club who are not going to well at the moment. But yes I became a Carlton follower and still am.

We've got something in common there.

Yeah the old Blues [Carlton 'Blues' Football club], they'll come good again.

You talked about Anzac Day marches, tell us more about the marches from your point of view at the time?

What from when I was

17:30 a kid?

Yes.

I thought that they were awesome. Being amongst all the soldiers, all the diggers [veterans] with their medals and what not. I was very proud to be there, you know. And from, in hindsight and from memory they sort of welcomed you being there as well I feel. They used to rub your hair and say 'hello son'

18:00 and all that sort of stuff. So, yeah, I felt very proud and honoured to be there. It had a big influence on me, yes. Course I didn't go to the reunions. Dad took me home and then Dad went back to the reunions. They were perhaps out of my league at that stage of the game, however.

How did Anzac Day have a big influence on you?

18:30 I was always oriented to the services. I appreciated what the World War I diggers did in my younger years and I was always pro services, still am and the method and what they do for our country. So, yeah, I think it had a big influence.

19:00 What particularly did you like about the marches?

I suppose trying to think back, marching along with them, trying to march with them and I had a bit of difficulty keeping in step but yeah we did that and it was good. And the crowds, the crowds clapping and cheering on the way that grabbed me too.

19:30 So, yeah it was quite an experience.

Alright can you tell us on that note, can you tell us what Empire meant to you at the time?

Yes, I was very proud that Australia was part of the British Empire. The flag and sun never set, as we were taught in school in those days, the sun never set

20:00 on the Empire so it was spread right throughout the world. So that impressed me a great deal and to this day I'm still a monarchist. And I believe some of the stories about the monarchy is just blown up a little bit. I think they do good for the country but yes, I was very proud of the British

20:30 Commonwealth or the British Empire as it was then and then our atlases at school, I remember had all of the British Empire, all of the countries coloured in red. So, they were easily recognised when you were at school. The school teachings of that day was more Empire oriented and was brought up in that atmosphere.

21:00 What about your country, Australia, how was it important to you at the time?

Yes, very important. As I said earlier that my mother was from the country, western district Victoria and I felt very, very, proud of them being early settlers. They were settled in the western district not long after [Francis] Henty [settler]

21:30 arrived there. I think that they were there in the 1840s from there on and it might have been a bit earlier on. I feel proud of that because my father was a bullock wagon driver and he was injured doing that and became a cripple because of it. He was carting logs to the sawmill

22:00 on a limber with 8 bullocks. He undid the chains that were holding them, they were pyramided. He undid the chains that were holding them to unload the logs and the top log slipped and he dived under the wagon and the logs fell on his legs and he was crippled from that time and he had to manage a small farm as well. But he did it rather well, it did it rather well with the assistance of

22:30 his son-in-laws and things of that nature. I was very proud of all of that. And yes, I still am very, very proud of the farmers and people like that, too Australian and I like their traditions and thoughts, yes.

You said also before that you had an appreciation of what the diggers went through...

Yes.

23:00 what did you mean by that exactly?

Well, you're talking about when I was young. Well no I didn't have much of an appreciation I might've given the wrong impression there. I was too young to make an impression or gain an impression of what the diggers did. But from school days we were taught and that's

23:30 when I started to get, appreciate what they went through and what they did. Reading histories and things of that nature impressed me greatly, yes.

What sort of histories?

Oh well history of World War I, did have a bit of Boer War but I can't recall much of that but the history of what they went through in the Gallipoli particularly and the Middle East and in France. So I read

24:00 and was taught all that history. Don't recall a great deal of it but enough to know that they were terrible times and what they endured was out of this world.

Do you get a chance to talk to many diggers? Like your father's friends?

Yes, all the time, all the time. I'm always at reunions and functions where there are all the services are represented

24:30 and yeah, and dealing with ex-servicemen and widows and helping them with their pension claims and what not I get a lot of stories, yes.

Can you tell us any of the stories?

Oh, there are far too many to relate, none in particular stand out. They all stand out in fact. I can't

relate to any specific at the moment.

25:00 **For instance would they talk about their experiences at the front line?**

It's part of my, well I see it as my job, part of my function as pensions officer, voluntary pensions officer is to help them with their pension. Now to do that I had to provide a hypothesis of why what they're claiming whether it's the death of their husband,

25:30 or whether it's a disability etc, how to link it with his service. To find that out I have to question them about their service and we go into detail as far as it's known either with the veteran or with the widow and find out as much about his military history or his service history as possible. So that I can then help them provide a factual hypothesis on how that disability is linked to his service.

26:00 So I hear a lot of stories.

What about the World War I vets at that time though?

Well I don't see many, there's not many World War I vets...

No, I mean in the 30's before the war, when you were meeting with World War I vets?

I didn't actually meet with them outside family circles, really. The ones that I did meet were friends of Dad's and

26:30 he used to tell me a story or two every now and then. Not much but just depending on something that had related that day. You know, he'd say I remember when so and so you know. And that's about the only time he'd relate to his service history. Yeah it's, my memory's not the best anymore either so,

27:00 you'll have to forgive me for that. No I can't bring any specific to mind.

What about the divisions between Catholics and Protestants, can you tell us more about that?

I never recognised any really. In my younger days it didn't mean anything to me anyhow. We all mixed, we all played together.

27:30 As I say I used to go to church with my friend two doors up and even go to confession with him. He was a Catholic and I wasn't. But I was accepted and there was no problem with that. I felt no problem either, nor did he. We never saw any divisions whatsoever. That I'm aware of.

28:00 So we just went on, we're more interested in getting out playing cricket or playing football or doing something of that nature.

Do you remember coming across or joining anything like that associated with pushers. The gangs at the time?

Yeah. There were a lot of gangs around at that time. I can recall and I only know them by name I don't know the,

28:30 them personally but there was the Bovey Street mob which was a fairly volatile mob from Bovey Street, Carlton that had a reputation. We were wary of it; to go anywhere we'd sort of try and dodge anything of that nature. There was another mob that used to hang around Melbourne City and they called themselves the Crutchy Push. Most of them

29:00 wore crutches and they were pretty volatile too as the story has it. And when I grew up a bit and started work I suppose you could call us a mob too but there was about half a dozen of us. We were only just friends we didn't annoy anybody or do anything wrong. So, I suppose

29:30 in modern terms we'd have been called a mob too. But we did nothing except just meet around and were just friends you know. So mainly interested in motorbikes.

I've heard about the crutches before. So they were called the Crutchy Push?

Yeah.

So they are real?

Yeah.

It's unbelievable.

Yeah, oh there were quite a few mobs around at that time.

30:00 I think possibly, this is just a guess, but I would say that they borne out of the Depression, the have nots, you know, I don't know what they did other than just annoyed people.

What was the age group of these people generally?

Oh they were youthful I suppose once again a guess, but by appearance

- 30:30 I'd say anything from 16 -17 to 22-23 somewhere thereabouts in that age group and yeah they were very volatile and they subject to inter-mob gang fights. In those day particularly in Carlton, north Carlton, mainly in Carlton
- 31:00 a lot of the houses had wooden picket fences and if a mob fight started off there was no problem at all to strip the fence and they all used pickets to whack one another with and we used to keep well away from that sort of, but that happened, I won't say very frequently, but from time to time and the press would come up with headlines talking about hoodlums
- 31:30 and all that sort of thing, you know. Interesting times, interesting times.
- Now I just want to ask you one more question about the Crutchy Push? These people were all on crutches?**
- Yeah, predominately, I think it's my guess that was part of your membership. You had to wear crutches and they used these
- 32:00 as an advantage in a mob fight too. So I believe. I've never witnessed their fights but I've heard of them.
- So what was their reputation like?**
- Oh fearful. Yes, they were feared generally speaking. Particularly of people of my age group we used to go to places and if any of those were even in the vicinity we would go home again,
- 32:30 dodge them, get out the way.
- They'd be chasing you with crutches?**
- Oh well anything likely to happen they'd hold you up in the street for no reason and things of that nature. They were pretty volatile people as I recall it.
- I wonder what happened to them?**
- Yeah well that's it. I think they grew up.
- 33:00 **Now what did you know about politics of that time? Obviously you were quite young but did you come across, you know with the Depression there was a lot of communist activity going on?**
- Yes there was.
- Tell us about your experience in that?**
- It never worried me I was apolitical at that time and I never had any interest in it and life rolled on sort of thing you know. But yeah there was a lot of communist activity
- 33:30 I can't relate to any specifics but it was generally known that that was going on and they had good cause to be. There was a thing that they used to have down by the Yarra [River] in Batman Avenue they used to have every Sunday, political talkers. This is where the soap box, they used to get up on the soap box and talk
- 34:00 politics. A lot of those were communists or extreme lefts and they used to put their policies particularly in the Depression and things of that nature. Never attended them never attended them at all but heard about them and dismissed them as, not interested.
- Sorry, where's Batman Avenue, again?**
- Batman Avenue is down near the Runsberry side of the river.
- 34:30 Where shall I say, down near the tennis stadiums and whatnot. That was known as Batman Avenue. Is it still known as Batman Avenue? I'm not sure. It terminates up near the Flinders Street Station and goes down by the Yarra. There were a lot of parks there
- 35:00 and these people used to have their soap boxes in the parks and spruik down there.
- There must have been a lot of activities with the sussos [people on government sustenance]?**
- Sussos yeah, the sussos I can recall the Boulevard, the Boulevard in Studley Park that was built by the sussos.
- 35:30 Sustenance was, a lot of families relied on Sustenance in those days because they didn't have a regular job or anything of that nature. And they employed, they did great work some of them, some good employment but it was a tragic thing, in hindsight, it was tragic thing that they had to be drawn from people on Sustenance to do these
- 36:00 jobs but thankfully it doesn't happen any more. Yes, so the Sustenance, we weren't on, as I said our family weren't on Sustenance because as I said Dad was getting a fortnight on and a fortnight off and that helped us a great deal. And at that stage I was at the Leigh Street State School. My brother had finished school

- 36:30 and so had my sister. And I was the only one at school, it was a state school. It closed because of the polio and things of that nature so we weren't so bad. The only danger being we could've got polio, and a few other things that were around, diphtheria and scarlet fever, mumps of course.
- 37:00 All of these were fairly prevalent. I had the mumps and I'm not sure I think I had scarlet fever too.
- What's scarlet fever?**
- It's a fever and you break out into this rash as I recall whatever it was. I never bothered about it much it didn't seem to affect me
- 37:30 a great deal. I wanted to get out and play and Mum wouldn't let me. With the mumps as well.
- It's any awfully nice name for a fever isn't it?**
- Yes. It probably has a more clinical name than that but that's what we called it, scarlet fever.
- 38:00 **With Sustenance work and sussos in general, did you know any people that were on Sustenance?**
- Quite a lot, probably every second or every third person or family that you come across was on Sustenance in some form or other. I don't know the ins and outs of the Sustenance exactly because I was too young to worry about it. But yes there was quite a lot on Sustenance
- 38:30 and we didn't have a lot of excesses. Our clothes were patches, we usually didn't have any footwear or if we did it would be kept for special occasions like church on Sundays and when you were going out somewhere. We had a Sunday best dress where we put them on and we weren't allowed to wear them other
- 39:00 than those occasions. And the clothes that we wore normally were stitched up and patched up and things of that nature and for example we used to draw a lot of footpaths with chalk. We didn't buy the chalk, we used to any old statues that had passed their use by date, we used to break them and use
- 39:30 the statues as chalk. We'd draw hopscotch and all that sort of thing on the footpath and the roads and do that and we'd become footpath artists, in a sense and things of that nature where we had to adlib and find other ways of doing things. That's why I think some of the games that we played in those days like tip cat, kick the tin,
- 40:00 all that sort of thing were all spontaneously invented by ourselves, by the kids to fill in time. Kick the tin was a particular one, you'd get somebody with a tin and they put their foot on it and somebody'd run and give it a kick and the person who had their foot on it had to go and fetch it and all the rest of us
- 40:30 would runaway and hide. And he has to go and find you. It was a pretty simple sort of a game. But that tip cat we haven't seen that played for years and years and years. But all of these games were played on the road. If you did strike a car well you'd just move over and let it pass by. There weren't many cars in the back of the streets but mainly horse and carts. You'd get horse and car vendors. You'd get the breadman,
- 41:00 he'd deliver the bread and the milkmen and people coming around selling fruit and vegetables from their cart. The horse was a big thing in those day.
- What's tip cat, how did you play that?**
- It's a piece of wood about so long and it was carved down to points at both ends and you had a stick and you'd tap the point
- 41:30 and that'd spin up and you were supposed to hit while it was in the air and it wasn't so easy. And that was tip cat.
- I thought something else for the moment.**
- To do with animals - no.
- Well we've run out of tape so we'll pause for a moment.**

Tape 2

- 00:36 **I wanted to ask you about your schooling and your employment. Now starting with your schooling, tell us about the school you were at. Give me an idea what it was like?**
- I attended the primary school, Leigh Street State School. Leigh Street State School I was there from grade 1

- 01:00 to grade 6 and then went to the Collingwood Tech. But in the Leigh Street State School I wasn't a good student. I wagged it a lot. I was a reasonable student teaching wise but I was a bit rebellious and I don't know why but I wagged it a lot. And
- 01:30 but I managed to pass all exams and things of that nature. The school I went to it had a history, Leigh Street State School. It's still there. It started off, I've read a bit of history about it, it started off as a, there was hardly any houses around it at this stage of the game and it was a, I'm not sure whether it started off as a gaol
- 02:00 or started off as a, they called it a lunatic asylum, a mental asylum, but it went through the stages of mental asylum to a gaol or the other way around and then became a State School. It still had the bell tower and all that, and still has. And it was a good
- 02:30 school in a lot ways. It produced quite a few sportsmen, boxers and things of that nature, Archie Kemp and alike, Billy Ravesbury. Yeah so I played up a bit at school and I'm sorry for that now because I think I could've done a lot better. But as I say, I managed to pass all the exams and things of that nature but
- 03:00 no school life wasn't for me and it was very similar when I went to the Collingwood Tech. I went to the Collingwood Tech after the 6th grade and went through to merit and I didn't complete my Junior Tech. I went out and got a job in the engineering world. Then I was interested in that.

- 03:30 I got a job just near the Collingwood Tech as a matter of fact, Gregory Steel Products, and I was on the lathes there.

How old were you then?

I left school at 14, this would be 15, 15 and 16 and then I enlisted in the army at 16. Shortly

- 04:00 afterwards I became 17. I think I enlisted in September 1941 and in November 1941 I become 17. So that was about it, my school life. But I was always interested in engineering. I beat the reserved occupation apparently.
- 04:30 They were bringing that in as I enlisted and I enlisted with a bit of a fib [lie], I told them I was 21 and they never queried it and at that stage I was 16 nearly 17. So I would've avoided a lot of things had they queried it. However, that's a brief history of what I did at school.
- 05:00 I, later on, after I when I was discharged from the army in 1975 I went back to tertiary education, got a diploma in Public Health and became a health surveyor. I converted this to becoming an inspector with the Environment Protection Authority in their investigation branch and I remained there for 11 years until I totally
- 05:30 retired because of ill health. I've recovered a bit from that but I've got permanent disabilities that still affect me and restrict what I can do.

With the onset of war coming what did you know about either Germany and Japan?

Nothing except the patriotic things you know Germans were no

- 06:00 good and Italians were no good and all the enemy were taboo they were no good they were terrible people. Normal press things you know and I didn't know a great deal about the politics or anything of that nature like that. In hindsight it's a bit different but yeah and being, I think I'm a bit super
- 06:30 patriotic to Australia anyhow and Britain for that matter. And I was influenced by that more than anything and not only that they way I joined up was, one of my friends, one of my mates he was older than me he enlisted and he was posted to the Armoured Brigade and I thought
- 07:00 that driving a tank and working in a tank sounded pretty good to me so I wanted to do the same. I enlisted trying to do the same but I wasn't I was posted to a workshop because I told them I was a fitter and turner. At the age of 16 would you believe I had more front than Myers and they sent me out to Caulfield Tech and I did a trade test out there and I past the trade test
- 07:30 and I entered the army as a Group 1 Fitter and Turner.

Actually Ian, before you go on, there's a few more questions I want to ask you before the war. You said that your dad was an Irish Catholic. I know there were a lot of Irish Catholic soldiers who didn't feel very patriotic about the Empire.

He never indicated one way or the other. He never, never expressed any

- 08:00 views in that regard. He was just, I know a bit about his history, before I was born when he was finally repatriated because of his wounds. They were living in Hamilton, Mum and Dad were living in Hamilton. He started a shop in Grey Street, Hamilton, which I believe is the main street in Hamilton
- 08:30 and joined the RSL [Returned and Services League] and the RSL Bowls Club and all that sort of thing. I've got some photographs of him doing that and I think he was quite happy to just go along. He never expressed any views about Irish politics or anything of that nature. He wasn't that sort of a fellow. He

just rolled along and he was quite happy to be with his

09:00 family and live that life. So no, he didn't have any, not to my knowledge anyway, any Irish politics. He didn't indicate that he was concerned about that.

When the war started were you surprised it had begun?

Surprised that...?

When the Second World War started were you surprised that the war had started?

09:30 Oh there was a lot of a build up. There was a build up over years. All of the pre-war engagements of what Hitler was doing in these countries that he was invading and threatening and all that sort of stuff. There was quite a build up so it was really no surprise it was just a matter of when. The night that it did start, it was a Sunday night and

10:00 I was at the Princess Theatre. The Princess Theatre had on Sunday nights what they called radio revels. And your entry there was a silver coin. Having a threepence is the lowest silver coin you could muster. That I could muster anyway. A group of used to go and that took us up to the gods and you were way up in the air and miles

10:30 away from the action but we were there when it was announced on the stage that Britain and Australia were at war with Germany. So we rushed out, there was a big newsagent around the corner in Bourke Street and bought an Extra [a newspaper]. There was a great crowd there buying Extra newspapers. So I wish I had kept that

11:00 it would've been a good souvenir but we didn't. So that's how the information of the World War II starting as far as we were concerned.

Were you 17 when the war started?

Yes I was 17 on the 8th of November and war started on the 7th of December. The bombing of Pearl Harbor. No I beg your pardon that was Japan.

11:30 The invasion of Poland. So there you are.

So what was the general reaction with the people you were around at the time?

Excited. Very excited. People were rushing here and rushing there I don't know where they were going and whatnot but they were all over the place and rushing around. There seemed to be a lot of people in the streets and so

12:00 that was the end of the radio revels for that night. I don't think we went back in there.

When you say there were people rushing in the streets, what were they saying?

I didn't pay much attention. They were just going hither and dither. At a faster rate as I recall. They seemed to be rushing here and rushing there. I don't know whether they were going home or going

12:30 to the newsagents or what they were doing but they seemed to be in a hurry. That was around the Princess Theatre area. Elsewhere I can't recall. I think we went back to our homes and nothing extraordinary was happening there except that yes, Mum and Dad were excited and worried. And that's

13:00 about as I remember it. No I can't recall anything else extraordinary.

What did the diggers think about the war? Your dad? What was his opinion, you said he was excited and worried?

Who, Dad?

Yeah, tell us about that?

No he didn't show any extreme emotions about it. Yeah he was worried

13:30 about it. And he was worried about its outcome. But all the normal things but I don't think he had any specific views about it. Because we were all virtually primed to, everybody realised that war was going to start I think because of the press and whatnot over the year or so beforehand and we were virtually

14:00 acclimatised to it. So when it happened it was au fait accompli. So that's the way I see it or remember it.

You think your dad was a bit sceptical about the war starting again?

People (UNCLEAR) because he was such a force, Hitler's force was such a force, devastating. And his early successes proved this

14:30 and people were worried of course. But in adversity the strengths come to the fore and we all know the result of that.

Now you felt that you needed to be up there?

Yeah, yeah that's about the size of it. We needed to do something about it. Patriotism came into it and

15:00 particularly when I enlisted in 1941 which it had been going for nearly two years at that stage, a year and a half and we were having brown outs and things of that nature which sort of brought it home more so. You get the fever and away we went.

Now you had no background in the CMF did you?

No I was too young.

15:30 I did try to enlist as a cadet with the 4/19th Prince of Wales Light Horse when I was about 12 or somewhere thereabouts. I'm not too sure what happened there, they said they'd write to me but they never did. So, oh that's right, yes, they had a full strength cadets.

16:00 According to somebody told me that and they'd write to me when there was a vacancy. That's what it was and it never happened.

Now the Prince of Wales Light Horse, was that a prestigious regiment?

Yes, still is. Still is, it's an armed regiment and it had a good following. The depot that I went to was in Park Street, North Carlton.

16:30 I think the depot's still there. But what it is now I don't know. But they are still part of the CMF Brigade. However I was unsuccessful in becoming a regimental cadet.

Now you were telling us before that you were

17:00 **sent to a fitters and turners course, is it?**

No I didn't do a course they sent me out for a trade test. I told them I was a fitter and turner; I told them that my age was 21. I told them that I was a fitter and turner and they sent me out for a trade test and I satisfied the trade test. Like I said, in those days I had more front than Myers.

17:30 I could tell porkies [lies] without any trouble at all. And always, how should I put it, a bit aggressive. And yeah I was able to pass the trade test. I've always been fairly good with hand tools and that sort of thing. And I had no trouble with the trade test which was fairly elementary by the

18:00 way and that's how it all started.

Did you enlist with any of your mates?

One of the reasons why I did enlist was one of my mates had previously enlisted and he had been posted to 60th Cav [Cavalry] which is armed and

18:30 he came to us when he enlisted in his uniform and that sort of jolted me on a bit. I wanted to be in this armed set up you know. So that's what prompted me to enlist. So I enlisted at Melbourne Town Hall September 1941.

What were the other reasons for enlistment?

That was about it mainly. Just adventure. I was an adventurous

19:00 sort of a person, try anything once or twice.

So what took place after you were last explaining you went through the process of getting to the Engineers Regiment?

I was then posted or did my rookie training,

19:30 basic training and Bendigo Show Grounds and was up there for a couple of months. And we expected to go to the Middle East as a field workshop. But the Japanese entered the war in December and that altered everything. Our unit was formed 2/10th Field Workshop. I was posted to the 2/10th Field Workshop and we assembled as

20:00 a unit at the Caulfield Racecourse late December 1941. And sailed for, as it turned out Singapore on, the early January. We arrived in Singapore after transferring from the Aquitania to six small Dutch cargo ships

20:30 in the Sundra Straits. And arrived in Singapore around about the 25th of January. Which is about three weeks before the capitulation of Singapore so we didn't have much of a run there. Do you want me to go on with the...

Actually I'm interested to know how prepared you were by training...

Very, very poorly. As I said I enlisted in September, late

- 21:00 September 1941 and our unit was formed in December 41 and we were in Singapore round about the 25th of January which is about three weeks before the capitulation and there was very little time to, for basic training. It was even less than 3 months. Frankly,
- 21:30 in hindsight there were 4,500 drafted onto the ship the Aquitania, a big funneller. A beautiful old ship. We left from Sydney early January but comprising of this 4,500, it was either 4,000 or 4,500, there was a,
- 22:00 we picked up a complete combat unit, the 2/4th machine gunners, in Perth but apart from that we had a couple of reinforcement units. Not many people I think. It was the 2/15th or 2/10th artillery and 2/29th infantry I think from memory. They were the only combatants on the ship. There wouldn't have been too many of those.
- 22:30 I suppose there'd be 1200 amongst that lot. Now the rest of us comprised of non-combatants. There was us 2/10th Field Workshop with complete ES, equipment scale, all our machinery all of our vehicles the whole lot. There was us, there was an ordinance field park, there was a complete dental and the such likes.
- 23:00 Now why they sent us at that stage of the game I've yet to ponder. I mean what were we going to do to help the situation and they were almost attacking Singapore at that stage of the game. Things were looking pretty grim. So why did they send non-combatants over there with all their equipment which was a complete gift to the Japanese. I was absolutely foolish. There

- 23:30 might've been a reason that I don't know of. I'm not saying that because I became a prisoner of war I'm saying that because I couldn't grab the logic of it. I still can't. It seemed to be rather stupid. Stupid whoever made that decision to do that. However, It might've been in the programme and they just continued on with it I don't know. But whatever, it

- 24:00 was rather foolish. The 2nd, by the way, the 2/4th machine gunners acquitted themselves very well and heroically. Very good indeed. So there you are, that was that, and that's my little bit of a bitch.

Every soldier has his own views, it's very interesting. What were you expecting when you were on your way to Singapore?

- 24:30 **On the ship?**

Well we didn't know where we were going. We never knew we were going to Singapore. Everything was a guess. We thought we were on our way to the Middle East but at that stage of the game they were withdrawing from the Middle East and sending them home, so we were in a bit of a quandary. And then the word started to sneak around that it was Singapore. It turned out to be Singapore. And when we got to Singapore

- 25:00 we were in the act of setting up a workshop at the Hume Pipeworks. That's adjacent to where the capitulation took place at the Fordworks. And we were setting up a workshop there but it never got into operation we were bombed out half way through the preparation. I was in charge of setting out a lathe, a milling machine, a shaper, a

- 25:30 couple of grinding, grinders and things of that nature. It was a dirt floor and I levelled the wall up with native labour and got them all levelled up and in place and whatnot and then they poured the concrete round them. There's a funny story there. They poured the concrete and I suppose it'd be about a day and half, two days old. It was going off. It was

- 26:00 not quite set but it was reasonably solid when we got our bombing raid. This was on a small mould, this was part of a workshop for Hume Pipeworks, it was more of a storeroom I think. It was built of a steel frame, asbestos sheeting on the walls and asbestos corrugated roof. And when we got our

- 26:30 bombing raid everybody scattered to slit trenches etc. I found refuge in a deep stormwater drain, closest to me and it was right next to this railway bridge which was, in hindsight, was rather a foolish place to be because I think apart from our workshop I think they might've been aiming at the railway bridge. Anyway they made a mess of the place and when we got back

- 27:00 you could see what happened on the wet concrete, about six feet apart were these little tufts where somebody had ran across and scuffed out the concrete and they'd run straight to the wall and where it was finished there was a great big hole so whoever it was and we never found out who it was ran across the concrete and straight through the wall. And I still remember that

- 27:30 I don't blame him either.

Your workshop got bombed did it?

Yeah. So after that we abandoned that and then we spent the rest of the time, it would've been at least a week and a half, two weeks just roaming round the island waiting for orders and what to do. We finished up at a place called Tanglin and

- 28:00 we took up a second position there, a second front as, I think they called us, Emu Battalion just to give

us a name and we were there as a back up to the main infantry forces. I don't know what we would've done, none of us were very well trained infantry wise. But the capitulation happened before we, before they, we were receiving mortar fire

28:30 and sniper fire just prior to the capitulation and so we were about to get the full strength of the Japanese infantry.

Now before you go on, how long after you came to Singapore was this incident where you first bombed by the planes?

How long were we in Singapore before we received this bombing?

Yes.

Before we received the direct bombing, what would it be,

29:00 a week or thereabouts, a week it might've been a little longer not much longer. And we abandoned it and then we roamed around the island for a couple of weeks until we finished up, well for a week or so then we finished up in Tanglin.

Okay before you go there, tell us what Singapore looked like? What was happening when you first got off?

Oh it was being devastated.

29:30 It was getting daily bombing raids. Not once a day but multi raids and whatnot. They were subject to fires, their water supply wasn't good. There was civilians dead all over the place. The Japanese bombing pattern they'd come over in flights of 27. And there was

30:00 one 27 followed by another and there might be 2 or 3 groups. They'd just blanket bomb the whole time and I'd never experienced anything like that in all my life. The first bombing raid at Bukit Timah was bad enough. The ground rocks underneath you and whatnot. You think every bomb, you could hear it whistling down as if aimed right in the middle of your back. And so it was in Tanglin as well because

30:30 Tanglin was part of their bombing process because it was in support of their infantry which was just up the road a bit. And yeah, not a very nice experience. And I can still see in my mind's eye trucks with dead civilians and whatnot in rigor mortis and arms hanging up and down thrown in the back of trucks taken

31:00 out, after the war, taken out to be buried somewhere or other disposed of somehow and it's a thing that you live with and I still see those sort of things from time to time in my mind's eye.

This stuff was happening straight away when you got off?

Yes, yes.

So you walked straight into chaos?

31:30 Yes, yes, yes, people were quite confused, rushing here, once again they had little defence, all they could was stay in their homes and their homes were being wrecked. There were fires everywhere. Yeah, not good.

32:00 **And what about your position in your unit, how did it handle the administration and things like that while this was all going on?**

I didn't notice any, when I say I didn't notice any different, things were still organised. We had our infrastructure that was still performing. We had our vehicles.

32:30 We were mainly in convoy around the island etc and we remained as a unit right up and until and including when we got to Tanglin and we were still an organised unit at the day of capitulation. There was still the proper infrastructure there. That was alright. We were administratively

33:00 and organisationally satisfactory.

Where was your unit moved up to in Singapore?

Where were they moved up to, well Tanglin. We roamed around the island, I can't tell you the exact places we were at... waiting on, I think they were waiting on instructions where to go and the instructions came out that we were to take up position at Tanglin. We went to Tanglin

33:30 we took up those positions and we were in place there. This was mainly in the residential area. One of the homes became our headquarters and we took up positions around that. Small, not far, we weren't spread out too far because we didn't have that many people. As a matter of a fact at one stage of the game I was doing some running

34:00 from headquarters with messages round to our various, so called outposts. They weren't too far away. We were within a couple hundred metres diameter. So it wasn't too bad.

Was your unit getting bombed?

Yes, not absolutely directly but very, very close. Sufficient to when you were laying down on the ground you were actually moving, the bombing

34:30 was pretty close. Terrible, terrible experience. I appreciated what those people in London endured. It's just unbelievable.

This is sort of a silly question to ask but for the sake of the camera could you tell us what exactly it was like when you say terrible experience?

Alright, okay, well when the

35:00 bombers come over you naturally look up to see them and you can see whether they are coming fairly directly over you or not and from the ground it looks like they're right overhead. Then you hear the bombs coming down well you'd take refuge. If you've got time you'd get into a slit trench. This time, one of the raids there, I wasn't near a slit trench so I laid in a gutter,

35:30 not a very deep one and just laid down flat face down. And the whistle of the bombs seems like every one of them was directed right into the middle of your back and you tried to dig in with your fingernails. I often humorously, try to be humorous, I always say that's were I found out to dig into solid rock with my fingernails

36:00 and hide under a blade of grass. And that's exactly the situation; you're trying to find cover. When the bombs actually hit and exploded you're in that position laying down you actually rock. The ground heaves is probably a better expression. The ground around you heaves and you can feel yourself heaving all over the place so it was terrifying,

36:30 terrifying, yes. But mm and I think about that from time to time too. And it didn't happen just once it happened reasonably frequently at that stage of the game. But fortunately there was only one of them that close that caused that. The others were a little bit further away. Bad enough, but not to the extent of that one I just explained.

37:00 **Who far was your unit from the front line?**

I'd say when the capitulation took place while I said we were receiving sniper fire and mortar fire. Now they were the small mortars equivalent to our 2 inch I think and that would be a range of about 250 metres something like that and the snipers would be

37:30 within 150 metres so that's about the size of it. Our infantry, we were just behind them. They were in retreat, yeah. So,

You were just behind the infantry?

Yes.

And what was the task of the engineers?

Just to back up, we adopted an infantry role virtually. We were to just stand and fight

38:00 the best way we could. I don't know how that would've operated but there you go. And yeah that was what it was. Terrible state of affairs at that stage of the game, yes.

So your unit was receiving sniper fire and the infantry were in front of you and you were still mortar?

Yes, the Japanese were very, very, adept at infiltration.

38:30 They could infiltrate, this was their tactic all the way through. Cause our infantry were, I don't know what the configuration was at that stage of the game but they used to get up into trees and things of that nature and they had the ability to climb these trees and act as snipers from a tree as individuals so they

39:00 could sneak through positions, get up a tree and fire as directed. So, yeah. Actually I never experienced any sniper fire myself. But our forward outposts, they did, so they weren't far away, up to 200 metres.

Which infantry was in front of your unit?

I don't know. I don't know

39:30 what infantry unit it was and we never ever saw them. They were, I don't know their configuration but they were virtually, you'd dig your slit trenches as you go or take other cover as around in the topography, but yes I can't tell you much more about that. That's because I don't know who they were.

40:00 They never came back through us at all after that either. They seemed to assemble at capitulation, they seemed to assemble and we all marched out to Changi.

What's it like to be under mortar fire?

That's as frightening but not quite as frightening as the bombing. It's still frightening because

40:30 you can hear the cough of the mortar but you don't hear the mortar descending until it's just almost there. Whiz bang sort of thing and yeah there, it's pretty devastating as well but you're reasonably safe if you're in good cover because their explosive content was nowhere near a bomb of course. Yes.

41:00 the Japs had the small mortars, we did too. They were very adept as well.

Can you also give us an understanding about what is it like to be in the sort of situation?

Tape 3

00:34 **Okay, rolling again, so I'd like to ask you now, go back a bit again, and just ask you a bit more about growing up in Carlton. You are in the 30's. We were talking before about the Crutchies, we're still a little bit fascinated by these guys.**

The Crutchy Push?

01:00 **I'm wondering if the fact that they carried crutches was because of the World War I veterans and the fact that there were so many amputees around?**

I'm not too sure if they had veterans in them or not, they were more of a younger age group. My guess is that their age group was somewhere around about 18-22 or maybe 24 something of that nature.

01:30 I didn't have a great deal to do with them or didn't know any of them and never met them or anything of that nature just knew of their existence and their exploits.

Any idea why the might've carried crutches?

No, some of them were limbless and others I suppose had some osteo [back] problem somewhere along the line but apart from that it's a guess.

02:00 **Okay, just wondered. What sort of things, as boy, what sort of things did you do for fun?**

As I said we played in the streets when we were fairly young as a youth, half a dozen of us would meet as a group and we'd just walk around, and maybe go to the Princess Theatre, or the movies or some place like that to

02:30 just to, because more than half of us at that stage of the game were doing some sort of trade school. We had, a lot of my mates finished up as carpenters and joiners and people like that and they were doing night school couple of nights a week. An apprenticeship in those days was more demanding than I think it is now and they used to do a lot of

03:00 school. So they were involved in that quite a bit of the time and if you weren't involved in that you just played it as it came. You know pictures, whatever you liked, maybe go into town and wonder around and have a look at shops just for something to do. There wasn't much entertainment. We used to go to, and it's still there too, there's a playground and a park called the Curtain Square in North Carlton and we used to go over there

03:30 and they had this big swing, like a circus type swing and one of us, his name was Waddy Stagpile [?] he used to be pretty adept at this and he'd do somersaults of it and all sorts of thing and he was entertaining. We used to do those sort of things.

What did you do for pocket money?

For pocket money, that was very restricted.

04:00 My first job was with Lauramere Contacts, it was a semi-engineering job, making electrical parts for auto spares and things. And I started off my job with 10 and 6 pence a week. And I used to keep 4 shillings and give the rest to Mum. Be surprised that 4 shillings used to get me a lot

04:30 a lot of things because you can remember to get into the pictures was 7 pence, I think it was in those days. So I could go to a few picture shows and things of that nature. We didn't have a great deal to spend on. We never smoked or drank or anything like that at that stage of the game. So the 4 shillings did very well and then it went up to 15 and 6 and I was made. I was in business. So then I could afford to take

05:00 a girl to the pictures. So we start to get to that stage.

Did you have many girlfriends?

No not a great deal. No I was more interested in playing football or cricket.

Did you know girls though?

Yes, as a matter of fact I met my wife in those days. And we used to go down on a Sunday night to St. Bridget's to a Sunday night dance. Well

05:30 conducted and that's where I met my wife Valda. She was a friend of a girl that I went to school with, Desma. So I met her through Desma. So we were sort of going together when I went away and we had a sort of proxy engagement type of thing and when I came home she was still there and came down to see me and we eventually got married so

06:00 that was the girlfriend before I went away. Before and after.

Did you have many friends?

Yes. But we don't see a great deal of them these days. Most of them live down south, down the coastlines and whatnot and we don't drive around that much anymore. And we used to see a lot of them but

06:30 one of my best mates, POW [Prisoner Of War] mates he went to live up in Townsville. And unfortunately passed away last year and I drove up to see him before he died and yeah his, he was one of my best mates while we were POW. So I was sad about that but he was 80 so you know, I'm getting that way myself.

07:00 **I think before when you were talking about the soap boxes, was it called Speaker's Corner.**

It could've been. It could've been, yeah.

They're talking about bringing it back now.

Yes, I heard that, that's the same thing. Yes we're talking about the same thing.

So did you ever actually

07:30 **go down there?**

No, no, I wasn't that politically minded.

There was much better things to occupy your mind at that time I think.

Yes. A lot of it was trade union talk and things of that nature and no it bored me stiff.

Did you know of John Wren [wealthy entrepreneur] at all?

08:00 Know of him, yes, I knew a John Wren and his association with, he was the Archbishop, lived in Raheen [mansion in Melbourne].

Mannix [Roman Catholic Archbishop of Melbourne]?

Yes, Dr Mannix. I heard a story about Dr Mannix you might be interested in. He used to walk to St. Pats [St. Patrick's Cathedral] every morning.

08:30 And he used to walk up through I think it was Yarra Street in Collingwood as one of his short cuts and one day as he was doing this in his cloak and his top hat and whatnot he came across a little kid sitting on the footpath, grubby trousers and knees and whatnot drawing on the footpath with chalk, which was a common thing to do then, and

09:00 he stopped and he stood over him, cause he's a tall man Dr Mannix, and he throw down threepence on the ground. This little kid obviously without a great deal of money and whatnot. He threw down threepence and the little kid looked up and started at his shoes and looked right up to his top hat and he said "Gee, Mandrake!" [a cloaked magician in a popular comic script] Yeah I won't

09:30 vouch for it's truthfulness but that was the story.

So you said you were aware of John Wren. Did you ever go past the tote in Collingwood?

No I didn't but I remember them and I remember him what he

10:00 did and read a little bit of a story about him at one stage of the game and that was in it, he also had a racecourse out in St. George's Road which has not been converted to residential and things of that nature. And he also owned Raheen and gifted that to Dr Mannix or the church.

So what's Raheen?

That's in

10:30 Studley Park Road, it's a big mansion. The, what's his name was in Carlton Football Club and he's also the owner of packaging and whatnot and Masonite and all that sort of stuff. I'll think of his name in a moment, his,

11:00 he lives in it now. Oh good effort, well known, very well known. I'll think of it and I'll come back to it.

You said before you didn't smoke, did you ever take up smoking?

Oh yes, yes, I took up smoking when I, I suppose I'd be about 15. I did smoke a bit at school.

11:30 We'd be able to buy what we called Cavaliers. You'd be able to buy 5 Cavaliers for threepence and used to get sixpence for my lunch and I used to buy 5 Cavaliers and perhaps something with the threepence a little party pie or something. They didn't have party pies then but equivalent and for lunch and get down behind the lower shed in the lower quad and

12:00 have a smoke at the Collingwood Tech me and my mate, Billy White. But, yes, that grew into a smoking habit but I was able to give them up when I was in Vietnam would you believe, that's when they were throwing them away, getting cartons of cigarettes for nothing. However, they were doing me harm so I gave them up. That was in about 1970 - 71.

12:30 At the point that you had joined up had most of your mates also joined up?

Yes, a couple of them had joined up at the same time as me, then I went away and come back to find out that several of the others had also joined up. But I didn't know about that because I was away at that stage.

Where were you?

13:00 I was in Singapore locked up behind barbed wire.

So most of them joined up after you joined up?

Yes. Like I say they were doing trade skills and things of that nature at the stage of the game and I suppose they wanted to finish those as well.

13:30 Can you tell me a little bit more about those two weeks before you were actually captured in Singapore? How were you occupying your time? What exactly...

We were in convoy, most of our time was spent in trucks. Wandering around, I say wandering around, driving around various

14:00 locations in Singapore. As I said before they were waiting for directions on what they were going to do.

Yes, you were saying the convoy...

Yes, we were in convoy as a unit and that's what we were doing most of the time. Driving around various locations in Singapore.

14:30 And waiting for instructions on where to go and what to do. It finally came through when we went to Tanglin as I said before and established a position there.

So how did the actual surrender take place?

How did it take place? From memory we didn't know anything about it until round about the

15:00 eight o'clock of the night time. It came through, the hostilities had ceased and that we were to assemble all of our weapons in one place, and our ammunition and any weapons whatsoever, which we did and then we just waited there until instructions came and they eventually did, couple of days later that we were to move

15:30 to a location, to start our march to Changi which was a selected place for our internment. So, that's what happened. We were very sad that this had to happen like this and apprehensive, most apprehensive, but at the same time it was a relief to know that the bombardment that was going

16:00 had ceased.

Did any of you sabotage your weapons at all?

Yes a lot of us we broke the firing pins in our rifles and things of that nature and yes we did. As best we could.

Were you marched through the city?

Yes, yes, and thousands of us

16:30 of course. I think there was 9,500 or something and yeah it was dragging whatever we could with us and it was start stop, start stop from memory. You'd walk a couple hundred metres and stop for a while and so on and so on. Right out till we got to Changi. Changi area, now a lot of people

17:00 have a misconception including the press about Changi. They think Changi is the Changi Gaol. We weren't in the gaol initially. We were in the Changi area but we were actually housed in Selarang Barracks. Selarang Barracks were the permanent barracks for the Gordon Highlanders in the Singapore Units, Singapore Battalion and that

- 17:30 became Changi POW Camp. The gaol was mainly for political prisoners and criminals. There were some military persons in there I understand, but later on when we were up on the railway line then Selarang Barracks was apparently emptied and they built new barracks adjacent to the Changi Gaol and the POWs were moved to that.
- 18:00 But a lot of people called Changi in the first instance Changi, Changi was Changi Gaol as far as POW. That's not right, we were in Selarang Barracks in the Changi area. That's a misconception that seems to be generally accepted.

Yes, I didn't know there was a difference between Selarang and

- 18:30 **Changi I just thought it was just part of the Changi Prison.**

Well it's in the Changi area of course, whatnot. Selarang Barracks overlooked Johor Straits, 7 or 8 kilometres away from the gaol. It might've even been more.

When you marched through the city did you see people alive?

Yes, saw people alive and a lot of them

- 19:00 were running out where they could and passing on food, small tins and stuff and whatnot. They were probably what you would call the loyal citizens of Singapore. Loyal to the British and we were part of that force. We saw a lot of dead too. That's where we came across people being moved in trucks. Tip truck full of dead bodies in various
- 19:30 poses with rigor mortis. It was a terrible thing to see bouncing up and down with the movement of the truck and all this sort of thing. I still see images of that. Devastating, yeah.

You say the people passed out packages of food...

Or cigarettes, things of that nature.

- 20:00 It may not have been food so much at that stage of the game. It was cigarettes and yeah.

But the mood was generally supportive and

Yes, surprisingly. And they'd been punished terribly with the bombing and whatnot. And not only that, one of the major points of the capitulation was they were running out of water. You see the main water supply

- 20:30 for Singapore comes from Johor Bahru which is already in Japanese hands. And their water supply fed the reservoirs in Singapore and they just turned off the taps. So the reservoirs in Singapore were dependent upon those and they were emptying so water supply was very, very critical. And there was no water to fight fires or anything of this nature. And that was a big
- 21:00 influence on the capitulation I'm led to believe.

So tell us about Selarang, tell us about the conditions there?

Well I was in Hut 49 I think it was, Hut 49 and it had a beautiful view. It was, in actual fact it was a house, it was officers' quarters. There were these quarters scattered around at various

- 21:30 distances and then the Selarang Barracks itself was a two or three storey Barracks in Selarang Square. A lot of units were in there but our particular was in, we called it Hut 49, 49 or 50. And it was an officers' quarters, it was a beautiful house. But it was a house built for a family of three or four I suppose. And
- 22:00 when you get about 150 to 200 people in it, it becomes a little crowded and but nevertheless it was liveable. The food was terrible of course but yes they engaged us there on converting old three tonne blitzes, blitz wagons, taking the engine out and leaving the brake system
- 22:30 there and reducing the tray down to a flat top and whatnot. And we use to push these, and the steering was still there and we'd convert these and they'd push them around Selarang Barracks. They'd push them around there carting rice and things like that to the various cookhouses. And so that was how I was engaged in daily employment in helping to convert these things.
- 23:00 Some of our boys were doing a bit of trading. You could trade a watch or a ring or anything else you had worthy of trade to local people. You'd get out over the wire; my mate was doing this going out over the wire, through the swamps to the Chinese and doing some trading. This supplemented say our food and things of that nature as much as we could.
- 23:30 Buy a bit of fruit or eggs or things of this nature. And it helped a bit. We ran out of razor blades so I sharpened up an army penknife and used to shave with an army penknife. I had a stone and I'd sharpen this right up to near enough to razor blade sharpness and of course I didn't have a very strong beard at that stage of the game
- 24:00 so it helped a lot.

What was hygiene like in the house?

Hygiene? It was sewerage. Selarang Barracks was sewerage so we didn't have too much of a problem but there was a fair bit of use on the existing facilities. I mean you know the sewerage system for example in housing and whatnot was well overloaded but we seemed to get by.

24:30 **Were all the chaps, I presume, sleeping on the floor?**

Yes, those who had a ground sheet were a little bit better off because all the floors were tiled and it was bloody cold. Sorry I used the language.

That's fine. Was there discipline?

Yes, we were subject to our

25:00 own discipline. Our officers were still with us and we were subject to our own discipline. And as a matter of fact I've got a pay book at home somewhere and it's got a red mark in my pay book because I went somewhere, I don't know where now from memory, and I should've been converting on of

25:30 these Changi trailers and Lieutenant Awnage [?], I think his name was, he put me on the mat and gave me 7 days CB [Confined to Barracks], as a Prisoner of War. Now I don't know how bad you can get 7 days CB. I think it's quite humorous.

Well presumably the Japanese would come and get you from the barracks

26:00 **and get you out to work, wouldn't they?**

Yes, yes. There's another story to that too, before capitulation I was interviewed by the same officer and he recommended that I be promoted to sergeant in my role as a fitter and turner. I thought when the balloon went and we all had become prisoners

26:30 of war, I thought well that's the end of that but 3 months after I was discharged, I was discharged in December 1945, about 3 months later I received a final statement, a financial statement or words to that effect and it included a cheque for 1,200 pounds I think it was in those days, it was and it says I'd been promoted to sergeant

27:00 from the 2/2/1942 so it did get home and I think that's a record somewhere along the line. I think I've still got that statement somewhere. But yeah it come in handy at the time I can tell you.

Did you think it was a pity you didn't have the stripes all that time?

Yeah that's right.

I don't know whether it would've helped or hindered you.

In actual fact I think I might've been a bit too young to carry them but

27:30 nevertheless there you are.

What was morale like amongst the men?

Generally pretty good. When I say pretty good it had its shortcomings people were disgruntled and whatnot and they'd disagreed with some of the officers' attitudes and instructions and whatnot. We're POWs now you've got nothing to do with us. But that only happened amongst

28:00 a few of them, but generally speaking it was okay and personally speaking I'm pleased that we stayed in our own system rather than go to the Kempei-tai, the Military Police and Japanese. It would have been disaster. But some of them didn't appreciate it but not that many fortunately.

Do you think that was important that discipline was maintained

28:30 **and that you didn't let go of the old rules and structure?**

Yes I think most of us saw that maintaining our own structure was important and it was. Yes we had some rules; some of it was a little bit over the top but generally speaking

29:00 it was the best thing to do and I'm grateful for it anyhow. And that was the best way because with our own officers and structure that way we had an approach, an official approach back to the Japanese and somebody to argue our cause when things weren't going as well as they should so

29:30 yes they did a lot of good.

Were the officers being made to work?

No, initially anyway. I believe that there was one group of officers, I don't know how they were structured but I believe there was one group of officers work party that was sent up on the line but I never knew much about them but generally speaking no they weren't working. We had our officers with us on the line. We were organised,

30:00 while on the line we were organised into 'kumis'. A kumi was 1 officer and 49 men, making up 50. So yes we had someone to, with us all the time that could argue our cause. Not that it made any difference; you could still get a belting if you did the wrong thing. You could get whacked over the head with anything. But

30:30 a kumi, 49 men and 1 officer. So we still had our officer structure.

Did they get better conditions, better food?

No, exactly the same. Exactly the same. There was no distinction there at all. As I said, Lieutenant Colonel Anderson, our VC [Victoria Cross] winner in the Malay Campaign,

31:00 he put up many arguments through Captain Drower. Captain Drower was an Englishman, an English captain who was an interpreter for A-Force and he got a lot of things for us that wouldn't have been available. Because he was the son of one of the ambassadors to Japan. And not only could he speak the language fluently he knew

31:30 several dialects. He used to be able to talk down to them from the position of an aristocrat and they didn't like that so he was very helpful in a lot of ways. But he finished up getting a terrible belting and he was buried up to his neck for 3 days before they let him out and that nearly finished him. He migrated to Australia. He's in Australia now.

32:00 How long were you at Selarang?

3 months and I think it was pretty much close to the day. We moved out of Selarang Barracks to go on A-Force on, I think it was on the 15th May 42 and we were shipped up to Burma in 2 or 3

32:30 cargo ships. Oh what a trip. We were packed into the holds of this, they left the hatches off for ventilation and put big canvas air chutes down into the holds for air but 3 or 4 days I think it took us. Our ship was unloaded and we went to Tavoy and we were we

33:00 engaged in constructing an existing airstrip. We had to expand that for, to receive Japanese bombers and on the way up there we used to, the only time we were allowed on deck was to come up and get food or the toilet. The benjo as the Japanese called it. The benjo on board consisted

33:30 of, I think there were 3 on either side, big wooden boxes lashed to the side of the boat. The planks on the bottom had one plank missing and that's where you squatted and did what you had to do into the sea but I was always, I always hung on for grim death in case the floors gave away because you know it would have been a beautiful trip

34:00 on a private boat or whatnot because from the bows of the ship when you were on deck you could see flying fishes, flying out from the bow of the ship and the swirl of a shark to take them and things of this nature. All these, the Archipelago, the Burma Archipelago or Mergui Archipelago I think it's called, was dotted islands everywhere. It was absolutely glorious scenery but not to be enjoyed by

34:30 POW's. They dropped us off at Tavoy. We marched about oh I don't know, it must've been about 20 mile or so from memory. It could've been more to Tavoy. At this early stage of the game we were reasonably housed in a disused school and things were reasonably good because we could

35:00 buy cucumbers and things of that nature from the locals if we had the money. And at that stage some of us did have money. So we supplemented our diet that way. That's where I got my first bout of dysentery and that laid me low for a long while to there. And I also contracted malaria there because our clothing was getting

35:30 pretty ragged at this stage and we were exposed to mosquitos. Yes so that's where it all started to happen.

Did you have any malaria medication at that point?

If we did, it was only the initial dosage. You might of got 1 or 2 doses of quinine and that was it because the Japanese did not supply us with enough medication. If at all. The doctors were

36:00 really pushed to help you there and they did a great job the doctors. Yes not long after we were taken prisoner of war and before we marched to Changi there was an Indian unit right next to us. They were an infantry unit and they were dishing

36:30 out food so I said "Can I have some". They said, "Alright" A chapati [Indian bread] and I called it a stew, I suppose that's what they called it, something like that and I made a very, very fatal mistake. I got my mess dixies out and I put the mess dixie [tin pot used for eating] over their food so they could ladle it out and apparently this cast a shadow on their food and this caused all sorts of things. They had to

37:00 re-establish their religion and whatnot and I was an infidel and a bloody mongrel and all sorts of things. And I wasn't aware of anything, I did it completely out of ignorance. I didn't do it to insult them or anything. But I thought to myself we don't really know other people's customs enough to respect them and I've always keep thinking about that not that I'm

37:30 subversive to them or anything of that nature but or yeah, just an experience that I had that was very nasty.

I've never heard that one before. Were they Malayan Muslims do you think?

Oh they were Indian and whether they were Muslim or not, I'm not too sure to this day. But it was a custom that infidels must not cast a shadow, or

38:00 for that matter anybody, cast a shadow on their food. What influenced me was that they were ladling their food out and there was food dropping over the floor and what not and being in our custom I put it over so that they wouldn't spill it. Completely unknowingly offending them you know because they'd sooner spill it than

38:30 apparently cast a shadow. That has been explained to me since. But I apologised to them and whatnot and they still gave me a chapati and whatnot so I was happy.

Did the Japanese enforce any customs on you?

Yeah, religious ones mainly. The salutations to the Emperor. Their morning salutations and things of this nature. They used to in a couple of camps, they'd get us out in the morning

39:00 before we moved off to the railway line and we'd have to face the east and I forget what their Japanese chant they used to have to make. Oh they made us chant a verse, bow and say 'ush' three times and we didn't want to do this and something, I just forget the actual Japanese version of it but it sounded

39:30 like this and this is what we interpreted as, "You're the cause of all this 'ush'". You're the cause of all this "ush" and the Japanese in charge would say "ush" and off we'd go to work. So he was quite happy. They were quite inventive you know some of the Australians.

40:00 Yeah, very good indeed. You're the cause of all this, were they ever. Yeah.

Small subversions like that give you a little...

Yeah that's right, believe it or not, it's easier to remember, all the so called funny incidents rather than the drastic ones. The beatings and all the

40:30 rest of it that went on and the illnesses, the starvations and whatnot, the lice and the bugs and all that sort of stuff. But you remember the funny incidents that happened.

Tape 4

00:33 **Tell us about the Sikhs?**

I think that the Indian unit that gave me the food was Sikhs I wouldn't be sure about it but speaking about the Sikhs I'm not too impressed because the Sikhs as a whole, the whole Sikhs units transferred over to the Japanese and

01:00 became Japanese Military Police and they gave us a particularly hard time and they were still at the end of the war, as far as I know, they were still Japanese forces. So that was a complete turn round as far as I'm concerned. They never impressed me whatsoever, still don't.

01:30 **That's interesting, I've never heard that about the Sikhs before. Were you working for the Sikhs up to that point?**

No, we weren't. This is after capitulation but prior to going to Changi, so it was in that few days in between. But the Sikhs remained in Singapore, as far as I know. They became the

02:00 Japanese Police as far as organising and controlling our working parties in Singapore. And I'm told that they gave us a particularly nasty time. Maybe it was a payback for something I don't know. That's hearsay as far as I'm concerned, I never experienced it myself.

Were they guards at Changi?

They could've been. Yeah.

02:30 **Previously we were talking about the time you got malaria, were many of the men sick at this point?**

Yes, quite a number of them were sick. Mainly with dysentery and/or diarrhoea and also malaria because now we'd come into, well malaria was also in Singapore but we had clothing then that we were able to

03:00 cover up particularly in the evening like at dusk when mosquitos become very active. And we were able to protect ourselves a bit that way. But once our clothing become rags and things of that nature well we didn't have much and working out on the airstrip, extending the airstrip etc

03:30 while we were, nothing on top and things of that nature and we were subject to swamps and mosquitoes all the time. And that's where I got my first dose of Malaria from there and it only got worse as it went on. So I had in Tavoy, I believe it's been given another name which I don't know, but in Tavoy I had both dysentery and

04:00 malaria in there. We were there from May to roughly October I think it was before we were shipped again up to Moulmein and then a train to Thanbyuzayat and then out to the 18 kilo [kilometre] where we started work on the railway.

Tell us about the airstrip you were repairing? Had it been bombed at all?

It had been earlier I believe,

04:30 but not too much by the Japanese because they were going to use it and we were all standing by at this stage of the game still extending, still working on it when the first two army 97's came in to land and for some reason or other I don't know what it was but both of them had a belly landing because the landing gear gave up. I don't know where it was pilot error or whether it was

05:00 aircraft error but this brought up a great cheer from everybody which also produced a few beltings. So two army 97's did a belly landing. First two aircraft, which was poetic justice.

Was there anybody on the plane at the time? Was anyone hurt?

05:30 Not that I know of. The only people on the aircraft were the Japanese I expect and no it didn't come anywhere near us so, yeah the efforts of labour. We all wished it that hard that it happened.

How long were you at Tavoy?

06:00 From, I suppose it took about 5 or 6 days to get up from Singapore to Tavoy our ship and we were there from May through to October 42. We started on the line in October and we went there straight from, well we went through to

06:30 Moulmein to the 80 kilo on the Burma side. 18 kilo I'm sorry.

What were the barracks like at Tavoy?

We were in a disused school. They weren't too bad. It was in reasonable repair. Overcrowded of course, but that was par for the cause at that stage of the game.

07:00 We expected that. Yeah it wasn't too bad.

What about food and hygiene?

Well it was a little bit better in those days because the local residents of Tavoy a lot of them were farmers. They produced a lot of vegetables and things like that and we were able to supplement our diet to a reasonable degree from that but when we got away from civilisation it become pretty drastic.

07:30 What were the guards like?

At that stage of the game we mainly had Japanese guards, some were Korean. But at that stage out in the work parties they got a bit uppish. They belted you, 'speedo', everything was 'speedo', 'speedo' they wanted everything done yesterday and if they weren't getting that response

08:00 they'd belt you across the ears with whatever they had. Bamboo was a favourite one. Sticks of bamboo and if they didn't have that, a rifle butt's pretty handy too. And we started to become used to them after awhile and knew what the score was and worked accordingly.

Did you try

08:30 any kind of sabotage or ways of going slow?

Yeah we were always trying to invent something and this was permanent conflict right throughout the whole thing. We'd try and do bits and pieces and slow down the works and don't do it efficiently in some way or another but on the other hand the Japanese Guards were looking at this all the time and giving us a beating for whoever was offending them

09:00 at this stage and that happened frequently, yeah. It became a daily activity you know, cat and mouse.

Did they have other methods of punishment, other than beatings?

Yes, very much so. One of their favourites was kneeling on a piece of wood and usually, not so much sharpened but they have an edge

09:30 on the wood and you'd kneel on that just under the knees and hold up a heavy log above your head and you just had to stay like that for hours and every time you weakened you got a belting and some people, I not talking about 5 minutes or 10 minutes I'm talking about days in some cases and people have just collapsed because they just couldn't stand it anymore and understandably.

10:00 And there was water treatment, where they'd just keep filling you up with water in your mouth and you'd just expand, and expand and expand. Fortunately I never experienced any of that. I got a few beltings but no, I didn't get that.

I don't quite understand about the water treatment, did they not let you go to the toilet?

No,

10:30 and you were just subject to drip, drip, drip, drip in your mouth. They'd just keep filling you up with water and you just couldn't take anymore. I don't know what they did whether they regurgitated or what I don't know, I can't remember. But I wasn't involved but that was one of them. But the most favourable was kneeling on a

11:00 piece of wood and holding another piece of wood above your head. That was, that was pretty strenuous. They were full of those tricks. There was cases where Spit Easton was tied up like a dog and water put just out of his reach for days and days on end and

11:30 made him crawl round like a dog and things of this nature and they'd bury you and sometimes put food close by you to bring the ants. So the ants would worry you, you know you couldn't, your arms were buried. That only happened a few times. Once when we were with Captain Drower as I said before that was the one I personally

12:00 know of. They released him after 3 days but oh he'd wasted away to nothing and he was very ill after that. Cause he used to talk down to them. In English he'd swear at them. "What do you want you little so and so?" and etc he picked his mark with those that didn't know English and then when they spoke to him in Japanese he'd talk down to them in a dialect that was superior to theirs.

12:30 So that was his modus operandi which worked quite a bit, but there again he and Colonel Anderson copped a few beltings out of it too. When they demanded this and demanded that particularly of the officers, Japanese officers. And yeah, they did a great job.

So this was well appreciated by the men?

Oh absolutely,

13:00 yeah, absolutely. They worship Anderson and Drower and the little, a matter of fact still up in Sydney, Doctor Rowley Richards. He's a RMO, he's a Registered Medical Officer [actually Regimental Medical Officer] with the artillery but he was Junior officer, he was only 26 when he was captured so he wasn't in practice that long and

13:30 he was great. I put him down to saving my life on a couple of occasions. He had to learn exotic medicine without manuals. He didn't have any manuals and whatnot and he had to confront all these tropical diseases with no medication and whatnot and what to do about it. All of our doctors, or a lot of our doctors, all of them were in the same boat they had nothing to work

14:00 with and had to learn about these medications and see what to do about it. A lot of people talk about [Sir Edward] Weary Dunlop and Weary did a great job and so did many, many others. I'm a bit disappointed that the others don't get the same sort of publicity as Weary did. Weary, I'm not taking anything from him; he was wonderful but so were

14:30 a lot of others. One that I can recall on similar starters was Sir Albert Coates, he was on the Burma side. I never heard A-Force generally, never heard of Weary Dunlop until the line was almost finished. He was on the Thailand side and there was hardly any communication. The only communication you'd get, they had some Australian

15:00 drivers going up and down the line on these jungle tracks and whatnot and you might get, drop the odd bit of communication there but never heard of Weary Dunlop until the line was finished, or almost finished. And we were in a position where we were joining up but Albert Coates and his team were wonderful. One camp, 55 kilo, on the Burma side was

15:30 deemed a hospital. That's were Albert Coates, Sir Albert Coates operated from and he must have done at least 120, 130 amputations from that camp and he was assisted by a chemist, a Dutchman, Captain Von something or other, can't think of his name right now. He was able to

16:00 construct an anaesthetic from cocaine tablets, which they had a few, and use them as an injection, a spinal injection to deaden the, deaden you from the chest down. I've watched Albert Coates from here to 3 or 4 metres away, watched him operate, amputation, taking legs of

16:30 people with tropical ulcers and he didn't mind you watching at all. And he used to do this 5 or 6 times a day, you know, terrible. At one stage of the game I got, they weren't sure, and they're still not sure, Doctor Rowley Richards sent me down to the 55

17:00 hospital because I started to recover. I went berserk virtually. I didn't remember anything and I was with the twenties [lost mental stability]. Don't remember much about it but my mate Vic tells me about it. He took me up to the hospital because I was wandering all over the place and I not remember and I

was using my bowels everywhere

- 17:30 and just completely out of control. And they're not sure whether I had cerebral malaria or tertiary pellagra it was one or the other but they seem to think it was cerebral malaria. I recovered from that and I started to come good and Rowley Richards sent me down to the 55 kilo. While I was down there I was getting a bit better and better so I volunteered to go
- 18:00 around and wash some of the amputees. Oh they were in a terrible state. Their beds were, when I say beds, their bed consisted of two rice sacks with bamboo poles shoved through them and spreaders on each end. They were full of lice and whatnot. I volunteered to go around and wash them. Well I had a dirty bit of rag and a small tin that they gave me.
- 18:30 And I used to go down and boil up the rag and get warm water and just swab them you know. One bloke he died the next day or so, he was at that stage that he, you couldn't understand what he was talking about. He kept on pointing, I used to give them, I'd wash their chest and to wash around their groin and whatnot I used to
- 19:00 wring the rag and let them wash themselves you know but he couldn't do that. He was at a stage where he couldn't do anything. So he kept on pointing to himself and whatnot, so I washed around his private parts and whatnot and I pulled back his foreskin and it had three great big bloody lice underneath it and they must have been chewing hell out of him. Anyway I killed those and he was most grateful for that but that was what he was trying to
- 19:30 tell me and I keep on thinking about that too. Bloody terrible, but things of that nature and the screams of grown men. Big, used to be big strong men screams when Albert Coates, Bertie he used to call himself, Bertie Coates would come up with a spoon, an ordinary spoon,
- 20:00 a dinner spoon whatever it was. It was sharpened on both sides and he would scoop these things out, all the rotten... I've seen ulcers running down the leg from ankle to knee with the bones, the sinews and the arteries all exposed. Just dangling there you know and all the muscle around them just chewed away by these bloody
- 20:30 ulcers and that's the stage where Bertie would say, "Right you're going to lose your leg." or whatever. Initially he started off cutting them with; he'd make a "V" impression one side and leave a tunnel at the other. He'd smooth them off a nice round stump and all the rest of it. Apparently, when you get malaria
- 21:00 your skin shrinks a bit and apparently he had to bust the stitches to allow for this. So what he did in the end was he'd stitch them up like a sugar bag, you know, they'd have ears and everything on it because he says, "Don't worry about that because when we get you home we'll do a cosmetic and clean it up then because what's the good of doing a cosmetic now if we're going to bust it up?" you know, which was fair enough.
- 21:30 That was Bertie Coates, marvellous. The equivalent to Weary Dunlop. Weary had, not generally spoken about, Weary had two other major, they were doctors majors, therefore they were fairly senior doctors. One in the high camp and one in the low camp. So he had those to assist him but you never really hear of those
- 22:00 for some reason. I forget their names now but they were through the cholera days and all the rest of it. Just about every camp along there had their own doctor. Not everyone but just about and they all did a fantastic job. Beyond their calling really and I think more attention should be given
- 22:30 to that rather than just one doctor. A lot of the people say he was the Christ of the Line, so were the others. And that's my contention all the way through. I'm not anti Weary Dunlop; I'm anti those who promote him above all others because I've seen it firsthand that these others were magnificent.

When Doctor Coates

- 23:00 **was working particularly doing amputations did you assist him at all?**
- Didn't assist him but I was an audience. He had his own; he had a couple other doctors assisting him. There was Major Crantz, Hobbs [?] I think was another one, I'm not sure whether Hobbs was with him or not but he had some seniors there with him and he was very good. Very good
- 23:30 indeed.
- What was the name of the camp where you were here, was this 55 kilo?**
- The 55 kilo was a hospital camp but that was established well after we'd past that point. Prior to that the camp hospital was at Thanbyuzayat. That was where the rotten line started from. And we started from the 18 kilo. We went from the 18 kilo to the
- 24:00 30 kilo. It was either the 30 or 35. And we were building embankments up to that stage and up to the 60 and then we came back to the 26 kilo they called in Kanchanaburi and that's where we joined with Williams Force and we became number 1 Mobile Force. How mobile can you get? Shanks pony [walking] and

24:30 we start laying the line and we laid the line right through to Konkoita I think it was where it joined on the Thailand side. But yeah we followed the Indian or the indigenous people. Oh they were treated terribly and under contract, some of them under contract.

Were these the Burmese?

Burmese, Malay,

25:00 Indian, Vietnamese, quite a mixture and they had no organisation in their camps whatsoever. There was people, they had to practice if they got cholera they'd take them into the jungle, build a little platform around them, a little screen around them, lay them there was a shirt on and nothing, no pants on and they just wasted away and died there and when they died

25:30 they'd just leave them there to rot away and their camps were the same. There was excreted all over the place. This was where cholera started from and transferred into, cause they used to use the local water courses, rivers, creeks, etc to draw their water for cooking and drinking and also for sewerage. And naturally,

26:00 contamination. Usually they were upstream and barred anybody from using that water downstream. And they did it themselves. They often used put the sewerage in above the water point for the kitchens and nobody there to organise them or tell them. It was a bloody great mess. As a matter of fact there was a special force, I forget what it was called

26:30 now of, there was about 120 Australians and I think there might've been some Brits [British] amongst that too. They were formed, they were taken up and distributed to the civilians camps as medical orderlies, etc and doctors and whatnot to try and help them. But I don't know how they went, I don't know.

You mentioned before that a lot of the ulcers the blokes were getting

27:00 **were rodent ulcers, were there many rats around?**

We never experienced, yeah there were a few rats, but we never experienced the rats to that extent. Our biggest problem was lice, bugs and things of that nature because the platforms in the huts that we slept on were flattened out bamboo. You know where you get bamboo you'd split it right down one side

27:30 open it up and chop it up so it was all splinters. There was cracks everywhere so the lice used to get into this and the bugs used to get into and whatnot. Every now and then when you got a rest day, when that came about, we used to take these out and light a fire outside, there was always a fire outside, light a big fire and take them out and assist one another to run them through over the flames and you'd hear these lice and bugs

28:00 and whatnot cracking as you gave them the treatment and this resolved it and they were back in a couple of days and whatnot. We always had this trouble with lice and I think they caused a bit of disease too. Yeah, the smell of the bugs, I don't know how the bugs go into the bamboo but they seemed to be inherent with bamboo in the clumps. You can smell them.

28:30 Yeah, an incident that, where we started off at the 18 kilo on the Burma side, Colonel Anderson used to often sit in on the sick parade to see how his troops were going and whatnot. And I, it was my 18th birthday 1942, and

29:00 I wasn't too bad. I was okay to go to work but I didn't go this day and I went on sick parade and I fronted up to Rowley Richards and he was sitting on a bamboo platform with an overhang and he was there with Colonel Anderson and he said "Yes Wall." he had a great memory for, he knew everybody's name in the camp, a 1,000 people. He said "Yes Wall, what's the matter with you?"

29:30 I said "Nothing sir." I said "I was just wondering if I could have a day on light duties because it's my 18th birthday". And he looked astounded at me and he looked at Colonel Anderson and Colonel Anderson was sitting with him and Colonel Anderson thought for the moment and he said "Give this man light duties for the day". So we did and away I went. Did my light duties and

30:00 all the rest of it. Celebrated my 18th birthday by doing that. The very next day I was on sick parade again with my half a blanket that I had and I'm shivering and shaking and whatnot, rotten with malaria and I front up to Rowley Richards again and Colonel Anderson wasn't there that day and he said to me he said "Oh good morning Wall." he said "Whose birthday is it

30:30 today, your grandmother's?" So he was always with it. Yeah and that was a camp that we all had our first stages of pellagra. Pellagra is a disease where your tongue, initially your tongue would split it was like herringbone and swell up. And also your scrotum would swell up and crack and weep and it's shocking.

31:00 And you could see all these blokes, we didn't have much 'eusol' [disinfectant], eusol? I think it was eusol that they used to mix up a disinfectant type of thing that they used to swab down in hospitals. And they all had a little bowl and Rowley Richards'd put a bit of eusol in all of these little bowls of water and you'd sponge them with whatever you had and you'd sit down on this drain that was there. One of the hut's drains and this row of blokes

31:30 there with all their scrotums all on show bathing them it was quite humorous to see. It wasn't very funny but if you had've been there with your camera it would've been marvellous. Yes, Rowley Richards, a great man.

So a sense of humour was very important?

Yeah, oh absolutely yeah, you had to

32:00 have a sense of humour. Every camp we went to, another thing too every camp we went to, of course we had no amenities. We wore our toothbrushes down to nothing. We didn't have any toothpaste. What we used to do was either scrub them with sand in the bottom of a creek or river. Just scrub them as much as we could.

32:30 Or alternatively you used to be able to buy from time to time a pack of I think it was 50, 30 or 50 cigars. These cigars were as black, shocking, full of nicotine and whatnot but you'd smoke them down and save the ash and you'd use the ash to clean your teeth. And when they got down to about that we all had a razor blade, not for

33:00 shaving but for cutting up the little bit and that became tobacco and you'd roll them up in whatever paper you had. We smoked all the books that we had. Even some of them got technique how to split paper. Particularly rice paper. The Bible by the way, it smokes, not a bad smoke because you'd roll it up and chew the edges to make it stick and that was your

33:30 cigarette you know. The Bible, I don't know whether it was an omen or not, it burnt black. I don't think it meant anything but yeah. And yeah we smoked whatever we could get. Now every camp we went to of course we never had any toilet paper. So the first thing you do when you to a new

34:00 camp which was just a, cleared jungle and whatnot. You'd go to the nearby jungle and take care in doing so and you'd select the leaves that you were going to use for your toilet paper. We got to this particular camp; I'm not too sure which one it was now. We were laying the line at the time so it was after the 60 kilo, it might've been up at the 80 kilo

34:30 but they had a lot of soft wood trees there. And the soft wood trees had larger leaves than the hardwood trees. This particular one had a nice big glossy leaf, underneath was furry and on the face of it was glossy. So I thought this is great stuff. What have we got here non slip grip sort of

35:00 thing with a fluffy underside, but what we didn't know at the time, these when crushed offered out a dye, a purplish type of dye. Now, we at this stage are just about of clothes and we used lap laps which was a bit of cloth with a thing tied around the waist and pulled up through your crutch and flapped over.

35:30 Now this exposed you a fair bit. And we were all walking around like the apes you see in the zoo with their coloured bottoms. That was in one of the camps.

I thought you were going to say the Bible came in handy there as well.

No that was too valuable as a cigarette paper.

36:00 Other than that we had to use water and we all carried a section of bamboo for that purpose. We'd go to the water and sanitary douche so to speak. All of those, the amenities that we would normally expect just weren't there. You know, no soap to wash, no tooth paste, no tooth brush,

36:30 no clothes. We were lucky to have a bit of salt now and then. We used to be able to buy 'shindegare', shindegare was, as the best I can explain it, is a slab about an inch thick about 4 inches by 8 inches and you used to be able

37:00 to buy a 'Vis' and I think from memory a Vis is about 3 ½ pounds or something like that. I might be wrong there and if you flogged your watch or a ring or something like that you might be able to, if you were near civilians anytime you'd get a Vis of shindegare. And it was like a solidified molasses, very, very sweet. If you got a bit of vegetation from the jungle and things of that nature you used

37:30 to be able to make a brew. It was highly alcoholic but we used to take a teaspoon of this for vitamin purposes rather than anything else. It did have a tendency to keep pellagra because pellagra is mainly a lack of vitamins, lack of B vitamins mainly and it can come in primary, secondary and tertiary levels and

38:00 that's what they think I might've had at the 80 kilo, tertiary pellagra cause it does send you off your rocker. So that's how we supplemented ourselves. The odd duck egg, you took your risk whether it was rotten or not but things of that nature you used to be able to supplement yourself if you were near any passing civilians or near a

38:30 village where you could do a bit of trading under the lap. Yeah so that was that, they used to say on the line, six men, six Australians were worth 1 elephant or the equivalent to thereof. I suppose we worked like that too.

Did you work with elephants?

Yes, mainly the bridge parties,

- 39:00 I didn't work on the bridges. But mainly the bridge parties worked with elephants. They used to pull these beautiful teak logs in and put them into position for building the bridge. How they did that I'll never know. They used pile drivers; they'd dig a hole, a bit of a hole down
- 39:30 a metre or so and stand the pole up in it and then have jury rebuilt with a monkey, they're a big weight and have 3 ropes on it and had about, oh I don't know 10 or 12 men on each rope and a Japanese would sing the time, 'ichi knee sarn see a sarn see a sarn see' and drop his sword and when he dropped his sword you let the rope go and down come the monkey.
- 40:00 Go 'ichi knee' pulling the monkey back you know get it up as high as you can and then let it go. So that's how they did their pile driving of all the pillars of the bridges and whatnot. And when the train went over them you'd get this sensation and you kept your heart in your mouth in case it all collapsed. As a matter of fact one bridge collapsed three times before they finally got it right. And then there was the bridge called the Pack of Cards Bridge and that's exactly
- 40:30 what it looked like. How they got away with it is amazing.
- We're at the end of another tape.**

Tape 5

- 00:37 **Can I get you to tell us about the relationship between the other forces, like air force, navy within the Australian armed forces in the POW camps and also foreign forces like the Dutch and so forth? Your experience there for instances?**
- Well we start off between the various
- 01:00 service arms like the air force, navy whatnot. We were all in the same boat so there was no difference. We were all POWs. That's the way it was. We were all brothers in arms. There was no conflict or anything there we were there to help one another as much as we possible could. And there was a saying and it's true that
- 01:30 any POW who didn't have a mate had nothing. He had nothing to live for. Every one of us had someone to care for us and we cared for them. It was a relationship more than just friendship, way and above that, mateship is a special circumstance. You lived for one another. They looked after you when you were sick and
- 02:00 you looked after them when they were sick. You went and made, there were times when certain illnesses like dysentery and things like that, diarrhoea, where you didn't feel like eating and if you didn't eat even though the meals were not very nutritious and whatnot you'd force them down. If you got sick you didn't want to eat so the mate was there to spoon feed you if necessary
- 02:30 and that was very important. Well therefore it didn't matter if you were in the navy, air force or anything else. One experience I had to explain that, his name, nickname was Nigger Hanson. He found a holdall of a dentist kit and I think he found it in Singapore and brought it with him and therefore became
- 03:00 the camp dentist. He was never a dentist. He pulled out a couple of teeth of mine when they were playing up and he even made a bamboo chair to do the chair. He had this; there were no injections or anything like that. He pulled them out with the pliers of whatever they call them and whatnot. So he was an air force photographer and he became the camp dentist. Now he was everybody's friend because he was the camp dentist.
- 03:30 But he's no longer with us unfortunately. He was a staff or flight sergeant and a good bloke. And the same, we had with us some Americans and our sailors of the [HMAS] Perth. The Perth and the [USS] Houston were sunk in the Sunda Straits and they become POWs. Well they just become POW's the same as we were
- 04:00 and we all got along very well together. Internationally, we had a few inhibitions with some of the Dutch, not all of them, some of them were good people. Well I suppose they all were. We used to call them offal eaters. I suppose that's a naughty thing to say now because they used to make what they call a sambal. Now they'd sell you this sambal
- 04:30 for 5 cents a serve, a little spoon full or something. They found certain things in the jungle they'd make this sambal out of including rats. We didn't know this at the time and that's why we called the offal eaters.
- Awful eaters?**
- Offal eaters yeah. And not only that they didn't gain a very nice reputation with us because they used to do us in
- 05:00 to the Japanese, a couple of them from time to time for different things and we didn't trust them too

well.

What sort of things?

I just forget what they were now, we were doing something and they let the Japanese know about it and we got punished for that. I just forget what it was now. I think the Japanese

- 05:30 had a pet goat and we slaughtered it and whatnot and the Japanese come round and said they found the carcass but we know they went straight to the place and looked for it and there was only one group of people that could tell them that, and that was the offal eaters. So, but generally speaking a lot of them
- 06:00 were friends, made a lot of friends there etc, etc, but we always suspected the Hollanders. The Hollanders we found that the Hollanders, the Dutchmen from Holland itself was a different person to the planters and whatnot of Indonesia. They were different people. The people in Indonesia were,
- 06:30 although all of the Dutch are very arrogant that's part of their nature but the Hollander was much more amiable than the Indonesian Dutchman. But apart from that everybody got on pretty well. We had our little digs, individual digs with the British from time to time. I had one myself with a fellow called Jonno
- 07:00 Johnson. He was about as thick as your finger. We were all pretty thin at this stage of the game but Jonno Johnson was always even in the best of health would've been slightly built and we had some sort of altercation at one stage of the game which come to fisticuffs [fist fight] and he done me up like a boot. He was all over me like a rash. I'm sorry I picked that fight. However,
- 07:30 we were good mates after it, so alls well that ends well. But no we got along pretty well with them. We found that the British, although we criticise them a lot, they were the one that sang their ditties and had a jovial outlook on life and things. Danny Shoebridge was one of them who was a true blue [genuine]
- 08:00 Cockney. He used to sing songs like Any Old Iron and I'm Henry the 8th and all those sort of old British ditty songs and whatnot and he was a good entertainer. We found them good company, I did anyway. So that was that. So there really was no animosity anyhow amongst the whole lot of us. We were all POW's together.

I'm curious about

- 08:30 **the Dutch Colonials in Indonesia, in what way were they different? Can you give an example?**

Oh they thought they were, they gave the impression that they were superior to you. You know they acted aloof and unfriendly in a lot of cases. Didn't want to know you, stuck to themselves and that sort of thing.

- 09:00 It didn't bother us a great deal. Didn't bother me a great deal. I just took it as it came and said 'too bad'. No, that's the way it was I guess.

What about the native Indonesians who were in the Dutch Army?

Well they were with them.

- 09:30 And they seemed to me as though they were with the white Dutchman himself and they seemed to be like batmen if you like. Subservient type of thing to the superior colonial Dutchmen. They treated them
- 10:00 like servants even as POWs. And we didn't like that very much either. But yeah it was their way I suppose. It didn't interfere with us at all, it's just that we didn't like that attitude. As you know, Australians are just free and easy sort of thing and when we saw this going on
- 10:30 as POWs we were criticised.

Did you have any Aborigines within your ranks?

Yes, and I'm trying to think of his name now, I think he's still alive and I think he's in the Northern Territory. He'd be an old man now like I am. But we had a couple in our unit and the one I'm thinking of was even friends with

- 11:00 him when we were released. But he moved up north and I've lost all contact with him. Reg I his name was, Reg something or other I forget now.

Wouldn't be Reg Saunders would it?

No, no, I knew Reg Saunders. He wasn't a POW.

Now these Aborigines in your unit, how were they treated in contrast to the way the

- 11:30 **Dutch Colonials treated there...**

No, no there was no difference they were soldiers the same as we were. They weren't treated in any shape or form different to anybody us.

Did they experience racism that you had seen?

No, as a matter of fact they were good blokes. I think a lot of them would be laughing at what's going on now.

How would they react to any?

12:00 **sort of jokes that were, you know, racist or something like that?**

They told a few. But at that stage of the game when we knew them there weren't those jokes about, about Aborigines. They were just treated as soldiers the same as everybody else was. We were all soldiers together.

When you say they told a few, what sort of things would they say if you could recall?

Oh I just forget now but little jokes about, have a joke on themselves

12:30 sort of thing. They were that sort of people. Good blokes they were. Good blokes and they were tradesmen.

Do you remember them saying anything about the way the Dutch treated the native troops?

No, that was just general conversation. We didn't get involved in that. It was just an attitude, we saw it happening and we would've mentioned it at the time and criticised them at the time but once

13:00 we said it, it would be all finished. There was no conflict. No conflict arising out of it. We just noticed those sort of things and just said not very nice sort of thing.

What about the Indians?

We weren't involved with too many Indians. They were in separate camps and we never struck them very much. The only time I,

13:30 was involved with the Indians was as I previously mentioned and that made me grow up a little bit. Not knowing through ignorance that got me into a bit of bother. But no, we didn't come into contact with the Indians very much at all.

Were there any other nationalities that you can think of?

Well there was

14:00 you've mentioned them. The Dutch, the British, The Indians, no I don't think there were. There were some civilians but they were British generally. If they weren't British they were Dutch.

What about politics

14:30 **inside the camp itself between the servicemen, the POWs? I mean surely there must have been differences in groups even though they may've had a common interest in looking after each other? There must have been sort of like...**

There was no time for politics. We were too busy trying to live, stay alive. Diseases were our biggest enemy. Diseases and malnutrition. We were all

15:00 starved, every one of us. I got down to a weight of just a little over 5 stone. And I was always fairly robust and generally around the 10 to 11 stone in good nick and you could imagine at 5 stone you could put your fingers around my tib [tibula bone] and fib [fibula bone] and run it up and down between ankle and knee and big knobby

15:30 knees and even my fingers were just bones and cheeks were drawn. Things of that nature it was, your whole being was trying to stay alive. And that occupied you daily. There was no time for politics. The only thing about politics I suppose

16:00 if you can call this politics, the Japanese were well aware of King George and refused to allow us to sing the national anthem and we sang Rule Britannia in lieu of that and they didn't wake up to that and they were, if you could call it that politics. But it was more

16:30 national pride. Particularly at some occasions at funerals and things like that. If we had a bugler they'd play the Last Post and things like that. No matter where you were you'd stand to attention for that. We appreciated life to that extent. No there was no politics. We used

17:00 vote our cooks in and that was only because it was an anti theft measure. We didn't have many rations as was the case so we put our cooks in that we thought would be the most honest people whether they were cooks or not. And one of these cooks, in one of these camps was a British sergeant. His name was Benny and Benny was, Vic and I,

17:30 my mate and I went round casting votes for him and all the rest of it or encouraging votes for him and he finally got into the cookhouse and whatnot. We thinking that he'd probably look after us and give us a moo bar or something now and again but he was more strict than anybody else. We got no more than anybody, nor should we but however Benny he was a good bloke. He was good bloke. He was the one

18:00 that sent out our dinner at one stage of the game and said that we've got a surprise for you. We've got some more meat, a barking deer. And a barking deer stew he called it. And the barking deer turned out to be Wat Narbi Gunso, Wat Narbi Gunso was the guard sergeant. Wat Narbi Gunso had a dog and Benny got this dog and it became the

18:30 stew and he called it the barking deer and Wat Narbi Gunso wondered where his dog had got too and looked all over the place and we said the tigers must have got him in the jungle because there were tigers about and panthers. And he also caught a python and we put that in the stew and supplemented at one stage of the game too. So he was quite innovative really.

19:00 **What was his full name?**

I don't know, I'm trying to think of his other name but it escapes me at the moment but I can see him in my imagination in my mind's eye. I can see him, he was a shortish bloke very jovial always laughing. Yeah happy sort of a fellow. Which was good.

I want

19:30 **to get to that topic of food and wildlife so bear with me for the moment. What about your relationships with the Japanese guards? Where there any good Japanese guards?**

Well the ones that we would've termed good weren't really good but they were better than the others from time to time. Some of them used to, they may've had little streaks of or moods

20:00 of generosity, I don't know. They'd offer you cigarettes and have a chat as best they could. I think some of them were trying to learn English from time to time and they'd stop and have a chat with you and offer you a cigarette. I don't know whether that was good or whatnot, I think it was just purposeful. They gave you a smoke to encourage you to talk to them sort of thing. But no, the guards were very poor.

20:30 Most of our guards were not Japanese they were Korean and I think I have the idea and I think this has been talked about by POWs, they were trying to please their masters the Japanese. Everybody bashed one another in the system. If the sergeant didn't like what the corporal was doing he'd clout him, you know give him a hiding,

21:00 hit and whatnot. And then corporal hit the lance corporal and the lance corporal would hit the private and the private would hit one of us because we were the last link in the chain. And this was their method of discipline and so it went on. Yeah, but the Korean guards, they were brutal. We nicknamed some of them because of their brutality.

21:30 You know like, there was the Boy Bastard, and the Boy Bastard's Cobber [friend], the Storm Trooper, Silver Tooth, Doctor Death and so on to name a few. The Storm Trooper he was a big man, he was about 6 foot 3, enormous brute,

22:00 he was vicious. He'd walk through the hospital and if you were in hospital as a POW you were really sick. The bed was a bamboo platform, and you walked down the centre of the hut, the centre of the hut was on the ground. You walked through, the beds were laid out, they weren't beds, slept on the slats. He'd have

22:30 those that were sick and dying stand up to attention while he walked through and all this sort of thing and some of them couldn't and those that couldn't he'd belt them. These are people within days of their death. That's the sort of people they were.

And you've seen this happen?

Yes.

With your own eyes?

Yes, terrible, terrible people.

You're saying that these people were living skeletons, right?

Yes, yes,

23:00 yes.

And how bad were these bashings?

Well he didn't have to bash them too hard and they were completely flattened. And somebody'd have to pick them up and put them back in bed. Some of them within days of dying. It was pointless, absolutely pointless what they were doing. It was

23:30 showing power. I think that they were probably peasants themselves in true life and they were relishing in their position as a guard.

This was a Korean man?

Mm.

So what's your view of the Koreans then in contrast to the Japanese?

Well the same thing. As a matter of fact I think I hold them in more contempt. The Japanese

24:00 cruelty mainly come, you see the engineers they weren't our guards. The engineers were out on the line, supervising the building of the line or laying of the rails etc. And yes if their work wasn't up to schedule they'd belt you, the all had lengths of bamboo, they'd belt you if they saw something going wrong or if you were bludging or something of that nature

24:30 they'd get stuck into you. But that's the only time we were confronted, oh I suppose it was most of the day we were out there. But the guards they were there all the time, in the middle of the night the whole thing. They expected you even in sleeping hours if they wanted to they'd get a hut up and bow to them and things of this nature just for no reason. They appointed,

25:00 they made us appoint, oh what would you call him, I suppose a type of sentry from one of our own, each. We took it in hourly shifts during the night if the roaming guard came round he'd get to the hut sentry and the hut sentry had a little spiel they had to do, I think

25:30 from memory I think it was, I forget the first part of it [phonetically] "fooshinbon needu membioki" it meant this "fooshinbon" I think that meant something about I'm sentry or something like that. Then you reported

26:00 "two men sick" two men, that meant they were in hospital "two men" or whatever. "Benjo" that means they were at the toilet otherwise "OK." all okay. We had a bit of a spiel for that I just forget the whole circumstance. We used to say "a few shin bones"

26:30 "knee men banjo" two men for example, two men at the toilet. "Knee men biooki" that meant there were two men in the hospital. Ejo Harrisons' son, we had a captain and a lieutenant in 4th Transport company, they were the Harrises

27:00 George Harris was one of them, football flame. We used to say Ejo Harrisons' son because we couldn't say Harry my son. Whatever it was then. I've lost the story there because I don't remember the whole sequence of it but that's what we used to say and they were happy with that "ush" and away they'd go. Yeah, so, we virtually disciplined ourselves

27:30 along those lines.

Who's the Boy Bastard, tell us about him? I've heard his name before incidentally.

Yeah well he'd been in several camps, he was known along the line. They all were known along the line. Most of these I told you about they got their names and reputation because of their activities

28:00 and their activities were unpredictable and usually violent. So that's how they got their names. Silver Tooth you can imagine what he got his name through. He had a mouthful of silver fillings and things. When he smiled he looked like metallic teeth.

Like a James Bond Film?

Yes, that's about it. Doctor Death, he was responsible for several deaths I think.

You actually had a guy called Doctor Death?

Yeah, Doctor Death, he wasn't a doctor. We called him Doctor Death.

What was he about, Doctor Death?

Well the same thing, violence, drop of a hat [over something minor]. You didn't need to do anything very bad to provoke violence from any of these. That Storm Trooper he would even kick

28:30 and keep on kicking you. You couldn't retaliate if you did you were dead. It was as simple as that. You'd never ever get out of it. Three or four of them would get stuck into you and beat you within an inch of your life. What were you to do? So

29:00 yeah that

29:30 was the way it was. But the Koreans, no, never forgive them either.

Were these guys Koreans you just mentioned?

Yes.

Why was he called the Boy Bastard?

Oh well he was a bastard and he was a baby faced bloke and called him a boy, a Boy Bastard. He was only a little bloke. Yeah and called him the Boy Bastard and the Boy Bastard's Cobber they were always together.

30:00 **Interesting names. These are all names that they've used in films...**

There were more than that but I just can't recall them all at this stage of the game. We had a name for just about every one of them. We did this so that they didn't recognise that we were talking about them. They might've got an inkling towards it after awhile because they were used frequently.

So would people say their names

30:30 **in front of them?**

Oh we'd talk amongst ourselves and whatnot and he'd be standing there. He wouldn't have an indication that we were talking about him. Most of them never understood very much English if at all.

What happened to these people after the war?

Don't know. Some of them,

31:00 the Storm Trooper, I know he was tried by the War Crimes Tribunal and he was hung. But the others I'm not sure.

Do you think it was the right thing to do, to have the hangings for people of committed atrocities?

Yeah absolutely. Yeah absolutely they didn't deserve to live.

31:30 They didn't let anybody else live. Unnecessary, completely and absolutely unnecessary.

Were there any Japanese that stood out in your mind? I mean I've come across other POWs who did say that there were a few exceptional Japanese, I know I've asked you this question before but there were good chaps who didn't actually use unnecessary brute force at all?

Yeah there was one,

32:00 this fellow was a mystery fellow. He came in, he was in some uniform and he was obviously some sort of an office but he had red tabs on like the Red Cross and I don't think he was Red Cross. And he used to dish out cigarettes right, left and centre and talk to us. He had a good command of the English language. At one stage he was

32:30 one of the fellows that went out shoot and shot a tiger and I think he gave it to us and it was cooked. I could never get the strength from him. He didn't demand anything from us or anything of that nature. He was just in the camp. Maybe there to report something or other, I don't know.

So he was the only guy that you can

33:00 **remember who was a good bloke? In that sense?**

He seemed to be. He didn't do any harm to us. He spoke to us and you know, talked about family and all that sort of stuff.

General conversation? Personal conversation?

Mm, yeah. He'd ask you where do you

33:30 come from? You got a mother and father? Any brother and sisters? Are you married? Any children? All that sort of stuff. Yeah he just talked to you along those lines.

Did he actually talk about himself as well?

Not much about himself. He used to say he had a family in Japan. I'm not to sure now whether he said he had children or not but he was at the age group that

34:00 he could've had. He was a bit of mystery. I never worked him out.

How did the other Japanese guards react when he was there?

That was another thing; he didn't sort of live with them to an extent. He lived when he was there, he lived in the same quarters as them but he kept a bit separate to them. I don't know if that was any reason. He may not have done

34:30 but that was the impression I got. I just don't know what he was about. He was a bit of a mystery.

Do you think there was a difference between the rear guard units and the Japanese front line soldiers?

Yes.

In what way?

Well we never come across the, when I say yes, we never come across the infantry. They were quite brutal.

35:00 **The Japanese infantry that is?**

Yeah they were vicious people and highly professional soldiers too. To give you an indication, just after capitulation we were in the Tanglin area as I said before and it was a residential area and we were in there and our headquarters was one of these houses and between two houses there was a space of a

35:30 metre, that wall wide and that's about 3 metres and this Japanese officer, I'd never seen him before in my life and haven't seen him since, but he apparently came in and confiscated a motor bike and side car and he came driving up this laneway as it was and I was walking across the laneway and he aimed the bike at me and I

36:00 flattened myself against the wall of the building and he drove it at me so that the side car just brushed my legs like that and he went "urrrh" and he was, quite vicious people. In the battle for Singapore they were so brutal they went into, Alexandra, they went into the hospital there and they massacred some doctors and

36:30 the patient. There was a corporal being operated on and they massacred the doctors the nurses and the patient being operated on and those in the wards. They also bayoneted babies. They bayoneted Chinese mothers and things of this nature so they were quite brutal in their tactics and whatnot. So taking it from that they

37:00 were highly successful because they were so brutal. Upfront and they were on a high, so gauging from that their front line soldiers were quite aggressive and brutal. But alright, okay so it be but the guards and whatnot were administrators and whatnot and they were there. The attitude to

37:30 POWs was they were expendable, completely expendable and they didn't want them. You'll do your job on the railway line to get this going by August 43 and that was it and then after that we were all going to be exterminated. And that's on record. That's a fact. It's now in the United States, the writing on that is now in the United States Archives. So

38:00 that was an order from the higher command.

Okay that's pretty interesting.

I have that record in a book I've got with me as a matter of fact.

I want to come back to your opinion on the Japanese in the next tape. We were talking about cooking,

38:30 **you know the snakes, tell us about the wildlife you would eat and you would get a chance to eat?**

Well we never had a chance to kill any wildlife ourself. We had nothing to kill them with. We didn't have any weapons or anything of that nature. If we killed a snake we'd have to kill it with a stick or something of that nature. And that wasn't too often if at all.

39:00 As a matter of fact it surprises me we weren't bitten more often, cause where we were was cobra country so to speak and we had in the wildlife, we had deer, we had panther and we had tiger. A lot of tiger and

39:30 snakes of course and geckos and all that sort of stuff. Up we didn't have the opportunity to kill any for consumption. In actual fact, the jungle itself in those areas and things of that nature was absolutely beautiful. When I say beautiful it was pretty unfriendly but

40:00 nevertheless it was pristine. And the wildlife was pristine. But yeah you'd strike the tigers from time to time and they'd look at you and you'd them, you'd go one way and they'd go the other 9 times out of 10. And relating to that there was a civilian, when I say civilian, the

40:30 Civilian Workers Camp been abandoned, they'd moved on somewhere. I was sent with another chap about 3 kilometres down the line to Ban Pong. Ban Pong was divided into two areas. I suppose they called them north and south we just said 1 and 2. But I was sent down to pick up something or other I forget what it was now

41:00 with this other fellow and we were carrying it back with bamboo pole and it was a part for a diesel motor and I forget what part it was. A diff or something like that or an axle. I'm not sure anyway we took a shortcut through this camp and up one end, cause when the civilians left the camp very often there'd be dead people just lying about that

41:30 they'd just left. They'd just walk out. I don't know whether the tigers were there for that reason or not. But we walked in and cut through this hut and we soon changed our mind there was two tigers up the end of it. They spotted us about the same time we spotted them. They took off that way and we took off that way.

Tape 6

- 00:33 **We'll finish off the thing on the wildlife, what other encounters did you have with the wildlife while you were in the POW Camps?**
- What other encounters? Only perhaps, oh there's only one real close call with a snake and that was on an open path. I was walking down the path and it saw me and raised its hood but fortunately there
- 01:00 was a big stone nearby and I threw a stone at it and it buzzed off back in the jungle. It was only a few feet away from me so I consider myself fairly lucky it didn't want to attack me any further. I wouldn't've been able to do any thing about it. We had no such thing as anti venom, not
- 01:30 even a bandage and that would've been fatal I would say but it decided not to attack and when I threw the stone that was enough for it to buzz.
- Did you encounter any monkeys?**
- Oh monkeys all over the place. There was one group of monkeys, I never did actually know that caused this but it usually happened in the
- 02:00 evening. You'd get this funny noise and it was like a bouncing ball. It was point point point point point and then it'd start again point point point point point and they said it was a monkey. I never saw it in action and I had to believe them because I couldn't counter it. I didn't know what it was but this happened frequently in the evenings just
- 02:30 at dusk. It sounded like some hitting a hollow log and just letting it bounce. Yeah there was all sorts of monkeys and they were everywhere. Wild bananas, clumps of bamboo. There was bamboo right left and centre in the Burma Jungle. Great clumps of it.
- 03:00 Everything was built out of bamboo. Our huts were made of bamboo. They never used any nails; they used the skin of the bamboos as ties. And amazing how efficient that was the whole building, the huts were built this way. And it'd hold a fair bit of weight. I learnt a few things about bamboo building there.
- 03:30 What else, from different camps we'd go to, we'd go on a bit of an expedition around the camp close by. We had to be careful. There were never any fences around the camp. There didn't need to be, the jungle was your fence and that kept you under control but we used to go hunting for what we could eat and we found
- 04:00 what we called, I don't know what it was called but it was a sort of a wild spinach. This wasn't plentiful by the way and you only got every now and then. There was a plant that came with a single stalk with one leaf and we called it elephant's ears because it resembled elephant's ears and you used to have to gather up a whole heap of this stuff and it'd boil down to a couple of spoonfuls but
- 04:30 that sort of thing we were always on the look out for. With pellagra, as I said before it was mainly a lack of vitamin. At one camp we came across this, where there was wild fruit tree and it looked like a small apricot or more like a cumquat but when you ate it, it was extremely tart it was
- 05:00 worse than a lemon but when you ate it within a few hours your pellagra would start to heal up. And it was very good all we needed was vitamins and we weren't getting them. Our diet was mainly just rice and perhaps sometimes some salt and sometimes a watery stew and that's about it. Maybe every now and then we'd get some
- 05:30 whitebait, small fish. You get a small spoon of that to sub. Rice was good that way, if you got a bowl of rice, and that wasn't very much, we only got a small amount of rice each meal but whatever you put with it the rice would adopt the same taste as whatever you put with it. So if you had say a bowl of rice and a spoonful of
- 06:00 whitebait fish then you mixed the whitebait fish with it then the whole lot became whitebait fish and it became tasty that way and it needed to be otherwise it'd just be plain rice. The Japanese thought they were getting rid of all the crummy rice on us. They used to give us good rice and husk rice, thinking it was second grade, third grade well we got vitamin out
- 06:30 of the husks and that was probably better than the polished rice because polished rice didn't contain the nutrients and we found out those things. Our cooks never knew how to cook rice in the beginning and they had what they called 'quallies'. It was like an enormous, what do the Chinese use to cook their food in? It was shaped like a,
- 07:00 wok, an enormous work and they had those to cook with. Well they found out their method of cooking was they'd fill this up with the quallies and they'd have the fire underneath it. They had built these little fire places and you'd actually, when the rice took up all the water, they put rice bags over the top to sort of keep the steam in,
- 07:30 to steam it. They'd pull the fire out and then that would burn the bottom layer of rice and that became crar. We called it crar, it was like toasted rice, layer on the bottom. You'd shovel the rice out from the

top and you'd leave the crar. And what they were doing, what we did there. We'd all have our ration of rice and you'd have alphabetical,

08:00 some camps it was alphabetical, some camps it was numbers. You'd have numbers backup and when your number come up you were entitled to a big slab of this crar, this toasted rice. You'd grab that and sometimes it was rather plentiful and you'd burn the rest of it and crunch it up and it become rice coffee. So you know it had it uses. We believe it had

08:30 some nutritious value, I don't know whether it did or not but they were the sort of things we lived with when it was time for a backup.

You guys shifted around Thailand a bit didn't you?

Not Thailand, Burma.

Was it Burma?

Oh I was in Thailand too but...

Burma and Malaya?

Yeah. I was, the line started both ends. The Thailand end

09:00 and the Burma end. I was on the Burma end.

Were you aware that the Battle of Kohima was taking place in Burma?

About the?

The Battle of Kohima?

No don't recall that. Don't recall that.

What sort of intelligence would you gather from the radios?

Nil, practically nil. Practically no intelligence at all. As I say the only communication we got was snippets of new from our illegal or so called illegal radio

09:30 and that was mainly world news principally on the war in Europe until that came to an end and then we got snippets of news from the Pacific. We never knew that they were doing in New Guinea or New Britain or anywhere we could only guess that. We never knew anything about that.

Would the Japanese guards say anything to you about the situation?

No the only thing

10:00 the Japanese guards used to say and the Japanese Engineers, Australian number 1 Japan, you know. In other words we're going to be in Australia shortly and all that sort of stuff but they never made it.

What did you see about the actual war itself? Did you see allied planes come over your camps?

Yes, yes, okay this was later in the piece towards the end of our

10:30 POW days. We saw a lot or reconnaissance planes, heard them, saw them. The Liberators, we never knew them as Liberators of course, some of them were camouflaged, some of them weren't. Towards the end they weren't camouflaged, like big silver birds. That superior to any, there was Japanese aircraft, was just about shot out of the sky I think

11:00 because the Liberators used to fly not very high at all, just enormous birds not far about the treetops. At this stage, I was, this was after the line was built I was sent back up the line to a Japanese field workshop and we were maintaining the rolling stock. I was in the turner shop and the diesel

11:30 engines which were also motor vehicles, road vehicles as well as rail vehicles they used to chew out half shafts, their back axles and the taper on them and whatnot and the keyway the used to chew them out, pretty strenuous loads on them. The dinky shop, the welding shop would build up the taper and

12:00 I'd, they had me turning up the taper again, turning up a new taper and cutting a new keyway and that was what I was doing at this field workshop. Well the Liberators used to come over and bomb the bridges and things of this nature and they were flying just above, as I said before, it appeared to me a couple of hundred feet up. It might've been a bit more than that. But they'd fly over the camp,

12:30 over camps and they'd waggle their wings so to speak and we got the message that they knew we were there and they use to fire at the station with their forward guns and their turret and take it in turns. Bobabobom, Bobabobom, Bobabobom and I think they was a sort of a message that they were sending to us because they weren't firing at us and

13:00 the Beaufighters, I beat one of them once, I think I beat it, I'm still here because there was a mountain range not far from the railway and they use to pop over the range and fly down the clearing for the railway and attack the station which was a couple of kilos down the track and they'd shoot up any train

or anything that were in there.

13:30 and I was in a situation where I'd, no return, there was a bridge and a cutting, almost one on top of another. I was halfway through the cutting; I was at a point of no return. I saw this Beaufighter coming and he was coming down the track so I ran forward and across the bridge and over the bridge and down the embankment by the time he passed me I reckon I'd done 600, 700 kilometres an hour.

14:00 I don't know whether that's a fact or not but he was probably further away than I thought, but I beat him. But he wasn't attacking me at all. He could easily recognise me, I was almost naked. We used to enjoy that.

Where there any bombing raids near the campsites? I heard a lot of POWs got killed by the bombing raids?

Only as, I heard of this but I wasn't in the camps

14:30 at the time, but in Kanchanaburi, that's in Thailand that was a major POW camp, was next to the bridge over the River Kwai as they called it which is wrong anyway it's a misnomer and the bombing raids were apparently, they did it obliquely and sometime the bombs would drop and one or two would fall into the camp.

15:00 And that's the extent but I've never known a particular camp that was purposely bombed. At the end of the war when we were all down at Kanchanaburi. All taken down there from up on the line and whatnot the British air force put up a big board and they had all these aerial photographs and it had all these

15:30 photographs of probable POW camps, possible POW camps, positive POW camps and so on and so on depending on their intelligence. They were well briefed as to where we were and what camps we were in and that was very interesting. Likewise, at the end of our POW life, within days, two or three

16:00 days there were British troops including jeeps and the whole box and dice, which we'd never seen a jeep before. They were with us and protecting us and they'd said they'd been in the vicinity within kilometres of the vicinity for over 12 months in the jungle observing what was going on etc. So they were the British commandos and all the rest of it were there. Magnificent organisation, yeah terrific.

You were in Burma when the war finished?

16:30 I was, I'd just gone down to a place called Ban Casi it was halfway along the Thailand side. I'd come down from the Burma side and we were laying the siding because the workshop that I was in was going to shift back from where it was at Ban Pong on the Burma side back to Ban Casi and we were putting in a siding to accommodate that and when the war

17:00 finished, yes. We didn't know that the war had finished at the time. The Chinese had packed us onto a train and all men go down to Thailand. And when we got onto the trains and whatnot some of the stations that we pulled up in, the Chinese said "All finish." We

17:30 couldn't believe it at the time but when we got down yes that was so, so that was it.

How were you actually taken out like from the camp? When the B52s were going over, not the B52s but the British Allied planes, is that how you first got informed that the war was over?

No, no, we just saw more air activity and we made the assumption that things were going pretty well

18:00 because we no longer saw any Japanese aircraft. I think a lot of them were shot out of the sky that's what we assumed anyhow. We saw plenty of Allied activity. They bombed a lot of bridges and they had to be repaired. So people were put to work repairing those and things of that nature. So we assumed

18:30 that the war was going well for us.

What about the Japanese guards?

Yeah they become aggressive. They become very aggressive and you could hear it on their telephone. You'd be at a position working doing something and you'd hear the phone ring and whatnot and "Unda Sqwarky" Sqwarky being aircraft. And it was usually referring to Allied

19:00 aircraft and soon after that they'd all disappear into their trenches and you'd disappear into something or other because you knew the sqwarkies were coming. So they got advanced information on that and ring a siren. Yeah air raid.

So the actual day you realised the war was finished what happened to the Japanese guards?

Well I'll tell you

19:30 how that happened, there were a series of events. As I said we were putting in this siding to accommodate the new workshop area. Our commander, I forget who that was now, he asked that 50 very sick men be sent down country and they first of all said no you can't have 50 you can have 20, 25 something like that. You can send down

20:00 the very sick men down to Tarakan and he kept arguing with 50. So they agreed with 50 in the finish within days and then all of a sudden out of the blue all men go, all men go down to Tarakan. So this was beaut, so we packed up and it was within hours they gave as a train and put us all on the train and away we went without any explanation whatsoever. We found out from

20:30 Chinese on the way down that they told us that the war had finished, all over. And we couldn't believe that either at that stage of the game it was too good to be true. But we got down to Tarakan and found out yes that was so. So it was all over as far as it was concerned. We didn't see any guards at all there were no guards on the train nothing, they all remained on the line or wherever they were. We don't know what happened to those

21:00 but I can imagine they'd all be rounded up by these British troops I would say.

And where did you meet the British troops, at Tarakan?

Yeah at Tarakan and they were fully equipped and whatnot. They gave us some clothes and things of that nature and they, beautifully done, they had Japanese working parties carrying the water and all that sort of stuff and we weren't allowed to go anywhere near the Japanese. Which is just as

21:30 well, just as well I think that there could've been incidents there but they were all under control of the British soldiers.

Did the British soldiers express any surprise to your condition?

They'd been observing apparently so they really knew but yes, they did. I was in a situation where my haemoglobin was such that I wasn't able to fly down to

22:00 Singapore, down to Changi. They returned a lot to Changi. So I had to stay in the camp for a while until things improved health wise. So I, I did that and I didn't get down to Changi until early October thereabouts and of course the war finished the 15th August.

22:30 Then from Changi, they did some medical checks. They issued us more uniforms, they settled us up and I got transported home in the ship, the Highland Brigade. The Highland Brigade was a freezer ship that had been converted to a troop ship and through the tropics we were in the hatches in the holds

23:00 and they had all of the freezing pipes boarded over and the bunk or hammock that I was in one of the boards had slipped loose and there was the freezer pipe and every two days they gave us a bottle of beer and I wasn't a drinker before but I thought well, it was something to build us up. I was about the only one who had refrigerated beer. I used to pop it down

23:30 into the, there was only enough room for one bottle so that was that. That was my experience on the Highland Brigade. What a marvellous experience coming home. They used to have us up on deck doing light exercise and things like that gradually building up our strength and I was still pretty skinny when I got home and Mum was surprised what I was like I was, so was

24:00 Dad.

Tell us about your homecoming?

Oh magnificent. We arrived, I think it was on a Sunday, we arrived, I'm sure it was a Sunday and the old Greenway Tramway buses, a great convoy of those. We were on those and we travelled from Port Melbourne through the city out to the Showgrounds

24:30 where we met up with our family. The Red Cross and the army had arranged for Mum and Dad and one other, my sister that was, out at the showgrounds to meet us. And the Red Cross supplied a car to take us home. Everybody, we went out there and we got leave, we got paid and sent on leave a period

25:00 of time whatever we wanted and then told to report back at a particular time for demob [discharge] but it was absolutely magnificent. My brother and sister-in-law, I was hanging out the window and waving to everybody and whatnot and didn't know anybody but we were waving to them anyway but we saw him in the crowd and he ran beside the bus for awhile. Yeah

25:30 it was most enjoyable I can tell you. And just, we'd made it and that was that.

How long after the war was over did you take to come back to Australia?

Well I think, well I got back towards the end of October was when I got back. It was three weeks and I think I counted it up once and it was three weeks to the day

26:00 before my 21st birthday. And that was a nice birthday too yeah, after all that time.

Where there still celebrations taking place? Where there celebrations taking place in Melbourne?

Yes, yes.

Three weeks after the war had finished?

Oh well I wasn't here three weeks after the war was over, so I imagined there would be.

26:30 See war finished 15th August, I never got home 'til towards the end of October.

Oh sorry, I misunderstood. When you got here the celebrations were still taking place?

Well celebrations on that day, particularly the day we got home the streets were crowded with people yes it was something to behold. Yeah, yes, it was a beautiful day too what's more it was

27:00 a lovely spring day and yeah terrific. It was a, and at home they had all decorations in the front of the house and all the rest of it. Welcome home Ian and blah, blah, blah. All, some of my mates, some of them were still in the army and still away but those who were home were all there to greet meet and the old mates, it was great, great.

27:30 **It must've been a very emotional day?**

Oh it was, it was, yeah it really was, yes.

How'd things changed?

Not a great deal I think from memory. I think the euphoria of it all was over, I think things settled down to just about what it was.

28:00 Like me to tell you about some of the diseases if I can. Is that alright?

Yeah okay.

Some of the things, okay, I've already said that we were deprived of the normal things of life, toothbrush, toothpaste, soap, toilet paper, things of that nature. Well with this vitamin deficiency

28:30 a lot of us got what we called night blindness. You were okay if you were in the light and that, for our lights we had a fire in each hut and that provided the light. We didn't have any lanterns or anything of that nature. No electricity of course and while we were in the hut and the light was there it was okay but as soon as you stepped into the dark you had a periphery

29:00 blindness, you couldn't see straight ahead. You might've had around the periphery of the eye but you couldn't see anything but you tried to follow it but the periphery vision would go with you so you couldn't see and that was because of a vitamin deficiency. For this reason, all of us had either diarrhoea or dysentery and we needed to go to the toilet frequently.

29:30 Well for this reason from the end of our huts we built a fine bamboo, the small bamboo rail to the toilet so that we could find our way to the toilets. And now and then one of the rails would get knocked down and you couldn't find it, so you'd go wandering off to wherever you thought it might be and sometimes you might go into the jungle. If you weren't back

30:00 in sufficient they'd send a search party for you from those who didn't have night blindness and this was a terrible thing you could've finished up anywhere you know but as soon as we got some vitamin that disappeared and I don't think it's had any further effect. Another thing this pellagra that grabs you,

30:30 the pellagra where you had the split tongue and scrotum and whatnot, it was the same as soon as you got these cumquat things that we found in the jungle, the tarty things, ate of few of those and it immediately responded and it was good. But that's all they needed. If they had've done something like this and provided a reasonable

31:00 ration even though it be rice, rice and vegetables or something like that they would've had their job done much easier, probably faster, etc. There was absolutely, unnecessary, completely unnecessary what they did and they proved that they didn't value any life from POWs by issuing this order from the higher command that we were all to be wasted. As a matter of

31:30 fact at the 80 kilo in Ban Pong at our camp at the, when we were working at the workshops, field workshops we had to dig a trench 2 metres by 2 metres by 2 metres and this was down one side of the hut on the perimeter and when we asked what that was for they said it's aircraft recognition. But they kept the spoil of it and whatnot

32:00 we've since found out that was to be our grave when we were no longer useful and when the word came from command to exterminate. This happened in all camps, so you know it's not a story it's a fact. I've got that report out in a book outside now if you're interested in reading that at anytime. But that was from higher Japanese Command. So that's

32:30 their opinion of people and in my book that hasn't changed.

How did you deal with the post war setting when you came back to Australia?

I consider that I was fairly average in the way of diseases and suffering the various bits and pieces.

33:00 Once I got malaria we didn't have much treatment because the doctors had very little medication. If you had an attack of malaria you might get one or two doses of quinine just to quieten it down but then

again have reinfected shortly afterwards. So on the average you'd have three attacks every two months, roughly. So this works out, if you work this out over the

- 33:30 I was a POW for 3 years, say 3 years because we didn't have malaria immediately, if you work this out over the 36 months you're looking at something like about 40 attacks of malaria and that would be about it. However, there are other things besides, I had about 4 or 5 attacks of dysentery and how I ever got over that I will never know. And interspersed
- 34:00 between that there was plenty attacks, countless attacks of diarrhoea it was almost diarrhoea most of the time. I also suffered beri beri and pellagra they were the extent of my disabilities and the night vision things of that nature. Skin, I had terrible skin problems. I had lots of abscesses
- 34:30 on my back and face. You can see I'm still active in my skin problems. I think that was because I was youthful and I had lack of vitamins, lack of nutrition and whatnot and it became a serious skin problem. I used to be able to burst these in the wet season. See the water would run off the roofs at a fairly rapid rate it was a very heavy rain and we used to stand under that and the pressure
- 35:00 of the water on the back and whatnot would assist to break these things and clear them out. That's the only treatment we could have. The doctors would have to lance some of them from time to time and he had no anaesthetics or anything like that so it was just a matter of bite on a piece of bamboo and let him go to work and clean it out. That was an on going thing and still is. Not to the extent that it was but it still
- 35:30 is. I would say that's pretty well par for the cause, some didn't have those things but a lot of them did. That was general and most of it was pointing back to nutrition most of it. What we ate and the rest of it. So unnecessary we had no medicine at all from the Japanese
- 36:00 or what we did have was very, very little and soon used up. So it was up to our doctors then, and they did a great job by learning how to handle these exotic diseases.

Can I ask you how in the post war your experience as a POW, the physical and mental hardships that affected you?

I'm now a TPI [Totally and Permanently Incapacitated Pension], by

- 36:30 my war caused injuries. I have whole spine, lumbar thoracic and cervical spondylosis, it gets worse from time to time and it affects my walking. I've had a knee replacement in my left knee and my right knee is osteo arthritis and my right hip is osteo arthritic. I have emphysema and bronchitis. I've got the skin problem as you can see.
- 37:00 I am now diabetic. What else is there? There's a couple of other things. So all of these are relating to war service. And that'd be par for the course.

So tell us about the years after the war? I know you went to Vietnam as a trainer...

Yes, okay the years after,

- 37:30 the in between years I did a rehab [rehabilitation] course and I became a motor trimmer but I did a couple of years at that and I wasn't quite satisfied so I re-enlisted and I stayed in the regular army and retired 1975 and in that time I wasn't able to go to Korea because I was
- 38:00 classified as CZE, Communication Zones Everywhere and they weren't accepting them for Korea. I was a warrant officer and at warrant rank no commanding officer would want a warrant rank that wasn't FE, Forward Everywhere, so I missed out on Korea.

You were in the CMF weren't you?

I was in the CMF originally. I joined the CMF in 1949

- 38:30 transferred to the interim army in 1951.

What do you mean by interim army?

Well there was an interim army going on at that stage. It was neither permanent army, it was, you could get discharged at any time for the interim army but in 1953 I transferred from the interim army to the Australian regular army and they accepted me at that stage of the game.

- 39:00 Then in 1971 I think it was I went to Vietnam. Once again I was going to go earlier but once again my medical classification put a stopper to that but I was eventually able to go which I did.

How did you find settling into Australia?

Alright, there was no problems really to that. I spent most of the

- 39:30 time as a soldier so everything was taken care there. As a soldier's life I was quite comfortable with that. I was an instructor mainly eventually became a regimental sergeant major. I was quite happy with that classification. I wasn't commissioned because I wanted to

40:00 get out of the army around about the age of 50 so that I could sell myself to a civilian employer. I thought going beyond that would be a bit more difficult.

I wouldn't want to be past the Vietnam War just yet. Why did you choose to go back into the CMF after undergoing such trauma?

Yeah that's simple.

40:30 I was married in 1947 and my wife's brother wanted to join the CMF. He said would you join it with me. He didn't want to go in raw without knowing somebody. So I said yes alright I'll join the CMF with you. So we went down to 6th Battalion the Royal Melbourne Regiment and they had a company in Gratton Street, Carlton. That's now Melbourne University

41:00 Regiment. We joined there, it was B Company or C Company or something or other. So I accompanied him intending to let him get to know the ropes sort of thing and then I'd bow out, but I stayed. And just at that stage of the game or towards they were about to re or introduce their first national service scheme. And they asked

41:30 me if I would stay on and join the interim army and become an instructor seeing that the national service was starting because that'd eat up a lot of their (UNCLEAR) cadre staff. And that's what happened and in 1953 I decided that I'd stay in the army and I transferred to the Australian regular army.

Tape 7

00:34 **Okay, I just want to touch on a few things that I'm confused about. You mentioned before that the River Kwai was a misnomer?**

Yes, here are two rivers and the bridge over the River Kwai, so called was at the where the two rivers join the

01:00 convection. It's upstream from that on the, there's the Kwai Noi and then there's the Mae something. In actual fact it was along the other river I do know the name of it but I just can't think of it at the moment but it was on the other river. The Kwai Noi [Menam Kwai Noi River] runs just about along the

01:30 access of the railway and it is in fact downstream of the bridge. The other river that goes up country in the other direction, that's where the bridge is. It's a few kilometres upstream from the river Kwai.

Did you see the film?

What a lot of crap, I won't say it now

02:00 but what a lot misinterpretation there was and the bridge looked nothing like it whatsoever. It's I think, from memory, about an eight span bridge. So they brought the steel bridge from Java I believe and replaced the wooden bridge. First of all the wooden bridge was down near the Tarakan camp and it was replaced later on by a steel bridge which

02:30 is a few hundred metres up stream from the old wooden bridge. The old wooden bridge was wrecked but I believe you can still see it in low tide. If it's got a tide there, low level would be more appropriate in the dry season. Yeah, so not only misinterpreted in that film it didn't even look like it.

Why do you say it was misinterpreted?

Oh well,

03:00 the name is wrong, River Kwai, Bridge Over the River Kwai. It was Bridge Over River Mei.. something or other. I think it is, something or other. However, and that bridge you saw, the wooden bridge you saw was nothing like the bride over, the original bridge. And the performance of the troops and whatnot was

03:30 nothing like it either. They were all military dressed and webbing and the whole box and dice. Nothing like it whatsoever.

Allowing for a few inaccuracies for dramatic intent, did you think it was an alright film?

It was entertaining that's about as far as it goes. Any resemblance to POWs

04:00 was absolutely coincidental. I think they had a scene in it where they put somebody in a box for punishment or something or other, they did that but not in that fashion, but however we got the message.

You mentioned before that your friend

04:30 **the dentist was nicknamed Nigger?**

Yeah.

Why?

He was dark skinned. He was Australian birth but he was one of those fellows that suntan easily and he was quite suntanned. That would be forbidden these days I would imagine, but that's what it was then.

Did any of the blokes try to escape?

Yes, from Tavoy.

05:00 8 tried to escape and the 8 were executed. They caught them; they were given away by locals. I'm not too sure where it was now but they brought them back and they executed them.

How were they executed?

They were shot. Ah no they weren't, I'd have to check on this again I think they were beheaded. I'm

05:30 not sure, I'd have to check on that. There was a couple of executions there was one on Changi beach that I only heard about and Rerington he was executed by being beheaded. And I think the 8 were shot but I wouldn't be sure.

So you didn't witness any executions?

No, no.

06:00 **You must have seen a few blokes pass from disease and so on though?**

Oh absolutely, yeah, yeah.. I lost some very good friends sadly by just seeing them lay down and die. An older fellow Jack Warming from South Australia in our unit he was an ex-boxer, middle weight. He was,

06:30 must've been up in the 35's or something or other and I was only a kid so he became sort of a father image and he looked after us early in the piece but he got sick and he couldn't get over it and he was forever and ever sick and I do think he threw in the ghost in the finish. I saw him not long before he died in a hospital down at Tarakan. He was just wasted away, you could hardly recognise him. He just received

07:00 a letter home. The only letter that he ever got and he asked me to read it to him, which I did. And he was crying at that and I tried to buck him up a bit and told him I'd come back and see him and whatnot, and it was all fruitless and he just gave up. And this frequently happened blokes, threw in the towel because they saw no hope you know. And it got you that way. It really did get you that way.

07:30 Yeah, Jack Warming, yeah, I think of him every Anzac Day and at other times. Yeah, he was a good bloke and a few others of course. But him in particular because he sort of looked after me in the early pieces.

Did you have any kind of funeral for him?

They all had a form of funeral.

08:00 They were taken out, buried and the bugle played The Last Post and if there was a padre he said a few words and things of that nature and if not somebody else did. But everybody that died had some form of service when they were buried and a cross put up. When I went back to, for the 50th Anniversary of the fall of Singapore,

08:30 I looked at, I also went on a tour back to Burma, oh Thailand and I went to the war graves at Thanbyuzayat and picked out his grave there and also another fellow called Spidge Easton, from Kahoona, I saw both of their graves. I brought back photographs of that. I never contacted Jack Warmings family in South Australia,

09:00 however, a bit too late to do so now so, there it is.

I've heard what you said from other POWs, from ex-POWs that when a fellow gave up that was the only time that he died, it seems like the strength to go on

09:30 **was the only thing that kept people alive...**

Yeah, That'd be right, that'd be right. It was a big factor anyhow and if you threw in the ghost there was just no hope you just faded away to nothing you know. And this was aided and abated by whatever disability you had, and normally it was dysentery. Cholera of course you had no hope. If you got cholera it starts off,

10:00 it lets you know, you pass a white liquid and that's the warning sign you've got cholera, the next day you're dead. It was that swift, yeah, yeah.

So what kept you going?

Mates mainly. You kept one another going. You sort of overcome all the problems that you had

10:30 by dismissing them as much as you possibly could and just living your life with all your mates around you and doing what you could there you know. Eating as much as you could when you could which was all very, very little but you had to keep on going. You know have that urge to keep on going irrespective. And once you've lost that

11:00 you've lost it.

A sense of humour too?

Oh yeah that's true. As a matter of fact that was a good indicator if you lost your sense of humour you were in a bit of trouble. Fun thing in all adversities as I found there's always some humour around the corner. And that's sort of little bright lights in dark room. And that kept you going as well

11:30 the little incidents that happened. Particularly if you pulled off a swiftie with the Japanese if you tricked them or something. For example in the early pieces of building the railway down at the 18 kilo mark, they started off by marking out a section of the embankment that you had to complete each day depending on the number of men you had.

12:00 And they'd peg this out and so while they were doing that while the Japs weren't there in any great force at this stage of the game we used to have fellows go out and were digging and filling in this thing because the embankments wasn't that high at this stage of the game. And we'd have palm trunks, palm trunks are nothing they're very light they'd rot away in 5 minutes. We used to when we could put that in

12:30 and quickly cover it up with earth you know so that we'd fill our quota easily and we thought that was a great joke. This was to be aimed at. We got caught a couple of times but we had a few victories too. A bit of sabotage.

I'm interested in something you said before,

13:00 **I guess I've read a lot about the holocaust also and what Jews went through in the concentration camps and also things like life under Pol Pot [former Cambodian dictator] in Cambodia. There's something different about the POWs in the Thai, Burma Railway and Changi and so on. And it's something you said earlier I guess about**

13:30 **the discipline and the structure and maybe it's something from the British as well about the sort of stiff upper lip that you never let down. But I think it's something even the American POWs didn't seem to have and you mentioned about the villages up the road started to fall apart very quickly and lose their will to live. What do you think it is**

14:00 **that was particular about the British and Australian soldiers in the camps?**

Well I think one of the major differences in the railway and as you say Pol Pot and the Holocaust and all that sort of stuff, the Japanese had an aim and objective and that was to build the railway and everything was structured around an organisation to build the railway whilst they were doing it under extreme pressures

14:30 etc it was still an organisation. With the others it was just mass murder with no organisation in mind. It was just kill, kill, kill. Well there Japanese weren't there to kill, kill, kill, they were to build the railway. Many men must die, they said "Very sorry Nippon, very sorry many men must die." And that was their attitude

15:00 we died because of the railway and there was an objective in that and to do that there was a certain amount of discipline and organisation and you lived within that organisation. So I think that was a major difference or it could be a major difference. It wasn't just a complete massacre like the others.

Did you find that goal inspiring at all?

No not really,

15:30 damn the railway but you asked me the difference between those things and I offered that as one explanation. That's my explanation it may be right it may be wrong.

Well perhaps in someway. I mean at least your life had some kind of purpose and there was some method to the madness?

Yes, but we didn't look at it as a purpose of life, we couldn't care less about the railway and their method

16:00 of building it and the reason why they're building it but it was our daily task and we were kept going for that reason.

Okay, I've philosophised enough, I don't want to go too far on that. Just one more question, did you ever sing songs or entertain yourselves in the evenings?

Yes, yes, as a matter of fact in Changi they

16:30 raised a concert party and there's a few well know television stars that were in that, trying to think of his name now of a couple of them and they put on various things and I was on the 105 kilo camp and the

concert party there they built a stage and all the rest of it and the Japanese enjoyed them too. They came to watch and they were quite good. They

17:00 had the White Horse Inn was one of their plays with composed songs against the railway or about the railway and whatnot with a hidden meaning and all this sort of thing. And yeah they were quite good and it was good to get a laugh from it. One of the songs they sang in the White Horse Inn was

17:30 about the HMS Repulse and Renown [actually HMS Prince of Wales] the two battleships that were sunk off Malaya. And it went something like "Around the corner of the rocks to the Whale with a face like a Town Hall clock, Picking his teeth and cleaning his nails with a 12 inch gun from the Princes of Wales" and so it went on. There was the 10 little fishies. And they did this behind, the Japanese had a 10-man mosquito net and it was green. So that gave the impression that everything

18:00 was under water. And they put this up and we had little fish pulled across the stage and all that sort of thing. Yeah it was well done and all that sort of thing. 'Booboo didum dadum wadum chew' and all that sort of stuff. Yeah they were very entertaining.

Can you remember any other lyrics?

We had

18:30 one fellow that I know of with a wonderful tenor voice and a Dutch music teacher got hold of him and started to teach him singing and all the rest of it. I forget the song he sang now but we thought beautiful at the time. That was a take off of a

19:00 I think that might've been the White Horse Inn. I just forget the song now. Yeah they made up quite a few ditties on our POW life and our captors. And they had to be very careful, but we got the meanings. And the Japanese enjoyed them what's more.

You can't remember any of the words?

No

19:30 not now. That one that I just gave was, that stuck in my mind for some reason or other for years and years and years.

Yes something to sing while you do the gardening?

Yeah.

I want to ask you now about your reasons for joining the regular army?

20:00 **What was your knowledge of the Vietnam War at that point?**

It was 1953 it was before the Vietnam War, the Korean was just about finished and until 53 I was in the interim army mainly on CMF Cadre Staff and

20:30 I was CZE so, and a Warrant officer Class 2, so I wouldn't have been and I wasn't accepted by any commanding officer as a Warrant officer, a CSM, company Sergeant Major with a medical classification as CZE so I lost the chance of going to Korea and I joined the regular army just about on the close of the Korean War anyhow. And I went through

21:00 from there. So it was just a continued life. I enjoyed being back in the military under our own setup. And I thought I'd stay in it because I'd already done my apprenticeship and that was that, yes. And I'd do that again.

So what were you doing during the 1950's?

1950's,

21:30 all of the 1950's I was in the army.

And what sort of things were you doing?

I was an instructor mainly. Doing instructing on weapons, leadership, methods of instruction, map reading all of the infantry subjects and enjoying it.

What was your knowledge then of the Cold War and Communism?

Oh well I had a great belief in the domino theory I thought that

22:00 that was true and I was anti-communist and yes I would've done anything to prevent that happening. I thought that our involvement in Vietnam was by invitation and therefore correct and I had no inhibitions about that. Yeah that was my,

22:30 my political outlook.

Can you tell me a bit more about that. What do you mean by invitation and therefore correct?

Well we were asked to join by General Diem, Diem I think it was, from the South Vietnamese he was their President at that stage of the game and he was the one that gave Bob Menzies [former Prime Minister of Australia] to send forces and Bob Menzies did that.

- 23:00 And I don't see how he could've got out of it. I think it was influence by the Americans but nevertheless it was by South Vietnamese invitation and that should not be forgotten. That's the way I see it. And we fulfilled that invitation being a friendly country. That's the way I saw it.

During the 1960's you would've

- 23:30 **been in Australia, there was a lot of arguing back and forth about the Vietnam War. It certainly wasn't a clear cut case like World War II where the whole country was for it. What was your opinion of the debate?**

Well it was spurred on by a leftie [left wing] politician Doctor Cairns and he's responsible for a lot of the

- 24:00 disharmony around at the present time. And the radical union of students in universities and places like that to employ these tactics as they do now. So, yes I think that it's civil disobedience to a large degree. I disagree with it in many cases. I think today a proper

- 24:30 protest about something is a peaceful protest and it needn't been done in crowds like it is. You know of ball bearings under police horse hoofs and all that sort of rubbish is completely out of control and the people ought to be gaoled. That might be a bit harsh but what they're doing is also harsh and injurious. So I disagree with a lot of their activities

- 25:00 or the way they go about it.

Yeah but it was certainly a completely different atmosphere from the one in which troops were sent in World War II?

Yes, I was disappointed in that because when I went to Vietnam I was instructed not to travel in uniform and I flew to Vietnam in civilian clothes and I flew home on civilian clothes. And I thought that was an absolute disgrace when you had to hide your own uniform

- 25:30 because of these radical ratbags.

Even so, there was still a large proportion of the population, a big proportion of people who were against the war and that's not just students and radicals, did it give you pause to reflect about the justness of those people?

My reflection on that is, most of those people or a lot of them were middle aged people, family people, things like that influenced

- 26:00 by these other ratbags. In actual fact people who weren't fully informed about what was going on. And that's still happening today a lot of the problems are decisions made by people who are not fully informed. They're swayed by radical press and the like. I mean a journalist these days can simply write what he wants and put it in the paper and some people

- 26:30 believe it. It's starting to become known as don't believe anything you read in the press and I would support that. So some of the things you can and some of them you can't but I think that that's an influence on a lot of people.

There certainly was an awful lot of press in the 1960's about the Vietnam War, prior to your going to Vietnam how

- 27:00 **did you see this press? What was the message you got?**

I interpreted as I've just said a little bit, well not a little bit, but a lot on the leftie side and they had an agenda, a political agenda against the ruling Government, that's my opinion. And I think the same thing is going on now about Iraq.

You say that a lot of people were

- 27:30 **uninformed about Vietnam War...**

Were ill-informed.

Okay, what were they uninformed about or ill-informed?

The facts, the facts. Here's the facts as I see it. We were invited by General Ky [actually Diem] to send troops to assist them in the invasion by the north. We responded by sending troops there. The first troops to go there was the AATTV [Australian Army Training Team Vietnam],

- 28:00 and they went in 1962. This was followed up in 1964 or 65 by 1 RAR [Royal Australian Regiment], going and creating the Task Force and so on it went. This was all at the invitation of the South Vietnamese Government. It wasn't an invitation by Kennedy [President of the United States at the time] or

28:30 the US in anyway. It come from the South Vietnamese Government. People have seemed to shut their eyes to that and just go on as if the US invited us, you know, that's not so. Whilst the US may have had an influence in it, that's a different thing. I don't know why people have got it so wrong.

It's particularly important given your role,

29:00 **then that you were there to train, and advise the South Vietnamese. You weren't there to work with the Americans so much or to train their troops...**

Well we were, the team did work with the Americans we weren't part of the Australian Task Force we were controlled by MACV [Military Assistance Command Vietnam], Military Advisors Vietnam, and that was a US establishment. The

29:30 CIA [Central Intelligence Agency] had an influence and things of that nature. We worked as advisors and down in the Delta we worked with an organisation with the acronym of CORDs [Civil Operations & Rural development Support] Central Organisation for Regional Development which included development or their schooling, development of roads, infrastructure their farming things of this nature.

30:00 And the Australians, a lot of people don't know, weere putting in a water treatment plant which they never had. A water treatment plant and putting the pipes down for reticulated water down to homesteads, down to the 4 inch pipe and from thereon it was up to the local government to include the plumbing to go into the individual houses. Now they never had a potable water

30:30 pipe to their homes before. Never had a water treatment plant to that extent. Now the Australian Government paid for that with Australian Engineers. That's never been talked about as part of the development of assisting the South Vietnamese. And they were putting one in at Da Nang too I understand but I didn't know that for sure. But they're the sort of things that I'm

31:00 for. I give them a plus.

Yeah, I just meant that the distinction that you make that you were invited by the South Vietnamese, not by the Americans was important because you were in fact training South Vietnamese not fighting with the Americans. Whereas most of the Australian troops were fighting with the Americans?

No,

31:30 the Task Force was the only force that actually took up arms against the Viet Cong and the NVA [North Vietnamese Army]. They sent Battalions over there and their area of operation was the Phuoc Tuy province. Now they took this up but they were still under control by their

32:00 rules of engagement by the South Vietnamese. They had to get approval to fire on things unless their life was in danger. Now as far as the team was concerned we had advisory teams out with ARVN [Army of the Republic of Vietnam] out with the regular troops of South Vietnamese and their, what do you call them? Popular Forces and Regional Forces, they were engaged

32:30 in combat. They had the ability to call in artillery, they had the ability to call in airstrike. Most of the South Vietnamese didn't have that except the ARVN but yes they were engaged in combat. But on an advisory, they advised the Commanders what to do in a particular situation and they had the authority to call in US [United States] Forces. US

33:00 Air and all that sort of, US Artillery. The ARVN's didn't have that authority, they could call in their own but they had limited air and artillery support. So that's the reason why they were there and that's the reason why the engaged in combat in that role.

Now the point that you went to Vietnam, was it 70 or 71?

71, I think so,

33:30 I forget it was either 70 or 71. A role had changed at that stage of the game.

Yes that's what I wanted to ask about because it's getting towards the end of Australia's involvement in the war and getting towards the end of America's involvement in the war, so how did you see the state of the war at that point and how had Australia's role changed?

Well,

34:00 the state of the war at that stage, they're saying that, the popular belief in the press was that the American's lost the war. In a sense they did but rarely did they ever lose a skirmish. Now all of the North Vietnamese invasion and final completion was

34:30 when the Americans withdrew. They withdrew and were never defeated. This has never been said that I've ever read in the papers. America withdrew and the North Vietnamese walked in. So that's how I see it. The Americans were not defeated, they withdrew out of the country by popular belief. And therefore all the stories about American surrenders, that was wrong, they never ever did.

35:00 They just pulled out.

Okay, but I want to try and take you back to that time without, cause obviously you have seen a lot of information since then and views have changed and history has been written and rewritten. At that time though, how did you view things? How were things going in Vietnam and what were you going there to do?

Well

35:30 towards the end of my tour there we were training Cambodians to take up arms to protect their own country because the war was escalating towards that way and they needed to protect themselves too. The Khmer Rouge were very active and we were assisting in the fighting against the Khmer Rouge. We were preparing the Cambodians

36:00 to take arms to protect themselves. Okay, so that was what we were engaged in towards the end of the war what you were talking about and I agreed with that system completely. Once again it was a communist thrust. The same as the North Vietnamese was a communist thrust and they had to be beaten. Well they weren't. They overrun the South Vietnamese towards the end. If the Americans had've been still there they wouldn't have

36:30 overrun them because the Americans never lost a battle. They may've lost the odd small one or walked out on it but in fact they just pulled out of the thing and the North Vietnamese overran them.

Alright, so when you were sent, you said that you had to wear civilian clothes, tell me about that flight and what your first impressions of Vietnam were?

Yeah,

37:00 okay, we left Sydney airport and flew to Singapore and then on to Vietnam. Arrival at Tan Son Nhut, I've never seen, it was a shocker. There were aeroplanes going in all directions. I don't know why they didn't have aeroplanes having accidents on the ground. They were like,

37:30 all over the place like ants. It was a big airport Tan Son Nhut, and there was planes going and coming all the time. They were attacked a few times by perimeter mortaring and all that sort of thing. But what a madhouse Tan Son Nhut was. I'm glad we were met there by some American advisors who immediately issued us with small arms and ammunition and

38:00 we were moved off to our appropriate, we first of all went to the Australian accommodation which they took over a hotel in Saigon and then I moved down to the Delta where I stayed for the first half of the tour, six months. It's to be remembered that no Australian had more than 12 months posting in Vietnam unless there were

38:30 exceptional circumstances. You could do more than one tour but you couldn't do them consecutive. You had to have a spell between. So when they compare some people at the moment, Vietnam Veterans too, trying to compare Vietnam with World War II, I totally disagree with that it's just unrealistic. Their 12 months in Vietnam could compare

39:00 to some having 4 and 5 years in World War II. And some of the infantry, and there were many of them in infantry battalions. The total death, Australian deaths was 503 or 506, something like that and we were there involved in it, round figures 10 years. Half of those, roughly half of those deaths and whatnot were non-combat

39:30 related. They were accidents whether they be air, vehicle or illnesses so there it comes to a further 250 or so combat deaths. Now, if you like to do a bit of quick arithmetic that's less than one a week now compare that to World War II and you've got a different story. I'm not decrying what they did in Vietnam but I'm against people

40:00 creating stories that are misleading. And that's one of them. I'll be condemned for that but that's the truth.

Well certainly on that basis somebody who may have started in the Middle East and then Alamein and then Tobruk and so on and then get sent to New Guinea, you know 6 years you could be out there and

40:30 **go through the whole hell. But I don't want to get into too much political philosophy just yet, I want to stick to the facts for the moment. So after you arrived, what were your first duties?**

Oh okay, we were first of all supplied appropriately, mostly with US

41:00 equipment and arms. They gave me an M16 rifle, a 9 millimetre brownie hand gun and ammunition to suit [others say that all advisors were issued with a US .45 calibre handgun]. Accommodation and then they flew me down to Can Tho in the Delta and I took up my job in the Can Tho

41:30 assisting Major Hughes who was the commanding officer of the teams down in the Delta. And I assisted him in the management of the teams.

Now was he an American or an Australian?

No, no, an Australian. He worked out of the headquarters of what they called CORDs the Central Organisation for Regional Development. He worked out of that office.

Tape 8

- 00:33 Okay, so I arrived in the Delta and took up residence in what we called Australia House which was the headquarters of the NOTT's operating team, Night Operation Training Team under the command of Major Hughes who was the officer commanding the team and my job was to assist him in the management
- 01:00 of the team in all aspects. So we did that, and we did that for 6 months of the tour. There was nothing really untowards. The system there was that the teams at Bac Lieu and Dong Tam would teach their counter insurgency operations mainly concentrating on counter ambush, ambush,
- 01:30 counter ambush and the like and we were teaching Popular Forces, NCOs [Non Commissioned Officers] and officers and this was developing into some ARVN [Army of the Republic of Vietnam], the regular army troops of South Vietnam but that'd only just started when we packed it up. We packed it up to go up north to Ap Long Hoa. There were two camps there of the US, United
- 02:00 States Special Forces. And both of them were, one was in Ap Long Hoa Village itself close by and the other one was a couple of kilometres away. I was in the one that was away from the village and protecting the airstrip. It was adjacent to the Ap Long Hoa Mountains which was a stronghold of the Viet Cong and there we undertook the
- 02:30 training of Cambodians and the equipment of Cambodians to fly back to Cambodia and take up arms against the Khmer Rouge which was the Cambodian communist armies. This went on for the remainder of the tour and it was a successful programme. Had a couple of things,
- 03:00 inhibitions that we had to contend with and that was we had to teach American tactics and we had to teach American weapons. It took us a little while to adapt to these but we got there alright and we had to do all our training through interpreters. Cambodian interpreters. It seemed to work alright.
- 03:30 I think from memory we bought over, I think it was 1200 at a time. They flew them in and we had a 12 weeks course. Including live firing once they'd been taught the various weapons we had live firing practices and flew them back with a full equipment issue of
- 04:00 a battalion, their battalion with American weapons and equipment and that was the system. I don't know if there is anything else I can say about that.

Okay, you said you were working for Night Operations..?

Yes Night Operations Training Team.

NOT is it?

NOTTs

- 04:30 yeah, N-O- double T, yeah.

Can you tell us about your training in NOTTs in the night operations, initially you were training the ARVN troops?

No.

Oh, Popular Forces you said?

Popular and regional forces yes.

So what are the Popular Forces outside ARVN?

Popular Forces are, the nearest I can get to that is militia a sort of CMF,

- 05:00 Popular Forces and it was a militia and they were brought in on full-time duty and all that sort of thing.

What was it like training them?

Well fairly successful. They were all keen and interested in what we were doing and what they were doing. Their training culminated in setting up an ambush, going out setting up an ambush we accompanied them

- 05:30 to set up the ambush. It was never sprung to my knowledge I don't think we ever sprung an ambush but we taught them how to set it up and how to defend it and counter ambush in case we were ambushed all that sort of thing that was tested.

What was it like training militia?

Alright, no problem to anybody else. You go through a set

06:00 training schedule and lesson plans and that was, we did that through interpreters and that went okay, you know fairly well.

What was the difference in training in militia and ARVN groups or the difficulties?

I don't think there's any real difference in training anybody. They're all human beings they either get the instruction or they don't. You

06:30 offer a pattern of instruction with lesson plans. You go through your lesson plan, you test that lesson plan, you test it at various stages and by this testing you find out whether your instruction is getting through or not and if it's not getting through you recapitulate and so on until they've got it. Then it's finally tested by them putting in an ambush.

07:00 Your there as a checkpoint to see that this happened the way you taught it. And you write reports along those ideas. What we did was once they finished this course we issued with the Owl Badge. It was an Owl with a laurel wreath that they could wear. They were very proud of this, the owl being a wise old bird and etc

07:30 and the laurel wreath to indicate that they've qualified at the NOTTs training team. They were very proud to wear this. I've got one or two at home I think brought home for souvenir.

Now you were in the Delta region while you were training them?

Mm.

Tell us about the Delta Region what were the difficulties encountered in regard to the opponents and the civilian population?

Mud, mud was the problem

08:00 The airstrip, I used when I went visiting the teams and/or Saigon for any reason I used Air American and the Americans had the airstrip at Can Tho. The conning tower or the operations tower at the airstrip; it was a fairly big airstrip,

08:30 it had a plaque at the base of the tower and that indicated from memory that that point was only a few feet, 7 or 8 feet above sea level. So you can imagine, the Delta and its estuaries

09:00 spread out like fingers. There was half a dozen estuaries and I was a fairly big river, very wide. And there was mud everywhere. There was hardly any bitumen roads they were all mud you could easily get bogged there at any time and it was that sort of mud that was slippery. You'd slide, you could feel the back wheels of your vehicle sliding from side to side. You had to be very

09:30 careful. And putting in operations and that you were always sloshing through mud and that was one of the major difficulties down in the Delta. Dong Tam wasn't so bad but Bac Lieu was it was a shocker.

What was the composition of the civilian population there? Were they Catholic, Buddhist? What was there differences?

10:00 It was mixed. I think in all there's something like 40 odd religious groups in Vietnam. Some of them very small. There were lots of Buddhists, lots of Catholics I can't give you the composition of Can Tho, Bac Lieu or Dong Tam but generally speaking right throughout

10:30 Vietnam it was mixed.

Now the troops in the Delta area you had trained, you and the training team, Australian Army Training Team Vietnam had trained these militia and ARVN were they mainly Catholics?

We never took a record of that I don't think. We didn't care who they were as long as they were friendly. Not to my knowledge I don't think we took a record of that.

That wasn't

11:00 **differentiated at all?**

No, no. I can see no reason why we'd do that. It makes no difference as a soldier whatever you are.

When I was reading that book you had on the training team, it talks about the Diem's Catholic, predominately Catholic regime was unpopular amongst Buddhists and there was some

11:30 **ill will between Buddhists and Catholics.**

That may've come into politics but as far as we are concerned down at the instructional side I don't think we bothered about it a great deal. Yes I suppose we took some knowledge of it but I don't think

that influenced our ability to instruct them.

You were given no briefings about...

Yeah we had a, we were issued a book about

12:00 the customs of South Vietnam and it explained briefly but concisely all of that sort of stuff. We had to take note of it, we couldn't and didn't abuse their religions or customs or anything like that. We tried to avoid that. So we stick strictly to the purpose of why we were there to teach military subjects. And we taught those military

12:30 subjects and it was the same for a Buddhist as it was for a Catholic or anyone else. That's the way I saw it. I never took much notice of what they were or anything like that. If they had a particular reason such as a religious holiday etc we'd observe that. We weren't there to offend any religion or anything of that nature. So we'd observe

13:00 all of that.

What did you find, I know the ARVN groups had problems, they had political problems and they had internal problems to do with commanders. Tell us about those problems you may have had when you were training them.

Well I wasn't adviser with the ARVN. We weren't adviser with the ARVN down in the Delta we were there as an instructional team. Yes

13:30 they, we heard stories and I just can't relate to too many right now but they did have a problem but as far as we were concerned the training team in our training as advisers we stuck strictly to what our job was to advise the leaders on situations and to assist them with support fire.

14:00 And that's what we did. Now I don't think we got engaged in any politics with them. Yes, there were some discussions and arguments about authority to fire, the rules of engagement. Although we went out, say for example even in our battalions in the Phuoc Tuy Province the

14:30 Australian's area of operation, we weren't allowed to fire on people unless we got South Vietnamese approval unless you were fired upon and at risk. Now this meant that the South Vietnamese General's and Commanders had control of the situation all of the time. If you were going out on an operation I know this we were taught this. If you were going out on operations

15:00 and you expected to be fired upon you'd get approval for rules of engagement. You get approval from the South Vietnamese Commander of that area to open fire as you would. Otherwise you didn't do it and this meant that they controlled their own country. Worked reasonably well. I think it caused problems from time to time but they were overcome.

15:30 Yeah.

What operations were you involved in, in the Delta?

There were no operations in the Delta they were all finished. In the Delta when I was there our operations were to teach ambush and counter-ambush and that's what we did. That was our objective and we tested this by actually getting them when finish the course to

16:00 conduct an ambush and where necessary counter ambush.

You said you were involved in some actions, in actual combat actions?

That was at Ap Long Hoa not down in the Delta. We were never fired upon down in the Delta. I think Bac Lieu got a mortar bomb but I don't know about that.

Was there much

16:30 **Viet Cong activity there in the Delta?**

Yes, but it was being looked after by their own local troops. They had their fortifications at strategic points and they were visited from time to time. A pretty hairy sort of a job that too but no we weren't involved in any combat

17:00 contact.

What do you mean by the fortifications that were visited? You said it was a hairy job?

Well river junctions, road junctions, river crossings and things like that always had a fort and it was manned by regular troops or Popular troops, regional troops and they protected this, the most likely areas of attack and it was very quiet because of this,

17:30 earlier in the piece, Tet and before and whatnot there was quite a bit of activity and most of it was brought under control. What they did in the early stages, was a lot of the farmers, the Delta being so wet is a high productive rice area, so what they did there they got the hamlets and brought them in to

18:00 make a village a fortified village so the Viet Cong couldn't attack the individual families for rice and things of that nature. And they go to the fields and work and come back to the fortified village. That stopped a lot of it and that's the way it was when I was there.

How many people from the Australian Training Team were working in the Delta when you were there?

How many

18:30 personnel?

Yeah.

Let me think, 5 in each location, 5 or 6. An officer and about 5 warrant officers and the sergeants, warrant and sergeants in each they were all instructors and that was about it. And there was the boss and I,

19:00 the major and I at headquarters.

I'm interested to know why you said that the Delta had very little enemy activity after Tet?

They still had activity but it was all engaged by their own troops. There was no need for any other activity there. They had some ARVN there and they seemed to have it under control. During Tet I believe that

19:30 the VC [Viet Cong] were that confident, they marched through the town in front of the Americans and all the rest of it and nobody touched them. So a big force did that but that was during Tet. We had no such problem.

You weren't there during Tet were you?

No, no, no.

Now before you go to the Delta, in the previous region you said you were employed, what was the name of the place

20:00 **again? Before you were sent to the Delta?**

The Delta was the first part of my tour. I was at Saigon, arrived at Saigon and immediately posted down to Can Tho in the Delta. The second part of the tour I was in Ap Long Hoa.

Tell us about Ap Long Hoa?

Ap Long Hoa, well that was with the US Special Forces.

20:30 We engaged on a training that involved the Cambodians. And the Cambodians about 1200 strong were flown in. We gave them a 12 week course, equipped them with American weapons and equipment and flew them back and another 1200 would come in and so it went on. That was a fairly successful operation.

21:00 That was pure and simple and didn't involve any problems after that. There was a few incidents at Ap Long Hoa mortaring and small arms fire received and one officer, one Yank officer went out in response to an incident at I think it was at... and stood on a mine and lost his foot

21:30 but apart from that it was reasonably quiet. It was a dangerous area but we lived within the precautions of a dangerous area so we were protected by that alone. We were in a fortified position as well.

Now, you said you were working with the US Special Forces and you were compelled to us their

22:00 **tactics and weapons.**

Yeah, the programme involved using their tactics and their weapons because they were going back to fight in that way. So we had to learn their tactics, we knew a bit about them, but to teach things you have to deal with a lot of detail. We had to pick that up which we did and their weapons and we picked that up without much trouble

22:30 and did that, communications and things of that nature. They operate a bit differently to what we do.

So how did the Australian troops operate then in jungle warfare and training? How did the Australian troops operate that was different to the Americans?

How different was it? Oh we had a different tactical approach we were more like British approach. And our weapons were, well GPMG [General Purpose Machine Gun] was American but

23:00 our point 5's and things of that nature were Brownings and only certain troops had those like armoured and whatnot. The infantry tactics were a bit different. For example the American infantry section had an A Team and a B Team. We did have such a thing as that it was too cumbersome in our opinion.

What do you mean A Team and B Team?

Well,

- 23:30 the A Team, I think I've got this right, now it's been a long while, the A Team consisted of the riflemen etc and the B Team was heavier weapons and supported by some small, now they operated them different in the tactics line when they had contact etc. We have a section commanded by a section commander it's
- 24:00 9 men. I've got an idea that the American I think if I'm right in memory was about 15 something like that and ours is 9 men and a corporal is in charge and our main automatic weapon is a machine gun, the GPMG, we had other automatic weapons but they were lighter such as Owen machine gun, carbines and things of that nature and sometimes shotguns and we operated
- 24:30 on scout systems and gun group and rifle group and it was much easier to control however we had to do it their way.

What was it like training with the US Special Forces?

Alright, they accepted us with open arms. They treated us as one of theirs and yeah it was pretty good. Yes,

- 25:00 like I say they've got their own little funnies compared to us but we got used to that and they were friendly people, fairly friendly.

Tell us about those funnies you referred to?

Oh I can't think of them. They were all

- 25:30 a bit gun-ho about recon [reconnaissance] and all that sort of stuff and of course they were Special Forces and they liked jumping off high walls and all that sort of stuff and rappelling. They had towers built in their camp where they used to repel regularly all that. They were impressed by that sort of thing, that was their job and they kept it up.

What

- 26:00 **do you mean by rappelling and so on?**

Rappelling down a wall.

Abseiling?

Abseil, yeah.

Oh that was the old word for it, was it?

Yeah, yeah and all that sort of thing. They were forever at that, that was a big thing. Parachuting, although they didn't do any parachuting when I was there, that'd gone, it'd passed. Mike Force, they were engaged in Mike Force but that didn't happen, that was abandoned

- 26:30 when I was there. That was a Strike Force, very effective.

What were they used for?

They were used for assault troops. They would jump in and whatnot, Mike Force, very, very effective Force. Some of our team members were also members of Mike Force in earlier days and yes we had

- 27:00 a few involved in that but I didn't experience that. I was mainly on, as I said, the instructional side of it for NOTTs and Cambodians and they called it the FANK Programme, Francaise Armies Khmer I forget what it stands for now it was a French thing [Forces Armees Nationales Khmers - Cambodian Army].

Did you

- 27:30 **ever liaise with any French personnel there?**

No, no I never met any French personnel there. The Vietnamese themselves were friendly people generally speaking the average village person. They had a lot of cottage industries; they all worked from their house. In the front room.

- 28:00 You'd get a motor mechanic. You'd get a person that'd fix up air conditioners. Now that was a popular one because everybody and his dog had an air conditioner. Air conditioners, furniture makers all working from their front yard you know. There was not a great deal, not a great sign of large industry. They had generated,

- 28:30 fuel generated power and things of that nature but I think that there were moves a foot. Everybody, every Vietnamese family had a 90cc Honda. All of the larger cities and whatnot was always encased in a blue haze from two stroke smoke and

- 29:00 you were breathing two stroke smoke all the time and it was not uncommon to see 5 or 6 people on a

90cc Honda. They were sitting on the handlebars; mother was sitting side saddle at the back. She had a baby on her back or on her front and you know people were standing on extensions to the axles and all sorts of things. They were all over it. You couldn't see the bike for people. But they all had, and traffic was

29:30 everywhere. So that was a madhouse yeah. Had to be careful where you walked.

Did you get involved in any combat operations when you were with the US Special Forces?

No.

Were you in any at all in Vietnam?

No. When you say combat...

That means engaged in anyway whatsoever?

No, no contact. Well we were fired upon in the

30:00 camp. But the US sent out their own people and dealt with it but at that stage of the game they were hit and run. They would fire a couple of mortar bombs and then buzz off; you'd never find them, into the hills. Just nuisance things you know.

What sort of tactics would the Viet Cong and the NVA use to your knowledge at

30:30 **the time?**

That's a hard one to answer. What sort of tactics did they use? I don't really know have to answer that. They had their tactics and they always used them. They, most of it was, or a lot of it was, how shall I put it,

31:00 hit and run. That was VC, they'd park a bike that was loaded with explosives next to a café or restaurant on a timed device, walk away and leave it and have it explode. Something similar to what's happening now, like a bomb type of thing. That was the VC or they'd have raids

31:30 like in Phuoc Tuy. What happened at Ap Long Hoa was a VC unit, a local VC unit I think it was 249 or something like that aided by the North Vietnamese regulars. Something like, I don't know, I think there were hundreds of troops, 2000 troops something of that nature and they attacked a company of ours,

32:00 or came in contact. Now they were building up their force a long while before and intelligence knew it and they came down to apparently attack Nui Dat and this company was out and made contact and had a successful contact although we lost quite a few men in 11th Platoon but that's being celebrated,

32:30 when I say celebrated, as a memorial now as one of the important battles of Phuoc Tuy Province.

Long Tan you're referring to?

Long Tan yeah but in actual fact what it was, was a company in defence, as simple as that. But a very heroic action and brought some very heroic actions

33:00 by some of the members on it and the troops that were there. So, yeah, so you get incidents like that where you have a major force or strike a major force and then again you can have simple force. A lot of it was night time ambush for VC moving through different places. You see the VC had to get a supply from somewhere and they stood over villages and whatnot for rice and things of that nature,

33:30 and if they didn't get it they'd slaughter the headman and all that sort of stuff. And that's what it was all about and we were there to stop that and protect it. Well it did cut out a fair bit. When I say we, the whole friendly forces so to speak. Yeah it eliminated a lot of it and that's when the North Vietnamese Army came in through the Ho Chi Minh Trail and whatnot to bring supplies

34:00 and all that sort of thing because they were, the villages were bring brought into protected areas and stopping the Viet Cong slaughtering their head honchos and all the rest of it.

There must have been villagers that supported VC without coercion that is?

Yes there were. There were many. And they were anti.

How did you deal with them?

Well, the

34:30 South Vietnamese dealt with those and rather harshly too when they found out about it. They didn't mess about with those. Yeah, because I'd had no experience with that at all.

What about the politics between their US troops themselves, you know, there was a severe convulsion going on within the US Army, divisions that is on race and politics.

35:00 **What did you see of that and know of that?**

Oh not much, I think that might've been a blow up. We didn't hear a great deal about that. We knew of some actions that were along those lines but I think that was quickly brought under control. But no, we weren't that closely involved with the Americans under those circumstances.

35:30 There were problems amongst them sometimes I think, yeah.

Did you come across conscripts? American conscripts?

Yes, but you couldn't tell them one from the other. Never in conversations about it, never. I didn't have that closer contact. The Special Forces were all enlisted men so they were the ones we had the most contact with so no I didn't have

36:00 any involvement with the other.

Were you convinced that the war could be won when you were there?

Well put it this way, if you're having a fight with your neighbour and he climbs over the fences and breaks your windows and goes back over the fence and you're not allowed to climb the fence to beat him up you're not going to win the war. And that's the way it was. We weren't allowed to go over the 38th Parallel [actually 17th Parallel]

36:30 (UNCLEAR) one of those and it was just escalating. We tried to do it by or the Americans tried to do it by bombing but they defeated that by numbers. Yeah, so yeah I think it could've been won but I think it was at risk of escalating the whole thing.

Did you think it was necessary to bring in Australian conscripts to Vietnam?

There were no conscripts that went to Vietnam that didn't have the opportunity of reneging. This must be made clear; no conscripts were conscripted to fight in Vietnam. When their national service was completed they were posted to a unit that was due for posting to Vietnam. Now the unit

37:30 was posted to Vietnam not the conscripts. They were not conscripted for Vietnam. I know this because I was involved with the movement. Now what happens is if, for example finished their national service basic training, they went to corps training, then they were posted to an infantry battalion and that infantry battalion was scheduled to go to Vietnam. They'd go with it

38:00 unless they objected to it on religious or other grounds, etc and if that was the case they were reposted to a unit that wasn't going and they never went. But before that happened they were told of the benefits of repatriation and all that sort of thing and there was not one that I know of that objected to going to Vietnam that went. Not one. That's a story, a fairy story.

Okay, I didn't know that. So these people were volunteers out of the national servicemen?

They weren't volunteers, they were national servicemen.

But they all volunteered to go overseas in they had that choice?

They had the choice, put it this way, they never objected. They went to a unit that was going to go to Vietnam and when they found that out they had the opportunity to object on reasonable grounds and if the reasonable grounds were accepted

39:00 then they'd be posted to another unit and they wouldn't go. Now most of them never objected and they went because of the benefits they got when they come home. Now I know of not one national serviceman that was ever conscripted to go to Vietnam. And that's a furphy [lie].

Okay. What about the incidence of fragging [killing or wounding of superior officers by their soldiers] in the Australian ranks that took place, I understand there were at least 5

39:30 or maybe even 10 incidence of fragging that took place in Vietnam?

Frag...

Shooting of officers by their men?

No, I...

Have you heard anything about that?

No, no, there was a grenade incident in Nui Dat but that's the only one that I know of and, no.

Tell us about this grenade incident?

40:00 Well as I hear, it was only hearsay as far as I'm concerned apparently this soldier had a grudge against another soldier and he dropped a grenade in the tent. As I say I can't confirm or deny that so you know, that's the only thing I felt. Our discipline doesn't allow for that sort of thing. Similarly, you hear things about rape and all that sort of stuff.

40:30 Our troops go out on an operation and they're under control at all times. Now our discipline doesn't

allow for that sort of thing and it just doesn't happen. And I deny any of that ever happened. That's a beat up. Our discipline just doesn't allow for it because they're under control of it, not an NCO, an officer. And the officer is usually in control of

41:00 the NCO anyhow. If you knew our tactics that's the way things work. Search and destroy, surround and search and all that sort of thing is done by an operation and it doesn't give an individual soldier any time to rape anybody or anything they're too bloody busy. No I won't wear that at all. That's a beat up.

Tape 9

00:34 **Sorry I should've asked you to wait could you say that again for the camera please?**

The national service conditions that national service was raised during the Vietnam War in the 60's, it was raised in the early 60's and the conditions were that they were balloted in by their birthday dates. There was drawn

01:00 a particular date, all those born on a particular date would go into national service at a particular time and they would do two years national service involving 6 months basic training [actually 12 weeks recruit training], 6 months [actually 12 weeks] corps training and 12 months with a unit, an appropriate unit after corps training. And at that time in their unit training or joining a unit,

01:30 they were a fully trained troop in the particular corps and then they were subject to move with the battalion wherever it went. If it was going to Vietnam and they had an objection they were given the opportunity to voice that objection and if it was accepted as an objection they'd be posted out of the unit to a unit that wasn't going to Vietnam. And to my knowledge there was

02:00 not one national serviceman that ever went to Vietnam against his wishes. Simple as that. Paddy.

That's a good explanation. With the fragging we were talking about before you were saying that that incident that you spoke of was more or less a personal

02:30 **difference?**

Yes.

Rather than a political grievance?

Yes I haven't heard anything to differ from that. As far as officers are concerned no I haven't heard any stories along those lines. I'm not saying that they didn't happen but it seems to me to be fairly iffy.

What about fragging

03:00 **in the American ranks, that was very common over the...?**

Well once again, once again we didn't have that much close contact with the Americans except when we got the Special Forces. There were the enlisted men and the conscripted men there was always differences there but how far it went I'm not too sure.

Did you get a chance to go to American bases?

Yeah I was in

03:30 American bases with the US Special Forces. That was an American Base but no others no.

Have you been to Nui Dat and those places? Bien Hoa?

No, no.

What was that other American base, Vung Tau?

Vung Tau?

04:00 Vung Tau was mainly an Australian base. We had recreational places there. All of our non combatants our and engineers, engineers were there it was a recreational area. People on R&C, Recreational in Country [Rest and Convalescence]. They all went to Vung Tau to have I think it was a 5 day spell. And Vung Tau is a

04:30 coastal town for the Phuoc Tuy Province which was the Australian's operational area and it was well known that Vung Tau was a recreational area for VC as well as friendly troops because you couldn't tell the difference anyway. Yes, it was lay the ears back and have a good time town.

Was there much of a presence there?

05:00 **Like...**

Yeah a big presence. We had a big landing strip, engineers, ordinance, medical, hospitals and whatnot. They had a swimming pool, gym and all that sort of stuff there and the surf beach which wasn't exactly clean and things of that nature.

05:30 That was Vung Tau, supply area and that was in Phuoc Tuy Province. Quite a few kilometres from Nui Dat but easily to get to.

What was the morale like amongst the Australian troops?

Very good, never any different. It was always very good. I put that down to our

06:00 disciplinary methods. Our methods of operation. We have a system where we keep all troops down to the private soldier fully informed where necessary. Before he goes in operation he is briefed. First of all the commanding officer briefs the officer and the officers brief the NCOs and the NCOs and the officers brief the private soldier so they all know their mission and they all know what their

06:30 mission. They all know what they're going to do and what they're about to achieve so in that way they're fully informed. And that keeps them a lot happier; they know what they're doing. And that's common to this day.

Now with the training of the Lon Nol Regime and their troops in Cambodia,

07:00 **at that time did you see any benefit in doing so? Considering that the Lon Nol Regime was about to collapse?**

Well our training session with the Cambodians with the FANK Programme, I consider was successful. The only thing that happened there that a little bit of a question mark on it was, as I said, we'd get 1200

07:30 over, train them, equip them and send them back. After a while we noticed some very familiar faces coming back not one or two but many and what we think was happening they were sending them back for a return visit to get the equipment. But that was an American problem not the Australians. We were there to teach them whoever was there. I don't know what they did about that

08:00 because I left before that was resolved, if it was resolved. I don't know if it was even proven but it was suspected.

At that time the American government was denying that it was conducting operations in Cambodia?

Well they weren't conducting operations in Cambodia; they were bringing Cambodians to Vietnam, training them and sending them back.

Were you aware of the secret bombing?

No.

You weren't?

Secret

08:30 bombing?

Yeah in Cambodia?

No, I wasn't aware of that yeah.

And of course there was a big offensive, I'm not sure which, you've got to forgive me here my knowledge of operations in Vietnam is limited, but there was a big offensive where they actually did conduct a major push with a lot of ARVN Forces into areas immediately surrounding the border of Cambodia. I forget the name of that offensive.

09:00 That could've been so, I don't know of it myself but my guess is that the American troops involved would be advisors to the ARVN troops. I think it'd be mainly concerning ARVN people with probably American advisors which is normal, a normal situation. Which is my guess and I feel comfortable with that I guess.

With your role as an Australian Army Training Team in

09:30 **Vietnam, what was your understanding of what was happening around you? Was it limited to your sphere or could you have greater access?**

There were briefings but we weren't involved a great deal with the Task Force in Phuoc Tuy. Because that was a Task Force Operational Area, OA, [Operational Area] and didn't involve us. We worked with MACV, the

10:00 Military Advisors Corps Vietnam [Military Assistance Command Vietnam] and as such were under control of American and in co-operation and support with the South Vietnamese. CORDS, the Central Organisation for Regional Development [Civil Operations and Rural Development Support] was a CIA setup and it assisted regional development, farming,

10:30 schools, infrastructure, all that, roads, all that sort of stuff and a great idea. Water reticulation came into that. Purification because portable water was a bit of a problem in Vietnam. You dare not drink out of taps or even clean your teeth out of taps. It might be alright to swill your face or something every now and then

11:00 but, big problem.

Now what chance did you have to liaise with the CIA?

Well that was all done through our commanding officer. We had no contact with them, any or their agents. That was all done at headquarters with Major Hughes.

11:30 **With Vietnam, also I wanted to ask you what you thought about the US casualties? They suffered something like 58 to 60,000 killed in action. All killed. Why did they lose such a high percentage?**

I've never really thought about it. They went in with large numbers and therefore I suppose you could expect

12:00 larger numbers being casualties. Well compare them to our own killed in action or killed during the 10 years which is probably less than 1 a week it seems to be out of proportion. I've never really gave it any thought why. With the exception that possibly the way they

12:30 operated. Possibly because their tactics are, see if you go in with a bunch of people and you've got a machine gun in front of you, you're going to kill half a dozen or so before you have to move because they're all packed up. We don't operate that way. When we strike an ambush

13:00 then we got, they have too, got contact drills but ours seems to be fairly efficient as it could be and I don't know what they do and why they receive that amount of casualties I don't know for sure. And only a complete guess.

You I suppose, must've known about the desertion that were in some instances...

Head of them, heard about it a little bit

13:30 but yeah once again it's only hearsay on my part, we never really paid much attention to it. We were involved in our system and we stayed that way.

What about Australians that deserted?

I've never heard a figure on it. I suppose there were some but no I've never heard a figure on it so

14:00 I can't talk on that either. You always get somebody that has reason to do that. Whether it's fear, disappoint or whatever I don't know.

What did you learn from your experience in Vietnam? Overall in anyway?

14:30 Yes I think there was a genuine need to for the South Vietnamese to consider that they needed to be independent from the North. The North of course was influenced a lot by the Chinese which is their bordering neighbour and it's a possibility Ho Chi Minh had a good idea but I think that the French

15:00 started the rot and it went on from there. Perhaps it could've been resolved had it been done a different way. But South Vietnamese themselves, I found them to be a polite, a very friendly person generally speaking. They were family people and I was impressed in the way that the school teachers

15:30 took their children to school when I was in the cities and whatnot. You'd see them marching them and taking charge of them when crossing the road, busy roads and things like that. It doesn't happen here but it happened there and it impressed me some of their customs like that. So I believe they wanted to live their own way and to defend that was not out of the question.

Did you think that

16:00 **the nationalism in Vietnam on part of the Communists had legitimacy in anyway?**

No I don't think so. And I believe that initially that it was part of the domino theory and that's what I thought and believed it had to be stopped.

16:30 Because they'd come down through Malaya etc and be a direct threat to Australia. That's what I believed.

Did you think that if they came into Indonesia, if the PCI, the Indonesian Communist Party had succeeded in stopping Suharto's coup, do you think Indonesia could've been a direct military threat to Australia?

Yes.

17:00 We're living in precarious situations and I think that the war in Vietnam was part of that as it turned out now it stopped but at that time I thought yes that it was conceivable that that would happen.

Do you still think that Indonesia is still...

We're still under threat, eventually, yes, I think we are because of

17:30 our low population but at the same time I think that if anything like that did occur we'd be protected and supported by the US. That's why I think our relationship with the US has to remain fairly strong. Because we haven't got the means to defend ourselves against 200 million people. How could that happened, yeah.

Can you tell us why?

18:00 **you think Indonesia would invade or be a threat?**

Well they've openly stated that they want a Muslim area you know, including us and these are the radicals of course and I think that's their aim and objective and I think we're under threat until that's resolved.

Did a lot of people that you served with in Vietnam think that as well?

18:30 I think so, yeah I think so, all the old diggers. Yeah I think they do.

Did you serve with the troops who had Indonesian confrontation experience? Malaya?

Malaya yes. I've struck a few since, helped them with their pensions

19:00 and whatnot. Yes I have, can't recall anything specific about them at this stage. There was not only Malaya, there was Bougainville and now I'm striking some Timor people

19:30 and no doubt there'll be others.

What was going through your mind when you saw the divisions in Australia? Now I know you mentioned this before to Colin [interviewer] about the Moratorium and so forth, but how did it affect the troops in Vietnam?

We were completely and absolutely disappointed because when you see

20:00 Doctor [Jim] Cairns and the like collecting money and giving that money to North Vietnam, it didn't have, it wasn't received very well amongst us. It actual fact, what he was doing was supplying money against his own Australians in Vietnam. That's our opinion and I think that's true. And he should be condemned for that and

20:30 his followers.

When you say condemned, in what way?

Oh I don't know, just condemned. I don't mean to bring him any harm except nullify him. Those who were his supporters should think again.

What about the feminist movement?

Oh Save Our Sons and people like that. They're a nice fouled mouth lot.

21:00 During National Service they used to assemble them down at Batman Avenue Training Depots. The engineers and artillery training depots put them on buses and drive them up to Puckapunyal. Well they had from time to time they used to ask some of us, I've been on duty down there, and we had a chain gate to stop traffic coming in and when the buses were ready to go out we'd undo the chain and

21:30 they'd swarm in and when we tried to stop them and just hold them back and whatnot we were spat on, sworn at, things of that nature. And I mean sworn at, nice language and whatnot and I wasn't impressed at all at that. Once again I think it was a leftie element, mad university students and the like and some of the

22:00 mothers, which were influenced by them. Those SOS people, Save our Sons people who scribbled all over the footings of the Shrine. What enjoyment would they get out of that? Desecrated, you've got to remember the Shrine is a consecrated building and that was desecrating a consecrated building apart from anything else. So

22:30 where do their thoughts lie? Yeah, not nice, not nice. I think un-Australian. Mm, there it is.

How did the soldiers react to being spat on, pushed and so forth, sworn and so forth?

Our reaction was angry but you can't do anything about it. You're not going to go giving a right cross

23:00 to some female even though she's mad you know but we just had sort of cop it and do the best we can from stopping them getting into the buses and whatnot. Dear oh dear.

Now what about the effect of the Vietnam War on the veterans who suffered from post traumatic stress disorder?

Oh well post traumatic

- 23:30 stress disorder, there's quite a few factors of post traumatic stress disorder, personally I'm not a psychiatrist, I can't make any real judgements on the post traumatic stress disorder but let's face it if you walk out and fall over the gutter while going across a street and whatnot, okay, you've got post traumatic stress straight away. You've hurt your knee
- 24:00 and whatnot but it develops into a big strength and personally myself, I gauge this by POWs they probably had more post traumatic stress which wasn't known at that time, it was a psychoneurosis. Some of them called it bomb happy or things of that nature, psychoneurosis. Not any POWs to my knowledge
- 24:30 have ever claimed post traumatic stress disorder. There's quite a few that have been accepted as psychoneuroses which is par for the course, which is pretty normal under those circumstances but Vietnam veterans, remembering they were in Vietnam for 12 months and not all of them struck combat, we're getting cooks, and people in Vung Tau Education
- 25:00 Corps, I know of one Education Corps, no names no pack drill, claimed post traumatic stress disorder because he used to fill his jeep or whatever vehicle he had with library books and drive up from Vung Tau to Nui Dat to change library books and put in a claim for post traumatic stress disorder because of perceived ambushes on the road up to Nui Dat. If you knew the road up to
- 25:30 Nui Dat it was like the Hume Highway. It was that busy etc and that well protected that nothing could happen. That's the sort of thing that's happening. I don't say in all cases, far from it but I've got doubts. There was over 50 per cent of Vietnam veterans with a claim for post traumatic stress disorder. That's way out of proportion to World War II. So

26:00 where does it start and finish?

So you disagree/agree as a norm?

I think there should be a more clinical look at them. And if they don't satisfy the statement of principles on post traumatic stress disorder they should be rejected. Now psychiatrists come into this, they're they only ones who can diagnose post traumatic stress disorder but there's degrees of post traumatic stress disorder in my opinion.

26:30 You know somebody might be upset with their service in Vietnam for a particular reason but it may not be that stressful. I mean, you've got several things, do you have nervous reaction, do you have sleepless nights, do you have all these sorts of things that come into it, hyper-vigilance all this sort of things comes into it and unless you can satisfy those factors

27:00 you should be looking at. I'm not saying that they're not looked at but I don't know how intense the look is.

What about the difference in actual engagements between the Second World War and Vietnam?

How do you mean by engagements?

Sorry, I mean by the operations itself. They were totally different types of wars; you had conventional wars and unconventional wars

27:30 **where you could be attacked at anywhere anytime?**

Yes that's true. Yes, but underlining all that there were the basic tactics. There was patrolling, and there was still the company battalion, section, whatever in defence. There was the same thing in attack. There was contact drills, ambush drills, counter ambush drills they remained the same. The things that differ are the search and destroy,

28:00 the surround and search, operations of that nature where you're dealing with villages. You close a village off; you have a look at it, and go through it and all that sort of thing looking for arms cache, and all that sort of stuff, tunnels. Okay, that's different and the tunnelling themselves by the engineers most traumatic thing that was, or that must've been but basically

28:30 the tactics haven't changed that great deal. We have a good tactics systems, in my opinion. Yeah the World War II for example Long Tan, we'll take Long Tan it was technically, it ended up a...

Now I suppose what I'm trying to ask you is that whether

29:00 **it's tactically sound I suppose is not really the issue, what I mean by that when you don't know who your enemy is, the Vietnamese all predominately look similar that it's difficult to tell who's the communist and who's not. Who's with the Americans and you've got double agents and infiltration, corruption which I'm sure you must've encountered corruption at this level. That complicates the**

29:30 **tactical situation.**

Well it does. The farmers in Vietnam all wear black pyjamas alright so do the Viet Cong. The North Vietnamese they wore uniforms so they were easily identified and they all carried arms. The difference being that the Viet Cong, when they're acting in a Viet Cong role they're carrying weapons. So you can easily

30:00 detect them. But when they're carrying grenades and things of that nature, yeah it's a bit difficult because they can hide them in their clothing. A lot of them used bicycles as part of their attack by filling the bicycles up with explosives and detonating them remotely or detonating them and walking away and letting a timed fuse go off

30:30 things of that nature. You're not going to control that, you just got to, you don't know when it's going to happen or how it's going to happen. But yeah when the Viet Cong are operating as a Viet Cong company okay they're under control and they've all got weapons so they're easily detected then and that's why they're easily detected in an ambush situation of a night time you

31:00 set ambushes on known trails or suspected trails and if the ambush is triggered you'd deal with it and there's various ways to deal with it in an ambush. But yeah that's the Viet Cong but during the daytime if you saw Viet Cong in a town or in a city and he's just got his pyjamas on and nothing else then there's no way of telling that he's a Viet Cong as

31:30 opposed to any other civilian. But it doesn't disturb troops to my knowledge if, because it's rarely that you're in a village with them anyway. If you are in a village you're more than one out and you might be having a cup of tea in a local area or something like that and that's unavoidable but generally

32:00 speaking what are you doing in the village one out sort of thing. We were always taught to be in company and protect one another. That's about the size of that. It never worried us a great deal.

What about massacres? Now what would prompt soldiers operationally, now I'm really not sure what happened in the Australia scene in the

32:30 **province but of course the Americans, there were examples that massacres did take place where suspected villages were wiped out like My Lai for instance? What would prompt soldiers to react in such a circumstance?**

When they were fired upon or any aggression whatsoever. Usually if it's just aggressin without arms they arrest the person

33:00 and take him for questioning because he could be part of a Viet Cong chapter in the area. If you find a cache of good or a cache of ammunition or a cache of weapons then you suspect and know that that village is Viet Cong sympathiser. So you start questioning around, headman and all that sort of thing and if they attack you

33:30 well you attack back. That's the part of it you're defending your life so you're allowed to do that. And that's the way it is, yeah. A lot of these massacres, massacre is a press invented word when they want to create a sensation in my book. Yes, villages have been wiped out but they have been aggressive towards their

34:00 searchers and even fired upon and for that reason they've fired back and destroyed the village. So there it is, it's not just males, it's females and children as well that are involved in many cases. So we've got to take note of the actual facts. And that sort of happens on the spot

34:30 because on the spot, that reaction is done in exactly that way, it's on the spot and you take the consequences later on if you're wrong.

Now having said all this about tactics and operations and politics interlaced do you have a more sympathetic approach to the qualms or grievances of the Vietnam veterans as opposed to some of those Second World War vets who

35:00 **don't look about the experience sympathetically?**

No, I'm all for supporting soldiers that have a real grievance or a real disability.

35:30 **Now there are quite a few World War II vets as you know of course being one yourself, who don't look at the war sympathetically in the sense of their grievances. Outside the cases of PTSD [Post Traumatic Stress Disorder] what reason do you think the Vietnam Vets have both military, and politically and socially**

36:00 **to be upset? A lot of them seem to suffer from serious problems as a result and being shunned from their country and things like that in certain ways?**

Yeah, I don't know if they were shunned. I don't think that's happened. As a matter of fact I think the Vietnam veterans are well treated. Well treated by the Department of Veterans' Affairs as

36:30 well. Repatriation Department have got things in place that concern only Vietnam veterans and their families. Medical services etc that are available to Vietnam veterans and their families. That excludes World War II and Korea and anywhere else. When Con Sciacca was the

- 37:00 Minister for Veterans' Affairs he brought in things of that nature which I do believe that there should be no discrimination between any veteran. Any veteran should have all the same entitlements. And that's the way I see it. And Vietnam veterans are no different to that they should have the entitlements just the same. If they got a
- 37:30 proper war caused disability they should be dealt with as such. If they haven't got one well there's no bit about that or there shouldn't be. It all is approval that's got to be linked to their service. Any disability has to be linked to their service. And it's linked to their service by the factors in what we call "Statements of
- 38:00 Principle" and these are arrived at by specialists of, 5 specialists of different, for different reasons, for different categories. Yeah I think the system is fairly fair at the moment. I just can't see the differentiation between Vietnam veterans and any other veteran.
- 38:30 I think they should all be treated alike. That's about the size of that.
- Now we've only got a few minutes left so I've probably got only room to ask you a couple more questions? Now how did the war impact on you altogether, Vietnam and World War II as a whole? How did it impact on your personality and your world view?**
- I think I'm a lot wiser than I used to be. I was
- 39:00 a bit of a radical before I enlisted and I think I've settled down a lot and of course age has got a lot to do with that as well. But, yes I learnt a lot of things as a youth in POW Camp and I've learnt a lot of things since as a regular soldier. As a regular soldier I learnt how to behave in a proper manner. I hope in a proper manner and
- 39:30 yeah I think it helped to settle me down to a large degree. Discipline in the army is mainly designed so that you can eventually use self discipline which is the best type of discipline of them all and self discipline comes through practise of the systems in the army. I think the army system is a very good system.
- Okay, did you see Vietnam in hindsight now or**
- 40:00 **do you see as Australia's deployment in it, involvement in it as a wasteful one? In hindsight?**
- No because I think that Australian troops in Vietnam their contact with the civilian population and whatnot I think it built up fairly reasonable relationships with the everyday South Vietnamese. South Vietnamese
- 40:30 that have migrated here are testament to that. We've got quite a number of them that come here and quite happy being here and they've settled in as I can see as ideal migrants or good migrants. They're industrious and the join in with us generally speaking and I think that that's because they knew us when we were
- 41:00 in, they knew were weren't there to harm them except the Viet Cong and whatnot. Yeah we did a lot of things to help their day to day living building things and whatnot.

INTERVIEW ENDS