

Australians at War Film Archive

Alexander Hampel (Ian) - Transcript of interview

Date of interview: 19th August 2003

<http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/677>

Tape 1

00:37 **Ian, could you give us a brief summary of your life to date?**

It's not a very exciting life of course but it began in the Victorian Valley where my father was a returned soldier and he took up a block there. Went to a state school there. And, then of course in my teenage time the war emerged and of course that interfered with quite a lot of things.

01:00 I was away therefore at the war for four years and I was twenty-one when I was discharged. After that I did a technical course in aeronautical engineering and I've been involved in engineering ever since that time. It hasn't really deviated from that pattern actually. Although, of course, during the period, the tendency is to do all sorts of other jobs. Various mundane things when you're trying for a house or to pay for a car or something like that

01:30 but otherwise it hasn't deviated from that.

Very Good. Thank you. That's a commendably brief summary. Excellent. All right, well go back and get a fair amount of detail now. Could you tell us when and where you were born?

I was born actually in the Victorian Mallee at a place called Murrayville. It's just a small town there and this was in 1924 and my father had a farm at a place called Boinka.

02:00 It doesn't even exist any longer it's been written off the map due to various other matters. But then I grew up on the farm and went to school at a small school called Warrua. In which the total number of pupils was seven, that was the entire school. After that, of course, then I worked on the farm for a couple of years and then my father, who was fairly badly gassed in the first war, couldn't really continue with it so he had to leave it

02:30 when I went to the war because he couldn't work it. So he became a postmaster.

Sorry, we need to stop. Ian, just to recap because of our relighting situation. Could you tell us where and when you were born?

Yes, I was born at a small town called Murrayville in the Victorian Mallee. It was along an area where, after the first war, a lot of returned diggers took up land

03:00 and so I was brought up on a farm there and went to the small school called Warrua of which the total number of pupils was seven and that's not my class, that's the entire school. And, so of course we had a fairly, not exactly primitive but fairly elementary sort of life in which we participated in everything. And as a child, of course, I had to kill the WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s to feed us and trap rabbits do and all those sorts of things

03:30 and later on when I was early teens I used to drive the stripper on the farm, all that sort of thing.

Had your father been a soldier settler?

Yes.

He had

Yes, he was.

What can you tell us about your father including his World War I involvement?

He was one of those rarities who was hopelessly almost stupidly honest and as a consequence we were nearly almost broke. He would never, he couldn't

04:00 bear to do anything that was slightly suspect and, of course, this didn't bode well for us as children. And I don't blame him for it, I admire him as a matter of fact.

Why didn't it bode well for you as children?

Well of course we had some, like in every community there are always some undesirable neighbours. And some of these used to steal sheep from us and they used to steal wheat that we had bagged

04:30 in the paddocks and he never did anything about it. He just used to feel disgusted that's all.

So, as children, you were aware of what was going on?

Oh yes, oh yes, we knew.

It must have been very frustrating for you?

Well, it was indeed. At that time I even, at that time I was perhaps was developing a bit of aggression and I said, look Dad, why don't we shoot them, you know. But one of my neighbours who was stealing chaff from our chaff house we had to feed the horses with. But of course Dad would never entertain anything like that

05:00 But I felt that he was being taken for a ride when he was working so honestly. And he was in poor health at the time because he was gassed in the first war, you see.

What did he tell you of his war experience?

Well, quite a lot actually. Perhaps was more than usual. He used to enjoy relating them, because along the line, I call the line between there were quite a few soldier settlers and they all got along very well. And they used to yarn together about

05:30 various things they did in France usually all the humorous and the antics that they used to get up to. So I got to know towns like Villes Brittany and Yves and you know Charleroi and all these places very well. Strange that isn't it. And yet I've never really been there, I've travelled through them but I've never really looked at them.

What sort of things would he used to tell you about them?

Usually it was just the fun and games they used to have and when some of the boys used to get on the,

06:00 on the grog [alcohol] a bit and trying to get them back into operation again. There was another, thing that wasn't related to his leave period but it was during an attack when the boys had captured, or they got into, a cellar full of wine and the artillery were supposed to lay down a barrage before the infantry attack. But they were all blotto [drunk] and they couldn't do it. So there was a court martial about that and Dad had

06:30 to give evidence before Sir John Monash. He wasn't Sir John then but he was the 3rd Divvy [division] commander. So he had to give evidence at the court martial.

Had your father been among the people that had imbibed before the attack?

No, he wasn't. That's why he was asked to give evidence. He was an artillery driver. He was, like most of the boys from the Mallee or from the various country areas, they could handle horses very well so of course he was in the ammunition column.

07:00 **What did he say about the evidence that he gave at that trial?**

I think he was trying to be a little bit generous because you'd never do in the rest of the boys, you see. But I don't think his evidence was ever contributory to anyone being court martialled in a very serious way.

What had he actually seen?

Well, I don't really know that. He didn't tell me that. I think, He wouldn't like me to have said it to anybody either.

Did he

07:30 **tell you about any of the details of being in action?**

Yes. Yes. He said one of the worst things is watching what he used to call the PBI, that stands for Poor Bloody Infantry, the wreckage of them coming back, all torn to pieces and so on and so on. And he said, there's nothing you could do for them, you just had to watch them drift on, he said some of them died before they got to the RAPs [Regimental Aid Post]. So he cautioned me and said in any future event don't get in the infantry. Of course, that's exactly

08:00 what I did, being always obedient.

Were you in any way inspired by the stories your father told you about World War I?

Yes. Very much. Particularly about the comradeship, where they never let each other down. This was overwhelmingly of consequence and he carried that right through and fortunately along where we had our farm in the Mallee, most of the diggers in the line were

08:30 absolutely reliable. Like, for example, the gentleman who probably everyone knows by now, Mr Jack Lockett who lived to be 110 I think or 111 eventually. But when I was a child he used to nurse me on his knee and he and Dad were great cobbles [friends], he lived at Underbool.

He's a very familiar name, can you tell me a bit about him?

Yes. He was, he was a champion bomb thrower, he was in the infantry in the first war. He wasn't with Dad at all so they didn't know each other then.

09:00 But he was in infantry and somehow or other, although he was wounded, he survived. He survived the war when at that time the average life, for example, of a machine gunner was 20 minutes. Yet he survived all of that and he never shirked anything. He was a wonderful man and he was extremely respected, very well respected right along the line.

Did he win any bravery awards?

No. That doesn't mean that he didn't qualify for them.

09:30 It was an awkward situation with regard to bravery awards in that army regulations lay down that any event must be witnessed by an officer. Well, of course if there's no officer there, there's no bravery but how did the war get won?

I think that would apply to all wars?

Yes. It does. Indeed it does.

Now, can you give us a description of your father's personality?

10:00 He was always very, very cheerful and in some way or another he'd recover quickly from a disaster and, by jove, in the Mallee you needed to. Excuse me. And then early in the war, in fact in 1940 during the blitz in London, all of his family were killed during a bombing raid. They went back to England, they'd never, they were all from Australia, but they went over to England because my uncle was an artist and he couldn't really earn a living in Australia

10:30 at that time. And when he went back there he became very well known and he even sold some of his pictures to the Queen Mother so of course his reputation was made at that stage. During the blitz everyone opened their houses to whoever was in the street and thirteen other people came in from the street at that time and they sheltered in the house but a 500 pound bomb went straight through the house and exploded in the cellar. And it destroyed dozens of his paintings as well as everyone in there of course.

11:00 **It must have been quite a, quite a catastrophe for the family?**

Yes, and then of course, on the farm, the war was in progress and all of his people were killed and he knew I wanted to go but of course I was only fifteen.

What a major dilemma for your father?

Yes, it was.

To have lost his family and then be faced with you going abroad as well?

That's right.

Did he have, I mean stories I've heard of the Mallee was that the Mallee itself and the Mallee farming scheme was a bit of a disaster?

11:30 It was. That was correct. Had it been done with the current availability of knowledge, those farms would all have been bigger. They were insufficiently big for that type of terrain to support a family. And also, too, it was in the era of horses when you couldn't really cover sufficient ground so if the farms had been made bigger you still couldn't have done it with horses.

Was there also a problem with unforeseen drought?

Oh yes, yes.

12:00 And I remember very well mouse plague and a grasshopper plague and on both of those occasions they actually wiped out everybody's entire earnings for the entire year. But we just had to keep going and live on rabbits and whatever we could do.

When was that?

They were in the thirties, both of those. And the mouse plague was first and that was a terrible thing because it carried all sorts of sicknesses with it. But the grasshopper plague completely destroyed

12:30 all the crops.

So you must have gone without in terms of food?

Yeah we did, we did. So my trapping of rabbits was very important. And I bought my first bike that way,

it cost five pound nineteen and sixpence, by trapping rabbits for a couple of years and selling the skins and selling the carcasses. It was a fairly, it was a very honest life but it was, not exactly primitive, but it was certainly fundamental.

13:00 **Ian, it's going very well but one tiny thing, you're tapping your feet which may be being picked up on the microphone.**

My apologies. I can fix that.

Oh by taking your shoes off.

Just in case I automatically.

Yes, some people do. All right, thanks for that. So, just before we get back to life on the farm. Can you tell us about your mother?

My mother was of direct Scottish

13:30 ancestry and her parents, yes that's right, her parents, her mother, came out from Scotland about the time that the ship, the Lochard, was, was wrecked on the south, on the Victorian coast. And they ran into a particular storm because they were sailing ships then and her mother was very, she was only a little girl but her mother, that is my

14:00 great grandmother kept telling her, "Have faith in the lord laddie," she says, "It'll never sink."

So they ran into some storms but they didn't encounter?

No, no, they survived it all.

Because the Lochard disaster was a disaster?

That's right and, anyway, they took up land there eventually at a place called Birchip in Victoria and my mother grew up also on a farm of course. So it was no stranger to her

14:30 all the difficulties we encountered at a later stage but I think she would always have liked something a little bit smoother because she was born with a particularly beautiful complexion. For some reason or other her skin was absolutely flawless and she suffered a bit in the Mallee because of that. She was far better than a lot of the people who advertise all this skin rubbish that is sold currently. But any rate, she always wore stockings

15:00 long stockings even going out on the horses, you know. And she wore a gossamer over her face when she was going in the buggy. She tried to look after her skin, but we didn't know anything of skin cancer then, we knew nothing of that. It was just that she knew she suffered because of her complexion.

Did she keep her good skin into until old age?

Yes, she did. Yes, she was always very smooth right to the end.

Could you describe your mother's personality?

She was a bit more

15:30 intolerant than my father. She would have liked everything to have worked a bit quicker and made a bit more money and survived possibly a bit more comfortably. But that was not really possible in the context of the Mallee. And as a consequence she was often, with us, I think bad tempered. But she certainly was very understanding and she could never withstand anyone else's misfortunes.

16:00 Her own she didn't seem to mind but she would collapse in a heap at someone else's misfortunes. She was like that.

So she would empathise with them?

Oh yes, yes. And some of the conversations that as women get together and talk, a common thread of conversations used to be how many children did they have, and they'd mention that, and the next question was always, are they all still living? Because it was expected that quite a number of

16:30 any family would die and when she heard of those things, she used to collapse.

What were the usual causes of infant mortality?

Well it was a fairly hard life and there wasn't of course the availability of medical help at that time. And if a child got, for example, gastro enteritis they simply died and sometimes for appendicitis because we couldn't get to a doctor quickly enough and that sort of thing. None of my family died but we were a bit lucky.

17:00 **How was the health of your family generally?**

Fairly good really. We were really very lucky, we don't complain so much about that and I don't really know that we deserved it but we survived it all.

Did you have any brothers and sisters?

Oh yes, yes. I have two sisters and two brothers and they are still living. They're all, I have an older sister and all the rest are younger than me.

Now, just getting back to life on the farm.

17:30 **You've described droughts and other conditions that were part of the existence on the Mallee but to what extent were the hardships accentuated by the Depression?**

Oh very much so because, of course, it was not possible, all the wool prices were down and wheat prices were down and even though it was still in the latter stage of clearing all the stumps, that is the mallee stumps from the ground, now they were worth quite a bit but we could never afford to sell them. And actually

18:00 this actually sticks in my mind now in recognition of the energy that was wasted because we had to burn them. And yet people in Melbourne and other places needed those stumps and we couldn't afford to sell them.

So people in Melbourne were quite happy to pay for them for firewood?

Yes, oh yes but we couldn't afford to, to truck them away or to send them on the trains because it cost us money to do that and we didn't have the money.

Now you've mentioned a couple of the activities of the farm but what was, what was the produce

18:30 **of the farm?**

We, it was sheep and wheat and of course you had to grow a lot of hay because we used horses instead of, we didn't have a tractor. So it was, oh well, I used to drive a combine [combine harvester] planting the wheats and the oats and of course I used to drive the stripper for stripping the wheat and then supervise the cleaning because we sometimes had labourers there who couldn't even work out how to

19:00 operate the engine you see. So, before going to school in the mornings I used to have to go out and start the engine for them and make sure it was oiled and then come back and have a wash and clean up and go to school.

How old were you then?

Oh, I'd have been about ten or eleven, twelve perhaps, yeah.

And so the labourers on the farm were they itinerant workers or would they generally stay around for a while.

Oh, they used to stay around for but a lot of them were, well, currently we'd call them refugees but that was not very worthy then.

19:30 They were English labourers very often and they had never been on a farm and didn't know very much and usually not of an extremely high IQ [Intelligence Quotient]. Because if a man can't work out that you need to oil a machine to make it work he's not very bright.

Why would you say that they were the equivalent of refugees?

Well, because they came out after the first war when conditions in England were pretty terrible and we got a lot of migrants at that stage.

20:00 And some of them, some of them were resented. Mind you there were some very fine people among them too and one of my best friends, a man named Jack Butler, was one of those. He was a splendid chap.. And then there was another man, Bob McFall, he was a Scottish migrant, he was, he was middle-weight champ of Scotland too. And I used to like Bob because of course he taught me to box.

At what age did you learn to box?

Oh goodness me, I was only about six or seven.

20:30 **Of course there was a big emphasis on assisted migration after World War I?**

Yes it was. Yeah, that's correct.

You mentioned your schooling before, could you talk about the first school that you went to?

Yes, the first school was held in Jack Adams' dining room which was no bigger than, say, the average lounge room in a house. And we actually had some chairs,

21:00 I think we had one or two desks but that was all. It was not really a proper school at all. We had a teacher, Miss Fogerty, and Miss Burgen, they were all lady teachers at that time. This was about 1929. And that was all the school there was. Just the front room of Jack Adams' house.

And did you enjoy school?

Well, my memories of it unfortunately were not good because

- 21:30 we used to have to walk two miles to get there and I was only four and a half at the time and I used to have to carry a big bottle of water because it was in the summer and the temperatures in the Mallee used to get up to around the 100 degrees mark, you know, in Fahrenheit and I used to get terribly tired. And I remember to this day carrying that bottle of water but we had to do it because we couldn't impose on Jack Adams' water supply either because they were on rainwater. So it wasn't easy.

So what did Jack Adams do at that school?

- 22:00 **He wasn't the teacher. He was the farmer. It was his farm and he was in infantry in the first war too.**

So who was the teacher?

Miss Fogerty and Miss Burgen.

And what sort of subjects did they teach?

Oh goodness, at that stage, you see, I don't even remember if I ever learned anything really. I was only four and a half to start.

So from what age to what age did you attend that school?

Well, that lasted only for about six or eight months

- 22:30 because Jack Adams' wife was a rather unusual woman, let's put it that way, and after a while she objected to us using her house as a school. So we had to get out of there. There was an abandoned house though just across the road, we used to call it Bailey's, so we had the school there. We had the school in the kitchen there. And just behind my desk, I actually had a desk, there was the old kitchen stove and I recall one day there I turned around and here was a snake crawling around the stove like that and moving towards me you see

- 23:00 so there was a sudden exodus out of the school. A teacher there was a girl named Miss Cumin.

And to what extent was your education being interrupted by the requirement that you do farm work?

It wasn't that early in the piece. I wasn't really old enough at that stage then to do very much. But then later on the local residents including Hurtle Burke, Jack Adams and my Dad and so on, they built a school, called Warrua, and that

- 23:30 was the one that we attended for the rest of our time. So, during that time, the time we were at Warrua, yes, we used to do quite a bit of farm work then and that was often before I went to school of course and when I came back.

But you were able to put in the normal hours of a school day?

Oh yes, yes, we did.

That's quite unusual, parents and citizens actually gathering together to actually establish schools?

There was no other way. The education department, I think it was called that at that stage

- 24:00 in Victoria, said, well, we can supply a teacher, you supply a school. So the local men got together, and they were all very handy with their hands, they just built the school, one room.

And how many students on average attended. Well, how many were at your school?

Seven. That was the total school.

And when you say you continued right through, I mean did this go into high schooling as well?

Oh, no, no. I had to leave school when I was thirteen

- 24:30 I think it was thirteen, and work on the farm then. And then I worked on the farm for a couple of years and then, of course, as my teen age got on, I had to go to war.

So all of your education, all the latter part of your education was spent at Warrua?

No, that was just my primary education and there was no further education from that time until after the war. So I emerged after the war knowing almost nothing about anything.

- 25:00 **What did you learn from those early years of schooling?**

Well, I took an intense interest in history, of course, and geography. And I think that was influenced in part because my Dad was interested in all of those matters too. And we had a kerosene lamp at home and we had a, indeed there was a serial running in the weekly times called Tom Toms In The Night. It was a story by an Italian named Commander Gatty who

25:30 did a trip from Cape to Cairo and he wrote this book about Africa and it was serialised in the Weekly Times and my Dad used to read that to us at night. It was beautiful.

Fantastic. Were you receiving radio at all?

Oh no, we didn't have a wireless [radio] at all until 1937 until another teacher, a man named Ray White, made one for us. He was very good with radio but we didn't actually have to buy a radio.

What sort of radio did he make?

26:00 Well, it used to pick up 3LO in Melbourne and we used to run it on car batteries and Dad rigged up an aerial outside and we used to catch the waves all right. It used to work.

So, we're talking about a standard radio, not a crystal set?

Ah no, it wasn't a crystal set, no. It had valves in it.

I believe at that time you could buy kit radios and put them together?

Yes, but of course, we weren't able to buy anything very much.

Now, you've mentioned

26:30 **your father's involvement in World War I. How important was the legacy of World War I?**

Overwhelmingly I think. It was absolutely overwhelming because Australia suffered more per head of population perhaps than any other country due to its loyalty to the empire. Australia suffered more casualties for its population than Germany did.

27:00 And that was a most awful blow because those chaps, there were sixty-odd thousand of them killed in France and the Middle East and they were all the fit young blokes who built the country so, of course, that was a, it's like eating the heart out of something that's vitally important. And I think Australia was set back very badly because of that. But at the same time there was an intense loyalty built up and there

27:30 was an admiration for what they suffered.

The intense loyalty was to what?

Well, it was to the troops who came back and some of that was partly misguided of course as I mentioned earlier with regard to the soldier settlement thing. But they tried their best and there was a lot of absolute respect to the old diggers who came back. There was a few of course who didn't measure up

28:00 but usually it was a measure of man's integrity that he was an old digger.

Was there much sign of, did you, I mean around the region that you lived were there many, apart from your father who'd been gassed, were there many injured or disabled people as a result of the war?

Yes. Some were wounded but they weren't really hopelessly disabled because if they were on the farm they couldn't do it. But there was one chap from Ouyen who was bayoneted through the stomach and he survived all right.

28:30 But, no, there were no others who suffered a total legacy physically because, of course, they couldn't operate a farm if they had.

Was there any emphasis or was there any great emphasis on Anzac Day at the time?

Oh yea. That was overwhelming. That was the day of the year.

What would happen on that day?

Well, as children at school of course we used to have little parades and we would learn some of the traditional songs and

29:00 then we would get on someone's truck, Len Walker had a truck, and we used to sit on that and drive to Underbool and that was twenty-odd miles away and we'd sit on the back of the tray and we had a parade there up in the hall, a few speeches. And there was a maxim gun at the back of the hall, I remember that very well.

Would that be fired?

Oh, no, no, no. It was a souvenir that the boys had brought home. Yes, Anzac Day was of major consequence, not only to the returned troops

29:30 the returned troops but to the rest of the people around the area.

Of how much consequence was the British Empire?

There was an intense loyalty at that time. There was in recognition I think that Australia was in danger, even though people now don't realise that that was the case, because of what we used to call the yellow peril. That is the Japanese have always had avaricious eyes towards Australia, even though Japan was ostensibly

30:00 on our side in the first war we knew what finally would happen. And our only protection really was the British navy until Australia developed one and I don't think there was ever a sense of being, as some people currently say, of being suppressed or pushed down or in any way disadvantaged being part of the Empire because really we had more

30:30 freedom than say most other countries anyway. And Australia, there was a never a single soldier left Australia to fight for the empire who was conscripted, not one. We were all volunteers.

So with this intense loyalty to the empire where did Australian nationalism fit in?

Well, of course, Australia itself was the major item but it was only part of the empire and well, we regarded Australia as just the tops.

31:00 Absolutely.

Because of course today there's a big emphasis on Australia for Australia's sake but from what you're saying Australia was at that time and many Australians were seeing themselves as part of a broader context?

That's correct. Yes, that is true too. And it was a strange thing that for many people now to realise that. But you could have both. An intense loyalty to Australia and a loyalty to well, what we used to call the mother country or the empire.

31:30 **And of course there'd be big days like Empire Day and?**

Yes although Empire Day was not of such consequence, we didn't worry too much about it. But certainly Anzac Day. We recognised at that stage that the Empire itself was a stabilising influence in the world. It was not really a dominating influence but a stabilising one and really the preservation of a lot of the standards that currently exist in the world were due to the empire. Even though people say there are a lot of negative aspects to it

32:00 we accept that.

That's very well stated actually. Now, once you left school what was the work that you were expected to do?

Well, I used to operate all the farm machinery and I particularly used to operate, we had an international three horsepower engine to drive the chaff cutter and to drive the cleaner. Maybe I should describe the cleaner. After you do the striping which I used to drive the stripper anyway,

32:30 you tip the cocky chaff and the wheat out into a heap and then you have to bring the machine up to it and hook a belt up to it with the engine and clean it to get the wheat out, and bag it and then sew the bags. And I used to do all of that as well. But I was only about fourteen then and I learned very well then how to protect my back when lifting bags because they weigh 180 pounds.

How would you protect your back?

Well you don't actually lift the bag itself, you manoeuvre it on your knee and shuffle it

33:00 along on your feet and you can do a certain amount of balancing by using the strength of the bone below your knee. But try to lift a bag straight out was something for a bigger man than I was then.

Did anyone teach you how to lift a bag?

Oh just by observation, yes.

You probably watched other people rupturing themselves?

No, no, well I don't recall any injuries of that type. Most of the men who worked on farms had

33:30 learned all of these tricks and they knew how to do things.

Now you mentioned that the men that worked on the farms, as many of them being British migrants, probably assisted migrants after World War I. I'm interested in the whole concept of the itinerant worker because the concept one has of the 1930s and particularly the Depression era was that there was, there were a lot of men who were constantly drifting around Australia in search of work.

That's true too.

34:00 We used to call them the swaggies [swagmen - itinerant workers]. And, as children, when we'd see a swaggie going along the road you know there was great excitement, you see. These were men who had no home, they had nowhere to go and nowhere to stop and they had no job and so on and so on. And, of course, our parents always cautioned us you just never go talking to the swaggies. It was as though

there was something less than normal. But that was not the case of course. They were just blokes who were down on their luck.

34:30 And a lot of them were returned diggers too.

Did you talk to any of them?

Oh, yes of course.

What sort of things did you talk about?

Well, just where they had been what they'd been doing and what they did in the war, what was their units, that's about all.

But the image of them was that they were slightly less than wholesome?

No, but suspect less than wholesome because they didn't have a stabilising situation

35:00 to fall back on. They had no home, they had nowhere to go so that we didn't quite know what they were really worth.

Were there any cautionary tales about swaggies?

Oh yes, there were. And some of them were, one or two of them, of course you always get undesirables in any group and some of them fitted that category. But the majority of them were just decent blokes out of work.

I just wanted to return for a moment to what you were saying about the yellow peril.

35:30 **Of course, with the white Australia policy which came in, or well the White Australia Act that came in after Federation a lot of Chinese people found themselves being discriminated against and indeed being deported, no longer being allowed to come to Australia. To what extent did fears of the yellow peril also include the Chinese?**

Well it did. Of course, it embraced them as well. But less so than for the Japanese.

Why

36:00 **the Japanese?**

Because they've always been an aggressive race. I mean, they have been a vigorous, sometimes a clever race but it's necessary to recognise that in less than a 100 years they came from a tribal mob into a modern society who could build battleships and guns and planes, they could do all those things so obviously they were a clever people.

Was, did you have any awareness when you were growing up in the 1930s of this,

36:30 **regarding the Japanese?**

Oh yes.

You did? How would this be communicated to you?

Well of course, we were well aware of their attack on Manchuria and then of course their invasion of China. And then in 1937 the most hideous, the most disgusting crime in modern history in my view was their, what currently or what eventually became known as the rape of Nanjing and that was publicised and so on and so on. It was very well known. We

37:00 we had a certain fear of the Japanese. And it was quite justified because they didn't fit the standard picture of humanity.

That's really interesting, nobody else has actually expressed it in these terms. Quite a few other people have just said, yes, the Japanese were suddenly in the war but, of course. To what extent were you aware of what was going on in Europe in the 1930s?

Well, quite a lot because during the Weimer Republic when

37:30 Germany was in such dire straits and then the French invaded the Ruhr.

I'm sorry, just rephrase that if you like.

Yes, when the French occupied the Ruhr, the Germans then were deprived of their source of revenue for which to pay reparations so the resentment against the allies despite what they had done to us during the first war was very strong and this of course

38:00 was fuel to the fire of people like Hitler and all those who preceded him. But of course Nazism as it developed at that stage was not just a Hitler project it had long existed in the mind of the German Right from about 1803 or something with Nietzsche, Hagel and a fellow named Fischter and so on prolonged most of the things that finally came out in the Nazi program. And yet, when Hitler was elected, and he was actually elected

- 38:30 in '33, I remember very well my father was speaking to Harry Adams. We'd be killing a pig and we had it stuck up on a tree and we were scraping it and, my father said, well Harry he said, at least this bloke that they've got, he said, at least he knows what it's like so maybe we'll never see it again. But gosh, how wrong could he be. But he said that because he knew that Hitler had been a soldier in the first war. And actually this personal courage was not to be doubted.
- 39:00 He got an iron cross second class I believe.

How were you, apart from conversations with members of the family and friends, how were you - actually we might pick this up on the next tape.

Tape 2

- 00:34 **We've got a couple of points we wanted to pick up on but you were making further comment about the standard of migrants in the 1920s and 30's.**

Yes, that's correct, yeah. And it manifested itself in various ways. Unfortunately, of course some of the local blokes resented the migration program and occasionally when there were

- 01:00 baits laid for foxes there would be a notice put up, poison laid for foxes and someone would write underneath and migrants. You know, this sort of thing, you see this undercurrent of resentment was there but it wasn't totally universal.

What did the locals have against migrants?

Well, I don't really know but certainly they resented the fact that they were pretty useless and really had to be carried.

- 01:30 When I say carried. They had to be told everything. Like, for example there was one chap who built his house in an area just north of where we lived and he built the house all right but then he couldn't reach up to get to the ceiling to nail the rafters on so he dragged a buggy in and they climbed up on the buggy and they could wheel that around and then they nailed all the rafters on. But then they finished all that

- 02:00 and they couldn't lift the buggy out. And this sort of thing, you see, and there was another fellow who decided to build his house, so he built a room and then he wanted to build another one so he put that on the end of that and then another one on the end of that. But to get to each room you had to walk outside in the rain and go out in the dirt and come in the next door. They had really no idea of what it was like to provide an intelligent attitude and action to

- 02:30 pioneering. They really didn't know much.

What was the racial background of these migrants?

Well, I don't really know. I think they were just English. I don't think that ever manifested itself in any way.

But surely we're looking at people that came from a background that probably didn't involve farming?

Oh, of course, that's correct. And a lot of them were what we'd currently call slum people who had

- 03:00 had no real experience with anything except city life and a fairly low type of city life at that.

So we're also looking at an area that today the government would be more involved in surely in terms of selection and education?

Sometimes we wonder about that. There are very strong feelings sometimes manifest on that and of course I have views on that too.

But that's fascinating. So looking further at the Mallee, I believe your father and grandfather had some involvement in

- 03:30 **pioneering the district. Could you talk about that?**

Oh yes they did. They came up there to the Mallee area before the first war at about 1910 or 11 and indeed my father and Jack Adams made the road that runs from Boinka for about six miles south to where our farm was. And they completed grubbed and made the road and they got two and six a yard by the width of the road which was about a chain and a half wide and that was their

- 04:00 pay. They had practically no other supplies so a train used to come up there once a week and it brought flour sometimes, sometimes other things, but occasionally the train just didn't run at all. So they used to get by on what they could find. Kangaroos and rabbits and things like that. It was a very simplistic type of life.

If the Mallee ended up, in environmental, organisational

04:30 **and productivity terms being such a disaster, do you have any theories as to why it was selected in the first place?**

I think it was just a fundamental lack of knowledge of what was involved in the area and its capabilities because it was all covered in scrub. And apparently in the early days there was a reasonable rainfall in that area but when the scrub was cleared, no one realised then but the rainfall disappeared. Now, I have no theories and no knowledge on that but certainly

05:00 that is what happened. And now of course it's a fairly dry farming area.

I gather the same thing happened in south-west, Western Australia.

I'm sure, something like that, yeah.

Now, you seemed to be to have been tremendously well informed about international events before World War II. How was most of this information being conveyed to you?

We used to get two papers a week. They used to come up when I was going to school and I used to read those and then in 1937,

05:30 as I mentioned earlier, my school teacher made a wireless for us so we used to get the news. And there used to be a chap named A.E. Mann, who broadcast on the wireless at that stage. I forget the title of his program, but I used to listen to that with great interest and there were many other things too that we could pick up so we tried to follow events that were happening around the world. Not necessarily with a, necessarily a very incisive,

06:00 intelligent view point but we certainly absorbed as much as we could.

It seems to have been quite a far amount of intelligent discussion form the sound of it.

Well, I can't claim that, but.

So, as the 1930s wore on how inevitable did it seem that there would be another large scale war?

It seemed completely obvious to me and I remember something that almost developed into an unfortunate social

06:30 situation because of that. And this was at one Anzac Day session that I previously mentioned in Utabul where various speakers spoke about the events in Europe. And one chap got up and he was speaking about how wonderful the youth movement was in Germany. How healthy it was for all the children, how wonderfully happy they were etcetera, etcetera. And I remember at the time watching my father sitting there because he was on the stage as well

07:00 and he was shuffling around and shifting a bit and he didn't, fortunately, say anything. But he said afterwards, when we were talking about it, he said I could have hit him. He said, is he too stupid to see that they were just training an army?

Was there any awareness of what was happening with the, with the Jews in Germany.

Yes there was. We heard little reports but they were only reports.

07:30 We didn't necessarily of course get any factual information but of people who were jailed for complaining about shortages etcetera. And of course we knew all about it before etc. So, yes we were aware that there was a trend there that was sliding down the path towards warfare again.

Did you see any newsreels during that time of international events?

I remember seeing only one newsreel because of course we had to drive about

08:00 twenty miles to the nearest hall where the film was shown and usually those news reels were last years anyway. So that was not a very reliable way of picking up information.

So, just to get back to how inevitable war seemed to be. You've talked about, discussions and general awareness, but could you clarify for us how inevitable war did seem to be?

Well it did because of the repudiation of the Treaty of Versailles

08:30 and the annexation by Germany of Austria and then the aggravation of the Czechs etc and Hitler's consistent lying about events. It was clear, in conjunction with the training program that was going on in Germany, and the intense nationalism that was fed by that, that it could only end in one way. We knew that.

Now

09:00 **just moving the focus back to you and what you were doing at this time. Did you, did you have any time for recreational activities while you were working on the farm?**

Not very much but on Sundays we had a tennis club at a place called Boika where we lived. And we used to play tennis there and indeed my mother used to play there a bit too but that was only on weekends and that was very seldom. There was a footie team, we used

09:30 to play Aussie Rules of course, but I was too young for that.

So what was your favourite sport at that time?

Well I can't honestly say that I had a favourite sport because there was not the opportunity for any consistency in any.

Now there was a point in time before the war where you left home wasn't there?

Yes, there was.

How did that come about?

Well it wasn't actually before the war but it was during it.

Well look,

10:00 **before we get to that, look at the outbreak of war. Do you remember where you were when you heard that the war had erupted?**

Yes. Oh yes. I was in the dining room listening to the wireless. And we had one of those loudspeakers with the big horn sitting on the sideboard and the ultimatum was delivered to Germany to withdraw their troops from Poland, which of course we knew would not happen. So it was only

10:30 therefore a matter of time because 3 days later therefore that the empire declared war on Germany.

Do you remember hearing [Robert] Menzies [then Prime Minister of Australia] speech?

Yes, I do. Yes, I remember it very well.

What sort of impact did that news have on you?

Well, actually, it was clarification of everything that we knew before. It was going to happen it was just a matter of when. And we were particularly concerned about it and of course the old diggers were young enough then to know what it was

11:00 like and they all were absolutely dismayed. And I remember my father saying I'm absolutely disgusted with them. He was talking about Germany because Japan hadn't attacked at that stage.

How keen were you to become part of the war should it affect Australia?

Oh very anxious. Oh yes. Because, well, for several reasons, one of which was the fact that I never really did like the farm.

11:30 I didn't like working with horses, I was always mechanically minded and, so the farm really had no real interest to me and geography and history were very important in my spectrum of thinking so of course I wanted to get in and do what I could to try to help Australia and I was really only a teenager.

To what extent was the possibility of travel also an attraction?

Not really so much. I wasn't really interested in that. I just wanted to get in there and do

12:00 a bit.

Could you, at that time, I mean once you heard that Britain was also at war and therefore Australia was at war to what extent could you see there being a security risk for Australia?

Oh it was intense because we knew then that the Japanese would be anxious since they were already attacking China for the second time. First of all it was Manchuria in 1931 and then China again in 1937 and then of course they continued their advance south in China

12:30 and we knew that a race like the Japanese would not stop there. We were very concerned about the Japanese even though of course all the diplomatic overtures were still being made. Everyone spoke of them as diplomats and so on and negotiations were still going on in Washington and so on and so on. But we knew what was going to happen.

So, did the war change your own plans for the future?

I didn't really have any plans for the future at that stage, except

13:00 completing the war. I wanted, eventually, to be a pilot and to, well, my earliest hero was Bert Hinkler of course who flew out and eventually was killed in the Italian Alps. And he was my hero.

Why was that?

Oh, for reasons that I can't really explain. But I've always loved aircraft and flying you see but I've

never held a pilots licence.

13:30 **So why focus on Hinkler as opposed to someone like Smith or Ulm?**

Well they were after, they came after Bert Hinkler. Of course Kingsford Smith and Ulm and Pettybridge and all these blokes they came later on in the 30s and of course then I attached to them too.

So what was it about aviation that appealed to you?

One of the things was

14:00 this may sound strange, even stupid perhaps but as a kid at school I was the champion boomerang maker. And this was because if you get hold of a jam tin lid, which has curvature in it, I realised that if you threw it actually upside down it would fly better than if you threw it with the curvature downwards. So I realised that that was the way that aircraft wings were made. They had curvature on the top to help them fly better. So of course I used to build little models

14:30 and all that sort of thing and boats and I employed this sort of principle in it.

You mentioned a boomerang? Well can you relate the boomerang to the jam tin lid as well?

Yes, because I used to cut them out of galvanised iron, boomerangs and then put them over a hollow piece of log and keep hammering the middle until you got a curvature right through the boomerang and this gave a curvature to the top surface and they flew a lot better.

So, you were a successful boomerang maker?

Well,

15:00 I can't say how successful but certainly they used to work.

And did they come back?

Oh yes, oh yes.

So were you more interested in the technology or you were more interested in getting yourself into the air?

I was perhaps more interested in the technology. I always have been for reasons that I can't really understand but of course the experience of flying is great and I did a lot of that during the war but

15:30 it was understanding and making things work that as of profound interest to me.

Now could you talk about how you came to enlist?

Yes, during, after the war had started and the Empire was doing very badly and we got hunted out of France etc. and then Norway was attacked and so on.

16:00 It seemed to be a terrible stalemate that we were stuck in. And I was stuck there on the farm and I remember Dad saying "Just keep out of it," he said. "The best thing we can do is to grow as much wheat as we can to feed the empire." But of course the appeal of growing wheat didn't interest me very much. So, early in 1941 I had cleared out on my bike, the one I bought for five pound nineteen and six

16:30 and I rode it to Melbourne and of course I didn't tell them where I was going, my parents, so that left them with a lot of worries. And I just got a job in a factory there for a few days while I got a place to live. And then I tried to join the air force but of course I was rejected, I mean, it was quite obvious I wasn't eighteen then.

Can we just go back to explore leaving home. I mean you'd obviously been very essential to your father's farming activities?

Yes, that's so.

17:00 **Did you have any mixed feelings about this?**

Yes, I did. Yes, I was worried about that but I also knew that my sustaining where I was wasn't going to help it. Maybe I didn't analyse that correctly. Perhaps I was greedy but I certainly wanted to escape from farming.

So in a sense you were running away from home?

Yes, oh yes. Without doubt.

Did you not feel that you could have put a case to your father to

17:30 **have justified your going?**

Well, the only answer to that would have been that he would have had to employ someone else which he couldn't afford to do.

But wasn't he going to have to do that anyway?

Well he then had to leave the farm. So really I brought that about. It was rather, perhaps, a cruel way to do it because I loved my Dad but there was nothing else that I could see. I couldn't see a path ahead.

18:00 **How long after your departure did he have to leave the farm?**

Oh, only about four or five months from memory. But he really had to walk off it.

Was he not able to get anyone else?

Not really, not at that time.

Was this an economic thing or a manpower thing?

Both, both. Because that was in wartime you see.

Did this cause conflict between you?

Not really. No, Dad was very sympathetic. It's like I said, he was always very forgiving.

18:30 **What about your other brothers and sisters?**

Well my older sister of course had no part of it. She was at high school then and my younger ones were still at state school.

So they were not involved in running the farm either?

No, no.

So it was not as if they had a vested interest and they were going to get left in the lurch?

No, not at all, no.

What about your mother's attitude?

Well, she never liked the farm either, as I mentioned earlier, so that she could more or less understand why I did it but she, she knew it wasn't

19:00 the fair thing to do. So I felt that rather badly.

Did you discuss this with her?

Not very much. No, she avoided that. She was pretty good at avoiding a conflict and she has always known that there is no future in conflict. So she never tried to provoke it or try to talk me around to any other aspect. Indeed perhaps from that time on I think it is probably true to say that in her eyes I could

19:30 really never do anything wrong.

Anything wrong?

Yes.

That's putting a lot of one's own personality aside to?

Yes, but she was a bit like that.

And yet you were saying that there were situations that she was intolerant of?

Yes, that's right, on the farm. When I was too late getting the firewood in or I'd left it too late and the dew had settled on it. It wouldn't light in the mornings, you know. Or I forgot to get the eggs out from underneath the stripper and they'd gone bad because they'd been left for a week and all

20:00 this sort of thing.

And yet something as major as this she accepted?

Yes. It's strange isn't it? She was very tolerant in some ways and very unforgiving in others and yet over all she had a great understanding for someone else's feelings.

Empathy. So, once they left the farm,

20:30 **what happened to them?**

Well my Dad, prior to the first war, he worked in the post office in Bendigo. So he applied for a job as a postmaster and he became a postmaster at a town called Walpeup which is just further down the line. Along the line, between Ouyen and Pinnaroo. So he became the postmaster there.

It was probably more guaranteed income anyway?

Well, it was and he was quite pleased. He could do that job well, it didn't affect his health etc. etc. and I think they were both

21:00 very happy about it.

How did you feel within yourself to be actually basically running away from home?

A bit bad really. I couldn't avoid that because I knew there was disloyalty.

Because you'd been brought up to believe in loyalty and supporting your mates?

Yes, that's right. Exactly. Yes. And yet I also knew that my staying there would never have got us out of the rut.

For how long had you planned to do this?

I thought

21:30 about it for several months and of course I had to collect my little kit. I had, you know, a little bottle of water and I collected about five pound in money and you know a couple of items of clothes and that's about all.

When did you make contact with your parents to let them know you were OK?

Well, I didn't, I went to Melbourne and I worked in this factory for a while and I stupidly then wrote a letter to my

22:00 old school teacher to try to get him to make a recommendation for me to join the RAF [Royal Air Force]. But he did he sensible thing, he took the letter to my father.

What happened then?

Well, the next thing was my Dad turned up in Melbourne and he said, the first thing he said, "Look I haven't come to take you home, we'll talk about it". That's all he said.

And what did you talk about?

Oh well we just wandered up and down along the street, it was down at Port Melbourne and he said, "Whatever you want to do", he said, "I'll support it".

22:30 He was like that.

A very accepting and broad-minded person by the sound of it?

He was a wonderful man in my view.

You mention working in a factory. What sort of factory was this?

That was Swallow and Arial's biscuit factory in Melbourne.

And what sort of work did you do?

Just labouring, you know, just terrible, labouring.

Can you describe the factory?

Oh well one of the disappointments I found there was that there was not the intense

23:00 loyalty to Australia or to the Empire which of course I was accustomed to in the Mallee. And these people were way out lefties [left wing supporters] sort of thing and at this time the communists were giving us a lot of trouble and all the rest of it, you know. And a lot of the conversation that used to go on there among the blokes which whom I worked I found very depressing and indeed disloyal.

What sort of things were they talking about?

Oh, well, perhaps there was nothing drastically wrong with it but it's just that

23:30 they didn't concentrate on the areas that I regarded as of consequence.

So I imagine they were dealing a lot with union issues.

That's correct, that was one of them, yes.

How, I mean of course there'd been the Russian Revolution of the late 1910s but how strong a fear was there of communism in Australia at that time?

Well it was regarded as a scourge almost like, a, you know,

24:00 infantile paralysis or something. It was something to be feared and yet I doubt if anyone really totally understood it.

You've used the term infantile paralysis to mean?

Well, it was a scourge that you had to resist. Yes, in some way.

Can you be, I mean this might seem a bit of a sidetrack but I'm interested because nobody else has mentioned this apart from union activity during the war. Can you be more specific about why it was seen as a scourge?

Well because

24:30 we recognised that in the revolution in Russia in 1917, despite all the propaganda, all the talk that we heard, it was just the supplanting of one dictatorship by another and all the promises that were made to the so called workers of course were never materialised and it was not the sort of thing that the Australian character would lend itself to. The suppression of the individual was not one thing that was

25:00 ever part of the Australian character at that time. Where individualism and just doing things for yourself was of paramount importance as I've mentioned on the farm.

But there was also a big emphasis on collectivisation and mutual support under communism?

Ah yes, that's right, but subject to the suppression of the individual's wishes and needs. Even an invention that you developed in that time was never rewarded. It was taken by the government

25:30 and the person who invented that gave it as a gift to the glorious social revolution.

So what did you fear, and what did people you knew fear more. Totalitarianism of a Hitlarian kind or communism?

Well, the Hitlarian type of dictatorship was of course of more direct interest.. More direct worry. Because this was coming and it was quite obvious what was going to happen. Whereas communism was taking the, the

26:00 the path of an insidious undercurrent that would tend to white ant the structure of the society in which we lived and I think that was the feeling that people had. Even without a full understanding of what really it meant or what its results were they could see really that this was to be a disruption of the comfort zone.

To what extent were the activities of the biscuit factory disrupted by union activity?

Not a great deal. No, not a great

26:30 deal at all. It was just the conversation. And, of course, a lot of the people that used to work there, well, they were very oddball characters.

In what sense?

Well, I can't describe. Some of them were quite obviously dropouts from all sorts of other areas and maybe it was the lowest area that they could get a consistent wage in. It was perhaps my first

27:00 experience of factory work. But on the other hand of course there were decent people working there too.

So what was your wage?

I even forget it now. I really have no idea now.

Where were you living at that time?

I was living in a place in Bay Street, Port Melbourne with a woman named Mrs Buckingham and she had two sons both of whom were cold footers.

Can you explain that?

Yes, they resented the idea

27:30 that Australia should ever be involved in the war and therefore they would never join up and so on and so on.

That must have made for some interesting conversations?

Yes, but even then. Fortunately, perhaps I was cunning enough to avoid those conversations or to sidestep them. So we never got, there was never conflict.

I think if you'd probably put the boot in you probably wouldn't have stayed there?

No of course not, no. But Mrs Buckingham on the other hand, she was very kind. She, recognised, because

28:00 I had to tell lies when I got there, you see.

What did you say?

Well, I told her that my father had died and, you know, I had just left the farm because I couldn't keep going, all this sort of story. I even forget the complete story but it was terrible.

Did she ever find out the truth?

Yes, she did. Oh yeah.

How?

Well, when my father walked in the door.

Her face must have been a sight to behold?

Probably, it was too.

What happened when she found out?

28:30 She confronted me, "Ah," she said, "What about your father Ian." Of course, that was the end of that.

Did you stay there after that?

Yes, but not for long. I then got a job with Victorian Interstate Airways and I was working then as a template maker.

And who were Victorian State Airways?

Victorian Interstate Airways.

Interstate Airways. Could you describe what sort of things they did?

Yes. they used to run an airline between

29:00 Victoria and Tasmania and of course they got swallowed up as usual. They were run by old first war diggers and they used to make arts too for Tiger Moths for the RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force].

How big was the company?

Very small.

How many employees over all?

Oh, about six or seven.

This is an interesting part of history. I've never heard of this company before. Who were the people that ran it?

I'm trying to think of his name.

29:30 The chief used to be, he was a pilot in the Royal Flying Corps in the first war, I forget his name now. He would long since have gone on. Oh, Mr Roberts, Captain Roberts, that was his name, yeah.

And when had they set up the company do you know?

I don't know. I didn't know much about its history then but I knew that VIA [Victorian Interstate Airways] operated and they had ceased flying by that time and they were just making parts for the RAAF.

30:00 **So what was your activity with the company?**

I was a template maker and I was also making little parts, sheet metal bits and pieces for Tiger Moths and other aircraft.

Can you describe what a template maker did?

A template maker has, from a flat sheet, make a part that can be folded up to form the final article. And of course, as you're aware, when you fold a piece of metal, it gets shorter so you had to make an allowance for the corner,

30:30 or for the bend. And that's called a set-back. So we used to do that and make these on moulds and then we also used to, after they were made, the model was made and then that was hardened and then the sheet metal bit was placed over that and drilled and filed into the correct shape.

So how long did you stay with that company?

Only until I joined up and that was in, on my seventeenth birthday in fact.

31:00 **And, you moved from the first house. Where did you move to after that?**

To a place in Keila Road with a family named Neba and I was boarding there for thirty bob a week and I used to get thirty-five bob a week. That was my wage.

From the aviation company?

Um.

So for how long were you with the aviation company before you enlisted?

Oh, just for a few months, yes.

Given the difficulties of

31:30 **enlistment how did you actually eventually enlist?**

Well, it was quite interesting. I was in Melbourne one day, in, I walked into, the recruiting office was in the town hall. And I walked in and I said, I'd like to join the AIF [Australian Imperial Force]. And the old sergeant behind the counter who was obviously an old first war digger. He said, "How old are you son?" you know, son he called me, you see,

32:00 and I puffed out my chest and I said, "21." He said, "Can you show us a birth certificate?" I said, "Oh yeah, if it's necessary" and he said, "Oh well, it's not necessary." Phew, I breathed a sigh and just walked straight in. But of course, I was seventeen then.

Now, you tried to get in before this hadn't you and I think, we have to switch off. Could we just lead back to have a little more detail on your first attempt to enlist?

32:30 Yes, in 1940 I was picking grapes, picking fruit up in Redcliffs and, that's one of the dirtiest jobs possible to do, in spite of what people may think or the advertisements but you have to crawl along the vine and just cut the grapes off and fill the buckets with them and all that sort of thing and you get filthy dirty. Anyway, my cousin and I decided to go into Mildura and enlist. So we went in there and went into a

33:00 recruiting office and got hold of a form. You had to fill in your age of course. Well, when I looked at that I thought, Jesus, there's no way in the wide world I'm going to convince them you see. So what I had to do then is rub the blinking wording out and put in a handwritten age. Well obviously it was as clear as daylight a forgery. And of course when I presented these documents to the recruiting officer

33:30 he, I presented the papers across the table and of course the recruiting officer behind the table looked at it and he looked at both of us and we were, I think I was fifteen, I doubt if I was sixteen at that stage. And he realised that this was not going to make the grade. He said, come back boys a bit later on. We felt rather humiliated, we just walked out but it was a forgery of course.

34:00 **So, you were picking grapes. Was this, this was away from the farm was it?**

Yes, yes.

And you were still living at the farm at this time?

No, this was up in Redcliffs. Oh, I was still living at the farm but I went up there during the grape-picking season to make a bit of money.

And how often did you do that?

Just that one year, that was in 1940.

All right, so you, to get back to the sequence of events after your successful enlistment, after you'd puffed your chest out and looked convincing, what happened then?

Well,

34:30 I had to go for my medical etc. all that sort of thing and I convinced them apparently that I was 21 in some way or other. They wouldn't have believed it. But there was an interesting sideline to that. There was a cousin of mine actually, named Carmichael, who worked in records office in Swanston Street in Melbourne.

His name was Carmichael?

Yes, that was my mother's maiden name too. And he looked up my records and it had written there, says he's

35:00 twenty-one looks about nineteen. So they let it go.

So this was a post war finding of the record was it?

No, no that was during that time. And he realised then that, or at least I realised then because he told me, he told my aunt that he'd found my records and that it was, says he's

35:30 twenty-one but looks about nineteen and I realised then I was through. Because at nineteen you had to get a parent's consent. At twenty-one you didn't, that's why I said I was twenty-one.

Now, you'd enlisted with the AIF had you?

Yes. Well I couldn't get in to the RAAF because I couldn't forge the certificate well enough and I had no education at that stage either. Obviously, I wanted to be flying and of course you needed a certain amount of education which I didn't have.

36:00 **What did you expect that you would be doing with the AIF?**

Well, my Dad cautioned me to get into a technical unit but sometimes you can influence units that you go to and other times you can't. And at any rate, I was drafted to mechanical equipment company and that, they were supposed to be handling mechanical equipment for earth moving and all that sort of stuff but that didn't wrap me up very much at all. But at any

- 36:30 rate, during that time then, I met my cousin in Swanston Street at one stage, this was the same bloke that I'd tried to enlist in the RAF with in Mildura, and he'd been on the booze [alcohol] a bit, he was shot. He says, "Come on we'll have a steak." So we went into this, I think it's the Criterion Café in Swanston Street, and we were sitting down there having a feed and he said, "Look, why don't you bung in an application for the armoured div [Division]", he said, "We'll get to Africa and we'll be fighting the Germans in Africa." I thought, great, I'll do this, you know,
- 37:00 so I lodged an application for the armoured div but of course the armoured div finally never materialised. But then I was at Bendigo, at camp there, with the mechanical equipment company and suddenly the whole unit was called out on parade. Just one day. This was after the Japs [Japanese] attacked. We lined up on parade, my name was called out and they said, when I was called to the
- 37:30 orderly office. Did you lodge an application for the armoured division? I said, yes, I did. He said, well, go back to your tent and stay there. So I was the only one called out of that parade. All the rest of them were sent to Singapore and they got there just before it was captured. Sometimes you can be lucky.

Are you a believer in fate?

Well, there have been so many things like that that have happened that eventually there is, it's a strange situation that you can survive so many.

- 38:00 There are a couple later on I can mention but they didn't do too well of course.

Had you made any friends that went to Singapore?

Yes, I did, and of course some of them went there and I've never heard of them since.

And have you kept in contact with those that did return?

No, I haven't because I lost contact with them but when I went then from there, I was sent to the Territory [Northern Territory] with the mechanical equipment company and I made contact with

- 38:30 a lot of mates there and I've kept with them and I can show you photos of some of them later.

What was the role of the mechanical equipment company?

Really they were a construction company. Building roads and digging ditches and stuff like that, that really wrapped me up.

I'll bet. When you were recruited were you then sent for training?

There was very little training of any kind. It was all very rushed at that stage because

- 39:00 the urgency of the Jap attack meant that no one really had time for involved training in any form whatever so that we had to more or less learn on the run.

Tape 3

- 00:32 **So Ian, we got up to where the rest of the unit was sent to Singapore and you were left behind. Can you tell us what happened next?**

Yes. We were sent then in the other, the other nucleus of a unit that was left behind. We were sent up to the, the Territory and became formally the mechanical equipment company. And I was still with them then. And

How did you get up to the Northern Territory?

- 01:00 That was quite a saga in itself, it took nearly three weeks. But we went up through the centre to Adelaide and then up through, with the Ghan, and then on the trucks because there was no railway at all and then right up to Larimer, Katherine, those places. And we were then camped at Katherine. Being a mechanical equipment company of course they had to do quite a bit of maintenance of vehicles etc. and there
- 01:30 was a particularly big tree just adjacent to our camp on which they could rig up a pulley block etc. for hauling engines out of trucks and things like that. Well, we did that and then along came an old aborigine and he said something to the effect of, this is a sacred place, you shouldn't be here. There was no argument about it and it's to the credit of the company and the boys then there. There was no argument, they dismantled everything and just shifted from that place.

02:00 And this was long before there was any of this hoo ha [fuss] about aboriginal rights or anything like that at that stage, it was just respect.

So, that's actually quite an interesting, it might be an interesting thing to talk about, like the relations between the Aborigines and the White Australians. Was that like a common relationship for it to be so amiable towards?

Oh, it was. It was quite good.

02:30 It 's interesting and it's probably worth analysing that principally the troubles and the misunderstandings etc. have all arisen since that time. There may be those that would say, well, Aborigines were so suppressed of course they had no voice but really they did have. And we listened to them. And after Max Hamilton and I joined the independent company which were based out of Katherine

03:00 we had quite a bit to do with some of the local Aborigines. Members of the Larrakia tribe were one and I have a photo of myself with them at a later stage. But there was never any disrespect shown. It is often thought now, for example because we were in the habit of using the word Abo [aboriginal], which was just a legitimate abbreviation of Aborigine, that it's a disrespectful term. But words have a feeling as well

03:30 as a meaning and we never felt any condescending attitude to them whatever and indeed we got on very well with the limited contact that we had with them in the Territory.

Did you serve with any aboriginal soldiers?

No, we didn't have any in my unit, no.

Now, I think I might have jumped ahead too quickly. At the end of the last tape we were actually talking about training and

04:00 **you were talking about there was limited training but perhaps if you could just go on with what the training actually was?**

When we were in the Territory with the mechanical equipment company, Max Hamilton and I had heard that there was an independent company available. Now an independent company is just a company of commandos. They were available locally so we went up to the Major, Major White, of our unit and said

04:30 we wanted to transfer. So, being the gentleman that he was, he contacted the CO [Commanding Officer] of the independent company and we went and had a yarn to them and Max and I were simply transferred. It was as simple as that.

How long had you been in Katherine before the transfer happened?

Well, it was several months but I'm unsure of the actual timing. But I was still then in Katherine with the independent company because they were

05:00 based there.

And why did you want to transfer?

Well, clearly we were just doing labouring jobs and digging roads and making, all that sort of stuff. Really, we felt that we wanted to get into the war properly and the independent company stood the best chance of that.

So what was Katherine, what was Katherine like as a town at that time?

There was a pub and a post office and there were a couple of ramshackle huts there but that's about all . And a dirt road there in front. I've been through it since and you can't recognise it.

05:30 But that's about all there was there.

And what did you do for entertainment while you were in Katherine?

We didn't really have any entertainment as such but at night times we used to go out raiding some of the local farmers and pinching pineapples and bananas and things like that. And Max and I got pretty good at that theft job at night.

06:00 Perhaps to our shame. But, well, we reckoned we were on borrowed time anyway, so we made the best of it.

Borrowed time in what sense?

Well, we knew we were heading off to somewhere.

So, you've mentioned Max a couple of times now. Can you describe him?

Max, yes. Max Hamilton was with me when we were camped here at Liverpool in Sydney and I met him then And we became mates

06:30 all the way and we kept cobbles all the way through the line and when we transferred from the mechanical equipment company he went with me. And it was a very good operating situation. We got on very well. He was a damn good cobbler. He's still alive too by the way but he's got is OBE [Order of the British Empire]. That's 'over bloody eighty.'

So he's obviously been a friend that has remained close to you for a

07:00 **long time?**

Yes, he has been. Yes, he's a pretty good mate. He's living up at Griffith now.

O.K. So...

I have photos of him if they're of any interest to you.

I'd like to have a look at them. So just before we go on to the independent company can you tell me a bit more about the mechanical equipment company and what the role was and what you did?

Essentially they were making aerodromes, airstrips for fighter plane etc.

07:30 and building communications roads and all that sort of thing and this was all absolutely vital. There was no question about that but it didn't wrap Max and I up very much. Maybe we were too impatient or something, I don't know. But we wanted to get away and sort of get stuck into things a bit.

What were the other men in the company like?

Oh, they were a mixed bag. They were a pretty good mob though and we got on fairly well with them.

08:00 But naturally, with that type of company, there were some older blokes there who had had their lives working say for councils and for various companies and so on and so on and some of them had been on the wharves so they were a different age group to Max and myself. Didn't form many close friendships with any of them but I respected them, they were quite good jokers.

Now of course,

08:30 **you were obviously still quite young at this point and I'm wondering, I mean we have spoken to other people who at the same age as you found it quite interesting relating to older men, learning to drink and becoming men themselves. I'm wondering if you could talk a bit about any experiences that the older men taught you?**

09:00 Yes, With regard to quite a few of the older blokes used to booze a bit whenever there was a chance but there wasn't much while when we were away but perhaps its significant, there were quite a few of us who didn't drink or smoke at all and I was one of those and we continued that right through to the end of the war. Even when we got back on leave and we felt the need to unwind a bit there was never that sort of temptation. So maybe we were

09:30 an unnecessarily sober mob in some way. I don't know but it doesn't fit the common picture of what a commando was supposed to be in the public eye. Someone fairly rugged and a bit brutal perhaps. But it's not the capacity for, or the implementation of brutality, but something else I believe. Possibly the understanding of the needs and wishes of others and perhaps with the

10:00 moral and physical fortitude to carry it out when he sees the need. Not that that sort of philosophy ever entertained our minds at the time but that's the way I see it now.

So what about, I mean Katherine was obviously a very small town at that time. What about, where there any women around Katherine at the time?

I don't ever remember seeing one. I don't think there were any there.

10:30 **Did that ever create any frustration amongst the men, that there were no women to?**

Oh, I don't know, we never talked about it. There were all sorts of ribald jokes going on and all that sort of thing but I don't think, we sort of put all of that aside. There was no hope of suddenly finding Marilyn Monroe or Betty Grable as it was then. They didn't exist really.

11:00 **What about, were there any nurses at all at Katherine?**

Yes there were. There was a hospital there and we did have a little bit of suspicions about one of our lieutenants who drove a truck out one night and he took this nurse out for a drive and suddenly found the truck got bogged you see. Well, he walked back and said his truck was hopelessly bogged. So one of the boys just walked out and got it and drove it back. We had our suspicions about that.

11:30 **And what was your suspicion?**

Well, maybe in fairness perhaps he wanted to watch the moon or something, I don't know, something like that.

A deliberate bogging perhaps?

Something like that, yeah.

And, I mean, women being a minority in Katherine at the time. How were they treated by the men?

Well I don't remember any women being there.

Oh, the nurses I mean there.

The nurses. Well, of course, they were always respected.

12:00 We always had nurses on a pedestal. Possibly, some could argue perhaps that it was not quite justified but in our minds it certainly always was.

Yeah, they were certainly great ladies, did an incredible job?

I've never known any, only once have I never known any rudeness from a nurse and that was in Heidelberg Hospital in Melbourne. But that was later on.

After the war?

12:30 No, it wasn't it was during the war but I had to go there to get an operation on my toe there, a big bodgy.

O.K. Now you were successful in your request for a transfer to independent company. Can you describe to me what the purpose of independent company was?

There, in warfare there are big formations like first of all the armies, then divisions, or corps at least

13:00 which comprise the armies and then there are divisions which comprise the corps and then you get down to battalions and companies and then sections etc. platoons and sections. So it is all a declining degree perhaps of numbers but with that goes their role as well because a big formation such as an army going through a country operates very slowly and in a very deliberate way. The independent companies, of which we were part, could undertake raids or

13:30 activities or intelligence gathering on a very small scale completely away from the restrictions that are imposed upon a big formation. With that, of course, went several disadvantages we had no heavy armaments, we had no artillery, we had one or two mortars but that's about all. We had access to the RAAF. We could call them up for bombing strikes or whatever. But really,

14:00 being independent meant, yes, we were totally alone as well so we had to make our way with whatever we could get and we had to live as well as we could off the land as possible.

Now could you define for me what a commando is or was?

Well actually the term began long, long ago in Poland when Koshesko was fighting the Russians, Russians who were occupying Poland

14:30 at the time and he organised a company of commandos who were doing lightning raids without the benefits or advantages of a big formation. And then it was carried on during the Boer War and indeed that became a common word. In fact the Boer Commando was a very flexible, mobile group of blokes who used to get around attacking the British troops who were in rigid formations. And I think that taught the British army quite a lesson. Well,

15:00 in a country like the Territory, for example, where big formations could move in certain areas but not in others. Our intelligence gathering or our patrolling was of great value and we were not restricted by being hamstrung by a big formation. So we could get around very quickly, we could up anchor and be gone in a few hours, or an hour perhaps.

And what special training did you undergo at Katherine?

We should have had a lot more but of course in the urgency of the war

15:30 there was very little opportunity for it. Certainly we learned to use our Smith & Wesson .38 revolvers and we used Thompson guns, we didn't even have Owens [Owen guns] at that stage. Only Thompsons and Brens [Bren guns] and rifles and two-inch mortars. And we did a little bit of basic training on those and of course we had HE36 grenades they were the fragmentation grenades

16:00 and then we had the HE79s which were an instantaneous grenade. And we used those, we didn't actually use them in action because they were a bit dangerous but we certainly learned how to use them. But the main weapon was the rifle and the Bren gun.

I might just get you to go through some of those guns and describe, perhaps if we could start actually off with the grenades because I haven't actually, I've only actually heard of grenades not of specific

16:30 **definitions of one and perhaps if we could, you mentioned that HE7**

Do you want me to show you one?

I'd love to see one later on, that would be great.

O.K. we can do that.

But the one you mentioned that, is it the HE36?

No, the one I've got is a Jap grenade because of course our own were of no real interest to bring home I was so familiar with them.

But you trained and you learned how to use was it the HE36?

Oh yeah, that was our standard Mills grenade. It's called, it's the same grenade that was used in the first war

17:00 called a Mills bomb. And you often see that written in the old literature about the first war.

And what were its specific qualities.

Well it was an excellent weapon, it had a spring-loaded plunger with a lever on the outside and you pulled the pin out and then if you let the lever go, of course, the plunger drove down to the spring, fired a detonator, worked through a timing fuse which was usually seven seconds and that ignited

17:30 the detonator which burst into the baratol or amatol and that burst the shell and it was very effective. Fragments went everywhere and killed anybody around and we liked that.

And the HE79?

Well that was one that we used later on in training and we didn't ever take them away with us on operations because they were a little bit risky. They were an instantaneous grenade you see. And

18:00 if you held one in your hand, took the cap off and actually dropped it, it would start to unwind and then the detonator was armed. So, it was a bit risky. We didn't like them very much and they were only bakelite actually on the exterior they were not made as a fragmentation grenade. But I've seen one of them cut a tree in half which was about two inches in diameter. So if you hit someone with that it just went straight through him.

Were there any ever injuries or casualties

18:30 **with the training that you were undoing at this point?**

Not in our training, no we didn't. The boys were very conscious of what weapons could do and there was never any shiaking [teasing] or training or anything, or fooling around with weapons. We never had an accident.

That's actually quite unusual from our experience, yeah. So,

19:00 **the Bren gun?**

Yeah, well that was mine you see, I was a Bren gunner, I was scheduled as a Bren gunner from that time because unfortunately I stupidly became fairly accurate on the range and therefore I was landed with a Bren. But it was a beautiful weapon and I loved it. Mind you, it weighed a bit. It weighed 23 pounds but it was very effective, very accurate and it had only perhaps two faults that I could say. The

19:30 magazine didn't hold enough and if you had the gas port on number 4 hole, it always fired two shots no matter how quickly you released the trigger. And I could mention something about that at a later stage.

O.K. What, could you describe the Bren gun for me?

Yes, it consists essentially of a frame, a steel frame, into which a magazine sat on the top. Underneath that there was a piston and cylinder and

20:00 this piston was fed by a small hole in the barrel further up towards the muzzle which fed gas down and drove the piston back that dropped the bridge block down which was locked, carried it to the rear and throughout the empty cartridge case underneath the gun. When it went forward again it carried another cartridge into the bridge and it waited there until you fired it. And they could operate on either single shot

20:30 or automatic. But very accurate and a very good gun.

Thank you, those are excellent descriptions.

Not very good.

No they are, they're great. Now, you mentioned that you were receiving instruction from, from people. Can you describe your instructors?

Well, actually when I say instruction there was just the other boys who knew more about it than perhaps some of us did. We didn't actually ever have

21:00 any official weapons instructors. We had to learn everything on the hoof. There was not the time, there was not the luxury of being able to afford detailed instruction on weapons. We made it our business to learn them though because we knew what depended on it. We knew we depended on them.

And what else were you learning during this time?

Well, there was another grenade that we had which also was never used

21:30 and that was a glass, glass-coated grenade for demolishing tanks. And I'm glad we never had an opportunity to use it. But it had a very sticky substance on the outside, inside a glass case. There was a light steel cylindrical casing on the outside which you flicked off. This exposed a very, very sticky material and that would stick, if you threw it at a wall, it would stick to it.

22:00 But when it hit a wall, it broke the glass plate, this allowed the chemicals inside to ignite and it would burst through the armour-plating of a tank. It had a handle on it, that was also made of glass, and if you flicked it too hard, it would flick off in your hand. I'm glad we never got the opportunity to use them. I don't know if any tanks were ever demolished with them. And then we also had daggers, of course,

22:30 but not many of us used daggers because once you've reached that stage, if you can't use your revolver you're in trouble. It's a one-on-one wrestling match and we don't like to get involved in that. We also got instruction on stranglers, which are a material which I think it is probably best not to describe in detail because we don't know eventually who gets hold of this information but certainly when you've got them around someone's neck there was no escape.

23:00 **So were you, it sounds like you were taught techniques in the quick kill basically?**

Yes, that's right. And how to, how to escape from a bloke charging at you with a bayonet and all sorts of little tricks like that.

How do you escape from a man charging at you with a bayonet?

Well, what you've got to do is get rid of the point of that bayonet first. And fortunately if it's on the end of his rifle it's got a certain amount

23:30 of inertia. So if you can give it a swing its own inertia will keep it away from your body for a split second. You can do that by kicking with your right foot or your left foot. You kick it either upwards or you can be game enough and wait until he gets reasonably close then brush it aside with your hand. It's not something that you involve in a daily activity but to know how is very handy.

Yes, and I'm sure some of these techniques

24:00 **served you later on?**

Well, whether you use them or not, there is a psychological aspect to training in that if you know how to do something whether you have to do it or not it gives you that confidence. And I think therein lies a lot of the benefit of training because there are many things that you'll learn that you never have to actually use.

Now, of course, some of these things that you were learning. You know, the quick kill and

24:30 **self defence etc. I mean, it really sounds, like you're learning, training to become killers. What other things were you learning to help you become more like a killer?**

Well, we, those of us who had section weapons as I did, I had a Bren, we were issued of course with Smith & Wesson .38 revolvers. Now, a lot of the boys were very disdainful of the revolver

25:00 because of course it's a pretty puny weapon compared with a rifle but the weapon itself is inherently reliable and if you can become accurate with it, it can save your life if it needs to. So I learned to do snap shooting with my revolver without cartridges in it, just clicking it, and you can tell exactly where that bullet would have gone. Just in the split second that you fired it. So I was never disrespectful of my revolver, I always carried it and I liked it although I never

25:30 had to kill anyone with it. But before I went away, my Dad always said, if ever you have to use a revolver, he said, use two bullets. He said, never, never trust one bullet in the body, he said, because even though it may penetrate his lungs or his heart, he may not be dead. You've got to disable his brain therefore always use two shots.

Good advice.

Fortunately, I didn't have to use it.

26:00 **Now, tell us about other sorts of training that you did like survival techniques?**

Yes. We had to do a bit of that, of course, and that involved map reading and finding our way and compasses and all that sort of stuff and picking whether water was clean or not, that you could drink. Actually making camps was never part of it because we always just dosed out on the scrub

26:30 on the ground anyway and when we were in training we did that. So actually building shelters etc.

things like that were never part of it, it was just survival for the moment.

And what were the rations like?

While we were in the Territory we were on standard army rations but then, of course, when we got sent away we had no rations at all. So that was a bit different.

Well, we're talk about that when we get to it.

27:00 Now, who was your commanding officer at this point?

Major McWalker. He was a civil engineer in Civvy [Civilian] Street and he was an absolute gentleman. So much so that he trusted us. And that was a mistake because Max and I used to get out pinching pineapples and bananas and things. But he was an absolute gentleman. He was a very capable man, too. And he taught us things that I've never forgotten since like

27:30 for example, how to strike a match in a wind. Many people, these are things that I've tried to tell my grandchildren, you know. When they're trying to light a fire they just hold a match by the end and usually break it in half so it just flicks away in the breeze and they've lost it. Things like that. But, principally, he was telling us how to hold the match against a fuse and you move the box not the match and you make sure that the fuse starts to burn

28:00 etc. after you have checked that it's time fused and not an instantaneous one and so on. And then the use of gelignite and how safe things are. PHE [penetrating high explosive] and 808 were the two explosives that principally were used. And also gun-cotton. Gun-cotton is a very high explosive but of course it's a very safe one. And I've actually held a slab of it in my hand about the size of a brick and nailed it to a tree. And we used to practice demolitions and unfortunately we

28:30 used to cut down quite a few trees but we had to know how to do that to demolish the piers of bridges.

I've, I've actually never heard of gun cotton before, could you explain what that was?

It's a very innocuous looking material that has the appearance, say the colour of cheese perhaps but it looks like a slab of compressed fibre of some sort. And it's available in, well we used to get it issued in blocks

29:00 about the size of a brick but half the thickness. And there's a hole in the centre where you put a primer. Because it's such a high explosive it's therefore very stable so it won't explode. You could hit it with a hammer and it doesn't matter. And we used to carry blocks of it around ourselves like that and I've often thought of these, some of the unsavoury episodes occurring in the world at the moment. But it was quite safe for us to do that.

So how would that actually be used as a weapon?

Well,

29:30 well, not as a weapon against men but as a weapon against bridges and things like that. And later on we did use that over on Timor to demolish a bridge.

O.K. We'll talk about that when we get to Timor. Now, I do have to ask this. How do you light a match in the wind? I'm curious, I actually would find it quite handy at the barbecue?

Yes, it's not always easy either. But of course,

30:00 the wind is the killer because it prevents the flash of the phosphorous from igniting the timber. So what you must do is shield that wind from the match head while that wind is on. And if you can you hold it in your hand like that with a match in there and if you can you move the box away from the match. If you can, right. Well, I tried just in this last week and I failed about three times, it didn't work, but

30:30 while we used to practice that it was for the purpose of course of igniting fuses.

Thank you for that, that was very interesting. So, now, did you know what were you preparing for?

We didn't really know what we were preparing for until we were told about ten minutes before we got on the destroyer in

31:00 Darwin. So it's a bit like everything else that happened at that time it was learn on the run. We had to learn fairly quickly and we tried to do that.

And how long were you training as a commando as part of the independent company in Katherine?

Well, our training went on there until we embarked in, well, after, may I rephrase that. When we first went to Katherine and

31:30 we were as a unit we were sent out then on patrols along the Roper and the Daley River and through Arnhem Land and we patrolled most of the Northern Territory in very, very small groups and in platoons, who are split up then into sections, and I was number 7 section C Platoon. And we were out on

the Roper River and we had to watch there because the river was navigable right up to where we were and the Japs could easily have come up there in a boat at night and we had to watch that.

32:00 **You were in an extraordinary part of Australia?**

Yes, we were.

Could you describe the landscape?

Yes, well the Territory, of course, is fairly familiar to a lot of people now. But to us it was also part of an enemy to be conquered because it was very inhospitable and the rivers were never safe to swim in, of course. We used to shoot the crocs [crocodiles] there in the Roper quite a lot. And

32:30 we shot quite a few roos [kangaroos] for tucker, you know. And in exploring around there on patrols, at times we came across copper seams which of course were of some interest but of course here we were just troops, we could do nothing about it and we didn't even know if they were rich and what they were worth or anything like that. But the Territory was

Sorry, sorry, copper?

Seams.

Oh, copper seams, right. O.K. yeah.

33:00 But we don't really know if it was rich or if it's been exploited since or what.

I think they've been trying haven't they? Now you also mentioned earlier that you had quite a bit to do with aboriginal tribes that were in the area. Could you describe your interaction with them?

That was principally when we were in Katherine itself before we were out on the Roper.

Actually, can I just get you to stop there.

33:30 **O.K. so, Ian, you were about to talk about the aboriginal tribes that you came in contact with?**

Yes. We patrolled up and down the Daley River as well which flows through Katherine and the Larrakia tribe used to occupy that area apparently and maybe they still do. And we used to talk to them and it was quite a novelty getting our photos taken with them and things like that. And they were a very pleasant group. We never had any problem with the Aborigines of

34:00 any kind whatever. And we tried not, of course, to interfere with them. There was one further thing that I may mention there. That that area where we were was undermined to a very large extent with caves through which streams used to flow and in one of these the boys found quite a lot of aboriginal weapons and bones and all that sort of stuff. And in

34:30 their enthusiasm in the beginning they collected a lot of this stuff and brought it back and suddenly it became an order from headquarters, take it all back. So they crawled back into the caves and planted it all again. There was that sort of respect and it was never betrayed really. We left everything that was theirs as it was.

Did other units,

35:00 **companies have the same respect for the aboriginals?**

Well that I don't know, of course, because we didn't have much contact with them. In fact, we might as well have been on the moon with having contact with other, bigger formations in the area. Because we were always out in the scrub on our own or something like that, you see.

And how much contact had those tribes had with white people before you?

Quite likely quite a lot because they used to work on stations and they were so close to Katherine that they

35:30 would have had contact with the people there too. And also, they were aware of railways, they were aware of aeroplanes all that sort of thing. So they were not right back several hundred years ago at all. And some of them could speak a strange form of English.

And, would they, would they be of assistance and of help to you when you were, when you were out, you know, surviving

36:00 **in this landscape?**

They were at times with advice of various gums that exuded from trees, whether you could eat it or not. Various timbers all that sort of thing. But we didn't really gain a great deal from them because we were operating completely independent of them and we were never in the one place for very long. I've got no doubt that a lot of that information should have been collected. Perhaps it was

36:30 by somebody but certainly it was not by the boys in our unit.

Yeah, it's a fascinating, we haven't come in contact with somebody who had that much contact with the aboriginals up there. Now how many men were in independent company?

Well, we were always under strength. We were supposed to be over 200 but we were never more than about 150 odd. And we were nearly always under strength

- 37:00 and even when we were sent away we were still under strength. And then of course you get a few casualties and it's very difficult to get reinforcements. Although we did get some on Timor. But we had two chaps who were drowned when we were out on the Roper River because one of our canoes sank. We used to use the aborigines' canoes. And we used to paddle those up and down the stream.
- 37:30 And that's how we used to get our barramundi we would make little bombs out of gelignite and paddle over and drop the bomb and then collect the barramundi you see, because they used to be stunned with the shock. Well, one day some of the silly cows, dropped their bomb over and then paddled the wrong way and of they were following along with it. And, of course, there was a tremendous scramble as soon as they woke up to what they were doing. They got out of the way and it went off all right. But, it wasn't just a matter of getting
- 38:00 wet because the Roper was infested with crocodiles and we shot a lot of those.

So you mentioned that you lost two men?

Yes.

Was that how they were lost, during that incident?

No, no. They actually drowned before I came to that section in The Roper. So I don't know the actual circumstances but I know they were lost because their canoe sank.

So, how, how much of a threat were the crocodiles?

Well, they lived

- 38:30 on meat and we were the meat. And they could get buffalos or things that came down to the shore. They used to drag them under. And I once saw seven crocs pulling the one buffalo down. They had it out in the middle of the stream and they were all around it. We were fortunately in a bigger boat then, we were in a motorised boat. So we all lined up on one rail and got our rifles ready and somebody counted down, one, two, three and we all fired at once. And there was a tremendous splash then
- 39:00 when all these crocs were hit with these bullets. They belted with their tails. They then just drifted off or went underneath or were killed or something and the buff [buffalo] just floated off down the rest of the river.

We might stop there and continue on the next tape.

Tape 4

- 00:32 **Ian, we were talking during the break about that, the particular grenade that you were discussing earlier, could you continue on with that?**

Yes, that grenade operated by having a piece of chord or a tape with a weight on the end of it and as you threw it, the rotation of the grenade enabled the tape to fly off, it meant that the percussion cap would move back and what it did was move towards a detonator located in the centre of the grenade so that

- 01:00 instantly it hit, it exploded. I found that of interest because I'd known long, long before, my Dad had mentioned something that he had come up with and submitted to the army inventions officer during the first war, and that was an artillery shell whereby it was extremely sensitive in that the original shells had to have a sufficient, a fairly solid whack on the nose to explode them and of course, in the mud in France, that didn't always happen so there were a lot of dud shells.
- 01:30 So he developed one whereby the nose cap was held forward of the percussion cap. But in between the nose cap and the percussion cap was the needle which had a tape wound around it. This tape had a weight on it. With the rotation of the shell after it came out of the barrel, the tape unwound and flew off into the air, the nose cap moved back and it was therefore just resting against the percussion cap. The slightest touch would have set it off.

And your father invented this?

Yes he did. He submitted

- 02:00 that, therefore, to the, it wasn't called the Army Inventions Directorate at that stage but it was something else. But it was produced very shortly or very quickly after that so he doesn't know if somebody else thought of it as well. But certainly, he was never acknowledged.

Remarkable invention.

Yeah, well.

So was this, was this you know a common topic of discussion with your father about

02:30 **the different types of weaponry?**

Yes it was, he used to, well he was interested of course principally in the mechanical side of things. Particularly the French 75 artillery shell. Because the 75 calibre gun was a mechanical marvel for that period of time. It had a hydraulic recoil mechanism and it worked beautifully. And he was never, never tired of extolling its virtues. It has

03:00 of course been used in other matters now. The hydraulic shock strut is very, very well known. But as far as I'm aware that would probably have been the first application of it.

Thanks for that. O.K. We were talking about your trips on the river and your various,

03:30 **I can't think of the word but patrols that you were doing. Were there any other incidents that come to mind at this point?**

We just used to make sure that we knew what was happening along the river and even if nothing sensational happened your purpose was achieved if you knew exactly what was happening and who was there and what the terrain was like

04:00 because we may have had to use it at a later stage. But then during our time out in the Roper River for example there were no incidents that caused us any major problem like that.

Thank you. Now what had you heard about the attack on Darwin?

Well we knew about that of course while we were in the Territory. And we knew it was a bit of a mess. But a lot of the newspaper reports about a widespread panic and all that.

04:30 we just didn't quite believe because we knew the army units there would never panic anyway. But apparently there were quite a few people who just bailed out and ran for their lives in their cars or whatever they could. Expecting a Jap invasion which didn't come.

And when did you first hear that you would be going overseas?

Well, like a lot of things in the army, they're all dead secret, but the troops always know about it.

05:00 At any rate, we got bundled into the train and were sent up to Darwin with all of our equipment and we were paraded in an open area which once used to be housing or something or other but it was just bare patches of concrete. And we were addressed by Major General Stevens. And he said, he said, you men are going to Timor and your job there will be to kill the Japanese and keep on killing them.

05:30 And he said, now, if any one of you feels that he doesn't want to do that job, or can't, step out now and there will be no recriminations. And, of course, there wasn't a sound, not a man moved. Maybe I just heard all the rattle of all the buttons popping off their shirts as their chest expanded. But certainly nobody tried to get out of it.

What was, what was your impression of Stevens?

06:00 Well, I saw him only once, of course. He was just a Major General doing his job. I don't really know anything about him at all. He had a brother who was the commander I believe of one of our navy ships and I just forget which one at the moment.

When he gave that speech about killing Japs how did, what was your reaction to that?

I thought, oh, great,

06:30 great. Oh, that's what we looked forward to, yeah.

Now, just getting back to Darwin, obviously Darwin had been attacked by the time you'd gotten there. Can you describe Darwin as you remember it?

Well, when we got there, of course, it was a series of wrecked houses and buildings and it was very largely flattened. There was not a great deal left.

07:00 There were a few brick building still standing but not much. I think the Japs had done a fairly thorough job. It was a bit like using a sledgehammer to crack a walnut. They could have done it a lot cheaper I think. But of course, in the harbour there were wrecked ships everywhere.

Was there a sense of what was to come?

Oh, we weren't so worry about that because we could protect ourselves but

07:30 we thought there may have been an invasion but, of course, that was the principal reason of sending us away to give some sort of pre-warning of that and also to report back on what was available for that

invasion if it ever came.

Now, I'm interested to know that, the independent company, you know, was quite small at 150 men. I imagine that there must have been through the training and the patrols that you were doing

08:00 **a growing sense of camaraderie and mateship. Could you talk a bit about that?**

Yes, I think that's manifest more in a company or a unit that is either in, or intends to be, in danger. Because you're very, very dependent. Not only upon yourself but upon your mates. And if they're not reliable, you don't want them. And

08:30 I must say that we didn't have any disappointments. I mean I'm not saying that we didn't possess fear at some times but certainly that can always be overcome, to a certain extent. But it's overwhelmingly important that you have confidence in the boys around you and we did. So there was not the anxiety that people might imagine, that you're suddenly thrust out into the totally unknown. Even though

09:00 we had very few around us. It was not like in a big formation whereby you could fall back and there was headquarters behind back and something else behind that and so on. We had none of that. We were totally on our own.

How important was trust?

Oh, overwhelming. Without that there was nothing. Oh, yes. Well, trust and honesty and loyalty are all part of the same spectrum of

09:30 activities in the brain. Let's put it that way. But, in or type of unit it was overwhelming. We couldn't have survived without it. You had to be, if a bloke said he was going to do something or he was going to be somewhere, he had to be there, and he was always there. There was no possibility of there being any half-way house in what we were doing.

What, what do you

10:00 **remember of your farewell from Australia to Timor?**

Of the trips?

Yeah. Was there a farewell at all?

No, there was no farewell. But there were some official photographers from Canberra and I got some photos that they took and maybe they can be traced up. There would be more in that collection but I got only two of them, anyway. And we just embarked on HMAS Voyager there and we headed out

10:30 one evening, and I have a little bit written on that I can show you later, and we headed across towards Timor. And it was only when we were at sea that the Captain made an announcement. This ship will arrive in Timor at such and such a time and you will disembark. Full stop. Bang. There were no pretty maidens with garlands and flowers or anything like that. Quite a shortage of them.

11:00 **And what were the conditions like on board the Voyager?**

Well, we just stood on the deck. There was no, and we slept wherever we were because we embarked at night and we arrived there the next day. And we just dosed there and during the night there was a little bit of excitement when she revved up a little bit because they detected a U-Boat somewhere in the vicinity. There were no depth charges dropped or anything like that but

11:30 there was a little bit of excitement that woke us up but we just went back to sleep again.

Now at this point what was your attitude towards the Japanese?

Well, because we had heard such a lot about them and their atrocities in China particularly and what they had done in Manchuria. There was to be no possibility of any hail fellow, well met sort of attitude even if we captured

12:00 any, which we never did. Our attitude towards them was just if we contact them, we'll kill them.

Had you heard any stories of what the Japanese had been doing up in the North?

Yes, not in the Northern Territory.

No, I mean..

Oh yes, yes.

Yes. What had you heard?

12:30 We had heard, of course, that there, there was another independent company, the second 2nd, which were in Timor before the Japs actually occupied it. And they were there, therefore, before us. And they were spread right across the Timor right down to the western end which was the Dutch end of Timor. We were in the Portuguese part. They, some of them were killed and some of them were captured

which, of course, meant the same thing. But they then

- 13:00 came across towards the Portuguese side and they told us some of the things that the Japs had been doing and their treatment of the native population etc. but I didn't observe anything that the Japs had actually done to a native population or a native people at all.

What sort of things had you heard?

Well, they used to molest the native women, of course. Because they've got no principles of their own and they just regard women as being

- 13:30 the absolute scum of the earth. So, they had no respect for them but of course, even from a military point of view, they should have recognised that would be counter productive. Whereas when we arrived there, of course, our attitude was totally different and that was always respect for them. We always saluted all their women, as all women must, as all soldiers must and..

- 14:00 **We've got a door problem. It keeps on slamming.**

The bathroom, yes, O.K.

Sorry, you were talking about the army's attitude towards women?

Yes. The women on, Timor is a fully occupied country and it's a terrorist island. Very highly, heavily populated and there are rice paddies everywhere and the

- 14:30 women used to work in these rice paddies. And they used to wear a unit which is called a slendang. I think it's called a slendeng, or a sarong, I'm not sure but I think it's a slendeng. Anyway, it's a garment that fits right up over their necks but when they were working they used to roll it down to waist height, for working in the field. Whenever we saw them working there, we would always make a deliberate interest on something the other side. And so they would very smartly pull all this up

- 15:00 and then we'd salute them or wave to them and we'd always smile. And we always used to yell, call out "Estare Timor," That means G'day Timor or something like that, and their attitude was such that we could pick them after a period of time, there was never any apprehension on their part. There was never any worry that we would ever molest them in any way and none ever did. And that may sound as if it's just a, a respectful moral

- 15:30 attitude but it has a strong military value. Because if you respected the women and the children then you knew all about everything that was happening in the area and that's exactly what we wanted to know. But also, too, they used to, when they used to crush rice for their own purposes. They used a hollow tree, at tree at least, and they'd hollowed out the inside and they used to have rods that they used to pound into that with the rice in it. And there used to be four women stand around in a

- 16:00 circle around this and pound the rice and crush it. We tried to do that and we'd get in a terrible mess because their co-ordination was marvellous. And they used to laugh at us and of course that was great because as long as they could laugh at us they were never in any worry.

I'd like to talk more a little later about your interaction with the local Timorese but perhaps if we could go back to your, your disembarking from the Voyager and what

- 16:30 **happened there?**

Yes. We had the announcement from the captain that we were to disembark there. He nosed the ship into towards shore, and I have something written on this which I can give you, and he didn't realise that there was a tide running and there was a drift towards the shore and gradually the Voyager drifted in until it touched the sand. We had to disembark over the side on fold boats. We had never had any experience

- 17:00 in paddling them or how to make them go or which direction or anything else about it.

Sorry, what is a fold boat?

Well it's actually a boat, the sides of which fold up and makes a pontoon. A hollow pontoon. You can get inside those things and paddle them. They're pretty terrible equipment but they folded flat and therefore they didn't occupy much volume. So we had to scramble over the sides with our equipment and then get

- 17:30 into these fold boats and try to paddle them to shore. But the boys were inexperienced and we had no one to show us how. And they were going round and round in circles and milling around but meanwhile the Voyager was drifting towards the shore. The captain made several calls, and I remember it very well, over the loud hailer to get us away from the stern of the ship. He wanted to start his props. Well, the boys were trying desperately to get away but they were going

- 18:00 around and milling in a very undisciplined sort of manner and we couldn't get these fold boats in towards the shore. Eventually, when he did start his props, he was too late. The Voyager was aground. But in retrospect, he should have started his props to reverse out of that regardless of our problem. Because militarily it was not worthwhile losing a ship for the sake of a few of us. He shouldn't have done it.

- 18:30 He was castigated by the Naval Review Board and he was sort of shamed from then on etc. etc. He'd made all the wrong decisions and so on and so on. It's very easy for outsiders to judge the man's actions but he was doing the humanitarian thing. It cost us a lot. But what about the parents of the boys if he'd started his props and killed a few of them.
- Yeah, tough decision.**
- 19:00 Yes, and in retrospect, he did make the wrong one.
- Even though you were one of those people on the fold boat?**
- Well, it wouldn't have mattered would it, because we needed the Voyager, we needed all of our navy.
- That's a very interesting statement to make.**
- Well there's nothing else to do. You've got to consider it in that context you see. And, we did. I mean, after all, none of us may have perished, we don't know that
- 19:30 but it was that sort of risk that he wouldn't run. And the chance was very good that we'd be drawn into the props.
- I mean, although, he might have made what you see as the bad military decision, I imagine that you might be slightly relieved that he did make that decision?**
- Well, yes, of course, but not when we realised we'd lost the Voyager.
- So what did, what did losing**
- 20:00 **the Voyager mean?**
- Well, it was a defeat for us, of course. I mean to lose a ship without taking some of the enemy with it or doing anything like that was a disaster. And the Japs didn't even know it was there. They came over on a recce flight and they saw it there and we saw them just above us and we had a few shots at them of course. They saw it, and then they sent bombers over to bomb it and they dropped quite a lot of bombs
- 20:30 around it but still didn't hit it. Oh yeah, it was amazing. So, a couple of corvettes, I think, were sent over to try to drag it off the shore line with these engines but it still didn't work so we lost the Voyager.
- So while this was happening, what was going through your mind?**
- Well, we were well aware that here we were on this narrow little strip of beach, with nowhere to retreat to and the Japs up in the hills,
- 21:00 that way. So we had to get out of that very quickly, which we did. It's all we could do.
- And what happened when you did arrive on the beach?**
- Well, we tried to form up, to a certain extent, just in little groups. Although, I think McWalker made a mistake then, he tried to make a little bit of a speech and so on, which didn't go down too well. But his intentions
- 21:30 and his emotions were correct.
- Could you describe what he said?**
- Well, just, I seem to remember it because it didn't seem to fit the picture at the time. He just said, "Well lads," he said, "Whatever you do, keep the... I forget what it was, "...keep the name of your unit up high in your thoughts" etc. etc. all this sort of stuff. Well really, we didn't want that, we wanted to escape. We wanted to get inland and get in amongst it.
- 22:00 But what he was saying was really, look after each other and so on.
- So, sorry, why did you feel like that was ill-timed?**
- Well it wasn't the atmosphere. You could make the most moving speech at the wrong time and it would have no impact. On the other hand, sometimes a casually dropped statement has a tremendous influence if the emotion of the moment is just right.
- And that wasn't the case in this?**
- No, it wasn't.
- 22:30 But, he was such a respectable man that no one said a word out of place.
- So what, what happened after?**
- From then on we had to, we had a couple of 2nd 2nd troops there, who knew the track inland from there and they guided us in to a certain extent. We marched then all night, carrying all our stuff

23:00 we were absolutely dog tired, of course, by this time but we just kept going all night until we got inland. As far away from the shoreline as we could. And we headed towards a place called Same, which has been in the news in recent times on other matters. Actually, we went first through a place called Fatu Berlio and then on towards Same and we were heading towards the

23:30 ridge of the Romolo Range which runs along the spine of Timor. Actually, Mount Romolo itself is about ten thousand feet, so it's a fairly high range. And we were trying to get up to about seven or eight thousand feet at that stage. And, contrary to what people might think, it's fairly cold up there. Even though it's in the tropics. So we headed inland and from then on other events occurred.

Now what, what was your first impressions of Timor apart from

24:00 **the disastrous voyage, of the landscape and that sort of thing.**

Well, it's quite a beautiful place, if you have time to stop and enjoy it. But, we, we were fascinated, of course, by the type of houses there and things like that. And the fact that bananas and paw paws and things seemed to grow along the roads and all that sort of thing. Something we don't see here. So

24:30 all of that was of interest for a while but we were pretty dog-tired and we just wanted to get in there and get ourselves established.

So what did getting established involve?

It just means getting ourselves organised, make contact with headquarters make sure we knew what we were supposed to do and then do it. And that came fairly quickly.

And what was the..?

Well, the first thing was that, of course, the Japs of course by this time knew all about the Voyager being wrecked. So they sent a patrol down to inspect it and see if any of us were around so

25:00 they could clean us up too. But their patrols, that particular patrol consisted of about 450 Japs. I mean, that's more than two of our companies and at any rate, so No. 9 section of C Platoon went up first. They went over the ridge and put on an ambush there, straight away. And cleaned up a few and I spoke to old Jo Bennet as he came back, he was a Bren gunner as I was

25:30 I spoke to old Jo, I said, how did you go Jo, and he said, oh, I pushed a few over. The Japs though just usually abandoned their wounded and they just formed up again and kept going. They had, of course, too, by this time, native guides who we would say are traitors but, of course, they just did whatever the bidding was at the time. And they were paid by the Japs. So they

26:00 were leading the Jap patrol along the roads when we were sent up then to make our little stand.

And can you talk us through your first encounter.

Yes, we, this was shortly after I spoke to Jo Bennett and we found a little position there whereby there was a bend in the road as it came down the hill with a long straight stretch. And I wanted that long straight stretch because that's ideal for a Bren gunner. And

26:30 so it was decided that the Thompson gunners would be, as we faced the road, on the right hand side just down below.

So you were talking about how you wanted the long stretch of road?

Yes, that's right because in that way you can do a good long sweep with the Bren and you can clean up quite a lot. We had the Thompson gunners down on the right hand side of the road and the riflemen

27:00 up on the left. And I was back further facing up that stretch of the road with two other blokes. There was Max Hamilton and Jack Callagher with me. And the Japs came marching down the road towards us. And they were marching in very good formation considering what they'd just been through because we knew 9 Section had killed a lot of them.

How many Japanese were there?

Well, in the initial patrol there were 450 but by this time I don't know.

27:30 **In the ones coming down the road?**

Oh, there'd be a couple of hundred, two or three hundred.

And how many were in your section?

Three of us. But, there were the three of us there. So the plan was to be that the Thompson gunners below the road were to fire first because they were the closest, then get out of it, while I covered them with the Bren gun, and the riflemen picked off any stragglers. Well, we watched the Japs coming down the road. They came closer and closer towards us.

28:00 **So, Ian, you were in the middle of telling the story about your first sight of the Japanese but before I get you to continue can you just clarify, how, I mean you mentioned that there were**

three of you. Was that, I imagine there were other people around. Can you just give us a sense of the numbers?

Certainly, of course. In each of the sections, well, a platoon consisted

28:30 of three sections.

O.K. So Ian if you could give us a sense of the numbers before you continue on with the story?

Yes, it was C Platoon that was to do this ambush. And C Platoon consisted of three sections. A, B and C Section. And I was in 7 Section C Platoon at that stage, so, the other sections were located down below the road and beside it.

29:00 And it was a very, really, a very small number to put on an ambush but there was only, say, about 30 odd men and we were attacking about 450 odd Japs. But, because we were spread out, they couldn't bring any concentrated mortar fire onto us unless they knew exactly where we were. And the idea was that the Thompson gunners would do what we call the 3S movement and I won't tell you what the last one is but it was

Why not?

But it was shoot, scatter and another one

29:30 but anyway.

Could you tell us what it is?

Well, I'll just forget anyway.

Just before we do go on, you don't have to be afraid of, you know, telling me anything but I imagine it's a swear word?

Yes, we used to call it shoot, shit and scatter. And they were to do that and, just at that particular stage and the Bren gunner was to open up, that was me and then the riflemen and

30:00 then we'd all clear out at once while someone covered, a sniper would be left behind to pick off any who tried to follow us. That was the usual pattern. But we waited in that position and I waited, and waited and I was speaking to Jack Callagher who was on my left. And I was getting just the range correct, I had everything just right, and I had the magazines on my right hand side just ready to pick up another one as soon as I emptied the one on the gun. I waited, I said, now Jack are you ready, and he said, no, no, no, hold it, you know.

30:30 So we just waited, there was a certain urgency in his voice, we wanted to get everything right. We waited for these Thompson gunners to open up and they didn't. There was not a sound coming from there. By this time, of course, it was too late. If I fired then, where the Japs had got past where the Thompson gunners were they could never escape so they must have been gone. We didn't know what had happened. It was one of those stupidities of warfare whereby the orders don't get carried forward.

31:00 They weren't carried through. We were all told to bail out of that situation. We didn't get the message. We three were still stuck there. So, the Thompson gunners had gone, the riflemen had gone, we three were just left there and the Japs were just streaming down a few yards in front of me. And it was too late to do something about it unless we made some sort of suicide stand and just cleaned up as many as we could. But we couldn't do that because we didn't know

31:30 where the rest were. And then, of all the loony things to happen at that time at that particular time, Max Hamilton accidentally fired his rifle. Well, the effect was electric. The Japs just stopped dead still on the road and didn't move and then there was some chattering from the natives in front. They made some sounds. We kept dead quiet, we didn't move. And they just resumed the march and kept on going.

32:00 We knew then that we'd lost the position. There was nothing we could do about it and we had to get out of it so we just bailed out. We picked up our weapons and magazines etc. and climbed up in the hills to go back along the track back towards Same. We got back to, a little distance, not much further along, on a little bit of a ridge, and we heard a tremendous amount of shooting going on in the direction towards which we were going.

32:30 We thought, oh, that's great, the boys are giving it to them. And then we heard a most unusual sound and it was a lighter weapon firing. We knew all the sounds of our own so we knew that wasn't one. And then, finally, the last sounds that you hear are the ones of the blokes that had won the fight and that was the light weapon. We knew then the Japs had been doing something. We didn't know what it was so we carried on towards that

33:00 hill which was down about perhaps a mile from where we'd set the ambush position. And just as we got there, a native came down the hill and said, something about, we didn't understand it then because we hadn't been long, but he was told us that there was a dead Australian lying down on the hill. Shortly, then, another white man came down from the top of that little ridge, and I've got his name. And he said,

33:30 this bung's telling us there's a dead Aussie down here. Of course, we didn't know that and we thought,

it can't be the boys have gone past here. So we went down anyway and on a little track, a little native track that runs around the side of that ridge, there was Snowy Horrigan lying on his back there. He had two bullets through his face just near his nose. There was one through his right arm and one through his chest there that came out that side. And he was just lying on his back on the road.

34:00 So, that was the end of Snowy.

What went through your mind when you saw Snowy dead?

Well, I was a bit uncomfy [uncomfortable] because I'd been speaking to him just a few minutes before. It's not a very nice situation. But we knew Snowy was gone and we didn't know what the cause was. But he had rolled, clearly rolled down the hill, he'd been shot apparently on the top of the hill, and because we knew a little bit about by

34:30 that time what had happened before we realised why he had done this. The rest of the boys had concentrated a bit and gone further down the road and Snowy had ducked back on his own to make his own last stand. And we realised why later because his brother had shortly before that been killed at Africa, in Bardia I think, and his mother died just before we left for Timor so he was the last of the clan. And he was going to just go out expensively.

35:00 So, there was nothing further we could do. We got some bayonets and tried to dig down the little track on the side of the hill but of course it was just like a cut in track, like a step section cut into the side of the hill, we dug a bit of dirt over him but it wouldn't, it wasn't very effective and I think the pigs might have eaten him.

What kind of impact did his death have on you?

Well, it was part of the game. We expected it. But of course,

35:30 it's not very nice you don't like to see one of your cobbers knocked out, like that. The Japs had taken his rifle and yet they'd left his Australias, they took his dead meat tickets [identity tags] and left his Atralias on his shoulder. And we found that rather strange.

Why do you think they did that?

Well, I can't understand it. They took his dead meat tickets to get his name, of course and his number.

36:00 But they left his Australias on his shoulders. Apparently, they're of no value to them.

So, Snowy was the first dead mate?

Yes, he was the first casualty we had there, yes.

What was his, I mean obviously this was something that would become a common occurrence later on?

Yes, it wasn't as common as perhaps people tended to think because we could move around a bit

36:30 and move pretty fast. So we really got out of that campaign fairly lightly as we can discuss later.

I mean, you mention his reasons for turning round and doing a final stance and, I mean in some ways, it sounds almost suicidal what he did?

Yes, I think he knew it was. There was nothing could be done. He, I mean against that volume of fire he could never have existed. He had only his

37:00 rifle. And they had sub machine guns, they had light LMGs [Lightweight Machine Guns] they even had heavy machine guns for goodness sake, there was no way in the world he could have survived.

Were you close to him?

Oh, we knew Snowy well. He was never a particular friend of mine, he was a good sort of bloke, he was a good joker to have around. He was a bit of a wild man in his ways but I liked him.

Now, what

37:30 **what happened next after you buried Snowy?**

Well to bury him is to lend dignity to a pretty rough situation really. But as I said we just tumbled dirt down over him and we think that probably the pigs ate him up. So, with this other chap who was a fellow named Corporal Field, in the 2nd 40th Battalion, he was one of the lost souls from the western end of Timor. He came with us and we followed the road down then through Same, on, trying to find the rest of the

38:00 unit. And because he, and some of the natives that he had with him, could speak a bit of the language, we were able to find out where they were. It's another advantage of always befriendng the local population. If you don't do that you've lost the whole job. And we knew then that they'd gone on down towards Fatu Berlio. So we kept heading on down that way, dossing up in umas at night and this and that along the track. And

- 38:30 it was during part of that where we stopped at a place called Amara where the Japs [Japanese] had already been through and it's necessary to appreciate that, in the early days, the Portuguese converted all of Timor into Catholicism. And it was deeply imbued in the natives attitude to things. And they had all their little effigies of Christ and they had their altars and all the rest of it and
- 39:00 their churches were well organised. And the Japs demolished all of this. They even go to their churches, particularly the one in Amara, and hacked the legs off so it was brought down to Jap height. They caught a priest in front of the altar and they cut him in half and they threw half outside and tried to burn it and left the other half inside, and it stank of course, in the church.

And you saw this?

Mmm. Now these are the sort of things, of course, that gave us

- 39:30 overwhelming allies. There was no way in the world that they could ever convert the Timorese to their cause when they were doing this to them. And they didn't seem to have enough sense to recognise that.

It's horrific.

Tape 5

- 00:32 **Following this encounter with the Japanese and the burial of Snowy, what happened next?**

We felt in a bit of disarray, because we had really had a disorganised fight and we didn't really win it. We kept going further south towards Fatu Berlio which is on the southern coast there, near Betano, where the Voyager was wrecked. And there we met up with the rest of the company and we organised a plan then

- 01:00 to go forward again which, of course, we had to do to keep track of the Japs. So, we went forward from that point. There was a funny incident that occurred there, when we were at Fatu Berlio, Sid Bell came up to me and said, he said, "I suppose you ate your emergency ration." I said, "Well no, Sid, as a matter of fact I was waiting for an emergency." He said, "Good God, don't you call that one." you know, but really everything has to be relative. We were,
- 01:30 we were quite able to survive as we were. At any rate, we went forward from that point, up through Same again over towards Hatudo and over the Romolo Range and over to Atsabe which is on the northern side of the Romolo Range. And from there we could survey out towards the northern coast and we could survey virtually the entire, no not the entire area, but a large area of it on the road that runs between Dili and Suai which is on the
- 02:00 south western coast of Timor. And this was the principal road area that the Japs had down from Bobonaro through to Suai. We we had to patrol that area which was about, well, at a guess it was about 20 odd square miles or something like that, it was a pretty big area. And at that stage there was only about six or seven of us and we did a lot of patrolling, a bit of skirmishing with the Japs and we kept up a schedule,
- 02:30 a schedule all the way, every day, back to Australia, to make sure that we were still there and not captured etc. And a pro po that, there was always an idiotic word which had to be included before every sched [schedule]. It could have been something that was agreed upon such as Woolloomooloo or dogsbody or any word at all but it had to be before everything we said. And if that was there then the Japs would never have known that.
- 03:00 So that showed that we were not compromised in some way. That was our code. And one of those I recall was yellow bastard. But anyway, we kept up that and they were fairly fully informed and we used to direct the bombers who came over, the Lockheed Hudsons etc. to bomb Dili and some of the shipping in the harbour as they came across the range. And there, for the first time, I saw a Lockheed P38. Now, not having seen one before
- 03:30 I thought it could only be a Lockheed P38 or a Fokker G1 which perhaps had been captured in Holland But as it turned out to be it flew over towards Atsabe and I identified it and we reported back and sure enough it was a P38. We got a congratulatory word back from Darwin on our aircraft recce. Which was the only compliment we received I think.
- On your?**
- Aircraft recce. [reconnaissance]
- 04:00 So we did a fair bit of patrolling around the Atsabe area and we became friends with the chief of Atsabe who was Portuguese of course and another Chinese man who had a shop in there. We didn't know his name, we used to call him Nissan. And we used to go down to his shop sometimes, we'd have cups of coffee. But at the same time, the Japs used to come into his shop and have cups
- 04:30 of coffee. And I was very, very alarmed about that. But Jack Callagher was one of those fellows who

didn't really have any nerves. He didn't seem to worry about anything and he reckoned it was quite O.K. I was always very apprehensive and I wanted to have old Nissan shot because he was a security menace. But Jack overruled me on that and, after all, he was a corporal, I wasn't, so Nissan survived that. There were quite a few little situations like that.

- 05:00 We had to blow the bridge on the way between Atsabe and Bobanaro which is on the main road down to Suai from Dili. So first we sent out a little recce party which consisted of three of us. Dave Craven, Dougie Harrison and myself. And we three went over there and had a little look around and measured the bridge and then we did a very stupid thing. We went up to the
- 05:30 top of the ridge, looking down on the bridge from the river, and we were skylighted. We were actually seen from the horizon. A native came up other on the side of the road and I went up and spoke to him. And you can always tell if there something wrong because he just averted his eyes, looked down like that. Suddenly he span on his heels and ran like mad. And that was a pretty bad sign. So, it was too late to go chasing him to shoot him or anything like that. So I just let him go. .
- 06:00 He was a Timorese, of course. We stood on this ridge and we were discussing the bridge and what sort of explosive we'd use and suddenly a shot rang out and a bullet came between, somewhere between we three who were standing there, and it missed all three of us and it went straight across the other side and we heard the whack when it hit the rock on the other side. So, it was a high velocity bullet because we got three reports which you always do from a high velocity bullet. We scrambled down that river,
- 06:30 down the bank, straight into the river and we tried to climb upstream to get away. And we tumbled head over heels going down there and kept on our weapons but as we came up to where the bridge was there was a little ford, a very shallow piece, just before that and the rocks were all wet. It had been, there had been moss on them. I stumbled and fell and I landed on my right elbow here. And I was holding my rifle up like that in my hand so that it wouldn't get damaged.
- 07:00 And while I was down on the ground I was cursing and swearing because I'd fallen over. And suddenly Dave Craven, who was a couple of yards in front of me, swung around and raised his rifle and fired a shot and then loaded and fired a again. And then he looked at me as he saw me get up and he had a very surprised expression, his eyes wide open. I didn't know what was wrong. I just got up and we scrambled on a bit. We got up eventually out of that little river, climbed up a bit of a cliff
- 07:30 and started shooting back. And that's when I think I got the one that fired at us. Certainly he threw his arms up in the air and just collapsed in a heap and went forward. But then Dave Craven said to me "By God, you were lucky". I said, "Oh yeah, well weren't we all?" quite innocently. And he said, "Well didn't you see that Bung [native]?" And I said, "No, what?" When he, David, spun around and fired that shot. He fired at the Timorese who were standing just beside me who
- 08:00 belted a spear straight at me. It went over the back of my neck at the precise instant that I fell. How those things can happen with such timing and for what reason I don't know. But it did. I was completely unaware of it. And their spears are about a foot long, about say, two, two and a half inches wide and they just cleared a fearful wound in you. No one ever survives it. But he missed me.

Another example of fate by the sound of it?

Yes it is. It's quite amazing.

- 08:30 Anyway, we got out of that and didn't think much more of it because those things happen. We went back then and we got some PHE or 808, I forget which explosive it was, but we were going to blow the bridge. Well we went down to do that the next day but this time I had the Bren. So we went up to that top part where we'd been sniped at before while Jack Callagher and Darkie Harrison went down to the bridge to lay
- 09:00 the charges against the piers that were holding it up. So I was on guard at the top. Just watching and trying to watch that way and that way as well, back and forth, to make sure we weren't jumped again. And somebody on the other side of the river started shooting at the boys down who were laying the charges. Well it was my job, of course, to get them. But I couldn't see them. They were in amongst the Umas and behind rock ledges and all that sort of thing. I sniped at a few but I didn't get any. Well, eventually, fortunately,
- 09:30 they didn't get Jack or Darkie. And Jack was justifiably angry when he came up out of that and realised I hadn't got them because they were still shooting at them. But I couldn't see any targets and that worries me to this day. I mean I couldn't have worn that to have let them get killed when I couldn't see who was getting them. But we got out of that all right. I think Jack's forgiven me by the time he died which was a few years ago. But
- 10:00 we lived, or we tried to, in Anumo which is about 8,000 feet up on the Romolo Range then, just above Atsabe. And below that there was a village called Iray which was also above Atsabe and from which we used to do our pips on the town itself. We used to look down the hill, looking through binoculars that were made in Japan and we used to count the number of Japs what time they changed the guard,
- 10:30 how many there were, what sort of machine guns they had. We'd supervise the lot and we relayed it all back to Australia. It was all an indication of what strength they had and where they were likely to use it and why they had it in that area.

So you were doing intelligence gathering as much as patrolling in the general sense?

Perhaps more.

When you say perhaps more what are you, what are you?

Well it was of more value to the people of Darwin. If we had, say, killed two or three thousand Japs. That's worth

11:00 nothing in a military sense because they had no end of population to make that up. But if we could give them indications of where their shipping was or what their likely tactics were likely to be or how many troops they had, that was of great value. Although that was the less spectacular aspect of it, I think that was of more value to Darwin. So, we did a lot of that anyway. But the Japs were giving a little bit of trouble gradually creeping back from Dili

11:30 towards Atsabe which was our only base. So we had to try to hunt them out. Just below Atsabe though, where the road goes down fairly steeply, there's a pretty big cliff and at the bottom of that cliff a gully there filled with jungle. We had the job of trying to hunt the pro Japanese natives out of that area. Well, we should never have tried it because that was their territory and they knew how to handle it very well indeed.

12:00 Well, we tried to creep through there and of course they were shooting at us from the cover of the foliage down below while we were at the top shooting down at them.

This is the native population?

Yes, yes. It surprises people that so many of the Timorese were with the Japs where as all of our propaganda of course then and immediately after was that the Timorese were wholeheartedly on our side.

That view lasts to this very day actually?

Well it does and it's partially true because without them we could never have survived. But in every population there

12:30 are always those that go wherever the love or money's best. I mean we saw that in Holland, Belgium, France, Norway particularly. Norway's record was disgusting but at any rate that was a side issue. So, I remember Happy Frank. He was a bloke who was never without his perpetual grin. That was why he was called Happy Frank. Frank and I were at the top of this little gully and we had to get across a fairly open patch to get across the other side to do some shooting down towards our left

13:00 and there was this open patch between these two rocks. Only a distance of about a chain, or a chain and a half. So I went first and I scrambled across there. I broke all records getting across that open patch. The sniper who was down below fired a shot at me but he missed as you can see. Anyway, I dropped down behind this rock and I turned round to Frank and I signalled him when I thought it was safe enough. He came bounding across, the sniper had another go and missed him too.

13:30 So, Happy Frank just dropped down beside me and he says, "Cheeky bugger isn't he?" That was his only comment.

Seems like humour was a very important part of war?

Well, without it you wouldn't survive it. You wouldn't. I mean if you took it all dead seriously you wouldn't survive it. But actually, during that little operation down there we had a chap named Harry Burden. Harry was a little bit keen on using his jaw bone.

14:00 He talked a lot. But anyway, during that operation he got shot under the right hand side of his jaw bone. The bullet went through the side, across the top of his windpipe, out the side and hit his jaw bone as it came out. And it gave him rather fearful toothache. He didn't get much sympathy from us because we reckon if he hadn't have been talking he wouldn't have got hit. Bit brutal wasn't it? Anyway, also, too, though during that Sid Bell

14:30 whom I've mentioned earlier, he was creeping forward, crouched down as we always were when we were trying to advance, and he collected a bullet down, directly from the front, and it went down, beside in his neck, straight beside his windpipe. And as he was crouched over of course the bullet went down almost parallel with his spine. It came out his back between his shoulder blades but it missed all the bones. And all of us are a heap of plumbing in there, we've got all sorts of arteries and veins and all the rest of it. It missed all of that stuff.

15:00 In some miraculous way, it made a hole in his back about the size of your fist and he bled a lot of course. And he wasn't feeling too good after that but we got him out of it, carted him back to our little, little shack, our Uma, but he was gurgling a bit and he was coughing up a bit of blood. And this sort of disturbed us we didn't quite know what it was. But he was breathing all right. And then,

15:30 during the night he gradually got worse and worse and he was gurgling a lot more and the next day he died. We had no idea what it was but we had a bloke called Jo Boothman, who had been in the Queensland Bush Nursing Service, and Jo was very, very practical and clever so he did a very rough

autopsy and he found out that when the bullet went in Sid's neck it actually just nicked the wind pipe and so it cut the inside of the windpipe and it just dripped, dripped, dripped blood all the time so he actually drowned in his own blood.

16:00 These were the sorts of things you just had to contend with.

Once again, did this make a fair amount of impact on you?

Yes, because we thought Sid would survive it and he was a pretty good sort of bloke. He was a curly-headed, you know, I suppose the women would say he was a good-looking bloke, I don't know but he was pretty good as far as we were concerned. And, we had quite a few little adventures from that era. It was

16:30 quite odd. So, we had to bury Sid, we just dug a rough old grave for him and put a little cross made out of a bit of kerosene tin and put, you know, wounded on such and such a date and died on the 13th. It was the 11th he was wounded, the 11th of December. So, we, what was I going to say, I'm sorry.

You were saying you had quite a few little adventures in that area?

17:00 Yes, we did. That's right. We had an old native there who came to us at this village which we called Villa de Scuta. Now Scuta apparently means flea in Spanish or Tedum or whatever it is. And, it was just called the house of fleas, which was pretty appropriate. And he came to us with a frightful wound in his left hand. He had had a spear belted through it during a tribal fight between the natives you see. And he had all that plastered up with something that looked like cow dung

17:30 bits of leaves and god knows what and it was throbbing. It was really quite obviously, painfully red. We ripped all that off and we tried our best. We put an emergency dressing on him and his name was Old Beralicki. He couldn't speak a word of English but we could get by with the help of some of the creados and, I didn't mention our creados before.

No, what are the creados?

Well, they were the young boys around the area who volunteered

18:00 quite willingly to be with the Australians because we possessed the power, or they thought it was power. We have revolvers, we had rifles we had guns. And that was power to them. They could go then from one village to another which, in normal circumstances, they'd be forbidden to pillage, to visit. But with us, of course, it was no problem. And they used to throw their weight around. They were proud little fellows when they could order adults around in some other village just because we were there. Oh, they loved that. And they used to be

18:30 a great help and they were a source of tremendous information. And we looked after them. In fact, I had two creados and one was named Mowbery and the other, well, we called him Dag, and the other one was Coolaberry.

You called him Dag?

Dag, yeah.

Why did you call him Dag?

He was always hanging around.

19:00 **Now, you said quite a few little adventures were a bit odd?**

Yes, yes.. After we got back from that little episode where Sid was killed. We moved back a little bit from Villa de Scuta to another uma further along the valley because we were really in too exposed a position there. And we had some boys from another section, and I don't remember why they were there,

19:30 but one of them was doing his normal routine of cleaning his weapons and all the rest of it. And I happened to be down on O Pip [Observation Post] this day, that's observation post, and when I came back I walked up towards the uma and I could see this native spread out along the ground so I walked over and had a look at him and he was lying flat on his back. But his skull was split wide open and there was no brains left in there. It was all gone, his skull was empty. And there was a bit of blood and

20:00 whatnot splattered round behind. And I thought, what the heck's going on here. So anyway the blokes told me that this chap was cleaning his Bren and doing the correct routine but he was distracted in some way. You always had to do the operation of cleaning, pulling the bolt back and fire it to make sure everything functioned well and then put the magazine on. He did it in the wrong sequence, he put the magazine on first. And it was on the No. 4 Gas Port so of course it fired two shots.

20:30 The first bullet hit this native right in the centre of the forehead and that split his head right open along the skull lines, the fractures of the metre, and it blew it all away so that his skull was completely empty. And his brain splattered back. Unfortunately we had a bullock, or part of a bullock hanging up there that we were going to eat and it splattered all over this. So, yeah, his brains did. So, we couldn't afford to chuck it away so Bill Burley and a few others we got to it and then we were scraping these bits of brain off and

21:00 flicking it all around, you know. It was like porridge, you know, we cleaned it up pretty well but we still ate it. The other part of that aspect was that when that Bren fired two shots, the first one hit the native in the forehead but the second shot went further back to another one who was standing right behind him. And it hit him in the arm, up near the shoulder joint there, and it took his arm clean off. It just ripped the entire arm off and left a jagged piece of meat and bones hanging there.

21:30 Well, once again, Jo Boothman came to the fore and he trimmed off the bone, sewed all this up, tied up the arteries and the native got up and walked away.

After, how long was the operation in itself?

Well, just as long as it took to tie him up. They held him down and did this because we had no anaesthetics or anything, you know. And it wasn't exactly the vicar's tea party, you know, it was a bit rough.

How many of you were trained in first aid?

22:00 Well, practically none of us. We had no doctor either. There was a doctor on the island but he might as well have been on the moon. I mean, he was miles away and you measured things in hours and days to get to anybody there so he was back over the other side of the Romolo Range.

But I mean, if an independent company is an independent company surely they'd have to have some kind of medical support?

Well, yes, officially there was. We did have a doctor.

22:30 To get to him was, of course, was quite a difficult matter. And, really, you could not have a doctor with every section. That was not on. Because he'd have to be a fighting man then and that's against the rules.

Right. Well, I'll just let you continue the story now, anyway.

At any rate, this native got up and walked away. From that point on, it couldn't be explained to them that this was just an accident. So we had trouble in that area getting help from the natives and I don't blame them in a way.

23:00 But the bloke that fired the Bren it was completely an accident on his part. He had no intention of doing anything. It was just a mistake.

Now, when you say you scraped the brains off the buffalo was it?

Yes, buffalo, yeah.

The buffalo was actually hanging up, preparatory to being eaten was it?

Yes, that's right. We used to cut lumps off it. It was hanging up.

And you still went ahead and ate it?

Well, what else. I mean, a lot of this

23:30 is embedded in the Christian idea, you know, of not touching the human body or something, eating it and all the rest of it. But after all, if we had washed that buffalo down, we didn't have water to do it with because you couldn't depend on the water. But if we had done that, then of course everyone would have accepted it I suppose but we just scraped it and just ploughed in.

So after that, did the support of the locals diminish?

In that area but then of course

24:00 it very soon became apparent, after a lot of propaganda on our part, that it was just an accident and that will never happen again, you know. But we had some excellent fellows there who, for example I'll mention one, Snowy Sten. At one stage one of the other sections, not mine, they were led, the Japs were led in to ambush them one morning by a native whom they trusted as a ronda. And,

24:30 Snowy recognised this bloke when he let him in so he chased him and got him with a bayonet and skewered him on the side of the hill. But very seldom did we have that sort of betrayal. Indeed we depended to an enormous extent upon the co-operation of the Timorese. And we used to give them, because we had no food, we just had to buy everything from them, with our own money, and

25:00 I spent ten pounds, at that stage, which was a small fortune to me by the way. And we spent all our own money and then we had to give them surets. That's little bits of paper which, say, such and such, so many bananas, so much and it was worth so much. And they were to be honoured by the Australian Government. When we got back here, I contacted a politician and I regret that I didn't keep the messages or write anything down about it. I wrote to him on this issue and said that we

25:30 should honour those surets. And his reply to me by phone was, Oh, look, you can forget it, there, he said, they'll all be dead by now. That stunned me, I nearly dropped the phone. I've never forgotten that.

How soon after the war was that?

That was quite a while after because I thought all this would have been done.

How did you discover it hadn't been done?

I forget how that came about but I just wondered whether it had been done because

26:00 first of all, how would you ever find all of these natives anyway. We didn't know their full names there was no such thing as an address or anything like that. But certainly, if those surets had been presented, with their names written on them and we gave them their bit of paper with their name on them, they'd have been honoured by us anyway.

Do you think the Timorese knew what the Surets meant?

Oh yes, they did. Oh yeah, there was no doubt about that. And we felt betrayed by that.

And obviously, they were betrayed by that as well?

Yes, they were.

26:30 And those things which you may say are fairly small matters but they have an enormous international impact. We don't know if that had a final impact after the war on Australia's reputation over there but it must have.

How many of the surets did you hand out?

Well every time we had to buy anything. For example, you'd buy a hand of bananas for about 5 patakas or something and, you know,

27:00 really a native could live there, on a hundred patakas for say a year and a pataka was one and sixpence.

It's remarkable they didn't try and hand them in at any rate?

Well after we were hunted out, there was no one to whom to hand them in. They had to hide everything then because if they were caught with anything with Australian writing or any contact with us they were slaughtered.

I can imagine.

27:30 **So to take the story on from here. To continue the narrative of what happened after this gun pit episode where the man was shot?**

Actually it wasn't in the gun pit it was out in the open, just outside this uma. I use the word uma because that's the native word for a hut.

So let's continue the story on from here?

Well gradually, from that point on, the Japs had developed a programme because they realised that their idea of befriending the natives would never work.

28:00 So they developed which was more normal to them, one of brutality. That is, they just went through and burnt all the umas, and slaughtered anyone who resisted and they raped a few of the women and all this sort of thing, you see. And they actually frightened the Timorese into giving us any further help. When they did that they began to win because then we could no longer sustain ourselves.

You said they frightened the Timorese into giving us further help?

That's right. They frightened them into offering us any

28:30 further help. So they immediately then turned sides and they went over to the Japs. Well, in a way, they had a right to survive and we couldn't offer them the power that the Japs had. We had no heavy guns, we had no mortars we had nothing. We couldn't guarantee their own futures, we couldn't even guarantee our own. So there was nothing really to induce them to stay with us when they were in dire danger themselves.

29:00 **At this time, how did it feel to you or how did your chances of survival appear to be to you?**

Not too good. We wouldn't have been a good insurance risk I think. Because, particularly at this stage of the game when the Japs had the upper hand, we knew that our time was limited.

How long had you been there by this time?

Only until about January the following year, that was in 1943.

So, by the point in time when you realised that things weren't looking too good.

29:30 **In terms of numbers of months, how long had you been there?**

Four months. A little over four months. Five months perhaps but that's all. And we, we knew, as troops always do, that there is a move afoot. So we had to destroy our radios etc., head off over the Romolo Range and we eventually came down through a place called Alice and then went on to the beach there

where we were to be picked up

30:00 by another destroyer. And that was the Arunta. HMAS Arunta. So I had the last trip on the Voyager and the first on the Arunta, that was her maiden trip.

Now, just before we leave Timor, you referred to sending scheds back to Australia and you mentioned the authenticator code word. Can you give us a bit more detail on what was involved in sending a sched?

There was always a time period when the

30:30 people back in Darwin had to listen because we had a definite time at which that sched would be sent. And even if it was a few minutes late provided that code word was there, they knew it was O.K. Because that code word was never written down so the Japs could never get it.

Did the code word change periodically?

Yes, oh, yes.

How often would it be changed?

I don't recall exactly because even our Sigs [Signalmen] knew the importance of secrecy and they didn't tell us just in case.

And was communication

31:00 **in the clear or was it using Morse code?**

Oh no, always Morse, oh yeah. And in jumbled code.

Now were you with the same seven men all the way through?

Well, after we lost a couple of course. We lost Sid Bell and Snowy. And then we were diminished from that point on, of course.

So you were down to at least five and it stayed that way?

Yes.

Did you hear what was happening to your colleagues from elsewhere?

31:30 Not a great deal because we didn't have any sort of social contact, if you could call it that, and it was not politic to relay on the radio anything that was happening to any other section. We knew they all existed, we knew where they were pretty well but there was never any contact with them with the result that when we came back to Darwin there were quite a number of the blokes we hadn't actually met.

It must have been an unreal situation?

Yes it was, indeed.

Now earlier in the interview we mentioned rations.

32:00 **What sort of food were you eating there in Timor?**

We used to eat Buffalo when we could buy it, and rice and sweet spuds and we were all, in spite of what people may think, we were nearly always and all sick. Because, well I had dengue [fever], acne, tinea, dysentery, singaporia and malaria and, of course, you didn't feel too good with all that stuff.

32:30 Oh, dengue I didn't get until New Guinea and I got all the rest there and, of course, you feel terribly weak, particularly dysentery, that's the one that drags you down.

And what is singaporia?

Singaporia. It is a germ that gets into your ear and it eats away and it's terribly painful and it sends you deaf too eventually.

So how do you work on that, how do you cure it?

We just used to dig them out and scratch about and wash and all that sort of stuff I don't know how we ever got out of it.

33:00 But somehow or other we survived it.

You're hearing's all right today by the sound of it?

Well I'm a little bit deaf in that ear but that's all.

What about emergency rations, did you go on to those at all?

Well, I carried my emergency rations and I carried them all the way until I got back here. So somehow or another we survived without it. But the rice, of course, there was no sugar, no salt, we had none of

those things

33:30 so we just used to live with whatever the natives had.

So you were told to literally live off the land?

Yes, but we weren't provided with the means to do that. Because, as I said, it's an occupied country. You couldn't just go around raiding the little farms or the plots that the natives used for their own sustenance. When we did that we had to pay for it and we paid for it with those surets that were never honoured. So it turned out, finally, to be theft.

Now

34:00 **you mentioned I think that you were on one of the machine guns?**

I was a Bren gunner.

You were a Bren gunner, O.K. Were you expected to remain on the Bren at all times?

No, for example, the time that we did the first survey of the bridge between Atsabe and Bobnara I had my rifle. I don't know why I went there with the rifle instead but I would have been asked to.

Talking about that bridge, you referred to laying charges I think, or preparing to lay charges.

34:30 **Were you able to get back there at any point to lay the charges?**

Well we did the second time, that's when I had the Bren. When I mentioned that they were sniping at the boys from the other side of the river.

Oh, I see on that occasion.

Yes, that was the second time.

And, did the bridge go up?

Oh, yes, they blew it up but it wasn't a totally successful job and really in military terms it was actually worth nothing because the Japs really didn't need it. They could build it up again in a day.

So, if it was only partially successful what happened?

35:00 Well it collapsed one end of the bridge but, of course, they just built it up again. So maybe it raised our morale and of course it raised the confidence of the Timorese in what sort of noise we could make.

Did you, I mean I've seen Damien Parer [war correspondent] newsreel footage of one of the independent companies there in Timor?

That was us.

That was you. Did Parer go in there with you?

Well, I've never seen him.

35:30 But he was further up on the Romolo Range he didn't come out to the section where we were.

One of the people he filmed was Bull Laidler?

Yes, that's right. Well he was a 2nd Company Captain.

And did you know him, personally?

I've met him but I didn't know him, of course.

Who were some of the officers that especially impressed you among the independent company?

Well, one of the chaps that, for which I had a lot of time and he's

36:00 still alive but he's unfortunately got Alzheimer's now. And he was the skipper of B Platoon and his name was Gordon Hart and he lives down here in Kingsgrove now. And he was a terrific sort of bloke. A very practical, down to earth, tough sort of a man, too. And he was with us right through until New Guinea. I must say, in fairness, that we did have one, one

36:30 disappointment in an officer. He was a fellow who simply realised that his nerves were getting the better of him and he couldn't do it. So he, he made a few excuses and got himself sent back. And we weren't very sorry to see him go because we don't need them.

What do you think are the characteristics of a good officer?

Well, it's not something that can ever be made or learned in military college or anything else. It's got to first be

37:00 his personality. He's got to be the type of bloke that people trust and like. And all the rest he can learn.

He's got to have a fair bit of judgement though and we had some fellows who were still privates who would have made damn good officers, too. But this is the way in the Australian Army. You didn't have to go to a special school or anything or that sort or the stupidity of having a descent from Royalty like the British army.

37:30 We didn't have any of that.

And leading on from that, what were the essential qualities for leadership do you think?

Well, certainly an element of courage like I've mentioned Jack Callaghan had who didn't seem to have any nerves at all and used to worry me at times. But a fair bit of intelligence and tact because you've got to understand what the other bloke is going through and you've got to do it yourself. And, unless you're game enough to do it yourself

38:00 no one is ever going to take any notice of you. It's a bit like, in civil life, very often the head of a department can't even do the jobs that he's expecting all his underlings to do. And so he's disrespected, they just disregard him completely.

So, it's very much a case of lead by example?

It is, of course it is, yeah. And by quality. No, if his quality is not there, it doesn't matter what other abilities

38:30 he's got he'll be disregarded.

Now I've seen the original camera footage for Damien Parer's newsreel, Special Men of Timor. There's a sequence where the Australian commandos are handing out money to the Timorese. Was that done as a matter of routine?

That should have been done as a matter of routine because there are some areas where they did have some money to buy for food. But when we were out in the sections, the group that I was with, 7 Section near Atsabe,

39:00 we'd exhausted all our money, we only had paper surest to hand out and they should have been honoured. That worries me still.

I just wondered to what extent the money was used for buying the loyalty of the Timorese. Was that ever an issue?

No, I don't think that was it at all. I don't think you can ever bribe someone into loyalty. I think that's a mistake. You can, you can get a certain amount of acquiescence, you can get a certain amount of submission but you'll never get loyalty that way. There has got to be the old element of trust and confidence and integrity and unless they are there you won't make it.

We'll have to change tapes.

Tape 6

00:32 **The reason that I asked that question about the money being handed out to the Timorese is that in the Men of Timor there is footage of a long line of Timorese being given money by Australian soldiers and it doesn't look like an ordinary purchase?**

No, and it also doesn't look realistic to me. And I've never seen that happen. Whenever we paid money for anything and, as I recalled a little while ago, after we'd got right down to Fatu Berlio rejoined the unit after the shemozzle up at Same saddle

01:00 I still paid out some money for some food then but that was the end of it, I had none left then. And, I believe there had been some money sent over to Timor but we never saw it.

Now, while the camera was off you were making some reflections on courage. Could you talk about that?

Yes. I think it's one of the manifestations of humanity that courage or fear, or whatever you like to call it is a normal part of the human make up

01:30 and it's a provision of nature to ensure the continuation of the species and I don't think you can ever declare that some form of apprehension or fear doesn't exist in a person. It's the overcoming of that that is courage. And some people are blessed with an abundance of it and others aren't. It's pretty unfair to condemn a bloke who doesn't have that abundance because he has no say in it, it's built in him from birth. And while men have been

02:00 shot for cowardice, not Australians, but British troops in the first war, it's not their fault it's born in them.

You've referred to one of the men, I think it was an officer, who didn't have enough fear. What was the danger with that?

Well, he was only a corporal at that stage, Jack Callagher. Well the danger was that he would do things repeatedly. That is, he would go to the same place day after day and that to me

02:30 is fundamentally the wrong thing to do. So whenever he and I used to go down, or three of us used to go down, to Atsabe just to survey the scene and pick up a bit of gossip. Jack always went to the same building to this old Nissan and I was very concerned about that because I knew some day someone would wait for us. I thought it was, I used to tell him it was a lack of judgement but then of course his response was, "Oh yeah, you're cowardly, you know." Mind you,

03:00 I don't think he ever meant that but you wanted to just get the information and then get out again.

That's that situation. Do you think there's a point where courage becomes folly?

Yes, yes there is. There are those that say that the Japanese are very brave but that's not the case at all. If, you might as well say a little child is brave when he'll walk out onto a road. He has no idea of what's coming. And if the Japanese, for example, were brainwashed to the extent that they were

03:30 that it's their duty to die for the Emperor, all this type of stuff, right, then you're quite beyond the normal rational reasoning of a human being and I don't think that can be categorised as courage at all. For a man to feel that there is an inherent danger to himself and to his mates and he still overcomes that, that is courage.

There was the term used, and it seems to have been used in all services including the RAAF, and that

04:00 **was lack of moral fibre. Was that term ever used in your hearing?**

Well, I've heard of it but of course we didn't use that. I mean we would never accuse each other of anything like that. I suppose there was always a bit of bravado amongst it because we always tried to show that we were never frightened anyway, you'd just feel ashamed if you showed that but it would be unrealistic to pretend that we didn't have it.

How did you overcome that?

Just by stiggling yourself to pretending, it's like having a cut in your hand

04:30 and you say it doesn't hurt. You've damaged yourself in some way and you keep saying, oh, it's nothing, it's not there. You can beat that for a while but I think eventually it must get to you?

Did you ever feel it getting to you?

Yes I did. And I've spoken to a few of the other boys since the war and I've confessed that and they've immediately come out and confessed the same. So I don't feel so bad.

Could you describe how it was getting to you?

Yes.

05:00 You become very, very touchy. The slightest unusual sound or movement and you immediately dive, put your hand on your revolver or something. You've got to be ready at all times and it's, it's an unnatural state. A human isn't really made that way. You must be working at the top edge of your nerves perhaps.

So it's a constant state of flight or fight?

Yes, it is, yeah, yeah.

Did you ever feel that this

05:30 **was endangering your judgement?**

It doesn't endanger your judgement but it does endanger your physical and mental capacity to carry it out because you recognise what should be done. That part of your brain is not affected but being able to overcome that fear and to try to conserve yourself is a problem that you've got to overcome and that's pretty hard to do sometimes.

06:00 **Endanger your physical or mental capacity, can you be more specific about both of those areas, about how both of those areas might be endangered?**

Well, if, if you're really, my apologies. If you're really

Well, we'll get you to talk after you've removed the shoes otherwise your voice will be down off.

Sorry about that, I forgot about it.

That's all right, no, I just remembered myself.

If, if fear takes

06:30 control of you so that you're actual, your blood turns cold and you feel that fear on your skin and so on,

it takes a lot of mental determination to pursue whatever you perceive to be the correct thing to do under those circumstances and some simply can't do it. Those who can do it have got what I call courage. There are certain times when the most frightening

07:00 situation doesn't require that sort of determination because there is a sudden determination to do the right thing without consideration of its consequences. Like, for example, a woman would always try to fight a snake that was attacking her baby, or a dog. They would attack it, even though they know they are going to lose that fight. But if they were told to sit back and then consider and contemplate that fight they wouldn't take it on.

Do you think your

07:30 **resourcefulness and your resilience under these circumstances was due to your age at the time?**

Part of it and also my lack of judgement, it was probably due to that too, I'd have to confess that.

Lack of judgement in what kinds of ways?

Well, I think social judgement, being brought up on the farm and isolated very largely from the rough side of life. Sometimes some of the boys used to surprise me in some of their antics.

08:00 **What sort of things?**

Well, a lot, not a lot but some of them were a bit keen on the booze and a few things like that and I must say that I think that was a lesson too because I've learned during that time and since that the rough edges of a man don't really matter much. It's his inner quality that's of consequence and, in particular, if I may quote a bloke who I knew who, I

08:30 formed quite a friendship with him and he claimed that he'd been in every jail between Melbourne and Cairns but, he said, never for anything wrong. And I thought, oh yeah, well, for what? He said always for fighting with the cops or drunk and disorderly or something like that but he never molested or bashed anybody or done anything fundamentally wrong. He had a weakness for alcohol but he was a particularly bright sort of man. With a lot of rough edges but his quality was there.

09:00 I liked the man.

When you were on this patrol, there were seven of you patrolling an area of 20 square miles, for how long did that patrol take place?

Well we were there all of the time that we were over on the north side of the Romolo Range until we got hunted out.

So that was most of the time that you were on Timor?

Yes it was, yes.

Can you give us a bit of a, I think you've mentioned one or two of the men but for the men that you haven't mentioned can you describe them and their personalities and what you might have known about their background?

It's quite

09:30 surprising how little we knew about each other's background. And that was brought home to me one day when, after I'd known the boys for a long, long time, Jack Callaghan and I were speaking one day and he said, "You were on a farm weren't you?" As though it was a sudden surprise and I thought, yeah, yeah. Because we knew very, very little about each other. Many times we didn't even know each other's name but we knew the bloke.

This is among

10:00 **the seven of you?**

Yeah.

It would have been hard, having spent some time, having spent four months together, not to get to know the names of these other men?

We knew the nicknames, that's all we needed, we knew the blokes. We knew how they'd respond to every single situation.

What were the nicknames?

Well there was Bluey of course, we always had a Bluey and then there was Bill Burley, and he was a redhead and should have been called Bluey, but he was always called Bill and Snowy Horrigan of course and

10:30 I was one of the youngest, I was called Sunny, not from my nature, just from my age and, well, then there was Curly Papworth. I don't even know to this day what his name was but that was his name. Then Bluey Levy. So, Darkie Harrison, now he was a man who, he joined up first when he was fourteen

and he joined up under a series of names.

- 11:00 But first of all when he joined up his mother came and dragged him out of the army and sent him back to school. So he joined up again and he had a series of names, he picked out all Irish names. He was Harrison, O'Shea, Kinnane, Wheelan and some other name I forget what it was. But anyway, he joined up under all these names and eventually when he was with us he was called Harrison, Darkie Harrison

And so you got to know the personalities of all these men?

All. You get to

- 11:30 know them very well indeed.

Could you describe these personalities for us?

Perhaps it's a bit difficult, it might even be unfair to do that but, yes, there were those who were inherently cheerful. You could always pick them. There was like, Happy Frank, who I mentioned a while ago. Bill Burley who was an automatic likeable character, he had a wonderful, radiant type of personality, Bill. He used to do Hula

- 12:00 dances for the kids over there in Timor and of course Bill wasn't the figure for a Hula dancer. Blimey. But anyway, he had them in raptures, they used to roll around, they loved him. He was the red-headed curly bloke that I just mentioned. But Bill was a great bloke he had a good balance of personal courage, a lot of ability and he had a good personality as well and he was very capable. There was no such thing as pretence or affectation about him at all.
- 12:30 We became pretty good mates Bill and I. But then, finally after the war, fate treated him very cruelly, he died of Parkinson's disease. And then, of goodness sake, a couple of years after that his daughter died of a sudden heart attack. So there was our last link with Bill.

Now you said there was a few humorists in the company? Well, can you elaborate on that at all?

- 13:00 Some of them were quite strange, there was Old Buck. Now I've never known his first name but his surname was Bukowski so we called him Old Buck. And he was a really wild sort of a man. He was absolutely unperturbed by anybody. He would never have apologised or bowed to the King. He was a complete entity unto himself and sometimes on parade he'd get there in the back row when we were all
- 13:30 lined up, back here this is, and he'd start yelling out and making a noise. And of course some of the officers up in front, who's that man, you know. And of course, he'd go dead quiet and then as soon as they'd turn around he'd start again. And he would keep this up until he nearly drove them mad.

What was he saying?

Oh nothing, he'd just make a noise. He just used to make a noise and I recall one occasion when he was on a truck going past the parade ground and he's standing on the top of the truck yelling out, making all this blinking noise as though he expected someone to understand it. It was all gibberish.

- 14:00 The rest of us could hardly stand up for laughing, you know. And he was like that all the way through. He always carried a knuckle duster, he used to carry two knuckle dusters and he had spikes built up on the knuckles so that if he ever got caught, and he had a blade hanging down about this far, so that if he ever got caught he could make a good go of himself. And he could fight like a thrashing machine too. He was a very wild man. But finally he got knocked off very cruelly.

During this, Timor?

No, not during Timor but on the

- 14:30 way to New Guinea.

When you were out on patrol, how often was humour playing its part?

Oh, nearly all the time. There was always something to have a joke about. I mean, if you didn't do that, if you considered everything as deadly serious you wouldn't survive it for long because it would get to you.

Can you give an example of the sort of humour that was happening out on patrol?

Well, I can't think of the specific things. There was one occasion when we were over near Bobanara and

- 15:00 and there was Dave Craven, Jack Callagher and myself and Dave and Jack had to go down to Bobanara to do a survey of the place and try to find out how many nips were in the town because it was between Atsabe and Suai. So I was left back there looking after all our creados and to just keep
- 15:30 an idea of what was happening. While we were there, all of a sudden, my creados who were around suddenly developed, as though it was magic, in amongst all of them, they suddenly developed a tremendous fear and they came racing back towards me. And I looked around and wondered what was on and then I realised there was a Timorese coming towards them who had, probably rabies or

something, he was absolutely mad anyway and I've never seen it before but he was foaming at the mouth, like, this, and yelling

16:00 and they were telling me that he was going to report us in to the Japs. So they said, "Kill him, tuan, kill him," and that means, you know, shoot him down. So I pulled out my revolver and I pointed it towards him and walked up to him and then he started backing off a bit and he was going backwards and they're still yelling at us, but he knew what a revolver meant. And he knew he was going to cop it. So he back straight off and eventually he kept getting further and further away and I thought well now, it's very hard to shoot somebody down

16:30 if he's unarmed. So I thought if he disappears it doesn't worry, it's no matter because the Japs wouldn't take any notice of him, he's mad. Well, I took no further notice of that. He just disappeared into the scrub. But then shortly our creados all got together and they chased him, they belted him down with stones and they had him on the ground and they were pounding him with big stones that they could hardly carry. They pounded him into the ground and left him for dead. Now,

17:00 it would have been the humane thing for me to have shot him earlier but I didn't. So they came back, they were quite satisfied that they'd killed him. So we just dossed there that night anyway and the next morning went out to have a look and he'd gone. Now that really worried them because they figured then, who got him? How did he get away because he was dead when we left him? That really had them worried. They were characters.

Did you ever find out?

No, I've got no idea.

Once again,

17:30 **in the Damien Parer footage there's footage of Timorese accompanying the commandos. These would have been the creados would they?**

Yes, yes.

They also had packhorses?

Yes, they had kutas, they were small Timorese ponies, yeah.

Did you have access to those?

We didn't have them where I was but we used to get supplies sent in when they were delivered on the southern shore of Timor and they'd brought across on the kutas. And, on one occasion, both Bill and I had to escort a pack of kutas coming across there and oh, it was a funny story that,

18:00 we lost one that fell down a cliff and oh, a few things like that. But, you know, it was a bit of a rough house really.

Can you describe the terrain you were moving through?

It was absolutely rugged. It is, if I understand it correctly, it is the most mountainous island of its area, on earth. And there is a flat country, that we call it, it's like our mountainous area,

18:30 but it's the flat country between the range and the sea and that extended on both sides of the Romolo Range. But people tend to think it's all jungle, just because it's in the tropics but as I said it was all occupied except the really precipitous areas and also some of the flat country in the south where I suspect there's a lot of malaria so it wasn't really occupied very much.

Were you taking Atebrin at all?

We didn't have any at that stage we just had to cop whatever came.

19:00 **Did you get Malaria?**

Yes, oh yes. But I got BT not MT fortunately. Fortunate indeed!!

Could you make the distinction between the two, I haven't heard that before?

Oh BT is called benign torsion but don't believe the benign bit, it's not, it's flaming terrible really, but it's the one that recurs and it won't kill you usually, not usually, but it recurs for about five or six years and if, after seven years, you haven't had a recurrence you're free of it. It gradually wears out of the system. But MT

19:30 is called malignant torsion and that's the one that attacks the spine and gets up into the cerebellum and the brain here and that kills people and it lays them really cold. It's the dangerous one.

You were mentioning the range of illnesses that you had at one point. Did you have them simultaneously?

Yes, yes, I did.

How did that affect your ability to?

Very badly, very badly indeed because, particularly with dysentery and malaria, if you have those two together

20:00 you're practically a cot case or a coffin case. Because malaria is so absolutely utterly enervating that you can't really do anything about it. When you've got malaria it's just as though there are a group of horses holding you down. You can't get up and you can't do a darned thing.

Were you able to rest at all?

Oh no, you've just got to keep going.

So you kept moving despite these illnesses?

You've got to, there's no option.

Did it affect your, your capacity

20:30 **to think clearly?**

Well, it affects your wish to stay alive, I'll say that for it but you can still reason on things that you should be doing. It doesn't affect really you there but you certainly lose the will to live. You really don't want to bother, just get it over with.

So how close did that situation come for you?

Well it does, it did, of courses, but you realise that it's only malaria and eventually you'll survive it in some way. So we just put up with it.

21:00 **And obviously with some of the other men having the same sort of situation there was?**

Well, we all just laughed at each other when we had malaria there was nothing else to do.

Did you?

Oh yeah.

It was another way of getting through it?

Oh yeah, of course. I mean, you see a bloke on the ground, he's absolutely writhing around, kicking like a snake that's just had its back broken, you know. And you know it's just malaria so you leave him. And eventually, if he gets out into the sun then he's a lather of sweat and he just can't do a thing, he just collapses in a heap and he lies as still as anything. So you drag him into the

21:30 shade again and so on. There's nothing you can do about it. It's just one of those things that you put up with.

And yet you're talking about humour in a situation like this? I mean, what would you say? I mean, could you give me an example, if you see a man writhing around on the ground, obviously in a profoundly wretched state what would you say to him?

There's nothing much you can say. And he knows quite well that you're in full sympathy with him but you can do nothing about it. So, you're going through it again, or something like that, you know.

22:00 **I just need to check something here. Now, how often were you able to do essential things like wash and shave?**

We didn't shave at all and washing was a luxury if you could do it but we always had to ask the creados was the water any good because when you were washing your face particularly you always had to be careful you didn't inhale any or eat any water that was

22:30 on the blink because it would really set you off with dysentery even if you already had it.

How would the creados know?

Somehow they used to know. I don't know why. You'd see a beautifully clean stream coming out of a mountain and they'd say, "Ladi actu, ladi actu" so you didn't go near that. That means no good.

Were they creados that knew the area intimately anyway?

Well, if they weren't they could always ask others and they knew. So

23:00 we really valued our creados I can tell you that. They were wonderful.

Yes, they seem to be absolute gems by the sound of it?

Well, very few of us would still be there. I mean we wouldn't be having this conversation if we hadn't had their help. No question.

How many, I'm sure you mentioned this before, but how many creados did you have with your

group?

Well, each bloke usually had a creado but because I was a Bren gunner I had two. And there was Mowberry and Coolaberry.

23:30 **So what were the duties of those two creados?**

Well, they didn't really do very much except when we were on the move. One of them used to carry my Bren magazines if possible and, or some of them, not all of them of course. And sometimes Coolaberry used to do some of the cooking, cooking these sweet spuds but their cooking was always a little bit on the blink because they used to cook in pig fat and, oh, gee, we all got horribly

24:00 sick and we developed what we used to call a rice gut. That is, we all got distended stomachs, even though we were hungry. It was a bit like the starvations pictures you see in Africa, you know. And it's not the common picture that people have of commandos but it's a rough game.

How long did the rice gut continue for?

Quite a while after the war. It took a while to go down. I, I

24:30 developed the idea then that I was pretty unfit, and I was, right up until '46. So I took on a programme of doing exercises myself all the time, push ups and sit ups and all that sort of thing and eventually I got back into a reasonable health but just early in '46 and late '45 I was really very ill.

I can imagine. You mention it was two men out of the seven that had died?

Yes.

So that you were five

25:00 **of you. Was this for most of the time there were only five of you or?**

Yes that would have been most of the time because that was, well that was in December when Sid was killed and, of course, it was as soon as we got there when Snowy was killed that was after we arrived.

I imagine the five of you survivors would have had to be particularly supportive, you know, to each other after the death of the other two?

Well, yes, that's true but that wasn't the motivating force, I mean we were automatically anyway, you know.

25:30 It takes a certain amount of absolutely mandatory loyalty. If you're feeling very hungry yourself and you find a bunch of bananas, not to eat them, but to take them home to the boys. These are the sort of issues that are important when you're living together. It's not all blood and thunder. There's a lot of social cohesion which must be working very well or else the group is no damned good.

Was the social cohesion taught or learnt?

No, it's just learned. It's automatic I think.

26:00 Most people, we see certain manifestations of that for example in our disasters here. Like, for example, during the tremendous storms people spoke to each other for a change. After the fires in Canberra, people talked to each other, right. There is a certain amount of help in any sort of major disaster and we were in a continuous disaster.

What do you think

26:30 **makes a good commando?**

First of all there must be an absolute unshakeable loyalty to both his mates and to his country. And without that he's no damned good at all. Because if he's not loyal, particularly the first instance is to his mates, if he's not loyal there well he's not really worth anything because he can't pull his weight.

27:00 You've got to have that. People, you can be taught how to use a rifle, you can be taught how to do all sorts of other things but the basic integrity of a man has got to be there and if it's not there then of course you can't sustain it. You can't sustain the impact of the emotions etc.

So those are two of the most important things. What other aspects, what other attributes spring to mind?

Of course you need to be physically fit

27:30 and it's a tremendous help to have done a huge amount of other things which all of us had. We'd all been in other nits, some were in artillery, some were in infantry, some were in horsemen etc. etc. They could all do something else and particularly the blokes who'd lived in the country or been bushmen in some way. They were overwhelmingly valuable.

So, just to get back to not washing and not shaving.

28:00 **Once again we were discussing this during a tape change. Why did you not wash?**

It was very, very unsafe to strip off or to take your boots off. You had to be very, very careful that you weren't immobilised for a moment and I recall sitting in a creek trying to wash once with my revolver just on the rock beside me and I never got beyond arms length of it either. It's not quite the way you can relax, floating around in a stream or anything like that.

28:30 You can't do that.

Did you have anything to do with the Portuguese there?

Yes, quite a bit. The Portuguese of course in their administration of the island they came there after the 1927 rebellion in Portugal. A lot of them were deported as communist agitators. And they were deported to what finally turned out to them to be paradise because they had all their servants and they had native wives and all the rest of it and they did no work.

29:00 **Just like Feudal Lords?**

Yes, well virtually. And there were some progressive ones among them who tried to make things work and they imported ploughs and tried to educate the natives into doing productive work but of course, as was usual, the Timorese converted those, anything of steel they converted into spears and swords. And into their katanas. That's a long sword well about two and a half feet, three feet long.

29:30 Much like a Japanese samurai sword. They made those and they used those against us, too.

What can you tell us about the Portuguese that you met?

Well, they came there about 400 odd years ago and they brought the weapons that were current at that time. They brought, for example, their old flintlock muskets and all those sorts of things. And I have the rare distinction of being fired at by a flintlock musket. But

Was it seriously a four hundred year old weapon?

30:00 They all were. They all were, they brought them there at that time.

So we're not talking about previously 400 year old weapons having been replaced we're talking about the original weapons still being in use?

Oh yes. Well, when you look at them you can quite well believe it, yes. Just by the manufacturing marks on them, how they were built and that, hammer marks still on them, all that sort of thing. And they were husbanded of course by the Timorese. The Portuguese, of course, had later rifles most of them.

When you say husbanded, what do you mean by that?

30:30 Well, cared for.

Cared for. You mean the Timorese had taken them or?

Well I don't know what the transition was but a lot of them had them.

So you're referring to a 400 year old musket being fired at you. What was the situation there?

Yeah. Well those that were with the Japanese you see, they used any weapon they could get because the Japs, like us, weren't really game to arm the Timorese that much. Although sometimes we'd have liked to. But you could watch him,

31:00 he was shooting at you and you'd see first, he'd aim it up, pull the flintlock back, and of course when it flashed over there was a big puff of smoke from the pan and it gradually went along the powder train and he had to hold it dead still. But while he was holding it dead still to aim at you for it to fire, you'd just duck down behind a rock or a tree or whatever it was. And there used to be bits of stones and bits of steel and all sorts of rubbish go everywhere but none of us was ever hit. But they were no match for our .303s.

31:30 **Funny that.**

I think it's quite a distinction that.

I think it's a great distinction. It's wonderful. Now under what circumstances did you meet the Portuguese?

Well, we tried to make contact with them of course immediately because they had authority, a certain amount among what are called the rondas, the native chiefs, the tribal chiefs of the island. And they also had a lot of information. And one in particular that we had over at Atsabe was a chap named

32:00 Alexandrino, he was an armourer in the Portuguese army at Macau. He was an armourer there. And he was particularly valuable to us. He wasn't a bad sort of joker, we formed quite a relationship with him.

When you say you formed quite a relationship with him. What was he able to help you with?

Well, any weapons that weren't quite O.K. He was very good with his tools,

32:30 you know, filing and all that sort of thing and he could do jobs like straightening Bren magazines all that sort of stuff. Anything that was necessary, he was very good.

Were there other Portuguese that stand out in your memory?"

Yes, a few of them were, there were some of them hand in glove with the Japs of course. As you'd expect. Because once again they tried to protect themselves and their families and all the rest of it and we couldn't offer them the protection which they needed.

33:00 We didn't have the strength. And some of them were quite unreliable and we had one at Atsabe there who was still a diehard commo and each morning he'd get out and start singing 'The International.' Gosh, it was hilarious. Still not with it, you know. Well, they're entitled to their attitudes and their viewpoints and

33:30 we valued the information we could get from them and all the rest of it and their cooperation and also the authority they were able to exert, just through being white men, among the Timorese.

How did the Portuguese and the Timorese get on as far as you could see?

Well, very often we heard complaints from the Timorese. They wanted to get rid of the Portuguese and they told us to. Get rid of them. Get rid of both the Japs and the Portuguese. This was their message very clearly to us.

Why, what was their gripe

34:00 **against the Portuguese?**

I don't really know. I don't know. But certainly they felt themselves to be an oppressed people. But there was not the slightest doubt and this was manifested in the creados and their older men too.

Now if we're talking about the Portuguese, what was the geographical area where you had most to do with the Portuguese?

That was on the north side of the range, round Atsabe and in Bobanara.

34:30 **Apart from that you were purely in the company of the creados I presume?**

Oh, the natives, wherever they were in the particular villages, yes.

Was there any particular ritual or routine when you arrived at a village?

Yes, we always sought out the head man and offered an apology for making a noise whether we did or not and we asked his hospitality and all the rest of it and we apologise for all the soldiers who were making a noise and chattering amongst themselves.

35:00 All this sort of stuff, you know. But it was all pretty important. And we asked, are the children happy, and, you know what I mean. It may sound a little bit affectatious but no, it wasn't, because we really felt that we didn't want to frighten them anyway and we certainly wanted their friendship, no risk about that.

Were you having to deal with them through interpreters?

Well, our creados were our interpreters and they were pretty good?

35:30 We picked up a few words of course but we could speak only a few words of Tetum but not Portuguese. Because we had most to do with the Timorese and they spoke Tetum.

And to what extent were these villages, and especially the village chiefs, able to give you valuable information?

Nearly always. Nearly always. They always knew what was happening and there used to be rondas standing on each hill every night, and this was their radio,

36:00 and they'd yell out to the next ronda who was on the next hill and then he'd relay it on and so on we knew exactly, everything that was going on.

Can you be a bit more specific about what a ronda actually was?

Yes. A ronda was a guard, well we interpreted them as guards, and they were just well watchman or guards or what have you. And they relayed all the information. A bit like the town crier perhaps in England.

From pillar to post, mountain top to mountain top.

That's right, that's correct.

36:30 and our creados could interpret exactly what they meant. Not just what they said but what the meant. And this was important to us, too.

Can you give me an example of the kind of information you were getting from the Timorese

villages?

Oh yes. For example one day there at Villa de Scuta, our creados came and told us there was a mob of

37:00 Japanese moving from Bobanara coming towards Atsabe. So we Opped them to find out how many there were and what they were doing and what they were likely to be doing there and all that sort of thing. And we relayed all this back to Australia of course.

Did you ever hear of the Japanese getting stuck into any of the villages or any of the Timorese people generally in retaliation for helping you?

Well, yes, in the latter part when they burnt the villages and when they used to attack

37:30 their women etc. and they were quite brutal about that. Because it was in their natural psyche to resort to brutality whenever they wanted to but the Timorese, I must say, were more or less accustomed to a form of brutality or at least it was rough justice. And I recall one time when we were fairly high over towards the eastern part of the island. We weren't actually very far down

38:00 but we were pretty high up in the range. And we were discussing something there. And two Timorese led another one in and he was blubbing and howling a bit and making a noise, you see. And we thought, what the dickens is going on. So anyway, they led him off into the, into the track just beside the road where we were and he was making all sorts of noises that weren't really right. And it transpired that he'd stolen a horse

38:30 and the penalty for stealing a horse was decapitation you see and he wasn't looking forward to it. So, anyway, he, he kept up this incoherent noise for a while and then suddenly there was a thump from a sword and then there was just a soft swishing sound after that and everything went quiet. They were quite, I'd like to see some of that sort of justice with some of the creeps that I've met since the war. There are some disgusting

39:00 fellas that you come across in your time and really, I'm afraid if we had that sort of treatment for those who steal cars or who steal from people or steal their ideas then I think there would be a sudden reversal of their attitude.

Well, it would certainly be a very large disincentive.

It would be.

Tape 7

00:34 **So, Ian how did you come to leave Timor?**

We were simply ordered to pack up and move towards the south coast to a particular place. We did that. We knew, of course, what was afoot but while we were on the way there we had to collect all the isolated boys who were out on special operations on their own. And two of these got caught by

01:00 the natives who recognised that we were leaving and, therefore, because they were being paid 100 patakas for an Australian's head, the two of these blokes were killed. One of them was speared and it was a bit unfortunate because he was a little bit overweight and he was ill and instead of going over the top of this hill he tried to run around the side. And that's where he met the Timorese with spears. They speared him to death. And, we then

01:30 went to the south coast to be picked up by HMAS Arunta. But while we were there, there was a call for volunteers to stick around for a while and just try to maintain a presence of some sort with a radio set. Well, they did get several volunteers and, of course, some of those got the chop as well but I don't know them now, personally, I can't name them although they are all listed in the book.

02:00 The rest of us were hunted down to the, they did a very game thing, because there was no support for them whatever. The rest of us were then trundled down to the beach where we had to pick up our weapons and just chuck them into the sea. And it broke my heart to pick my Bren by its barrel and just sling it out into the surf, but I did. And then we had to scramble aboard these scrambling barges again, these fold boats, and get out to the destroyer.

02:30 And it was a big of a job, we were very, very, we were ill at this stage nearly all of us. And one bloke particularly had to be carried because he was too weak with malaria and dysentery. And to get him out on board was quite a major job. But we succeeded without casualties and got away in daylight, before daylight came, I mean.

And, I gather, the ship took you back to Australia?

Yes, she was

03:00 she was flat out on the way back, she did actually 38 knots which is 45 miles an hour and we were just belting through the blessed sea there, and we ran into a storm as well. And I recall hanging on the deck,

with my arms locked around one of the davots that holds the lifeboats, and I was just being spun around every time a wave hit. And one of the sailors came out, they did have ropes along that the sailors used to hang on to so they wouldn't get swept overboard, and he grabbed me by an arm

- 03:30 and dragged me in. I didn't have enough strength to get inside myself. And we were all hopelessly seasick of course. Of course, we made a job of the seasickness, too. I remember Tim Daley saying that, he says Quinine tastes just as good coming up as it does going down.

You must have been a sorry looking bunch?

Oh, when we got off at Darwin we were just an absolute mess.

- 04:00 **Can you describe what you all must have looked like?**

Not very well but certainly we were no inspiration for anything by that time. And of course it was recognised then, by the authorities back here, that we were in bad shape. And we were put on a special diet because if we touched anything at all that came out of a tin we immediately got violent attacks of dysentery again. We were pretty seriously affected by that. And it affected a lot of the boys for quite a while after. Some were shunted straight

- 04:30 off to hospital to get over their malaria and dysentery. But it wasn't really a rapturous homecoming but of course we didn't mind that so much we just put up with it.

So what was this special diet you were put on?

Well, I don't really recall but it was all fresh stuff. It could not be tinned for reasons I don't understand. But gradually we got over that and eventually we survived it.

- 05:00 **So how long did it take for you to recover your strength?**

Well it took months really and I don't recall the exact time but I know it was a darned long time and even for weeks and weeks later when we thought we were pretty well cured, we'd try eating a tin of pineapple or peaches or something and become violently ill. So, we just had to put up with it.

And what was the morale like of the group at this time?

Ah, it was still pretty good but we'd really

- 05:30 thought we'd had enough. We didn't really want to go to New Guinea after that. But we were sent up after a bit of leave to Canungra. We all got leave to at least go home once. And I did that and, of course, my mother got a photo of me then just, you know, just for sort of a keepsake. Then we were sent up to Queensland for a bit more jungle training in preparation for

- 06:00 New Guinea.

Well, perhaps we might come back and explore Atherton a bit later on but I'd like to move on to New Guinea just in case we miss out? So can you talk us through from your departure through to your arrival in New Guinea?

Yeah, O.K. We, from the tablelands we went down to slightly north of Cairns to a place called Trinity Bay and there we boarded some barges

- 06:30 to go out to get aboard the Henry T. Allen which was a victory ship, I think they called them at that stage. That was to take us to Milne Bay. Well, there was only one bloke hopelessly seasick before he got on the Henry T. Allen and that was me. Oh dear, I think I'm the world's worst sailor, par excellence. But anyway, we eventually got on that and we were sent up there it was quite pleasant going

- 07:00 on the in boil of the reef, you know, all the way up there and then we went into Milne Bay which is a stunningly, beautiful harbour. And a very deep, beautiful, and lined of course with all the palms and coconuts and all the rest of it. And as we were going up the harbour a Yankie submarine passed us and the crew were lining the deck and they were pointing excitedly to their conning tower, they had this series of Jap flags. I just forget how many but this series of flags were on the conning tower and they were really cheering about it.

- 07:30 We gave them a cheer anyway. That was great. Because here we realised were a few yanks doing something because up until that time the American presence in Australia was not something we admired.

Why was that?

Well, we knew what they were like.

And what were they like?

Well they were keen on the more unsavoury aspects of the various towns.

- 08:00 And they more or less took over Brisbane and that caused the Brisbane, the Battle of Brisbane, about which a book has been written. And it caused an enormous amount of trouble between some of the blokes and their wives etc. and so on. And also disgusted the general attitude of civilian population

when we compared that with, say, the discomfort that we had endured. We weren't too pleased with it.

08:30 **I can imagine. It must have?**

It jarred the wrong way.

And yet you were happy to see them doing something with this submarine?

Well these were blokes who were actually doing something. This was quite different. But some of the refuse that was hanging around in the more unsavoury areas of Brisbane and Sydney and Melbourne was just nothing to be proud about at all.

So what happened after your

09:00 **arrival at Milne Bay?**

Well, we arrived at Milne Bay and there we had to do, we had to just form a little camp which was really only a staging post and we were in amongst the tall kunai grass there and we made a camp and the boys got into, stuck into making jungle juice of course out of anything they could find and, oh my gosh, some of them got into a hopeless state.

How did they make the jungle juice?

Oh, it's amazing, out of Red Cross parcels of apricots and

09:30 peaches and raisins and what not and then ferment that and mix it up with god knows what and you could eventually make jungle juice out of it. And it really worked like it, too. Oh, some of them got really ill.

But you never tried any?

No. No, I never drank at all, it never had any fascination for me. But anyway, so we did that. There

10:00 was a film on down at or up towards the Yankie area of Milne Bay and that as called 'Seven Sweethearts' and we saw that over and over and over again. Because we just used to go in there for night times to fill in time, you know and then go back to the tent.

Was it a good movie?

Ah look, I don't even remember what it was all about, there was just these seven blinking daughters of this family or whatever, I don't know what it was about. Standard Yankie movie.

10:30 **And, so, I gather at Milne Bay you were establishing the camp and getting prepared for your next action.**

That's correct, yes.

What happened next after Milne Bay?

Well, before we left Milne Bay we had to take, do some training in mortars and Boyce anti-tank rifle. That was about a half-inch calibre rifle. Well to call it a rifle, it was a miniature cannon really.

11:00 And it was a vicious weapon. It had a muzzle velocity of well over three thousand feet per second and a heavy bullet and it used to belt back against your shoulder. I think it did more damage to us than it ever would to a tank. But we had to learn using that. And then we got issued with our section weapons again for New Guinea. And we went out then to, we were embarked then on LSTs, that's called a Landing Ship Tank,

11:30 and with these we were sent up to from Lae towards, from Milne Bay towards Lae. And I wrote up something on that for the book, which you can have at a later stage if you wish. And we, the LST is a very slow ship so we went in convoy and we had destroyers darting around and we had air cover as well. Even when we went along the very calm waters just off the eastern coast there of New Guinea.

12:00 It was beautifully calm there and I recall on day, we were just stooging along and I was, well let me explain first. The LST is designed as a ship, the centre of which is hollow. On the both sides there are air-tight compartments. They're designed such that if a torpedo hits it will explode those compartments but the ship won't sink. But, of course, the AIF then put the boys in these compartments along the side of the ship and

12:30 when we were going along there, we were in those areas which were stinking hot. Some of the boys were playing cards and mucking around all the rest of it. They had water bubblers in there to try to assuage our thirst and I recall being at a water bubbler there and I was just having a drink and somebody yelled out, zeros. Well that didn't take much interpreting so I made a dive for the ladder. And I poked my head up just as a Beauforts gun was firing directly across the deck.

13:00 Just above my head. Obviously at a Jap plane coming in. Well, the impact of a anti-aircraft shell directly adjacent to your head is really just like a bomb burst and it really nearly knocked me down flat again. But I scrambled up on the deck anyway and, of course, it was massive excitement. The sky was full of

black puffs, the Japs were attacking us, they had dive bombers, torpedo bombers and zeros all having a go at our convoy, see.

13:30 And the barge directly behind the one that I was on. When we looked back at it there was a lot of smoke coming up from one of the gun turrets and around the stern of it. And also it swung badly out of line and we didn't like the look of that. We didn't really know, of course, what it meant at that time because we were a bit busy ourselves and the zeros were coming and striking the deck but none of us were hit. And they also tried to dive bomb us

14:00 but they hit the barge behind us. Although I saw two of them come down in their dives and didn't pull out of it. Then on the port side I was watching out that way and there was an American Oerlikon gunner just up ahead and he had his Oerlikon there, pointing out to sea, and he wasn't firing anything, and suddenly he pulls out from his pocket a bible and starts reading it. I thought, mate, this is not the time for that sort of stuff.

14:30 It's the rough stuff now, you see. I don't know how he got on with that but anyway I just left him too that and concentrated on what was happening outside. Sure enough there was a Betty bomber coming in, that's a Mitsubishi, coming in and they used them for torpedo bombing. And they had to fly a certain deliberate distance above the water at a certain speed to drop their torpedos to make sure of a hit. And they also had to fire forward of the ship so that by the time the torpedo got to us, it could get us. But on the LST, only the

15:00 stern was deep, the bough was very shallow so it could nudge into the sand. So the only place they could hit us was on the stern. Well he came flying in towards us and it was quite uncanny, he was flying very calmly, and every gun on the ship, Bren guns, the Oerlikons, everything was blazing at him. And shells and bullets were going all around him and suddenly he just nose dived straight down and dived into the sea. There was an almighty splash a

15:30 tremendous splash up into the air. But nothing floated up. Not a single thing. And there was a very large circle, I suppose a hundred feet, of purely calm water. And then gradually it just, waves lapsed into it again and it became part of the normal sea. It just seemed to absorb the profanity it didn't take much notice. It was quite interesting. And then the zero came in, a little bit later on and he was trying to strafe us

16:00 from a big higher up but a Lockheed Lightning got onto his tail and he chased him down but the zero whipped around quickly and the lightning couldn't follow. So the zero whipped off towards the coast of New Guinea and the lightning followed him and by that time they got lost in the melee and I didn't know what happened to it. It was good fun.

Incredible. Absolutely incredible. I mean what were you doing while this was all happening?

Well, I was standing there on the deck there at times and cheering

16:30 and sometimes wondering whether I should duck behind something or other. But there was nothing to duck behind. It was a flat deck. Well, far from it being something that would worry us it was beautiful entertainment. I mean, you couldn't get that any other way. And we saw quite a few dive bombers come in and, every now and then, one would just go straight into the water when the boys got them. I believe and, I don't know if the story's correct, but I believe there were 50 odd

17:00 Japs attacked us and I think only three got back. And that was just off Buna, off the shore of that part of New Guinea where the 7th Divvy [Division] had hunted the nips [Japanese] out of there.

Heavens. That was a very eventful landing. I might actually get you to, that's better.

17:30 **At least you didn't start skipping with it like some people. So, gosh what happened next?**

Well, it goes along like that and you realise we've been attacked and we looked around to see who was injured and nobody was not on my barge. We escaped pretty well. But on the barge behind mine, on which A Platoon were ensconced. They were all in the torpedo bulges when the torpedo hit so 35 of them were just simply absolutely

18:00 shredded. They were just ripped to pieces. Really good blokes like, Buck Bukowski, Jo Boothman, the fellow who cut the Timor's arm off and sewed it up, Snowy Stein, all sorts of really terrific blokes. They were all just wiped out. They wouldn't have known what happened. And yet in a very strange way while most of them were absolutely shredded, they were just unrecognisable, they just knew they were in there,

18:30 because there were bits of meat on the walls and blood around and nothing much else. And Old Bukowski was sitting up against the side of the ship, completely unharmed. Stone dead of course but there wasn't a scratch on him, not a single mark. The concussion of course killed him. I suppose that happened to a few but most of them were just torn to pieces.

That, that must

19:00 **have been quite an impactful moment to look in the barge and see your mates?**

Well we were in the barge ahead so we couldn't see back to that one but of course we knew, we knew A

Platoon was on that barge. So we just kept droning on then towards Lae. But during that attack, everything seemed to be happening at once and then all of a sudden everything goes quiet and it's just as though it didn't occur. The Japs, the remaining ones of

19:30 them got back wherever they were going, back to Lae perhaps. But, it just goes quiet as if the event doesn't occur. It's quite amazing.

And also this strange entertainment and yet this horrific death as well at the same time?

That's quite right and, of course, during the excitement off it, we're all busy dancing around and I remember Chica Donnelly who

20:00 climbed up on some carly floats that were stacked up in the bough and he was cheering away and yelling abuse at the Japs and encouraging the gunners. At any rate, it all worked out pretty well. We didn't know then how many of A Platoon had been killed but we knew they couldn't have escaped. We knew when we got ashore of course.

I imagine there's a certain amount of adrenalin that kicks in when you're under fire?

20:30 Oh yeah, yeah, it's tremendous. And then immediately after there's a bit of a let down and then there's a lot of exaggerated laughter and gaiety and what not, you know. When you realise you've escaped it for reasons you don't fully understand, but you have. And you're still there and so on and so on. But it was perhaps the first time there, that the reos, the reinforcements that is, that we got at Canungra, were actually in action with us. And really from that point on we couldn't differentiate them from the rest of us.

21:00 **So they had proven themselves?**

Oh yeah, they were as keen as mustard. Oh yeah, they enjoyed it.

Was there ever, I mean in this instance, was there a moment of reflection of what had happened to the A platoon?

We knew that something had gone bung but we didn't quite know what. And it wasn't until we got ashore that we realised that most of them had been wiped out.

21:30 **And did you reflect on that, was there a moment of personal reflection perhaps?**

Well, yes, because we knew, a lot of the boys that we knew were gone. They were done in and there was nothing further we could do about it. But it was part of the price and we just had to accept it.

What's it saying to you in those moments?

Well,

22:00 nothing very much, you just wonder if there's ever an end.

Was faith important to you?

I'm sorry.

It's obviously a very difficult thing to talk about.

Oh no, that's O.K. Go on.

22:30 **Would you like to have a break.**

Oh no, that's fine.

For a lot of people that we've spoken to faith had played a very important part in them dealing with the things that they'd seen and the death of their mates and I'm wondering if faith was important to you in these moments?

Not so much. It was just a practical fact of the way we were located and the things that happened and we just absorbed that.

23:00 I don't think that many of us, not like the Yank who resorted to the bible who tried to give us sustenance on that particular occasion because the rest of us were quite jubilant while that was going on. It was quite strange really.

Yeah, and yet it clearly has had an affect on you in some way. I mean you know we were talking about personal reflection

23:30 **and you're always surrounded by these men and these mates that are clearly very close to you. Was there a time, whether or not it was when you were going to sleep at night that the impact of what was happening to you on a daily basis really, really impacted, at that time. Or is it only in retrospect that you look back and you?**

No. It's only principally in retrospect. You're too busy at the time and

- 24:00 usually you're too tired, too exhausted and too busy doing other things. For example, when we landed at the, on the beach there for the attack on Lae, we simply had to unload the ship because it couldn't be caught there on the beach at daylight. So we unloaded that all night and then at daylight the next morning, we saddled up and headed off into the scrub. Going up the Busu River. And we were simply so exhausted that if you stopped, sat down, you were asleep.
- 24:30 There was nothing much you could do about it. So, really we had to have somebody who was awake and he had to keep standing up and walking around which was not what a guard should ever do. But, we had to do that and it didn't seem to matter what sort of uncomfy position you were in. If you were leaning up against a tree and water's pouring down your back you still went to sleep. You just, there comes a time when the needs of the body just take over. And that demolishes
- 25:00 any anxiety of what's just happened to a large extent.
- Did you feel that you were sufficiently recovered from your Timor experience when you went back to Australia and you, you know, had your time in Atherton and were fed this special diet etc., visited the family. Did you feel like you were prepared to go on to New Guinea?**
- Yes, but I didn't want to. I tried to get into the RAAF again. And the CO wouldn't allow any transfers so I was foiled again.
- 25:30 **Why was that?**
- Well, of course, nearly all of the company wanted to bail out. We really didn't want to do it again, you know, so.
- I mean it sounds like, you know, at this point in New Guinea that there was a low morale amongst the men. I mean there was still the mateship and the?**
- Yes, there is but there's always, that always happens immediately after an event. It's strange that during the
- 26:00 worst part of an event the morale is extraordinarily high but immediately after it you feel, oh, gee wiz, not again. Yes, and we felt that after Timor. That's when we picked up a group of, more reinforcements and they were the ones that came with us to New Guinea, well, some of them did.
- So, excuse me,**
- 26:30 **you were talking about arriving at the Buso River, excuse my pronunciation, what happened from there?**
- We had to keep going upstream up the Buso River, across all the little tributaries to try to get to a bridge called the Kunda Bridge, to try to get across that and around the back of Lae for the 7th Division was
- 27:00 attacking Lae from the western side and we were trying to cut off the Japs escape from Lae. We wanted to annihilate them there. But as it happened a lot of them got away anyway and when we got up to the Buso River there was a bit of a fight going on to get across it and a few of our boys were killed there. And the bridge was pretty well cut down anyway. So, when I speak of the bridge, it was just a rattan vine bridge, you know,
- 27:30 so it wasn't really worth capturing but it was the way to get across and the way to get across with equipment. You could hang on to one strand and balance on the other. When I say that, there was one strand high up, another one low down and you put your feet on the bottom one and hung on to the top. And you balanced your rifle or your gun or whatever it was and as we got across sometimes our feet were kicking in the river. One bloke got swept aside there, swept off, Brian Cumming and he was drowned.
- 28:00 There was no guarantee of anything really.
- His name was Brian?**
- Brian Cumming.
- And what happened with that particular incident?**
- Well, it was just that he slipped, he slipped into the river and those rivers just are enormously fast and full of boulders and he would probably have been bashed up and drowned.
- 28:30 We never found his body so we couldn't do much about it.
- And so, what happened after this?**
- Well, finally, the boys tried to get across that river, across on that bridge and Ken Whiteman, who was the Lieutenant in my section remembers going across.
- 29:00 a bullet hit his rifle which he was holding on his left side, I think, for some reason or another, it should have been on his right side. And it hit his rifle and also hit his water bottle and he could feel this hot liquid running down his leg and thought, oh, here we go, you know, I've done an artery or something.

But when he got across the other side it was just water. So there was all that sort of thing happened you know. But we finally got across it and the Japs, once again, did

29:30 the most stupid thing. They were in a very good position to completely block us and they abandoned their positions. They just bailed out. And what their attitude was to things is difficult to understand.

I mean, it sounds like you didn't have much respect for them as an enemy in terms of their military sense?

They were hopeless as soldiers.

30:00 and they were hopeless socially so that really they could never succeed in any country that they occupied. While they were dangerous, we were not frightened of them, if you get what I mean, because you could usually depend on them doing something utterly stupid, like they did at Sattelberg later on in New Guinea and I'll perhaps mention that later.

So you mentioned, and we've touched on this

30:30 **briefly when we were talking about Timor, that they were socially inadequate. Can you just define what you mean by that?**

Well, first of all it was their national psyche, which I think you could best describe it as, their contempt for their own, their inbuilt brutality, and their absolute contempt for women. And

31:00 they seemed to actually enjoy brutality which is something that I can't really follow for power is not an opportunity it's an obligation. Anyone that possesses power, whether it be mental, physical, intellectual or just by his personality he has an obligation to dispense that power in a manner that's befitting a Christian type society or a civilised society. And they didn't have that.

31:30 It appeared to us that their sole way of operating was always through brutality in some form. And of course, as a consequence of that, in all of the countries that they attacked and occupied they were hated.

Thanks for clarifying that. So what happened next after, you mentioned that the Japanese had you blocked but then they?

32:00 They abandoned it so we knew then that they would have gone north to get further upstream to go around the higher country to try to escape from Lae. So we went further up and, you wouldn't believe this, but here they are trying to escape from Lae and they were at night-time, travelling down a little track there down below the ridge that we were on. And during the night we heard something that sounded like, for all the world, like a gramophone playing.

32:30 They were playing a gramophone record for God's sake and they were hiding from us. I know. You see, as a military formation they were just hopeless. So anyway, we decided in the morning that we would go down and clean up any that were left and block the road, block the track that they were on. So we decided to do that. We went down to that track, climbed down the hill and we were following the track up. They had left behind all of those that were sick or ill

33:00 or wounded. So any that we came across we shot. And Dave Craven came across one bloke who was sitting by a little fire there and he had his dixie [small cooking pot] on the fire and he had a rucksack on his back. Well Dave just picked up his Owen gun and fixed him up all right. So he grabbed the little rucksack off his back and continued on up the track picking up others. When we get up to the top of this ridge, we tried to find which

33:30 way they had gone because clearly the majority from Lae hadn't gone along this track. We wanted to know where. By this time though it was getting dark. Well Dave Craven being the bushman that he was, because there was a junction of tracks there, he just got down on his hands and knees and he could feel with his hands the footprints because the Japs had a boot where the big toe was separate from the rest and it made a distinct footprint and he could tell just by feeling which way they had gone

34:00 in the dark. And he worked all this out and, excuse me, and he told Ken Whiteman, look they haven't come along this track they've gone along this one which we're on actually now and we were on that one which headed further north. So, we knew they'd got away anyway and we sat down there for the night, made a fire in some way or another and tried to cook up whatever we'd found. Well with the rice, we tried to cook that to spread amongst us because we had no other tucker there at the

34:30 moment. So we laid all this rice out that we'd got from this Jap that Dave had just picked up and I was scheduled to cook it. So I did that. Opened the blinking rucksack and as I was picking it out I could feel all these gelatinous lumps you see so I sort of knew what they were, they were patches of blood, you see Dave's bullets had gone straight through to the rice and they were sort of glued to the rice. So we picked those out and threw them out.

35:00 And I tipped all the rest in the billy [tea pot] and we ate that. And while I was chewing away on that, I thought I had done a tooth in on the right hand side and I bit on it hard and I thought, oh my God, what a place to do a tooth in. So I filled around with my tongue and fished it out. It wasn't, it was a 9 millimetre bullet. By courtesy of Dave, it was one that he'd delivered to the nip and it had gone clean

through him and I didn't even see it when I ladled all this stuff out and so on.

35:30 And I put it in my shirt pocket to bring home and I lost it. So truthfully I can say I bit the bullet.

You certainly have. Just going back a bit to when you came across the sick Japanese that were left behind. Was there, sort of an unspoken policy of taking no prisoners

36:00 **when you came across the Japanese?**

We were supposed to but we never really succeeded.

So what were you supposed to do in that situation?

Well, somehow or another in that situation if we reckoned that they were to be of any use for an intelligence reason then, yes, there may be something of value but we were not fitted up to bother with them and cart them back so we just shot them.

And was that, was that

36:30 **often a sense of revenge about revenging some of your mates' lives in killing the prisoners?**

No, I don't think that was relevant at that stage. It's just that we had long since resolved that any nip we saw we shot them.

We've

37:00 **spoken with various people who picked up various items that belonged to Japanese as, you know, as souvenirs, did you see any of that souveniring happening?**

Yes, I picked up the most useful thing was a Jap dixie. They had a very good one which was much better than ours. It had an insert in the top and it was kidney shaped, it fitted on your hip, it was made of aluminium and all the rest of it. And I brought one of those home, I've still got it in the garage.

37:30 They were quite useful and I used that for a long time after the war too.

So they were good for some things.

Ah yes, that was good.

So what happened next after this?

Well, after that little debacle, and we really should have cleaned more up than we did but we went south again then and we were scheduled to take part in the attack on Lae

38:00 from the eastern side. And we had to cross the Buso River where it was very low down and very wide but fast flowing. And the rivers in New Guinea, like a lot of them in Timor, were very, full of boulders and rocks and all that sort of stuff but very fast flowing and often shallow. And when we looked across that it was about a hundred, a hundred and fifty yards to the other side and this is where the Japs had their machine guns in place. And here we were supposed to go across this open part

38:30 facing these blessed machine guns for goodness sake. Well we knew we were supposed to go across the next morning. We had a very uneasy night. Just lying there waiting for goodness knows what was to be in the morning. But when we got up in the morning and prepared to make this drive across the river they had gone. Same thing again. They could have stopped us there easily.

It's so strange. Strange behaviour.

Very strange indeed, yeah.

39:00 They could have stopped us and they didn't.

But in the end, I guess that's a thing to be thankful for, that they did do that?

Well, in a way, yes, of course. Well we crossed then and we went on towards Lae and there was to be a naval bombardment of the town the following morning. So we laid up on the bank of a river just on the eastern side of Lae and waited.

39:30 And sure enough exactly at 12 o'clock that night when they were scheduled to start bombardment they opened up and the naval guns were belting shells into the town making a fearful noise.

We might actually pick that up on the next tape because we've just run out of tape.

Certainly.

00:32 **O.K. So, Ian, before the tape change you were talking about, you were just about to cross the Buso River and the Japanese had abandoned their positions?**

That's right. So we just kept on going then towards Lae and we laid up on a river bank there waiting for this naval bombardment which was to occur at twelve o'clock at night. I don't know why 12 but it did. Anyway, it made a hell of a noise and it bashed into Lae and smashed it to pieces and there were the flashes up in the sky.

01:00 But after a while we just got bored and went to sleep. And we slept through the rest of it but when the naval bombardment stopped we all woke up because of the sudden quietness. And then we just went on into Lae and poked around a bit and the Japs had abandoned it by then. But it was great to be able to jump onto a zero and smash it to pieces and kick it and all that stuff, you know. And we did that.

Can you describe Lae as you saw it?

01:30 At that stage there was nothing much left except an airstrip. And that was all. All the buildings around were flattened, there was nothing left. A lot of shell craters etc. but there was no buildings left.

Were there any injured Japanese?

Didn't see any, no. No, they suffered a very significant defeat there and that's as far as they got.

02:00 **And what did that, did the win there help with the morale of the company?**

Well, we didn't really need any morale building at this stage. We were really, we could see the way ahead, we were, we were on the up and up. We met a few yanks there and tried out some of their smaller carbines and sort of assessed them against the .303. And, you know,

02:30 played around a bit and we camped there for a while and then we had to get on the barges again and go up to Finschhafen for the job up on Sattelberg. So there wasn't much rest for the wicked or even the semi-goodens.

Well just before we do move on to Finschhafen, can you describe what it was like interacting with the Americans at Lae?

Well,

03:00 they, they were strange really in a way. From our viewpoint, we considered them childish in that they always had to know what it was like in the jungle. As though, everywhere else but where they were was jungle and we were the only ones that had that sort of experience. I don't know how they'd have got on if they were suddenly left on their own although we do know to a certain extent at Buna and Gona that they put on a pretty hopeless show there

03:30 and had to be rescued by the 7th Division. But, they were always very hospitable. They were quite good blokes yet I don't think we'd have had a supreme confidence in them to have them beside you on a job.

Now you mentioned that there was a bit of mucking about at Lae?

Ah yes, well we raced around and the boys were looking for souvenirs and all that sort of thing and poking around but we soon got sick of that,

04:00 just settled down again. We then got on the barges and we had to go then to Finschhafen.

So can you describe the events as they transpired from there?

Yes, from there, we just loaded directly onto barges for our next job up at Finschhafen to try to recapture Sattelberg which lay on a commanding position on a high hill back in the ranges. And, it was fairly uneventful. I remember these barges had grey marine diesel in them and I

04:30 was quite interested in that. We nosed into the beach there at Finschhafen and we gave the yanks a hand unloading some shells and explosives onto the shore. And they were very touchy about this explosive of course but our blokes were very gung ho about it and they were picking up these boxes of explosive and just throwing them and all this sort of stuff. And the yanks were hiding behind the barges and sort of cautioning us to stop

05:00 and all the rest of it but the boys were just having a game, you know. At any rate, when we went ashore there at Finschhafen, I walked up on the beach and there were a line of troops sitting down on their behinds against, against the palms there and one of them called out, "G'day Ian." I staggered back and you wouldn't believe it it was Jack Butler, one of the blokes who used to work for us on the farm at Boinka, he was one of the original English

05:30 migrants that came out. Well, it was great to see him there and he looked quite well, too. He was in, I forget what unit he was in then but, of course, he was doing his little bit. So we had a yarn there for a few minutes and it was wonderful to just meet him again.

Did that moment remind you of home or not?

Ah yes, it did, of course, because that was our connection.

Were you ever

06:00 **homesick during your time away?**

No, never. I had long since overcome any of that in my youth but I didn't endure any of that at all.

And what about in terms of corresponding home. Were you a regular writer?

Well, I was always being reprimanded from home because I didn't write enough but yes, I tried to be, although from Timor it was a little bit difficult. We could get some letter sent from when

06:30 I was there and I remember writing those on the back of a document on the other side of which was printed 'Colonia de Timor.' And here we were in a secret location, you see. At any rate, the boys all wrote these notes and we put them all in one envelope and I sent them back to my father who was the postmaster at Walpeup at the time and he sent them on to the various blokes' fathers. And in that way we maintained a contact. But from

07:00 New Guinea, of course, it was a bit more civilised if you could put it that way and we were able to send letters through, well, through an irregular post.

And how important was it to receive news from home?

I think it was very important for the people at home here to get some sort of an indication of how you were going and where you had been and what was happening and all the rest of it. And a pro po that, there were two occasions when I should have done a bit more.

07:30 I remember once I sent from Timor and just tried to describe waterfalls on the other side of the valley in which Atsabe lay, high up in the hills where there was a town called Calaco. And those waterfalls, after a rain, were falling about a thousand odd feet and they really looked beautiful. And I tried to tell my mother about this, I said, they really looked good but if we had time to stop and admire them. Well, she regretted later she'd never kept the letter, she'd probably tossed it out.

08:00 Those sorts of things perhaps don't matter but, yes, we could get letters back home, from New Guinea anyway.

And what about some of the men in your company that had wives or girlfriends. How importance was correspondence for them?

Well, we never sort of interfered with anything like that. Except that if one bloke got a letter back from home and the others didn't,

08:30 there was always a bit of shiacking about him handing over the sporting page. I don't know if there was ever a sporting page but, you know, they always wanted the sporting page.

So, getting back to Sattelberg. You'd met your, was it Jack, from?

Jack Butler, yes, but that was down on the, on Finschhafen.

Oh that was at Finschhafen, sorry. So, back at Finschhafen, can you describe the events from there?

09:00 Yes, from there we stated to, I was going to say march, but it was drag our way up easy street towards Sattelberg. And down in the flat country it was absolutely a quagmire over roads and all that sort of stuff. And we got up to a certain possie [position] where the 7th Divvy artillery had been bombarding Sattelberg a bit and they'd been using the 25 pounders with their sawn off barrels to make them a bit lighter to manhandle but they didn't have the range

09:30 At any rate they were bombarding Lae from where we were. It was quite interesting standing behind the gun and you could actually see the shell when you looked up at the top of its trajectory, just a little black speck wobbling in the sky before it went. Of course they were doing a fair speed too. And just in that position where we were, the Japs, for reasons unknown, they had tried to get the artillery, I think, but they had dropped daisy cutters [bombs] there.

10:00 **I'm sorry what's a daisy cutter?**

A daisy cutter was a fragmentation bomb that had a long spike on the end of it so it exploded about four or five or six feet or something above the ground. So when it exploded there was a vicious radial burst of fragments and anything that was in its path just didn't survive. And there were huge trees chopped down by them. I even saw one Owen gun barrel with a piece of shrapnel gone in one side of the barrel and out the other. It just went clean through the steel and out the other side.

10:30 So of course what hope did your chest have. Where they landed, where the daisy cutters landed there was usually no grass, nothing left and almost no hole in the ground. Just a little bit of a depression and everything around it was shredded, completely shredded. They were a vicious weapon. And while we were camped there we saw where these daisy cutters had landed and then we heard, then we heard the

11:00 sound coming along and the boys said, oh, it's only a barge, it's only a barge. But then, of course, we

heard the crump, crump of these blessed bombs well there was a frantic digging of holes and diving behind trees and all that sort of thing because we knew whata daisy cutter could do.

Now during this time, before we do move on further. Was there any interaction with the locals?

Practically none at all in New Guinea. I know there was

11:30 **some with other units who were involved in the Kokoda business but we were not there. We had almost no interaction with them in the areas that we were.**

O.K. So, we got up to the daisy cutters that the Japanese were bombing at you and as you were moving into Sattelberg. What happened next?

Well we went up towards a hill called Kumawa which was at the top of that little ridge

12:00 and that's where we made a bit of a camp and from that point somebody, probably our unit, called in for the Americans to do a bombing strike on Sattelberg. Well they did the bombing strike all right but it was on our hill and, oh, goodness gracious, so we did a lot of scrambling there, digging trenches and all sorts of things because the yanks were very unreliable in this sort of area. But eventually, they sort of

12:30 cottoned on as to what hill to bomb and it was very interesting watching whole rows of bombs coming out and then making a pattern across the hillside. The Japs actually sent, we I don't know if they sent, but certainly an officer crept up very close to where we were camped. And he was never detected. And he wrote down in his diary that he had viewed the enemy and he said, they were Americans. We felt a bit insulted by that but it was in his diary.

13:00 And he wrote that they seemed to be very well fed, they've got plenty of food and we're living on just potatoes. And anyway, his diary continued on in stuff that wasn't perhaps relevant and when he was killed later on, his diary was ready of course and that's how we knew what was in it. But, we then went across to do the assault on Sattelberg and in the winding little track that led up to the monastery on top the

13:30 Japs had absolutely perfect suicidal positions made from which we could never extract them in a million years, and they abandoned them all, once again. These are things that we've never fully understood.

So, I mean, what did you think when they did things like that?

Well, we spoke to some of these 6 and 7 Divvy blokes

14:00 and their opinion was universally much the same as ours although we hadn't have had their experience. They said, look, if Gerry [Germans] had been here we'd never have got it. In other words the Germans would have done things properly. We were very glad of that.

So what happened next?

From Sattelberg then we went down the other side of that ridge towards the north side of that Peninsula

14:30 down to a place called Gusika and we were camped there and that's where I got a very violent bash of dengue fever. And I recall at one stage we had a so-called cookhouse, we had a missionary's footbath and we had a kerosene tin and that was our total equipment. And they were cooking some rice and I had to get from a distance from about from here to the

15:00 front or about twenty yards perhaps. And in trying to crawl across the ground, I just couldn't make it. Dengue is so destroying of your will. You just cannot do it. So I just went without tucker [food].

Didn't anyone bring you anything?

We were all in the same boat. The boys just laughed at it, I mean, they knew what we all felt like. There was nothing you could do about it. Eventually, I

15:30 suppose I had something to eat but I recall that very well.

Just getting back to Sattelberg for a moment, did you actually engage the Japanese there?

No, no. No, they sent out a few patrols, and we did too, but we never actually cleaned up any in that area. It was funny that wasn't it? But here we were right close to them.

So,

16:00 **so, just getting back to your dengue fever. Sorry, I just wanted to clarify Sattelberg for a moment. So, you had dengue fever. How long did this fever last for?**

I think it lasts for a couple of days from memory. But then it goes and it doesn't reoccur.

Not like malaria?

Yeah, which occurs again and again. But dengue is very violent, it can kill to.

So

16:30 **you've mentioned some of the physical attributes of dengue, can you go into further detail about what was actually happening to you physically at this point?**

Well it is absolutely, it's not true to say enervating, it's totally collapsing of your physical powers. You just cannot, I mean, for example, if your arm was resting on the ground, you couldn't lift it up. It's that sort of situation. So that to move yourself around

17:00 was almost impossible. And it's not an exaggeration, all the boys were affected by it. It's not as though someone could, by willpower, overcome it. We found it absolutely destructive of your physical capabilities and yet it went away after a while.

But was it destructive of your will as well?

Well you can still feel determined but you can't do anything. And this is the annoying part. You can still feel quite determined to try to do

17:30 something but you can't move. It's a terrible thing.

And were many men in the company affected with the dengue at this point?

Oh yes. Oh yes. Most of us had nearly everything that was going. Not many of us missed out. And I got also other things too which was the cause of my being made B class later on. Wherever there was a pressure I got pustules

18:00 of something under my skin. Pus it was. We had a doctor at that stage and he used to lance them open and squeeze all this pus out, you see, so that I could keep going. And they used to be quite sore and if I had my rifle on my shoulder, my shoulders used to be one big bundle of pus underneath and he used to cut all that out. And then when my revolver used to slap on my hip there, he used to do the same there. And eventually, he threatened to make me B class. Now B class means, of course, that you're no longer fit

18:30 for active service in the front. So I objected to that and I argued with him to the point of being almost court martialled but he said, he said, "It doesn't matter how you argue, you're not going to win." He said, "You'll be made B class or discharged." I said, "Well, I'll go for a discharge." So, to cut a long story short there, after we came back to Melbourne after New Guinea, we came first to Brisbane

19:00 and then on down to Melbourne. And I got a discharge on the 4th of June and I was enlisted on the 6th of June fully fit.

So what was this condition. This pustuly condition that you had?

Well, I don't really what it is. It's some form of tropical disease that you can get which forms under the skin, there's nothing apparent on the surface of the skin. But

19:30 it all becomes a big spongy mess and its full of pus underneath and it separates the external layers of your meat from the centre. It's not very nice.

It sounds really gross?

So I used to get those cut out and he used to squeeze great lumps out of it and then put plasters on them to seal them up. And I was quite determined to stay with it but he said, I'm just not going to allow you. His name was Doctor Flanagan he was quite a good bloke.

Because, what did that mean if

20:00 **you were to become B class to you?**

Ah well, being B class meant that you were no longer fit for active duty. You could never join a unit doing its job, I'd have been doing guard duties or something or other or working in a base camp somewhere just doing labouring. I could never stand that.

And being separated from your company?

Ah, that was the worst part, I couldn't stand that, yeah.

I'm wondering like throughout this whole time, particularly

20:30 **towards the end, was there, was there ever a point where it just got too much?**

No, it didn't really although at times it certainly features there, gets close there but the sustaining factor is the loyalty of your mates, the fact that you've got a number, you belong to a unit. There is a sense of belonging. And there was a sense of unity and there was loyalty from the other blokes. As I've mentioned, you could be as sick as a dog

21:00 and they could laugh at you. But they weren't laughing at you, they were laughing with you, you know. It was a self-sustaining situation that we could all endure because we all suffered the same.

But did anyone ever, did anyone ever break under the pressure?

Only, there's one lieutenant that I know of. And he was sent back. He died some years ago but I hesitate to

- 21:30 condemn him even now because no one really knows when they're born with what they're equipped. You can't tell that. You can imagine things but we don't really know until we're put to it.

I'm really surprised that there was only one man that you could name. I mean really it's a remarkable experience that you've been to and it's such a testament to this extraordinary mateship?

- 22:00 That is one of the main factors. That is one of the main aspects that can keep you going. It's a bit like say a bloke who has had a major disaster with his family. If he's abandoned by them he sinks right down. There is no one to whom to appeal, he's got no one in whom to confide, he's got nothing left. In other words his morale just disappears. We didn't have that because there were always the boys around somewhere.

- 22:30 **Yeah, it's truly remarkable. So, where you discharged upon your return. Was the whole company returning back to Melbourne at this point?**

They all returned to somewhere or other and then they were assembled again for the job for Tarakan and I wasn't part of that

- 23:00 because I'd been discharged then from the AIU [Australian Independent Unit] and I was discharged I said on the 4th of June and I joined the RAAF on the 6th.

What was that like for you not to be included in Tarakan?

It was very humiliating. It was almost an embarrassment because I was in the RAAF at that stage and I knew the boys were up there on the job and, at that late stage in the war, it was in '44 and '45. At that late stage in the war, we weren't getting the casualties

- 23:30 in Europe so I could never get away and here they were away doing a job and I wasn't part of it. It was almost an embarrassment.

Why were you embarrassed?

Because I couldn't do my bit. And I was for a while out at a place in Melbourne called Point Cooke, no, Laverton, I'm sorry. And I worked out a scheme there whereby some of the boys used to ferry Kittyhawks and

- 24:00 Lockheed Hudsons and what not up north and I worked out a scheme with some of the pilots there where I could stow away and get up to Tarakan and get with them again. Even though I was still in the RAAF. Now I'd have got court-martialled for that, of course, but it didn't matter, I didn't care at that stage. I don't know what finally happened there, I think we got shifted or something and I didn't put it into operation but I had it worked out with a couple of the pilots who were prepared to take me.

- 24:30 **You were that determined and that close to them?**

Well, I mean, you know, I mean, knowing what the boys were doing and I was not part of it, you know, it was humiliating.

And what's that like for you now, when you talk to them, about being left behind?

Well, they understand. They knew quite well that I was discharged medically unfit and they accept that because we were all pretty medically unfit at that stage. Except those who had joined us just before New Guinea they were still pretty okay.

- 25:00 But, they all understand that. There was no shirking anywhere.

I mean, there must have been somewhere in side you a sense of relief as well I imagine?

Yes, there is. You're subject to a conflict of emotions and there's no way to sidestep that and you wouldn't be totally human if that didn't happen I think. Yes, there was a sense of

- 25:30 relief knowing that if this goes on for a little while longer then I'll probably survive. But on the other hand here I am and the boys are doing the job and I'm not part of it. I'm useless.

Well, you were doing some kind of work with the RAAF?

Ah of course, yes, but not exactly what I wanted.

So what were you doing?

Actually I was doing, participating in handing out parachutes for the pilots and doing

- 26:00 test flying with them and all that sort of stuff at Laverton. That's all I was doing. Embarrassing isn't it.

No, it's still important work?

Well, you try your best but sometimes you just don't succeed.

So what was your state of mind at this point, having been left behind and doing this work at?

Well, I realised that there was not much hope of ever getting away because we weren't getting the casualties in Europe

26:30 and certainly the Japs were along the way to being pushed back. So I knew I wasn't going to get away and I was just sort of wearing out my time. It was not, it was not satisfying at all.

Was it a low point for you?

Yes, it was, yes. And finally when I was discharged from the RAAF after training for aircrew but never getting away. I was discharged up at Russell Street

27:00 in Melbourne and I think the total low point of my entire army career was when I saw on the pavement there, outside the office where I'd just been discharged. And I had no number, I didn't belong to a unit, the boys weren't around, I had no rank, I was just nothing. I was just back to a nonentity and this was just the most devastatingly low feeling I've had for a long, long time. It felt as though you

27:30 were abandoned but of course you weren't. But it was just as though the world I knew, the only world I knew was gone.

How old were you at this point?

I'd turned 21 then.

It kind of puts it all into perspective a bit when you say that?

Yeah, I'd been in four years though.

So why were you discharged from the air force?

Oh, after the war.

28:00 It had finished by then see. I didn't get away. That was, you know, the humiliation of just sort of wasting all of that time.

Now, where were you when the war did come to an end?

Actually I was in Melbourne. I was in Melbourne then and that was a profound disappointment too, in that all sorts of emotions came to the fore at that stage.

28:30 There were the really shallow ones who just rejoiced and flapped around and behaved like lunatics and so on. And there were others who were opportunists for whatever was available you know. And suddenly I saw a great mob in the town who were not in uniform who were just people from the suburbs with whom we had no real contact or whatever and I thought, who the blazes are these, are these invaders or something.

29:00 But they weren't of course, they were just normal citizens. But they weren't part of us and I felt disappointed to be among them.

Yeah, we spoke to one lady who, for her, the end of the war was actually one of her most saddest days of reflection because she'd lost someone special to her and, you know

29:30 **from someone who wasn't there have this idea of the war end of being this celebratory experience but?**

You have heard of one of our VC [Victoria Cross] winners from the first war, in fact the super VC it's been called, Laurie McCarthy. He lived in Melbourne in Collins Street, he was a caretaker of a building there. And his son Laurie was a mate of mine and we used to play together on the farm up in the Mallee when Mr McCarthy,

30:00 Mr Mac as I used to call him, was a traveller for Vacuum Oil. Well, Laurie was killed in the Solomons and Mrs Mac, when the war finished, she was absolutely devastated.

Yeah, bittersweet.

Yes.

At this time, had you any contact with your family?

Ah yeah. Because

30:30 we could write to them when I was down at Somers during RAAF training and what not. And when I was discharged, of course, from that point on I did a CRTS course, a Commonwealth Reconstruction Training Scheme.

So you were just talking about, I'd asked you about your contact with your family?

And after the war, of course, I decided to, well, we did what was called

- 31:00 an aptitude guidance test. Because all of the blokes who were very young as I was at that stage really didn't know if we could do anything or something after the war.

So, if you could continue on?

Yes, we did an aptitude guidance test to see what we could do if anything at all to try to get the boys established back into civil life, you see.

- 31:30 So, of course, I had had no high school education, nothing at all, I was really at the bottom of the barrel. But I still decided I wanted to be an aeronautical engineer so I went out to Swinburne College for a matter of two or three months to try to get some sort of grounding. I was hopelessly behind all the rest of them who had done junior tech and high school etc. etc. and I'd done nothing. But

- 32:00 I kept on with that and eventually succeeded finally.

So what was it about aeronautical engineering that attracted you to the job?

Well, it's a bit like I said from the early days when I used to make boomerangs on the farm. Aeronautics has always fascinated me and I loved that and I still do, of course. But notwithstanding that and having qualified in that area, I still spent the last forty years doing air conditioning.

- 32:30 So we never know in which way the game leads us.

So, by this time had you managed to catch up with your mates who had gone to Tarakan?

Only some of them who had come back

- 33:00 and very shortly after that, I think it was in '46 we began to form what we call at the moment The Commando Association in Melbourne and of course we all joined that because we wanted to meet each other again and gradually we developed that and we still carry that on, of course.

And how important to you is that association?

Well, it's of some consequence because these are the boys in whom I have absolute confidence in various areas.

- 33:30 And I'd never wish well to meet some of the better ones. And, even Bill Burley, after the war, we had a business together for a while until his wife got TB [Tuberculosis] and then we had to abandon that and we did a few other things. But, we've kept tack and every Anzac Day we hire a ferry on the harbour and stooge around and we have a bit of a lunch and this and that. But there's no longer much in the way of boozing. Nothing like that. Indeed, it's a chastising

- 34:00 thought that nearly all of the boys who during the war used to smoke and booze quite a lot. They're all dead.

That's something to think about on Saturday night. Now, could you give us a summary of your life from war end to present day?

Really, there was nothing very thrilling there of course. We did our tickets

- 34:30 at Melbourne Tech, [Melbourne Technical College] at least I did, and naturally gravitated to Commonwealth Aircraft Corporation in Melbourne. I was a draftsman there and did lofting etc. etc. and I met a couple of other chaps there and two of them bailed out and decided to go for a trip around the world. And they did that, they went over to Sweden and one of them wrote back and he was describing what they were doing and all the rest of it and I said to me cobber, hold on, why don't we. So we did.

- 35:00 We got jobs on a ship going over there and spent a year travelling around and then get a job at the shipbuilding yard in Sweden etc. Then after that came back and established a house etc. You know, did the normal.

This is where you, of course, met your wife?

Yes, in Gothenburg, yes. And then came back and just traversed through the normal spectrum of civilian activity sort of thing. Nothing very exciting in that area.

And what about children?

Well, we've been absolutely blessed. There's my oldest son there with his, that's Nicole with him, but that's Bruce. We've been blessed with three that have never caused us really any anxiety. And a lot of people have a terrible problem with children in all sorts of ways

- 35:30 and we've had none at all. Except that they're too adventurous, I'd have to say that, especially Carl the youngest one. That's that one in the middle up there. He got himself arrested and jailed in Africa, a South African spy but, yes, and they threatened to shoot him and all that sort of stuff but he eventually got out of that. And of course he never was, he was just totally innocent but they were absolutely paranoid about spies

36:00 this was in Tanzania.

Very exciting. And you had a daughter as well?

Yes, that's Eva, yes. That's her there. And she helped me quite a bit when I wrote the book on Australian cross-country skiing. In fact she did a lot of the modelling for me in that. But I must say she was one of the most wonderful events that's ever occurred in my life. She's so understanding

37:00 and so forgiving and I don't totally know that I deserve her but she is and I couldn't wish for a better one. Now she's got two beautiful ones of her own.

Yeah, it's a beautiful family you've got.

Well, sometimes you can be lucky and I think we have been, haven't we?

Now, did you,

37:30 **so, I'm interested to know how much of what you've told us today you've been able to share with your wife and your family?**

Well, possibly, snippets

38:00 here and there but never a continuous history. It doesn't sort of lend itself to children hearing all this sort of stuff so you don't do it. You just get on with the job of trying to make the best of day-to-day life. And they've been a wonderful helping that.

38:30 **Do they ever ask questions?**

Ah yes, sometimes but not a great deal. I'm sure that they wouldn't be able to give you a concise picture of the various places I've been in. Because I've never mentioned it in that sort of sequence.

And do you, do you still dream about the war?

I never dream about it at all. But at times in the day time there's a bit of daydreaming when I visualise certain situations that we were in and what could have been and what couldn't have and

39:00 so on. But that's about all. It's an event in the past that has to be put in perspective.

How did the war change you as a person?

Well, it gave me an appreciation of blokes with whom in other walks of life you may never cross paths and of the intrinsic value that lies in them when they're put to the test. And how, with some

39:30 there is an overwhelming loyalty that you'll never find in others who put on a great pretence of trying to influence others of their own consequence. For this reason affectation and pretence are not major items in my admiration list.

We'll have to continue on the next tape.

Tape 9

00:33 **Ian, what does Anzac Day mean to you these days?**

It means a tremendous amount. And I'm very pleased that it's having such an uplifting, wholesome affect on the younger generation at the moment. There's a recognition that there has been something contributed by those who have long since gone and they are the recipients of it. And it's very pleasing that there are quite a number who recognise that

01:00 fact.

So many people going back to Anzac Cove, for instance?

Yes, that's right and they want to know a bit of history they want to know a bit of what's happening or what has happened in the past.

Yes, it's very heartening. And in terms of the future, having been through, especially the experience of war that you've had. What message would you give to the young people of Australia?

Well, there are several, of course. But, among those is

01:30 first develop almost a fanatic loyalty to our own people and their own country. And the second is to try to learn our own language correctly. Because if you can handle English correctly you do stand a chance then of learning other languages. There has been a series of, what I would call traitors in power somewhere or other, who have relinquished the learning of grammar in the schools, and then as a

consequence

- 02:00 there has been a group of people grown up who really don't know anything about our own language and as a consequence can't learn others which means that the understanding between nations is diminished because of that.

You use the term traitors in power, what do you mean by that?

Well, to willingly destroy the basis of your own language is pretty close to treachery in my view.

- 02:30 People laugh at the French for trying to maintain their own language and trying to eliminate Americanisms from it but I can understand why they do it. Finally, with the interaction and the silicon chip and the magic of the TV [Television] and satellites etc. etc. there is overwhelming communication between nations now and that leads to a dilution of the value of the various languages. And I think they should be preserved. It doesn't mean that you do not understand and try to co-operate with the others

- 03:00 but there is enormous value in knowing your own.

Do you think Australia was justified in being involved in the recent action in the Gulf War?

I've got doubts about that. I've got some grave doubts that we should be so slavishly committed to whatever the Americans perceive as being their own interest. I have some doubts about that. And I don't think that

- 03:30 Australian lives should be involved in any area like that particularly when there will be no gratitude shown from either our allies or our enemies.

Well, Ian, we have reached the end of the interview. And I'm just wondering before we stop recording whether there was anything else you wanted to add before we stopped?

There's one thing that I must say, I don't know if it's too late but

- 04:00 despite the fact that you've heard me categorising the nips as being something lower than the lowest form of humanity and yet, despite of all of that, I have faith in the future with them because they're a disciplined people. Now we know that discipline can work in both directions, either for good or bad, but if there is organisation in the people then there can be education along correct lines. And with the communication that no people can ever avoid now because of the

- 04:30 satellites, phones etc. TV and so on and travel, there must be an injection of certain western values in the Japanese youth and the fact that they are interested in learning English gives me courage in that area. Despite the horrors of the past and what they have done and for which I condemn them to hell, I think there is, I have reason to be faithful or at least to have faith in the future of them.

So it seems to me

- 05:00 **that your view of the Japanese has undergone a bit of a transition since the war?**

Not really but my view of the impact of technology on them has. Because this wasn't available before the war, before the war it was possible for people to be isolated and the Germans believed that the Poles made an attack on the radio station at Glewitz as a prelude to the attack on Poland. That could never happen now. We know too much about what goes on.

- 05:30 So that a lot of the things that we condemn the frivolity of the TV and the radio and all that for serve another purpose as well and it is, in some ways, quite beneficial.

That's very wise thinking actually.

Well, I don't know but I hope it works that way.

Well, Ian on behalf of Rebecca [interviewer] and myself and indeed the entire Australians at War Film Archive I want to thank you very much for an excellent and, at times, very moving interview.

Well, I hope if it's of some interest. I don't know whether it can be but I hope so. Thank you.