Australians at War Film Archive

Kevin Harrington (KP, the boy from Gun) - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:40 **So first of all, if you can tell me a bit about where you were born and where you grew up and your schooling years?**

Well, I was born in Gundagai on the 21 January 1924, the second eldest of eight children and Gundagai was a great place to grow up in because of all the

01:00 activities that went on in that town. At that time it was approximately half way between Sydney and Melbourne so the tourists staying overnight were there almost every day. There were 4 hotels in Gundagai itself and two on the other side of the river and they were invariably filled each evening and we saw some great personalities, as kids, as they passed through Gundagai. For example, Ambrose Palmer the champion

01:30 boxer going through to Sydney for one of his big fights. He had a yarn to the kids. The Australian Test Cricket team. We were having a game of cricket one day, fronting the main street, and these fellows were peering over the rail looking at us and they came down and introduced themselves and there were some of the greats like McCabe and Oldfield, Mailey, the great cricket players of the time and I also saw a great Australian

02:00 singer and I will think of her name in a moment, got a standing ovation in the theatre one evening. Gladys Moncliff, one of our famous earlier artists, got a standing ovation in the theatre. It has some humorous moments too, because as school kids we watched cyclists arriving in Gundagai when Melbourne celebrated its 100th Anniversary in 1938 and there was a cycle race from Sydney to Melbourne

02:30 finishing in Melbourne and an international Frenchman, a Tour de France rider, was neck and neck with Hubert Opman, the famous Australian cyclist, into Gundagai but the Frenchman came in first. The Country Women's Association had beautiful tables of food all lined up for the cyclists but mainly like salads and energy food. The Frenchman got off his bike. They offered him food and he shook his head, they offered him wine and he shook his

03:00 head. Whatever they offered him, he refused and in exasperation he sat down and relieved himself in the gutter, to the delight of all the school kids watching what was going on and as I said, Gundagai was a great place to grow up in as a kid because we all learnt to swim in the Murrumbidgee and that was a big feature because the inter-town rivalry between Tumut, Cootamundra, Young, Harden, Wagga [Wagga]

03:30 was always very great. Even at the schoolboy level up to the senior levels, in the football season in winter and in summer, cricket and tennis and swimming. Inter-town competitions were big so we used to visit those towns regularly and that was interesting. I went to the Convent School at Gundagai to the finish of primary school and because there was no high school in Gundagai then, I went to Tumut by train

04:00 every day, leaving about 8 o'clock in the morning and getting to Tumut about half past 9, twenty-five to 10 and that was interesting because one day the driver went to the pub whilst he was spelling to come back in the afternoon and he got pretty full and when he took the train off from Tumut on the way home and he opened the throttle full out and of course we were cheering him all the way, the train was rocketing along but

04:30 the police had been forewarned because it was dangerous and when it got to South Gundagai, before it came over a mile long bridge across the flat over the Murrumbidgee, the Police were there to take him off but we kids were urging him on and because he used to go through every station that he had to pull up in, instead of pulling up at the station he would have to go through and back cause he wasn't completely in control.

05:00 Growing up in the Depression, we didn't feel the effect like some people did. We lived in the town and there was a big Chinese market garden on the Murrumbidgee Flats and they virtually supplied the town with green vegetables and a lot of people grew their own vegetables but it wasn't unusual at

05:30 all to see men passing through that were on the dole in the Depression looking for jobs, looking for food and I can remember my parents packing food parcels to send to Sydney. Some relatives, who lived at Newtown and who had lost their jobs, were having a hard time and as a result we regularly sent them food parcels.

06:00 Another interesting aspect of living in Gundagai was things like Kingsford Smith, the famous aviator, came to Gundagai on a barn storming tour and for 10 shillings which is a dollar now, my brother and I went for a flight up just to circle the town and back down again because he was raising funds for his flying activities and wanted to fit in as many as he could. That was an interesting

06:30 aspect. I'm thinking furiously of other developments that took place but the seasons were a big feature of country life because eg. in the wintertime, football time, that was big inter-town rivalries and if Gundagai won the competition away playing say Tumut or they would take a special train to

07:00 take the supporters there and would arrive home with the driver cockadoodle dooing on his train as they entered the Gundagai station and there was great celebrations. Another interesting thing as a young kid was when the circus came to town. Now it used to come by train and we used to get up at 4 o'clock in the morning and go down and watch the elephants unload the train and these

07:30 mighty beasts gently easing the lion carriages or animal carriages down, transporting them to the flat where they erected the Big Top and to watch them performing as they did. That is in the work situation and then in the circus itself. That was always a very, very interesting thing from a young person's point of view because they were spectacular with what they could do and how gently they could handle equipment.

08:00 The local show was always a big feature too, each year. Jimmy Sharman's Boxing Tent would come to town and in terms of Australian history, that was a feature of most Australian towns beside the agricultural show which always highlighted the agricultural products of the local area, just like the exhibition does here now, and it was always a looked-forward-to event from a

08:30 young child's point of view because of the hurdy-gurdy's and the rides and what have you.

We'll come back and talk a lot more about the time at Gundagai cause it's a really fascinating sort of life, but just can you just tell me a bit about when once you passed your intermediate and the work that you did then?

Employment opportunities

09:00 were very small in Gundagai because it was a town of about 2,000 people so a good friend of mine, John Megsy Malloy, and I sat for a public exam in Canberra and we were both appointed to departments there. I was appointed to the Prime Minister's Department. He was appointed to the Department of the Interior, which looked after all the local aspects of Canberra, Local Government aspects. I was appointed to the Records Branch of the Prime Minister's Department and

09:30 it comprised many sections: a cable section for deciphering cables from overseas, external territories which Australia administered at that stage, protocol on behalf of the Government and a big Correspondence Department. When I was introduced to them, I walked into this room and fifty women stopped typing to see who this new kid was

10:00 and it was interesting because there were quite a few Queensland…I'm a New South Welshman having been born at Gundagai but there were quite a few Queensland girls there who I met later on. One of my first early jobs was to take confidential cables from the Prime Minister's Department, which had been decoded, in heavily wax sealed envelopes over to the private secretaries of each

10:30 Minister in the Menzies government and give them to them personally, not anyone else and as a result of that after about, oh I forget whether six or nine months, Murray Toole who was Private Secretary to Senator McBride in the Menzies government, Senator McBride was the Minister for Supply and Development, asked me if I would like to join him as his assistant and I said, "What have I got to do?". He said, "The Department's Headquarters were in Melbourne."

11:00 So when the House (House of Representatives) wasn't sitting, they would be in Melbourne or wherever the Minister had to go for conferences and meetings. He lived in Adelaide himself. So, he said, "You've got to arrange all the transport bookings, do all the filing", and this included, strangely enough, War Cabinet Records. You know I would have been a security risk but obviously they'd checked me out

11:30 and looked over your shoulder. Get the Minister in the House if there was a division when the bell was ringing. You know, the members have to be in the House to vote as soon as the bells finished. They close the doors. So if someone couldn't make it they weren't included in the vote and it was very important in some of the voting for different motions that were going through the House and do anything that was required. Sometimes the Minister would want a message

12:00 delivered quickly to another minister or even down to the Prime Minister's office. I remember one day, I

took something down to the Prime Minister's office and Billy Hughes was standing outside the cabinet room and he grabbed me and said "Look son, take this down to my office and get so and so and bring it back here as fast as you can". So I sprinted down the corridor, brought it back and old Billy said "Well done son, well done. You're a good sprinter". This wise and little

12:30 old famous man of Australian politics. That job was most interesting because when the House wasn't sitting we went back to Melbourne Headquarters. Regularly we would be over to Sydney for a conference, even up to Canberra for a conference when the House wasn't sitting, traveling by air sometimes, mostly by train on the Spirit of Progress between Sydney and Melbourne and Sydney and Canberra and, motorcar.

13:00 I went to Adelaide one weekend when the minister was so busy at a cabinet meeting, which was held in Adelaide at the time, he asked me to accompany his wife to watch his son do his first solo flying test at the aerodrome because he was in the air force and he passed well. We parked the car on the side of the aerodrome and watched the flight and he passed well but

13:30 unfortunately he got killed flying in the Middle East later on. That was a most censuring experience. Now because I was permanently attached to the Prime Minister's Department, the Menzies government was defeated in October 1941, I either had to go back to the department where I was permanently attached or go with another Minister if I was asked. John Beasley, no relation to

14:00 Kim, took over as Minister for Supply and Development from Senator McBride and his Secretary asked me to continue on with him which I did until I turned 18 on 21 January 1942 and I said "Look, I'm sorry, I'm going to enlist". Now, the Private Secretary had been in the infantry during the First World War and he said to me and this is what he said "You're a bloody fool". He said "I've been through it and

14:30 I don't recommend it to anyone if you want to serve in the infantry" But I persisted and I enlisted on 24 January, 1942. We went down to Sydney by train. John Megsy Malloy, the fellow that I'd started working with and had grown up with in Gundagai, we went down to Sydney and enlisted on 24 January, anniversary weekend, 1942 and I soon found

15:00 myself in the pig pens at the showground on a straw palliasse, which was interesting. But fairly quickly we were processed up to Dubbo to start infantry training for one month, then to Cowra for one month, more infantry training, then to Bathurst for more training before being put on a draft for they said the Trobiand Islands which

15:30 is northeast of Milne Bay but when we got to Ascot , Queensland, Race Course waiting to embark, the draft was just cancelled out of the blue for no reason, they didn't tell us. They don't tell you much in great detail when you're in the ranks and from there, I was transferred to the signals corps in Toowoomba.

16:00 Now, how are we going?

We're going well. We're gonna obviously go back over all that really fascinating stuff with the Prime Minister's ..

Yeah, there was much for a young fellow from Gundagai from the bush because I saw the great politicians of the era, Venture, Curtin, Menzies, Artie Fadden and those politicians who are historic figures

16:30 in terms of Australia's history, it was interesting to see them in person operating as they did.

Well, I've got 100 questions about that and we will come back to it but if you can tell me about being part of the signal corps in Toowoomba and then heading up to Torres Strait?

Torres Strait, yes. Well I didn't want to be in the signals. I wanted to be in the infantry and whilst I

17:00 have the greatest expect for signalmen because of the great job they do in different areas, even in the infantry where you've got a signals platoon usually signalmen attached to you but I wanted to be in the infantry. My father had served in the 57th Battalion of the 15th Division at Villiers, Britain [France] over in the First World War in France and I was young and fit and I wanted

17:30 to serve in the infantry but from Toowoomba we did an intensive course of line work signal training for a couple of months under experienced veterans who had come back from the Middle East who had been at Tobruk and were great fellows and as soon as that training finished, we headed off to a place called Ban-

18:00 Ban Springs near Gayndah and set up a camp there and started improving communications from there to Rockhampton going through Gayndah, Hidgevile, Mundubbera, Monto, Thangool to Rocky. And the idea was because Australia was greatly under threat then, was to substantially improve communications and that's what we did by

18:30 building new lines and improving existing communications. The country people in those towns were most hospitable. They used to put on dances on the weekend. They would invite us, in some cases, to their homes for a sing-a-long around the piano and they were most hospitable and we were very grateful and whilst I was very fit then because it was physical work,

19:00 erecting lines and in some cases, removing trees so there was a fair bit of axe work involved so, we were pretty fit and there were a lot of very good rivers, the Burnett River and other rivers and invariably we could have a swim most days so we were pretty fit. But I still wasn't happy in the sense that I wanted to go to the war and I prayed to myself many times but they just

19:30 refused. Eventually, another cobber and I prevailed and we found ourselves on the draft to Torres Strait Signals Headquarters, Thursday Island and their job was to maintain the signals between Port Moresby and Australia through the Torres Strait Islands. At the same time, provide wireless connection to the coast watchers who were men out on the

20:00 islands watching for aircraft flying overhead in the direction of Australia or Horn Island in the Torres Strait which had an airstrip, watching for submarines too. They reported on regularly, maintaining the communications on the various islands, the Torres Strait Islands where in some cases there were artillery batteries, anti-aircraft batteries and

20:30 the Americans used to come there in torpedo boats refueling on the way to somewhere. It was a very interesting experience because of the history of the place. It was only raided 8 times by the Japanese Bombers between '42 and '43 and the last one I remember when he came over very high and dropped his

21:00 bombs indiscriminately in that the airstrip at Horn Island was the one to attack but he was very high and he just dropped his bombs indiscriminately around different areas. And earlier, as were informed, the Air Force bought over a Spitfire squadron from Darwin in the early raids and surprised the Japanese by getting up high with

21:30 advanced warning coming from probably the coast watchers and got amongst them and the raids diminished after that. One evening we camped on Possession Island where Captain Cook took possession of Australia going to Cape York. At different times they did all sorts of signal work including pulling up submarine cable from the

22:00 floor of the ocean and the Thursday Island native divers were amazing. They would jump overboard with a knife in their teeth. Sometimes you'd see sharks swimming around the boat. They weren't greatly concerned, but if they saw a sea snake sometimes, a couple of times we were swimming near a shore and someone would sing out sea snake they'd almost walk on water to get out of there, they were so deadly. It was amazing to watch them,

22:30 how confident they were and competent in the water. Cape York was interesting because we walked down to a place called Somerset one day which in early history had been surveyed as a future township of Cape York. There was an old hut still there with the rifle slits cut in to allow them to ward

23:00 off the natives if they were attacked and it's interesting re the early history, you know of Cape York and Somerset was to be the township set up by Governor Jardine I think but it never happened. The Cape was an interesting place because of its flora and fauna and the fact that there was an airstrip, Jacki Jacki, we called it so there was quite a bit of activity going on all the time

23:30 with aircraft going through to New Guinea in particular, staging at Jacki Jacki and Horn Island. In fact we saw a spectacular crash one day when a group of Americans came through and they said to us "Clear the airstrip because some of them will certainly overshoot this strip". About 30 or 40 planes came in and several did overshoot into the scrub, as it were, off the end of the strip

24:00 and one pilot in a Lightning aircraft, which is a very fast reconnaissance plane, came in and buzzed the strip once, flying very low. We said he was a bit of a lair. Next time, very low. Third time he buzzed the strip and went up, straight up in the air and his engine cut out when he hit the top of his climb and luckily he had enough height to get out in a parachute and get down

24:30 and so he had a lucky escape, that bloke. Yeah. And there is a Liberator bomber off the end of the strip in the ocean. On a clear day you can see it just sitting on the floor of the water where it took off bombed up but too heavy, it didn't get up. Yeah. So there was always some activity going on there all the time. Yes. A Dutch New Guinea

25:00 town called Maurice [?], Dutch New Guinea north of Torres Strait, had some tropes there also and they had to maintain communication with them and all around the Islands.

And so where did you head after you left?

I kept parading myself to be transferred and they got sick of us I think another friend of mine and I found myself on transfer to the 2/6th Battalion because my friend, John Megsy Malloy.

25:30 had joined them at Greta when they came back from the Middle East. Possibly because I was a baby-faced young bloke and Megsy had broken his nose playing football he looked tougher, much tougher. They sent him straight to the battalion and I got sent to well firstly, it was to be Trobiand Island but then to signals. So, I went to join him in February '44 from Torres Strait Islands.

26:00 That was interesting because it's a famous battalion of the 6th Australian Division, the 1st Division formed at the outbreak of the Second World War. They had performed with distinction in the Middle

East right through from Bardia, Tobruk, Benghazi then they were sent to Greece to try and hold things up there and that was a bit of an ill fated campaign because they were vastly outnumbered with New Zealanders and they had

26:30 a fighting withdrawal right down the peninsula of Greece to be evacuated, some to Crete, some to direct Alexandria and they lost a lot of casualties there but I didn't realise until after the war, that that action delayed the invasion of Russia by 6 weeks. Hitler had decided to invade Russia and because of the

27:00 action in Greece, and why Hitler invaded Greece was to protect his flag in the Balkans because he was getting oil from Romania and he was worried that they would outflank him there and, he sent a very strong force of Panzers [German tanks] and infantry divisions down through Greece and the Australians and New Zealanders were overwhelmed but it meant that it delayed the

27:30 invasion of Russia by 6 weeks. And ultimately, the Germans got caught in the snow like Napoleon and suffered a major defeat there and the other aspect was in Crete where the Australians were, the Paratroop Divisions of Hitler suffered a terrible mauling. They lost about 5000 men and were never ever used again

28:00 as a strike force by Hitler because of the mauling they got from the Australians and New Zealanders in Crete. Yeah. So, that began a series of intensive infantry training. The 2/6th Battalion as part of the 17th Brigade which is the 2/5th, 2/6th, 2/7th Battalions had just come home from the Wau/Salamaua

28:30 campaign where they fought with great distinction in what is known as the Battle of the Ridges. They had to fight ridge by ridge by ridge in the jungle back to Salamaua and when Buna, Gona and Sanananda fell, it almost marked the end of the Papuan campaign but it didn't. The Japanese

29:00 wanted to protect the airfields at Lao right around to Penang, Aitape and Wewak where they had good bases - airbases and they moved in a crack group of troops from Rabul to take Wau, which was virtually sitting on top of Moresby and the idea was to knock Moresby out and alter the whole military campaign.

29:30 They got right up to the edge of the airfield in Wau where they were defeated by the Australians and driven back to the extent that some of the tropes being flown in got straight off the plane into action. Straight off the plane into action and the battle raged for a couple of days and they pushed them back and then drove them back, ridge by ridge to take Salamaua. Now that took 9 months, January to September.

30:00 So they had just come home when I joined them and they were rebuilding with reinforcements, then they started jungle training again which was intensive and with their knowledge and background, it covered the whole gamut of jungle training, ambushing, defensive positions, attacking, four street marches at 50 miles a day to toughen you up because

30:30 jungle fighting in the ridges is so tough where you get to the top of one ridge and then you go down the other side to the bottom, then you've got to go up again and it's terribly draining physically on your muscles and heart in the sense that it's very physical, very physical and in the jungle you're wet all

31:00 the time not only with sweat but of rain constantly so you're living in wet clothes and fighting against the country as it were. So, the training was intensive and teaching you to react automatically in a given situation and it paid off in the sense that when you went into action as a young fellow for the first time, you were a bit apprehensive as

31:30 to what was going to happen and how you were going to react and the training taught you to react under different situations. So it was interesting because some of them were 39ers, that is they enlisted in '39 and were still going. Others were reinforcements to the Battalions in the Middle East and others, like myself, had come, reinforced them in Australia.

32:00 Here. So there were many decorated men in the unit who'd won their decorations in the Middle East and in the Wau/Salamaua campaign and they were great soldiers, great soldiers. Some of them were like father figures to the younger blokes because some of them were much older men, some of them were family men, some of them were bushmen who lived hard and fought hard. They were great blokes.

32:30 Great comrades.

So when did you leave Australia with them?

December '44. We went to Aitape to relieve two American Divisions. The American Divisions had set up a perimeter, a semi-circular perimeter around Aitape and it was just a holding force because unlike the Australians, as soon as the Australians take up a position they start

33:00 patrolling immediately to find out what's going on around the area and that's what we did. And there were a few humorous events in taking over from the Yanks (Americans). As we moved in, they moved out and we back-loaded their equipment onto ships, to some of the ships that we came in on and they were very well provisioned, well looked after in terms of food. So as we loaded

33:30 their food we, to use an Australian term "knocked off" hundreds and hundreds of dozens of tins of food

of all sort and as we erected our tents on the beach where our area was we would dig holes in the sand and the food, hide the tins. Now at the finish of the day, the Yanks were checking their loading of this and realised that they were short. Hundreds of

34:00 dozens of food. So they did what they called an “emu parade” right through the camp looking for this food. Couldn’t find it! We buried it in the sand and the tent erected on top of it so it wasn’t obvious at all. So we lived well for about a week or so anyway and it proved the scrounging ability of the Australians in different circumstances and immediately

34:30 training continued in the sense of patrolling straight away. I did a most interesting patrol. I was a Section Leader in 18 Platoon from D Company. In a Platoon there are 3 sections. A section of 10 men, so 30 men with a platoon sergeant and an officer. They gave me 4 days with a dozen men to go to Sussano

35:00 Village [?], west from Aitape towards Hollandia. They said 2 days up, 2 days back. No longer. Intelligence reports said the Japanese had moved out of the village back into the hills but they wanted to make sure. So at the finish of the second day, this is right along the coast, we got to the edge of this beautiful (UNCLEAR) and we could see these beautiful villages several hundred yards across. The natives wanted to take us across

35:30 and we said no, that was the finish of the second day because once we got across we were cut-off. No escape. But we thought about it overnight and we were pretty heavily armed so the next morning we thought well, we better go and have a look and they assured us that the Japs [Japanese] had moved out, so they took us over by canoe and we got into this beautiful village, coconut village fronting the ocean and lovely huts but it was deadly quiet. No one around, not a sound.

36:00 And we thought, there’s something wrong. Something very wrong. So, next thing we’re surrounded by hundreds of excited natives yelling and screaming and we thought, oh we’ve been set up beautifully and they kept saying “Come this way, come this way”, we could talk a smattering of pidgin, “Come this way”. So we said, “Oh well we’ll go for broke we’re heavily armed and they haven’t made any move to menace us at all.” and it was a real anti-climax.

36:30 All they wanted to do was to show us a church which they had restored after the Japanese had moved out and we found out it had been built by the Lutheran missioners in 1926 I think because the German miners and missioners had been there way back in their time and it was a lovely church, beautifully restored and it was their pride and enjoy. It was a real anti-climax so, that was that. But the interesting part there is, do you remember reading about the Tsunami

37:00 or tidal wave that wiped out? It was that village. It was a beautiful village, coconut tree-lined right along the front. The lagoon itself, the Sussano Lagoon was a big lagoon and a lovely village and it got completely wiped out. I think 200 or even 2000 people died and because of my knowledge of it, I was able to help influence

37:30 raising funds through the 2/6th Battalion in the 17th Brigade in the 6th Division to help restore their village. That was a real interesting exercise coming on top of the Tsunami or tidal wave as I had personal knowledge of the beautiful village. I did a Junior Leader’s course there. NCO’s [Non Commissioned Officers] from

38:00 all the battalions 2nd through 6th and 7th and I was fortunate to become equal top in the course and as a result of that, I became a permanent Section Leader in 18 Platoon of (UNCLEAR) Company, leading 10 men in that section and it was an intensive course in tactics and defense and what have you and it was very,

38:30 very handy later on because we moved up early in March. The 17th Brigade, because of its great campaign in Wau/Salamaua was allocated to the mountains, the Torricelli Mountains. The other two Brigades of the 6th Division, the 16th and the 19th were given the task of driving down the coast to take Wewak, whereas we went inland to the mountains and pushed

39:00 in a pincer movement, pushed the Japs back towards Wewak through the mountains and where we took over from a commando group was at a place called Tong. That was 8 miles inland from the coast so we had to walk inland. There were no landing strips at that time or airfields so we walked inland to take over and then

39:30 started in action again. Patrolling is a big thing. The Australians are good at patrolling. Once your position was established you had to find out what was going on around you, reconnaissance patrols and then later when you found the enemy you had fighting patrols who go in and take the position and that produced some highlights. One

40:00 reconnaissance patrol featured where I don’t know who got the bigger fright, the Japanese man or myself. There were only three or four of us and we got into this village, we weren’t sure if there were Japanese there and I walked around the corner of a hut straight into a Japanese, face to face. Luckily I had an Allan gun which has great stopping power and I had to use it and

40:30 get out quickly because it was a reconnaissance patrol where you are supposed to find out information and not get into trouble, but I had no option. So, we got off the track quick and lively but they were so quick, they responded straight away. They were firing as we shot through the bush, quick and lively, we

got out of there. But I don’t know who got the biggest, biggest fright.

Tape 2

00:48 Well, we were in action now and the next most interesting moment that I had was on a fighting patrol where you go

01:00 out seeking to destroy the enemy with eleven men fairly heavily armed, we took part in a fighting patrol accompanied by the intelligence sergeant from battalion headquarters to just keep track about what was going on in the area. We came across a position where we were going through a clump of bamboo and we heard

01:30 chopping indicating someone was around. Moving quietly through the jungle, we came across a heavily defended position like a stockade. If you’ve seen the American wild west movies, the big high fences, just like that. They’d cut bamboo saplings to build a stockade fence with a narrow entrance and we could see, through the entrance, a pill box about 10 yards

02:00 back, another one behind that and then villages behind that. And, being a fighting patrol, we decided to go in. It was an obvious trap because narrow entrance and heavily fenced on either side but the Japanese let us right in and as we found out, to move forward, they opened up with everything and we took

02:30 cover as best we could and I was lying alongside a coconut tree where the bullets were hitting the tree on an angle and it didn’t occur to me at all that it had to be from a high up position. And the intelligence sergeant, a fellow named Frank Rankin, was lying next to me and we were lying slightly up hill, up hill because the land rose slightly up hill to the huts of the village and suddenly he was

03:00 hit in the back and it didn’t occur to me immediately that to be hit in the back he had to be fired on from an angle downhill and someone saw a puff of smoke then coming from a coconut tree high up. There was a sniper sitting up there firing at us and they soon dispatched him but Frank Rankin was severely wounded and instead of going on with the action, we had to get him out because he was an important fellow and the colonel had stressed that

03:30 he didn’t want unnecessary casualties, so we had to give covering firing and get Frank out for quick attention. Luckily he survived until after the war and unfortunately he was killed in a car accident in the post war years. infantry campaigning is interesting too because

04:00 once we took up a defensive position, we would booby-trap the area overnight. That is, in front of you and clear what they called a field of fire, cut down the undergrowth so you could see what was ahead of you because in the jungle it’s so easy to sneak up very close to the enemy or to your position and, every evening we would build these booby-traps with hand grenades linked by wire or

04:30 string so that if anyone tripped them, you’d get a chain reaction of them all going off and each morning it was someone’s duty to go down and delouse them and one of our blokes was called slab because he was broad as he was long and he was heavily built and not a fast mover in that sense. So, he went down one morning to delouse the booby-traps and accidentally kicked the trip wire, one of the trip wires

05:00 which meant it was going to set off all these grenades. Well, he came up the hill like an Olympic sprinter. I’ve never seen a bloke move so fast in his life. To dive into a slit fence before the hand grenades exploded and we jokingly said he was a (UNCLEAR) Australian. He was going to be the next Olympic sprinter. So fast did he move for such a heavily built man. Because we were in the mountains, we had to be supplied by air, by

05:30 DC-3 aircraft where they would drop ammunition, medical supplies and food to air drops. We’d have to mark areas usually with a big white cross of cloth as the dropping zone. Now often, if the drop wasn’t real accurate, the supply drop could go towards the enemy and you couldn’t get the supplies back.

06:00 In other cases it was great because until we could establish an airfield, which they did later after they captured a lot of villages, with the help of the natives they built an airstrip where they could at least get a DC-3 in. In other cases, there were a couple of little small landing strips where you could get a Piper Cub or one of those little aircraft in and we had to

06:30 take some of those positions and that’s where I injured my back badly. I had been doing long range patrols from our position over towards a little village called Yamal where there was a little landing strip for very small aircraft and because of that, a platoon from A Company, I was in D Company were given the job of taking the Japanese position protecting this,

07:00 this village and little airstrip. So, I went over from Don Company and we moved up one afternoon, dug in, ready to attack at the first light in the morning. Prior to the attack, a Beauford Squadron supporting us would bomb the area and then machine-gun at Strarford. Unfortunately, we came within their line of fire. We were about

07:30 400 yards or 500 yards away from the Japanese position and they shot us up and at first, it was treated as a bit of a joke in that they were chopping the trees down over our heads and someone said they couldn't hit us with a hand full of rice and the next thing they got on target and a fellow named Emerton, I didn't know any of the fellows because I was in D Company,

08:00 a fellow Emerton got badly wounded and two native carriers, ammunition carriers and suppliers who came up with us got hit and killed, and when they got on target, I took a running broad jump into my slit trench and as I did, I slipped in the mud as I took off and I hit the edge of the weapon pit which is a square on my back-

08:30 side and I thought I'd broken my back and at the same time, the rifle which I was using was on top of the weapon pit, the wood work was shattered, just shattered right back to the magazine, just hanging loose so luckily it missed me but I really hurt my back and, as a result of Emerton being badly wounded, we had to get him out quickly.

09:00 So we had to improvise stretchers with shirts and what have you to carry him out and that was a pretty heavy physical job because with those ridges, they're so steep and slippery, we had to take turns in carrying him and I'd badly injured my back. I laid up for about a week or so before I could get going again and just carried on.

09:30 But in the post war years, right from the end of the war, I'd had a lot of lower back problems, a lot of time off work. It culminated in major surgery in 1963 at Greenslopes Hospital and I went back again in 1971 for another bout but it was successful in that it got me back to work again but I've always had a crook back as a result and it affected my

10:00 career later in the Commonwealth Bank because in its wisdom, the Bank didn't send me to the country. I was having a fair bit of time off from work and they were very supportive in the sense that I had almost 10 months off in '61, '62 before I had the major surgery. That was another incident that I was involved in that

10:30 sticks heavily in my mind because of Emerton, Emerton died the next day we got him out for medical treatment but he died the next day because being in action in the mountains, the medical support is primitive in the sense that you've got your First Aid fellows but until they can evac [evacuate], with serious injuries to evacuate men to the coast at

11:00 early stage, they had to be walked out. Later, they could be flown out and it made all the difference in the world. Now,

So tell me about towards the end of the war and on from there.

Yes, it was interesting, our task was to push towards Wewak as the two sister Brigades

11:30 captured Wewak and then they pushed towards our brigade. Pushed out of Wewak with the idea of meeting and that was the stage we were at when the war finished. And, because I hadn't been home for two and a half years or so and many others, particularly what they called the '39ers or the older men, there were complaints in Parliament apparently that some of them were being killed

12:00 in this campaign which some regarded as unnecessary in that the Japs were cut off. The government's policy was that they wanted to liberate the whole of New Guinea because the Japanese army comprised about 100,000 men originally, about 3 or 4 Divisions, the 18th Japanese army and although they were cut off, they had no support air support as they did have earlier, sea support.

12:30 They were still there with a big influence on the native population and very cruel in some cases, very cruel in some cases. So they wanted to liberate the native population completely and that raised one interesting thing. I saw a renegade native summarily executed one day where the Japanese had promoted him as it were, promoted him in his eyes officer

13:00 status, gave him a cap and a pistol and he organised their, what they call their cargo lines for carrying equipment and supplies and he was their Chief Organiser and ANGAU [Australian, New Guinea Administration Unit], the Administration for New Guinea, had been trying to capture this fellow for a long time. Finally they did and I saw him summarily tried for all his crimes, which they listed, sentenced to death by firing

13:30 squad, saw him dig his own grave and stand in front of it and be summarily executed by police boys from New Guinea because he was such a wanted man and his crimes involved killing his fellow countrymen and Australians. They listed all of the crimes he was responsible for. An ANGAU officer

14:00 heard the case and summarily dismissed him. There is one reason why I'd never be a parachutist I think too. Before we went into action, I went up on a familiarisation trip in a DC-3 aircraft with the door off where they were dropping supplies to the commandoes in this particular case and you were just tied to

14:30 around with a piece of rope around your waist and to the side, to the inside of the aircraft and when the red light came on, all the supplies were near the door and when the red light came on, you pushed them out as he banked over the dropping site and I used to think looking down at tree tops, I wouldn't have the guts to jump out of an aircraft. It was a scary feeling so I could imagine the feeling of the blokes,

parachutists

15:00 jumping out of aircraft into space because you could jump to a conclusion very, very quickly. Yes.

Tell us about coming back and the end of the war.

Yes. I was just saying because many of the older fellows, in particular the 39ers, were being killed there were complaints in parliament and a routine order came out that those who hadn't been home for about 2

15:30 years were to be sent home immediately so I came home with that group and not soon after I got severe doses of malaria and I was in and out of hospital regularly and after going on leave I was on the way back to the unit, I was going to go back to New Guinea but they said "No, you're home now, you stay" so

16:00 I was held in staging camps in Brisbane and it was here that I was transferred temporarily into the Army Pay Office who helped finalise or speed up discharges of people being discharged. On a parade one day, all of the men who were clerks in civilian street were ordered into the Pay Office to speed things up and

16:30 I didn't like the idea at all but we had to obey orders and I found myself helping to finalise discharges here in Brisbane. My wife was working there as a civilian in the Army Pay Office as a clerk and I started keeping company with her but I was held here for 6 months before being transferred back to Sydney where I was discharged and

17:00 we became engaged and I came back to get married in 1947. 21st June 1947. I'll never forget it because it is the shortest day and the longest night and at our wedding reception, of course I got some great curry. They said "You're a cunning devil". I said "No, it was, was pure by accident and not by design". Yep.

17:30 So, we were married in 1947 and our first child was born on 25th June 1949 our daughter, Maree followed by Tony on 23 November, 1951 and that comprised our family. Because of medical problems, my wife had a couple of miscarriages and near death experience with thrombosis

18:00 in her third pregnancy, very nearly expired and as a result has a circulation problem. Other than that, we've had a very happy family life. Children are married and we've got one, two, five grandchildren and lived happily ever after except that I've had quite a lot of medical problems.

18:30 My back in particular, has given me a lot of problems over the years. I've had by-pass surgery 8 years ago, triple by-pass surgery, to the extent that I retired a bit earlier than I would have done because I was quite ill at the time. I've had two TIA transient ischaemic attacks, which are mini-strokes

19:00 but luckily, I survived them with good hospital treatment. I've got two screws in my left big toe which I broke in infantry training and it caused me to walk on the outside of my foot to take the pain off the toe and eventually I had surgery on it. Not without humour because the first operation, I finished up with an erection in my big toe

19:30 sticking up in the air and it, it had to be corrected by fusing the bones with the result, 2 screws are in my left big toe and that did cause a lot of walking problems but with orthotics in my shoes, it helps.

So, how did you do the toe again?

I broke it in infantry training probably leaping off somewhere in training

20:00 which was pretty vigorous on the table ends, yeah I thought of the table ends. It was intensive because the colonel was a disciplinarian who, who wanted tough, fit, fighting men under his command and he got it by tough training which, which stood us all in great stead later on and that's not without humour because our doctor

20:30 was a doctor who, not long after he graduated, joined the army and he said he was at the Exhibition Ground, in his uniform, with three pips up as a captain and this man with red braid passed him, walked past him and turned around and said "How long have you been in the army, young man?" and he said "A few days, Sir" "Well, don't you forget to salute a staff officer next time you see him"

21:00 and the doctor said "The only blokes I knew at that stage, with red braid, were Salvation Army blokes" and the same fellow, the same doctor, we were doing a 50 mile forced route march on the Atherton Tablelands and General Stephens came past him in a jeep, standing up in the jeep as they drove along and they drove past the doctor who was at the end of the, the end of our, our battalion

21:30 picking up any strays who weren't very well and General Stephens (UNCLEAR) came back and said "Why didn't you salute General Stephens?" And Doctor Quinn said "I was so bloody tired I couldn't salute anyone". Yeah.

Alright. Well, we might go back to the very beginning. Back to Gundagai. So, just. I know you went into some detail but just, just tell us again

22:00 **about growing up in Gundagai?**

Well, Gundagai is one of Australia's most famous towns because of its history. 'The Dog on the Tuckerbox' Memorial marks a tribute to the early pioneers who pushed out to the inland with big cattle, bullock wagons pushing inland and opening up the country and that memorial,

22:30 which is a significant part of Gundagai at the Five Mile Creek, was built for that reason to honour the pioneers and as a school kid I was in the guard of honour when Joe Lyons, the then Prime Minister, unveiled 'The Dog on the Tuckerbox' and I went back 50 years later for a celebration where they had a great week of events. They had a parade through the town. They had a ball in the evening. They had a race meeting and that was interesting because I ran

23:00 into a friend of mine who, from a farm who owned a race horse and he said to me, "I've got a horse the next race Kevin and it's a goer, you can back it", and I did and it ran stone-motherless last. The horses came out of the back straight into the straight in the dust and I couldn't see my horse at all, he was running last. But it was great to go back and renew acquaintances

23:30 with, with people I had grown up with and gone to school with, learnt to swim with and renew acquaintances with them. As I said, half way between Sydney and Melbourne there was always something going on, a great little town. No such thing as 'stranger danger' in those days. We could be out for hours playing as kids and no worries at all.

24:00 **Sport is mentioned as quite important?**

Sport was the big thing like in most country towns because in the winter, football in particular, inter-town rivalry was, was big. Gundagai was sought of surrounded by Temora, Harden, Cootamundra, Tumut, Wagga, Adalong, Batlow and the inter-town rivalry was strong and even as kids we

24:30 used to go to these towns. I remember the first time I saw snow was in the scouts when we went to Batlow to play the locals football and other sporting games and it was snowing. The first time I'd seen snow because you're getting up into the mountains near Batlow which is a great apple growing area and places like Wagga, which is really the capital of the Riverina on the Murrumbidgee,

25:00 it's a lovely city. Other adjoining towns like Young where fruit growing, in particular cherries, are a very big, big industry. Cootamundra was the centre of the sought of rail industry because it was on the main line from Sydney to Melbourne and Gundagai was a branch line of Cootamundra but it's closed now. There's no longer a train line running off Cootamundra to Gundagai and Tumut and Batlow so,

25:30 So time marches on.

So tell us about those rivalries. What would you say to each other?

Well, the rivalries were very keen, the battles were hard fought. Whichever town it was and the Gundagai football team was known as the Gundagai Tigers, black and gold, and the rivalry was intense. The cup which they battled for was called the Marr Cup. It's a famous

26:00 Group 9 cup and at one stage, in anger, it was thrown in the Tumut River I think from memory but eventually recovered without the top and it, it features in the history of Group 9 Rugby League in that area and as I said, locals would go by special train if they

26:30 were going away to play sometimes and if it was a grand final as it were and they won it, there was great celebrations on the way home in the train where the train driver would be tooting his horn, cocka-doodle doing, all the way home and especially as he came into Gundagai where there would be a great reception committee and great, great celebrations. A big feature of the town. My elder brother and

27:00 I were ball boys for an exhibition by Davis Cup players of the time, great players Jack Crawford, Vivian McGrath and Adrian Quist. That was interesting because they were outstanding Davis Cup players, Australian players and famous part of the Australian tennis community and it was a privilege to be a ball boy and see them in action, see

27:30 them in action.

What were they like?

Very approachable because on tour, on exhibition, naturally there was great adulation. These people you'd read about them and no television in those days, you'd heard about them on radio, you'd seen the reports in the paper and then seeing them in person was a big event in a country town, a big event. Also,

What, sorry

28:00 **what was some of the events attached to like a visit of the Davis Cup? What would people do?**

Oh, the whole town would sought of close down and, and go and see the event. For example each cricket season, a famous cricketer named Wendal Bill who played for New South Wales, would take a touring side through the country, mainly the Riverina. Now he bought to Gundagai Don Bradman, Stan McCabe,

28:30 Bill Oldfield, Arthur Mailley, Fingleton, great Australian Test Cricketers and what they would do was play the locals and then conduct a clinic at the local oval. The whole town would close down and come in from the farms and watch this big event and meet these personalities and some of us school kids had the privilege of carrying their sporting bags down to the local oval where they played.

29:00 So, there was a big event in the town when it happened. Another interesting fact of my life was that to earn some pocket money, I earned 5 shillings or 50c a week to get up at 6 o'clock every morning and go up to the local Ford garage, dealer's garage sweep out the workshop in the front of the garage and, and the office part, fill the oil bottles

29:30 that needed filling, clean them, put the tools back on the racks where they were designated in the workshops and earn 5 shillings a week. I'd have time to get home by half past 7, have some breakfast, get changed and head down to the railway station to catch the train to Tumut but it was fascinating in the sense that in the holidays, when I worked there in the afternoon, I got a job in the afternoon too

30:00 as a service attendant filling the tourist's petrol tanks and wiping their windscreens and checking their oil, we met a lot of very interesting people passing through and earning some pocket money in the process.

So, why would you go to Tumut?

No high school at Gundagai as there is now. No option but to go

30:30 to a boarding school at Goulburn, Wagga or Sydney and my parents couldn't afford for me to do that so I went by train with quite a few boys and girls from Gundagai. In addition, the train would pick up along the way because it came from Cootamundra and on the Cootamundra side of Gundagai, it would pick up at the stations on the way and some students came from places called Matama and Coolac

31:00 before they got to Gundagai and then on the other side of Gundagai at Tumbalong and Adalong it'd pick up more students and go on to Tumut.

Was education considered important in your family?

It was in the sense of employment opportunities. Gundagai was a small town of about 2,000 people. Employment opportunities very limited.

31:30 For example, my older brother went to Sydney to work in an engineering firm and he was what they called man-powered during the war. He wanted to enlist with his mates of his age group. He was 2 years older than I and many of his mates from Gundagai, they all knew one another, they used to do a lot of bike riding, bike racing, football, cricket and they would not release him. If you were man powered and they didn't want to release you that's the finish

32:00 so he was very disappointed but he had to go to Sydney to obtain permanent employment and he did.

Was it impressed upon you in your family?

Yes, in the sense of, of discussion of what you were going to do when you leave school because I didn't know what employment I could obtain but because of, I forget

32:30 how we found out but through public exam in Canberra, you could join the Commonwealth Public Service and John William Megsy Malloy and I who'd grown up together, learnt to swim together, played footy together, heard about this and went over for a public exam and passed and we were appointed to the Commonwealth Public Service. So it was and there are quite a few Gundagai people working

33:00 in Canberra for that reason. It's an employment opportunity.

Go back to your family, tell us about your parents. What they were doing?

My father was a, he was a carpenter. He was a man for all seasons. He was a carpenter, undertaker, manufacturer's agent for Westinghouse Goods and I did many trips out in the countryside with him, putting

33:30 in refrigerators and washing machines, radios were small time but the smaller electrical equipment, he was the sought of fellow who could turn his hand to anything. Pull an engine down, a motorcar, he often used to give a hand at one of the local garages when they were short handed. He was a projectionist at the local theatre, showing the movies, so my Mum was a

34:00 fulltime Mum with eight children, you can imagine. My memories of my mother are washing, ironing, cooking, sewing, fulltime nonstop, nonstop. A marvellous woman in that sense because no holidays, the grind of domestic housework. Yes.

Tell us about growing up in that kind of family.

Well, great because you were so close together and

34:30 my older brother and I used to often fight a fair bit. We had disagreements over this, that and the other and my brother was so cool headed, he could always beat me because he was so cool headed, he would

just tick me off and give me a hiding and my younger brother, Allan, he was a daring bloke, we all learnt to swim in the Murrumbidgee River and after school as soon as

35:00 we came home we'd say to Mum "can we go over to the river Mum?" and she'd say "provided Vince is with you", our elder brother. His job was to look after us and he did. But, Allan would dive off the railway bridge about 50 feet or more into the river or off the high tower at this, there was a swimming pool in the river, off the high tower, I was never game enough but Allan would do this regularly. So we were involved in, in sport all the time. Cricket in the summer,

35:30 swimming, football in the winter and we went to the convent school, the Catholics would always play the public school, play the pubs and there was great rivalry there and there was always some athletics on like Empire Day, they called it in those days, was a carnival at the local sports ground. There'd be the whole bit of athletics, sprints, the high jumps, the rest, broad jumps

36:00 and the competition was always very keen, very keen.

And your father was in World War I, can you tell us about that?

Yes, it's strange that he didn't talk a lot about it but I've since found out that he was in the 57th Battalion of the 5th Division and he served at Villers Bretonneux which was one of the famous actions

36:30 towards the end of the war, '17, '18 and he had an interest in the Army in this sense that during the war, he was in the Volunteer Defence Corps which it was just like Dad's Army [British television comedy], if you've ever seen those films, it was like Dad's Army and he served as a warrant officer in marshalling the local troops and he got blown sky high in Sydney at a training course

37:00 at Ingleburn and there's a famous photo in one of the Sydney papers that shows him in mid air. They were doing a water crossing like a creek, a pretty big creek and the explosives were, whatever happened, were mistimed or what have you and the boat they were in just got blown up but there's a photo of him in, or two or three of 'em in mid air as they were blown up so he suffered a casualty without an enemy shot being fired in that sense

37:30 but he was in the Volunteer Defence Corps and when you read the history of the trench warfare in the Second World War it was horrific, you know the casualties names were all, was enormous, enormous. Yes.

What, what exactly happened to him there?

Training exercise?

Yes. What happened to him?

Oh, he recovered. Yeah he recovered. Yes he was in hospital for, for a while and

38:00 he recovered back to Gundagai and they lived there until 1945. At the end of the war they moved to Sydney to Homebush, a suburb of Sydney. When I took my discharge, I moved to Homebush instead of going back to Gundagai and I didn't go back to Canberra. They appointed me to the Department of Supply and Development at, in Sydney.

And how with the family, did you

38:30 **manage with the Depression?**

Quite well by comparison in the sense that I mentioned earlier there was a big Chinese market garden in Gundagai and a lot of people grew their own provisions and a lot of the community was self-supporting in that, that sense. The, certainly there was a lot of unemployment but I can't remember

39:00 sought of feeling the affects of the Depression other than to see men passing through that were on the dole and had to see the police to get a food voucher or in, I can remember my parents packing food for relatives who in Sydney who were unemployed and could not obtain work but remained in Sydney and I can remember them sending food parcels to them.

What would they put in these parcels?

39:30 Vegetables mainly, fruit because some of the outlying farmers grew fruit and with rail travel that could be in Sydney the next day and very welcome. It was mainly vegetables and fruit.

And just quickly tell us about living as a kind of, as a train town.

40:00 As a, as a train town, the train was a big feature of the town because it bought supplies for the town keepers, shopkeepers by rail, it was a means of communication to Sydney through Cootamundra and people would go on holidays to Sydney. I, I went several times by train with my brother to stay with my grandmother at Homebush and

40:30 to school for several years to Tumut High School. You could do other trips up to Batlow in the mountains. It was a focal point as it were. As I mentioned, Worth's Circus would come to town by train. Other exhibitions that might come would often come by train instead of a big road train. It was a focal

point and a very important part of the town.

Tape 3

00:40 **I'm interested in when you passed the Intermediate. Can you tell me about that exam and what age you sat it and that sort of thing?**

Age about 15, in New South Wales at the time was the Intermediate Certificate and the Leaving

01:00 Certificate. I didn't go on for the Leaving because I took the job in Canberra when it came up. It covered the usual subjects of maths, English, science, a language if you wanted, I took French which later I was able to practise my schoolboy French on a troop in Europe which didn't work too well at times. But it was a good

01:30 school, the standard of teaching was good and except that the headmaster was the maths teacher and a tough disciplinarian. And a little impatient at times, he would say if you couldn't follow him, 'son you're dead from the shoulders up' And I used to sit next to a Chinese boy and he used to throw his head back and laugh because he you know like me, at times

02:00 he'd get lost in the exhibition of figures that he was giving. The same Chinese, there were three Chinese boys and the same boys benefited greatly from the Snowy Mountain scheme because Tumut was at the other end of the scheme where a lot of the supplies came from and they developed a transport business and did famously financially as a result. Their father was a wool and skin buyer and

02:30 they were delightful boys, the Doon brothers, D double O N. One became quite a prominent jockey, Eddy Doon and the other two boys carried on the business.

How did the other kids react to these Chinese boys?

Good because they were lovely kids and they just blended in with the community. One little fella had a great sense of humour that couldn't follow maths much and sometimes the headmaster would say what do you think Robert?

03:00 And we would put our head down and say so and so and sometimes it would have nothing to do with what the headmaster was talking about and the whole class would roar laughing. And this little bloke would throw his head back and laugh uproarlessly, great natured kids and were liked by everyone, no racism there, yes.

Just I heard you mention before the Chinese market garden, can you

03:30 **explain what that is to me?**

Yes, in simple terms they were gardeners who grew vegetables mainly and in their great tradition they're great gardeners. They had quite a big vegetable garden on the river flats and supplied the town and I suppose use the term exported to Wagga and surrounding towns.

04:00 They were accepted by the local community and although they kept very much to themselves they were respected by the community and did a great job in providing vegetables. And that has a humorous moment too and kids we raided the garden one day and infantry style we crept around on our bellies around the creek bank up to take what we were going to take and one of the old Chinese gentlemen spotted us and

04:30 tried to frighten us by aiming a rifle at us and kicking a four gallon drum you know which would make a noise, but thinking it would scare us. It did, it frightened us off we had to take off but he used to kick the four gallon tin drum and point the rifle at us.

I might've been listening to too many stories here with this question but how would

05:00 **the Chinese guys dress, traditionally?**

In their style of long pants, black pants usually with a coat like cover which would come about three quarters of the way day and their Chinese peak hats in their traditional style. And, they were quite popular. At one stage there was a Chinese cook in

05:30 one of the hotels and his two daughters used to come up from Sydney, they were beautiful looking girls and he paid for their education in Sydney, they were highly educated and beautiful looking girls and he was the cook in the hotel, in the family hotel.

Would he cook traditional Australian?

Yes well it was mainly Australian because the tourist would be staying there every night and he would cook Australian meals cause Chinese meals

06:00 weren't big in those days not like now. No, you seldom had a Chinese meal, yes. Are we still on

Gundagai because there's a famous museum piece there, a famous clock built by Mr Ruscione built out of small marble pieces. He was a monumental mason and a very skilled, highly skilled man born in

06:30 between Switzerland and Italy and he made this famous clock which is quite a feature tourist attraction in Gundagai now and I went to school with his boys and later one became a garage owner, well two did really and it's interesting that the Niagara Café run by

07:00 Greeks, those people weren't involved in sports much, it wasn't their scene but their grand children now are heavily involved in local sporting activities just normally like as football, cricket they feature primarily. It's interesting in the evolution of the family because that wasn't their style the football.

07:30 The Greeks obviously came from Greece to Australia and other say Italian families wasn't their scene but nowadays they just blend into the community.

So it was really quite a multicultural town?

In one sense you had the Greek Café. Mr Rascione was a sort of Italian sort of Swiss background and other nationalities yes, not strong but they were there.

08:00 And respected citizens, yes.

We started talking about our Intermediate, can you walk me through what process you went through applying for the job in the Commonwealth?

Well we got wind or we found out about this public exam and wrote over for particulars.

08:30 Application forms were sent to us and we put them in so we had to go to Canberra to do the exam and my father took me over. And it was a public exam were there were quite a few sitting for it because it's interesting when I enlisted I met up with a fellow from Young who did the particular exam that we did and another fellow from Temora.

09:00 So fellows from the surrounding towns did the same exam with the idea of obtaining employment there. And once we were accepted well we had to move to Canberra to live and I boarded with a family at Griffiths a suburb of Canberra near Manuka and… that was interesting in the sense that I boarded

09:30 with another fellow from Kilmore or another little town in Victoria and he was a very good Aussie Rules [Australian football] player, a tall young man a couple of years older than me and he kidded me into having a go with Aussie Rules with the local Manuka side. He was one of their of their good football players and I played with the intermediates which is the seconds and as I say they stuck me in what they call a back pocket where you can't do much

10:00 harm and you get a few kicks but it was interesting I learnt about Aussie Rules which was big in Canberra because there are a lot of Victorians living there.

What was Canberra like at the time as a city?

Well it's interesting there were only about 30,000 people there in those days. I used to ride a pushbike to work and in wintertime it was bitterly cold so I'd have an overcoat, gloves, scarf, beanie on the way to

10:30 work it was so cold. But now, it's a beautiful city in the sense that the lake has transformed the area and with the other suburban developments that have taken on with the new Parliament House, War Memorial other features it's a beautiful city. They say it's a bit soulless because it's a public service town, there are no big

11:00 industries there and that's true but it is a beautiful city.

Did it have soul when you were there?

I don't think so in the sense that it was strictly a public service town so all you had was the interaction between public servants now it's expanded in that there's more businesses of so many varied types there that

11:30 it's more diversified than it was then but it is a beautiful city. And the War Memorial is a magnificent exhibition in the sense of its portrayal of Australian Service activities. A magnificent building and the activities they promote to demonstrate the past is

12:00 excellent, yes. Something to be proud of.

So when you sat your public exam, was this a different kind of an exam to your Intermediate?

Yes, not as tough in the sense, so English was an essay and other précis of different articles of spelling

12:30 of course and then the maths mainly complies to arithmetic rather than algebra and anything else so compared to the Intermediate it wouldn't have been as strong to use that work.

And so your dad would generally get you to Canberra?

Drove over by car and we stayed at a building, a fairly prominent that one, called Brassy House where some of the politicians used to stay when they came to Canberra

13:00 up to the house sittings.

And did you drive back that night?

Yes after the exam, yes, we just stayed over night, after the exam. Gundagai was about 180ks [kilometres] from Canberra.

And how long to it take for them, like when did you find out that you'd gotten the job?

It was a month or so and then we were delighted of course so John William Megsie Malloy and I

13:30 went over to Canberra. He too obtained board with a private family who was a First World War digger. And the family I stayed with the man of the house had been a very senior official in the Taxation Department and at one time private secretary to Lord Cassey in the federal government and that was interesting because he had

14:00 a lot of interesting stories to tell and he enlisted in the army and went overseas in the Pay Corps to the Middle East and I haven't seen him since then.

And what were your first duties in the job to begin with?

I was appointed to the Records Department which involved simply at first moving files around all the

14:30 various departments and there was a protocol section, there was external territories which the government administered. Cables, correspondence and they were all pretty busy offices but my break came, in terms of getting a job with the federal minister when I had to deliver these cables in a big sealed

15:00 envelope to the hands of each private secretary of the federal minister that they were addressed to and only to him they weren't to be given to anyone else, had to be delivered personally. So this involved everyday walking from the building, the Prime Minister's Department was called West Block and it was several hundred yards from Parliament House, so you had to walk over to Parliament House. And that was interesting, because I used to pass

15:30 some of these personalities and I wondered who they were, Doctor Coombes who became senior advisor to the government, famous economist, and Professor Copeland another famous economist who had a style of address that attracted your attention straight away. A very loud tie and big handkerchief in his pocket and I used to wonder who was this fellow, Professor Copeland. Doctor Coombes was a littler man, nugget Coombes they called him because of the way he was built

16:00 and other personalities. But I used to take this directly to the private secretary of each minister and after many months, Murray Tyrell, who later became Sir Murray Tyrell as Ben Chifley's private secretary asked me if I'd join him as his assistant and I said 'Well what have I got to do?' He said 'you've got to do all the filing, you've got all the transport bookings, get the Minister in the House if the division bells ring.

16:30 Do any job if he wants it done quickly, you are asked to do and be a sort of general rouse about for what I want you to do.' And that's the way it worked out.

Just going back to what you mentioned before, you mentioned that there were cables and external and protocol and correspondence, can you describe what each of these, it may seem self-explanatory?

Yes, if you say protocol, that's the protocol for appointments by

17:00 the government, the conduct of functions where the Prime Minister has to meet and greet and conduct functions, whether it's going abroad or in Australia. The protocol that the government or he must follow is done by the department and all the organising of that function. Cables, of course it's sort of self explanatory

17:30 in the sense that the cables would come in often in cipher particularly because the war was on, BD cipher they'd come from all over the world, America and Middle East, England in particular, Churchill's office, be deciphered and delivered to the particular Minister mainly the Prime Minister's office and the other minister that I served with, was the Minister for Supply and Development and his job was overseeing the production of

18:00 munitions, aircraft, petrol rationing because it was on then but mainly on the munitions side of engineering making munitions and aircraft parts and aircraft. So each minister had his specific tasks and his job was Minister for Supply and Development, supply of all the parts, manufacturing etc, planes, munitions.

18:30 **You just mentioned one thing and I'm just trying to get the time frame straight, you started this work when you were 16, so what year was that?**

It had to be 1940, end of 40, yes.

So the war was underway?

Yes, the war was underway. We worked long hours because of the war. See the Cabinet used to meet regularly

19:00 in different cities, Sydney, Melbourne in Canberra when the House was sitting, Adelaide occasionally and you worked long hours because the correspondence was heavy relating to all the aspects of their department and we would often work till 11 o'clock midnight regularly. Other times you were travelling between Sydney, Melbourne, Melbourne, Canberra and

19:30 demanding in that sense but the war was on, it was a big war effort.

And working I guess so close to politicians where a lot of the war was being discussed, did your knowledge of the war or your interest in the war…

Oh yes, because I mentioned that part of my job was filing correspondence and I suppose in a security sense I should've have been doing it but at times I did and I used to see War Cabinet Minutes and things like that

20:00 and that was fascinating because Churchill would be sending cables to the Australian Government and cables were flying everywhere and I suppose in my sort of youth I didn't realise the extent of the security risk. I just did

20:30 what I had to do and did it faithfully.

What sort of information was going past your eyes?

Well when the Queen Mary was sailing for the Middle East with troops, disposition of troops, discussions between the Australian Government and the English Government, Churchill's government. In retrospect it surprised me that

21:00 I was doing that occasionally, yes, but most interesting. And interesting to see Menzies was in government when I first started with Murray Tyrell so you had Menzies, McEwen who's called Black Jack a Country Party [Country Liberal Party] member who was a very strong party supporter and he would often differ with the government from the agricultural point of view, Country

21:30 Party point of view, strong man. And then when the Government changed you had Jack Curtin, Prime Minister, Chiefly his Treasurer, Beazley the man I worked for after McBride. Strongmen that had come up through the trade union movement and were strong men.

Did you see much of a change when Curtin took over from Menzies

22:00 **I guess in their relationship with Britain and Australia?**

Yes because Curtin was more independent, Australia was greatly threatened the Japanese moved down so quickly through the Far East and we were really threatened and Curtin dug his toes in and insisted with Churchill that the Australian troops come home from the Middle East to meet the threat here. He had a stand up rule as it were

22:30 and to his credit, he won, he dug his toes in and he won and the Australian troops came home. They were battled hardened and proved it when they met the Japanese in New Guinea.

What was the atmosphere like around Canberra when he was having this brawl with…?

Well amongst the journalists you know there was a buzz all the time because we were threatened and it would appear at that time we would be invaded

23:00 I enlisted. I was young and fit and I felt I would be better served in the Army than what I was doing although it was an important job and… but the buzz at the time was that we were really under threat.

Was there a shift in the attitude of fighting for the Empire and then I guess fighting for your

23:30 **own country?**

Well it's hard to answer that one in the sense that our loyalties here were to the Empire but Australia first in the sense that we were directly under threat and for that reason Curtin made his stand and to his credit because had he not done so, Churchill's idea was to divert the Australian troops to Burma which

24:00 were fighting the Japanese on a big front there and it would've made the Japanese job so much easier to invade Australia but he insisted then to, I'll always say to his credit, and I think the worry and stress really killed him. He died just after the after from memory and they said he worried enormously you know about the responsibility

24:30 he had.

Was there a general respect for him amongst well the journalist and the public (UNCLEAR)?

Yeah, there was because of his stand and the promotion of the war effort and certainly a lot of criticism about [General Douglas] MacArthur because he was a publicity hound as it were. He had a great press call around him and was politically ambitious

25:00 but working with him meant that Australia was heavily supplied with equipment and men and munitions. It made a tremendous difference to the war effort.

I've read that some people say Curtin was a bit sort of submissive to MacArthur, what's your opinion?

You do see some reports like that because he was in a difficult position here was this

25:30 American general backed by America as it were and we're in such a powerless state, the troops weren't home by the Middle East at that stage and he was treading warily and he had to apparently because MacArthur was demanding and some Australians have been critical of him

26:00 but I wouldn't be.

Did you meet him?

Yes, yes, I did. And I met Mr Menzies. I was in the Spirit of Progress one evening going to Melbourne from Sydney and the Minister was in the compartment with the Minister and the Secretary Murray Tyrell and Menzies put his head in the door and said, "I want to speak to you Phil." his name was Phillip McBride and (UNCLEAR)

26:30 enough to say should I excuse myself and he said "No son you stay there, you're okay." and they discussed which I could hear, some aspect of McBride's portfolio and it was okay.

What was he like?

He was a bit like Gough Whitlam in that he had this bearing what do they call a Roman Senator.

27:00 An intellectual man who was a lawyer by profession and had a, you wouldn't call a superior attitude, but a forceful sort of personality. Yes.

You mentioned you were on Spirit of Progress?

That's the train that runs between Sydney and Melbourne. It's quite a popular train

27:30 and it was a more modern version of earlier train. It had a dining car and more comfortable situation like sleeping quarters for an overnight trip.

Maybe I'm thinking too much of seeing John Howard with his entourage these days, but what was the security like when the Prime Minister was on the train?

Not like it is now. No,

28:00 in that case I can't remember prominently seeing any bodyguards. Some of the journos [journalists] were former servicemen, for example the publicity man a journalist for Senator McBride was a fellow named Ginger Burke who had been a major in the army and there were quite a few of those sort of fellows around and they're very alert, the Press Corps very alert

28:30 you know amongst themselves they know all the gossip that's going on and keep one another well informed, yeah. So it wasn't obvious the security.

Were there normal passengers on the train?

Yes there were, there were and but I should imagine there would've been a few security blokes around particularly with the Prime Minister on board.

So you didn't get mobbed.

29:00 **And you mentioned you met Curtin, can you describe your impressions of him?**

Yes well you know a very simple meeting in the sense that I used to deliver the cables and one day I did that personally and he was a very quiet natured man but from the readings of it very strong willed. One of the icons of the Labor Party

29:30 and you read his career he'd been a heavy drinker at times but a strong man and in meeting him just superficially like that you had no indication at all of the man it was his performance as a politician in war time that highlighted you know what a great man he was.

I've seen some archival

30:00 **footage of his speeches and he seems to…**

Yes he wasn't what you call a front man, not a publicity seeking type man. You know some of the

politicians delight in it but he wasn't that type of man, he was a very quiet natured man. Used to see him regularly walking, he used to stay at Kurrajong House which is bit like

30:30 a B and B [Bed and Breakfast] I suppose, it's a famous place in Canberra, walking to Parliament house of a morning regularly with Chifley sometimes and sometimes on his own and a very quiet natured man.

Fascinating. Was there much of a difference going from Menzies to Curtin

31:00 **was there a difference in the work or any…?**

Not really because it was war time they had they specific tasks in their portfolios, for example, Senator McBride was the Minister for Supply and Development responsible for the supply and manufacture of aircraft, aircraft parts, munitions, weapons. When John Beazley took over in the change of government, he took over the same responsibilities

31:30 so they just carried on, as it were. So, the only direction in change of policy would be the changes that would've come from the Labour Party we'll do this or we'll do that as distinct from say the Menzies government approach. The Labor party would decide its course and follow through.

What were some of the major changes that you observed?

32:00 There weren't many, mainly the big policy change was Curtin's insistence that the troops come home from Middle East. Menzies was regarded as a great royal supporter and many people think that he would not have taken the stand that Curtin took because Churchill wanted to divert the Aussies to Burma but Curtin said no

32:30 and dug his toes in. That was one big, big change to our advantage, country's advantage.

Was there a difference I guess thinking about today the way opposition leaders and opposition parties relate to each other was there much of that?

There wasn't as much as there is today, there's a lot of in fighting

33:00 goes on in the House these days, in both Houses apparently. Traditionally the debate in Parliament is strong but courteous. I think Eddie Ward was the biggest stirrer in my time, he was a famous left winger from East Sydney who was very outspoken in his comments and personal in some cases

33:30 but otherwise there wasn't. There would be a debate in differences but in a more courteous manner rather than some of the dialogue that goes on these days.

I find it interesting that in a way, your job stayed the same but the person you working for changed, I mean was there ever any sort of what did the last bloke do,

34:00 **sort of…?**

Yes at different times they would've queried why this was done or that was done because in terms of the war effort planes had to be manufactures, parts, munitions, ships so depending on the expert advice the ministry got he would make a decision and often it would be with cabinet

34:30 we'll do this or we'll do that. It mainly depended on the situation for example the Owen gun was a gun that was manufactured here during the war, an Australian invention and there was a bit of debate about that because it had to be tested to see how effective it was under different conditions and what have you. And munitions and arms had to be kept

35:00 supplied to the troops so depending on what was going on in the different areas and the expert advice they got they had to make a decision and deal with it.

You being exposed to a lot of war time information but you were still quite young, were you sort of chaffing wanting to get out their and fight or were you…?

Not in that sense, I felt I should

35:30 enlist because I was young and fit and we were being threatened. I was in Melbourne staying in a hotel strangely enough when we'd just come back for a short time when Peal Harbour fell and I thought we were gone, Australia was gone in the sense that I didn't think the Americans could recover quick enough to regain their strength

36:00 in the navy but they were such a big powerful industrial nation that they did. And then with the Japanese moving so quickly Singapore fell in February I thought we would be invaded. It happened so quickly.

Was there much of that fear in the circles that you were moving in?

Not so much fear as the acknowledgement that

36:30 it could happen because you see in '42 that Japanese submarine got into Sydney Harbour, now Sydney Harbour had what they called a boom over the entrance. It you know, a boom of explosives. Now to get

in, ships had to be admitted with the control so what the Japanese submarine did apparently was to follow another ship in which was allowed to come in and it got right into the Harbour or a

37:00 couple of them did and one sank a ferry and got underneath a Japanese, not a Japanese an American warship and then a submarine shelled part of Sydney, Rose Bay I think it was and that brought home to Australia how close we were to invasion and it wasn't

37:30 known at the time but if you've been around to Point Danger at Coolangatta around the water front it'll list all the ships that were sunk around the coast, now we didn't know that they were sunk all around the coast of Australia right up here through Queensland but it lists them all and that wasn't told to the public deliberately, I'm sure, because there was a worry, they talk about the Brisbane line, so called line of defence where north of

38:00 that they would be just ready to abandon it and defend it from there back. There were all sorts of possibilities flying about at the time.

I just want to go back to a couple of stuff just before we move on, we kind of glossed over and I wonder if we've got time a little bit more detail about what your actual day to day duties were?

38:30 **Can you walk me through a typical day?**

Working for the minister?

Yeah, I'm sorry working for the minister?

Exactly, I might arrive at the office I find out in a couple of days we're going back to Melbourne. So I had to arrange all the transport booking by air if necessary, for the minister, the staff that was two typists, the Private Secretary, Murray Tyrell and myself. Or

39:00 if we were going by car, as we did occasionally, was to arrange a car from the Commonwealth pool of cars which were provided for the minister and for the two typists too. So that would involve two cars at least, that might be the start of the day. Filing all the correspondence, collecting the mail of course, the first thing, because the mail was heavy which the private secretary

39:30 had to deal with quickly sort out what the minister needed to see, what he could handle himself. Sometimes I would do minor, minor correspondence just acknowledging a letter and indicating that it had been forwarded to the appropriate department something like. If the House was sitting, the minister would be in the House part of the time but not all of the time because with the paperwork that went on

40:00 he had to deal with that paperwork. Some of it serious correspondence, part of his ministerial job by discussion with the private secretary as a result of his correspondence he might have different jobs. Take this down to so and so office, or this down to so and so office, take this over to the department it's important we want it dealt with in a hurry. Those sort of things.

40:30 And the day would go fairly quickly. Sometimes a bit slower than others but mainly pretty quickly because there was a volume of correspondence and in addition to the munitions and their production and what have you, petrol rationing was part of the department and there were complaints from all over Australia about petrol rationing. Some people wanted, and they did manufacture what they call shale

41:00 oil as a substitute for petrol. That was part of the department's responsibilities and but there were complaints from all over Australia the petrol rationing and go to the minister that was responsible for that that part of the government's activities and they had to be dealt with you know. And if these complaints were strong you know coming from another minister or some of his strong constituents, they had to be sorted out.

Tape 4

00:39 **So you're doing this job, just tell us about signing up again?**

Whereabouts…

Signing up first to join the war effort?

To join the army?

To join the army.

Yes, well I decided to enlist working, as I was working for the Minister of Supply and Development who

01:00 was John Beazley then, no relation to Kim. Mr Beazley had come up through the Trade Union movement as an electrician and was one of the leading members of the Labor Party. His secretary was a fellow

named Andy Callaghan who'd served in the infantry in the First World War and his words were 'you're a blood fool' because he'd served in the infantry and he said it was no fun. I said "No I'm sorry, I'm off". So John William Megsy Malloy and

01:30 I went down by train to Sydney on the anniversary weekend of January 1942 and enlisted on the 24th January 1942. And the process was you had a medical, you were given a uniform which fitted you everywhere and touched you nowhere and I was 9 stone 7 and dripping wet and looked the typical

02:00 boy soldier and we found ourselves as we jokingly say in the pig pens at the show ground sleeping on palliasses of straw. But they allowed us to go home for a few days, we had inoculations which sometimes caused some people to be quite ill just for a few days and back to camp up to Dubbo which was our induction into army life

02:30 training and that involved on parade at 6 o'clock for physical education training before you made up your bed and cleaned your rifle and got ready for parade about 8 o'clock and then you started your day's infantry training which involved weapon training. Mainly physical in those days of plenty of marching, route marching, field tactics

03:00 and it was more of the desert warfare type because they were still reinforcing the Middle East although the Japs were pressing, see that was January 42. We were originally trained for the 2/18th Battalion, which was in Malaya. Luckily we didn't go to Malaya because the draught ahead of us, November, virtually walked straight into a prison camp.

03:30 So we were lucky we didn't get to the 2/18th Battalion in Malay. So the exercise involved plenty of physical activities, PT [physical training], infantry tactics for one month Dubbo, moved on to Cowra same thing more intensive training, infantry training, field craft, moved to Bathurst a month later,

04:00 more intensive training with the idea of increasing your efficiency in your toughness, your physical toughness. Then I found myself on a draught heading north and they said we were destined for the Trobriand Islands, which are north east of Milne Bay. We didn't know why, except that it probably would've been a defensive position for

04:30 Milne Bay, which was attacked later. It was cancelled out of the blue. For no reason, given no reason at all and the whole draught was transferred to what they called Corps Signals. 1st Australian Corps Signals at Toowoomba and then we started an intensive course of signal training by NCOs who had come home from the Middle East who had

05:00 been in Tobruk and were proven experienced soldiers.

Why did they transfer the whole…?

Apparently it would appear that they wanted to strength quickly the communications from Toowoomba through to Rocky and I supposes in retrospect Australia was under threat then and they wanted to update their communications as quickly as they could because later as I found when we went to

05:30 Thursday Island and the Torres Straight Islands, the line of communication was down Moresby, through there and through Queensland and I suppose that was the purpose was to strengthen it quickly which we did by building new lines, repairing existing lines and upgrading the communications system.

So, tell us about how you

06:00 **worked and improved and repaired?**

It was mainly what they call line work, building new telegraph lines all the way through to Rocky. This involved the erection of telegraph poles, the stringing of the lines, in some cases cable jointing. Some blokes were former what do you call them, GPO [general post office] men and others were trained

06:30 cable jointers, where they could do cable jointing as we went helping repair existing facilities and improving them. But it was mainly physical work so we finished up pretty fit because is some instances we had to clear trees to clear a line of passage for the new lines they built made a fair bit of axe work and we became pretty fit. And as I mentioned there were some nice rivers

07:00 along the route, the Burnett River and others where you finished the day and you can go for a swim. And with axe work and a bit of swimming we finished up pretty fit. But I wasn't happy, I wanted to move, I wanted to go to the infantry and I was wasting my time parading myself, sorry son you stay here.

How would you ask your superior for a transfer?

07:30 I'd tell them quite frankly I wanted to serve in the infantry and join my mate in the 2/6th Battalion with whom I'd grown up with and enlisted. And I kept writing to him say 'can you claim me because relatives could claim one another, brothers could claim one another to transfer to their particular unit'. But I wasn't a relative and he approached the colonel, the commanding officer and

08:00 at that time they were going to Wau and the colonel said we haven't got time to retrain him and we're so busy we'll take him when we come out of here, and he did. So, I rejoined my mate, Megsy Malloy

when they came home from Wau/Salamaua.

Was that

08:30 **a big part of your joining up?**

Well I suppose it's the mate thing, we'd grown up together, learned to swim together and bike raced together. We used to do a lot of bike racing in Canberra and Gundagai before we went to Canberra and it probably was the mateship thing where he was a little bit older than me and said, it was probably November or so, 'I'm going to enlist

09:00 in the Army soon.' And I said "Well wait for me until I turn 18" because they wouldn't take you until you were 18 unless you were able to put your age up and I was a baby faced bloke and probably wouldn't have made it. So he said "all right", so he waited until January and as soon as I turned 18 we went out to Sydney. But I kept writing to him seeing if he could claim me and of course he couldn't but the colonel said yes I'll take him when we come

09:30 out of Wau/Salamaua. And he did, so I linked up with him again.

Tell us more about life on the road fixing and repairing the signals, where would you go and what kind of stuff would you do?

Well just the day to day work was building erecting new telephone lines between,

10:00 we started at Ban Ban Springs near Gayndah and worked our way through the towns, Gayndah, Mundubbera, Eidsvold, Thangool, Monto, Biloela towards Rocky [Rockhampton] and that involved intensive physical work daily and as I mentioned for that reason we became quite fit because there was a fair bit of axe work felling trees to clear the path and

10:30 some of the bush blokes used to laugh at we city slickers as they called us who hadn't done much axe work because if you hadn't you soon had very blistered hands initially, until your hands toughened up because you were doing it almost daily. And, it was interesting to see, they talk about the Australian serviceman being a bloke of initiative

11:00 and they were seeing a group of fellas like that, some of them were bushmen who had lived hard and worked hard, fencing, tree felling you name it and they were great blokes to be with because they were never daunted by a problem, you know, they handled it, find some way around it fixing things and used to fixing machinery, fences,

11:30 whatever they were doing, showed great initiative. And it's probably a reflection to the Australian servicemen who are classed as a bit different in some cases from other nationalities in the field because they seem to have more initiative, more up and go and you hear about and it's not derogatory, but some of the English servicemen are told to do something

12:00 and that's all they would do, nothing else. You know I mentioned that if we established a position in the infantry they started patrolling almost straight away to find out exactly what e the enemy were what they were doing, what their dispositions were and show a lot of initiate. It's been written about so much and it's quite true

12:30 and one book I've got by a 6th Div [Division] Engineer he calls the Prince of Comrades because they stick together so well and they did you know when the chips are down.

Tell us about time off and the towns you'd visit doing this work?

Yes, I might've mentioned earlier that the country people were most hospitable. For example, I can remember in Gayndah, they put on a dance

13:00 for us one evening and on another evening we were invited to the private home of a person for a sing song around the piano and it was most welcome and greatly appreciated. And I remember there's a man living here in Brisbane who was one of the sergeants in our group who met a lass who worked in the Bank of New South Wales I think it was, in the town, she was working in the town.

13:30 They became engaged after the war and married since. And, so that was romance that came out of that town and that happened along the way. They were most hospitable and welcoming.

What about you, were there any girls on the road?

Not really, although one lass at Gogango.., Ban Ban Springs was just a little road junction from Gayndah

14:00 to a place call Burns Town and there was a little hall standing out like a shag on a rock as it were, where the local farmers put on a dance for us one night and I met this family, two girls and there was a young boy I had a few dances with her and met her a few times.

14:30 That's to say hello, that's a bit of female company for a short time, yeah.

And how did the people react to your work in the town?

They appreciated it because it also brought a little bit of money into the town in the sense that if we

went to the town, you know the blokes have a few beers and the pub and buy things locally and they were very welcoming and

15:00 it helped the town in once sense I think as we passed through because we weren't like locusts that moved through and left it bare, it did bring a little bit of business I suppose in one sense because we used to buy supplies for the cookhouse. There were a group of, I suppose, fifty or sixty blokes in a group and they had to buy supplies and

15:30 that occurred regularly, that helped.

Was there any talk of possible Japanese invasion?

Yes, oh yes at the time see that was '42 and the threat was strong and naturally the local people were worried and they had relatives in the services right through. They were quite worried at different times, yeah. So actually they were pleased to see servicemen

16:00 in their area really.

And was the better communications thought about for future towns prosperity?

I'm sure, because if you look at this way it greatly upgraded the communications quickly and that was a benefit to each town in that ring even though it's more communication, more technical

16:30 now at that stage between say Rocky and Toowoomba in those towns all the way through it was a big add for them.

And tell us more about how you were feeling as you went through this? You've mentioned before of course you wanted a transfer, tell us more about that.

Well the fellows used to laugh at me, particularly who'd been in the Middle East in Tobruk they'd say you're mad,

17:00 you're mad but I was persistent as was my mate. I was with a fellow named Les Porterly and this is interesting, when I worked in the Minister's Office and we went to Sydney, we went to the Office of Department of Supply and Development in Sydney, and there I met a young bloke who used to get supplies or me if I wanted pens or papers or anything I'd have to go and see this fellow. And when I enlisted, I lost track of

17:30 him but in the dark when we moved from Dubbo to Cowra in the middle of the night, I ran into this bloke. He'd enlisted at the same. And thereafter we palled up and we went to Torres Strait Islands together. We did our infantry training at Cowra, Bathurst and then went to the Torres Strait Islands together, Toowoomba on the line work, Torres Strait Islands and he wanted a transfer like myself. And

18:00 they sent him to 7th Division Signals. I went to 2/6th Battalion and he went to 7th Division Signals and we achieved our objective of without any disrespect to signals at all because they did a mighty job, yeah.

Okay tell us about being transferred to the islands?

From Toowoomba when I kept asking for a

18:30 transfer out of the blue, my friend Les put in and found ourselves just the two of us on a draught to Torres Strait signals. So we came down to Brisbane, sailed from Brisbane on the Darvell to Thursday Island, which is the headquarters of the Torres Strait Group. And as an aside, it's interesting we heard later that the Purser on the ship absconded

19:00 with money and supplies in Darwin and that fitted because the food was terrible and what they reckoned he did was just provisioning sort of second rate food and pocketing the rest. But we heard later that he absconded. So alright we hit the Torres Strait Island and the signals situation there was the commander of signals through to [Port] Moresby

19:30 to all the outer Island and there were many in the Torres Strait group were there were coast watchers, men sitting out there on their own watching for submarines passing on information of Japanese groups flying over which ever direction they were going which was a good warning for Horn Island which was the airstrip just across from Thursday Island for a fighter sector. The mainland Cape

20:00 York and Weipa and Bamaga they had Bases over there. There were light aircraft units. There were heavy Battery Units stationed around Hayman Island and Good [Enough] Island and most Islands there was a situation where they needed communication so between all of those that was their job to maintain communications. So, you were moving around regularly

20:30 to different Islands and it was interesting because of the history of the place. One evening I mentioned we camped on Possession Island where Captain Cook took possession of Australia. And a Torres Strait Islander who was on board as a seaman cooked us breakfast of scrambled eggs of turtle eggs. And it was interesting to taste, it was very sweet, to taste it, too sweet for my

21:00 liking but as food it was very nice. We did a stint on Cape York for a couple of months where we built a

line across towards Weipa and it was interesting people were laughing later where we had a compass to sight the path that we wanted to put the line and they said from the air, it was just a small compass, they said it went like this, sort of

21:30 zig-zagged. But it was interesting to see the flora and fauna of the Cape. Crocodiles, very careful of crocodiles. In fact we had a swim in a hole one day and we'd been warned and be very careful where you swim and this was a fair way away from the sea front, after we had a swim an Aboriginal lad came over and said 'come over here' and showed us tracks

22:00 in the dirt of the crocodile. And he said they're so patient you know they'll sit and watch before they strike. Also, I mentioned earlier we went for a walk to Somerset one day where, I think it was Governor Jardine had intended to settle, a township, it had all been surveyed, pegged out and there was a

22:30 hut built there which was originally part of the huts that were there with rifle slits still built into the woodwork you know so they could protect themselves of native attacks.

Tell us about your impressions of the indigenous people when you first got there?

Well the Torres Strait Islanders are such a happy group,

23:00 good physical specimens, great in the sea, in the water, great seaman. I think I mentioned the times when we had to see them dive overboard to do something, sometimes bring up a submarine cable sometimes. Fearless in the water except we laughed and it's no laughing matter if you saw a sea snake they would almost walk on water to get away

23:30 from it cause of the danger, they're so deathly but very, very obliging and cooperative. I remember doing some work with the Torres Strait Light Infantry, had a battalion of Light Infantry there and you know great workers physically, good specimens and very popular.

And

24:00 **what about the women up there?**

The women folk well they're a bit more outgoing, the natives in New Guinea are very shy. Like if you came across native women washing in a pool or creek they would hide they were very shy. The Torres Strait Islanders were more outgoing because they're musical, love to sing and

24:30 that's a different in natives, you know different types of people.

Would they tell you stories?

Yes, yes, because in their cultures it abounds with stories of the sea in particular, events that went on in their history. Like the Queta [?], which was wrecked, ship wrecked in 1800 odd, I forget the date but many people drowned

25:00 and there's a Queta Cathedral on Thursday Island in memory of this famous event. And it's all interwoven with their culture the stories they tell and singing of their - of these events and their culture events.

And you also worked on Cape York?

Cape York yes. Yes, you know as a young Australian I found that very

25:30 interesting because the tip of Australia and to stand on the tip is something not everyone would achieve, although, now it's a regular feature of safaris to the Cape. I've even got, amongst my souvenirs and there are not many, an envelope stamped with the Cape York Post Office and the date we were there because some of those places were abandoned very quickly when the Japs came in. And,

26:00 this post office stamp and an envelope and we've signed it and it's got the date on it, Cape York such and such a date.

What was the environment like to your eyes?

Well it was an environment that you had to be careful in because of snakes, in the mangroves you had to be a bit careful, sometimes you had to lay sig [signal] wire amongst

26:30 the mangroves and on Horn Island it was a bit of a joke where a little dog came into the camp from nowhere one day, it was a little bitch they called Sally and Sally used to follow us everywhere, everywhere we went and we were laying some cable in a swamp one day when, not a swamp, mangroves, and my friend Les Porterly is a bit of a character and he used to say 'come on Sally, you go ahead if there's

27:00 any crocs here, we're right.' And Sally would follow us everywhere swimming along just out of the blue we don't know where she came from but whilst we were there we looked after her and enjoyed her company, yeah.

And tell us about your relationships, you're interactions with the local Aboriginal people in

the Cape?

Well in their culture they're paramount because they know the country, they know the dangers and they're marvellous

27:30 guides because you could get into trouble quite easily if you were very inexperienced you could get into trouble pretty quickly and they were good. And everyone I'm sure was appreciative I'm sure of any of their efforts cause as I said they knew the country, it was their country and they knew it so well.

And how did you work with them as a signaller?

Take their advice you know if you

28:00 wanted to do this that or the other listen to their advice which was always sound in terms of going here going there. For example, I'm not a pig hunter but one weekend we went pig hunting. And they said to us if you wound a pig, a wild pig, a big fella, and he's

28:30 bailed up in thicket or bush be very wary. He'll just stand there for time and he will charge and that's what happened, we wounded one, a big wild pig, with big tusks and he stood back in the bushes just glaring at us and all of a sudden he charged and there were three of us, we all had rifles and one bloke was a better shot than I, was able to drop him

29:00 but if you're a bit slow you know you could get injured quite easily. But it was an interesting experience because the native lad that we'd talked to described what could happen and did happen. He said it was just a common thing that they were used to.

And would you hear their stories, their cultural stories?

Sometimes, yes, sometimes if they came into the camp, they normally didn't camp with you but if they did,

29:30 if you got them going they'd could tell their stories of the local area and what went on which was always most interesting because of their background and what they were relating to, yes.

What did you think of their stories?

Interesting because I always think in anyone's culture, it's their lifestyle

30:00 and the history and I'm always interested to hear how the other half lives and particularly Torres Strait Islanders, New Guinea and on Cape York. I was always fascinated to hear some of the stories they told. For example, on Thursday Island wharf one day we saw a man who'd been stitched from head to foot as it were and the story was that he was

30:30 standing on the wharf and he say a shark heading towards this child in the water and he jumped on the shark and it ripped him from head to foot as it were. He had stitches all over his body and that was the story they told, he was quite a local identity. And you know what a story, the child survived and the bloke did too but it frightened the shark off, I suppose it got a hell of a fright

31:00 being landed on from the wharf.

What about any dreamtime or stories?

No, didn't hear much dreamtime you heard more say in the Torres Strait Island where pearling was such a big industry pre war where the Japanese divers were big. In fact there's a Japanese cemetery on Thursday Island they were quite big there and were expert divers and operated in a big way and with

31:30 the local community and you heard all sorts of stories of blokes getting the bends of too deep and rescues and other activities and yes.

And what did the local indigenous people know of the war?

Now

32:00 if we're talking about the Torres Strait group, naturally they realised what was going on because the Japanese had raided there by air 8 times from '42 to '43, they knew we were under threat because the troops had to move in and they thoroughly understood that they were at risk. And the civilian population had to move out

32:30 so quickly that when Les Porterly and I arrived there we were billeted in a house owned by someone who'd been very keen readers, they had a good library of books and we lived in that house for a week or so until they moved us on. But the people had just walked out because with the bombing raids the civilian population was at risk that if an invasion came they were in big trouble. So,

33:00 the local population were pleased to see the military move in. And they did in a big way in the sense that there was artillery, there was light (UNCLEAR) signals, Torres Strait Light Infantry Battalion of Torres Strait Islanders and another group I forget which battalion it was, I've forgotten but they

33:30 were there on Horn Island. So if you were related to Torres Strait Islands they were most pleased to see

them. In the case of New Guinea, particularly where the natives had been abused crudely sometimes they were delighted to have the Aussie there. On the other hand, there was a few that believed in the Japanese

34:00 stories of great material goods that they would have and other things that they would have if the Japanese won the day and they were recruited as helpers as I said cargo boys carrying equipment. In the odd case, as scouts you know against the Australians. And…

34:30 that's the reason why the (UNCLEAR) Campaign was written by one journalist is the forgotten, The Unnecessary War. Unnecessary strategically because they'd been bypassed but General Hidachi had the 18th Army across Wewak across the Sepik [River] up to Aitape, twenty thousand men, three Divisions and

35:00 exercising his control over the natives. And the Australian Government's idea was that they should be liberated from Japanese control because of even the post war efforts of the Japanese. And that was the reason for the campaign even though they had been bypassed they had no air support, no sea support, they were cut off but they were fanatics you know and they fought.

35:30 And they were beaten to demonstrate to the natives that Australians were doing the right thing by them.

And on Cape York the local Aboriginal population what did they know of the war?

Yes, it wasn't so noticeable there because where we were between Somerset and the Cape itself and towards Weipa, we didn't

36:00 strike large groups of them as you did with the Torres Strait Islanders or in New Guinea. So it was the odd few fellas that were used for information and direction.

What about their lifestyle as far as you could view it, in (UNCLEAR) relations at that time?

Well their lifestyle

36:30 was simple you know compared to ours, they lived off the land. If you take the Torres Strait Islanders fishing's big thing and they do it so well but where they live on boats of course they supply themselves before going off from mainly to Thursday Island, the main centre and but on the Cape well the natives that we did strike there could live off the

37:00 land comfortably. Fishing again was always big and local plants, which were familiar with, was part of the scene.

Was there a sense of somewhat self Government in a way?

Not really because it was war time and they were all subject to directions because the army took over and ran the whole

37:30 system of operations. So they could be supplied by the army also where they were being used to assist and they were. And so there was no sense of local government except there were chiefs of villages and areas and they were respected leaders and negotiated if they had to

38:00 with the powers that be.

And how did you live in your camps?

In tents, yeah. In tents when we around the Islands all the time. We lived in a house for only about a week and some of those houses were taken over and used as billets for troops on Thursday Island,

38:30 but the rest of the time we were mainly moving around the Islands and just camping in a tent. If there were only a few of you, a couple of you in some instance only a small tent and camp near the beach and that was it.

How did you enjoy this tour?

Well surprisingly, I didn't want to serve in the signals but it was a healthy lifestyle in the sense that being on the water a fair

39:00 bit of swimming, often we camped on a – right on a beach on the different Island. I remember on Entrance Island it was like paradise because there was no one else there, no one at all and you could get out of your tent in the morning and straight into the water if you wanted to have a swim and I'm a keen swimmer. So in that sense quite an enjoyable tour of duty

39:30 when you're not dodging bullets. Yet at the same time, it was a very important phase of the Army's operations, the communication system up to New Guinea, out to all the Coast watchers, Moratai and Dutch New Guinea, back through the Cape and all the surrounding Islands.

Tape 5

00:38 **Well start back up north, and tell me a bit more about how you were pestering for a transfer?**

When I was in the signals?

Yes.

I kept parading myself and didn't have any luck and

01:00 maybe, I'm not saying it did happen, but a routine order came out from, command centre where, saying if anyone considered themselves officers material they could undergo tests for selection. So my cobber and I Les Fordly, and he was a smarter bloke than I was, in the sense that he did a leaving certificate at Fort Street Sydney, and bright bloke. We did a serious of tests with other NCOs, warrant officers,

01:30 sergeants, tactics, weaponry, intelligence tests on, situations, physical tests, that is running with full packs and blah blah blah. We did very well, in that we beat some of the more, senior NCOs, and we were just signallers. We did quite well. And it wasn't too soon after that, and we kept

02:00 saying we wanted a transfer and we got our transfers. Whether it had any bearing I don't know. But next things we were on the way. So he went to the 7th Division Signals and I went to the 2/6th Battalion. Where I was delighted, I felt 7 foot tall because this was a distinguished battalion of the 17th Infantry Bridge, which comprised the 2/5th, 2/6th and 2/7th Battalion to make one brigade.

02:30 Of the famous 6th Australian Division. The 1st Division formed at the outbreak of World War II, the Volunteer Division for overseas service. And it's served with great distinction in the Western Desert, Greece, Crete and Syria in some cases, before it came home to Australia. And they had the 17th Brigade, that featured strongly in the Wau/Salamaua campaign and, there were many

03:00 distinguished soldiers amongst them. But not only that they had a colonel, commanding officer, lieutenant colonel, who was a really good man. A strict disciplinarian in the sense that he, trained his Soldiers to be tough and disciplined to be, met the needs of what they would meet when they went into action. So I joined the battalion with a great spirit of this predictor

03:30 and a great tradition and, the words I used, I felt seven foot tall when I marched into D Company, where my mate John William Meggsy Malloy was in D Company.

What was it like meeting up with them again?

Well halalulleh, I said this is great, this is what we intended to do in the first place. But it didn't happen and ultimately it did.

Was he

04:00 **changed at all?**

Yes, because he'd been in the Wau/Salamaua campaign for 9 months, which was tough campaigning. He was lucky to survive, he wasn't wounded, but lucky to survive, because they all had malaria, and faced the prospect of going back again, to do it again. Not a very nice thought, but, with the training, the older, members of the

04:30 battalion, they were mentors to the younger blokes that joined them. And they were great soldiers

Can you tell me about some of the expectations you had of begin soldiers?

Yes I knew that many of them had been decorated, and I was interested, very interested in the stand that existed, because you read of these great battalions and, you just followed that

05:00 that's what I meant , because the officers, most of them were, from the Middle East or from, since they came home from the Middle East from the Wau/Salamaua campaign, and they were real leaders of men. And my expectations were completely realised, because in the training we did it was full on in terms of physical training, weapon training, tactic training.

05:30 And it was what I expected it to be and it was. And they had learnt so much from their previous campaigning that they could pass that on, because jungle warfare is so different from open warfare. So difficult to see the enemy at times, who were masters of camouflage. And a cunning, brutal enemy, whose destiny

06:00 was to die for the Empire. So they were tough fanatical group.

Where did you go to first for training?

To the Wandecla [Canungra] on the Atherton Tablelands, because of the rainforest on the Tablelands, it lead itself to jungle training, because it was similar type atmosphere, where they could practice the tactics of jungle warfare,

06:30 by, defending positions and tactic position, movement though the jungle, ambushes etc. It leads itself to

that sort of training.

Can you take me thought the types of things that you were taught there, and I guess describe jungle training?

Yes, well for example patrolling in the jungle is very difficult, because you can't normally see too far ahead. You can walk into an ambush

07:00 so quickly. You were trained to look for signs that might indicate, broken bushes, footprints, in the mud, snipers in trees, and that's interesting, because one actin I was in it didn't occur to me immediately that the man had been hit in the back on an angle firing down.

07:30 It enabled us to do all the types of jungle training that is setting up a defending position to defend. We booby trapped you defensive position, and the way you located your defence. In the sense of the positioning your weapon fence. So that you where possible had a good field of fire. And that was one part of the training to clear in front of you which machetes, the low undergrowth, so

08:00 that you could see, because the Japanese were experts at coming up in the dark, and even delousing the booby traps or, getting inside your position. And other tactics were having what is know as a standing patrol, when you took up a defensive position, a standing patrol of one or two men further down the track or hill or wherever you were

08:30 to see any signs of movement early, in case you were surprised. Sometimes they could see enemy coming towards them, or movement in the bushes, detect them that way. And that was always a feature of your defensive position. In terms of attack, often difficult because in the mountains, the Torricelli Mountains, where we were, the, tracks along the ridges,

09:00 narrow and some of the villages, were from the neighbours, earlier, defence point of view, they sighted these villages on tops of these ridges. Very hard to get at so the fighting was, a manner of numbers, and section fighting, about 10 men or platoon fighting abut 30 men. Whereas in open warfare you can use a company or several companies. But it

09:30 involved a lot of individual work because the nature of the country. Positions being very hard to get out. So the training was developed along those lines knowing that the sort of conditions you were going to meet.

These guys who you were joining had already been in some jungle warfare. Did they, I guess did they want extra training

10:00 **or how did they?**

Really they didn't, except for the physical fitness, because a lot of them had had malaria and, had eased off after the 9 months of campaigning. And, weren't look for really to experience again, but the Australians attitude was we've got a job to do and I'm going to do it.

10:30 **What sort of stories would they tell you, like did you quiz them for information?**

Yes because you were in a learning phase and they could, talk to you about surprise raids, they could talk to you about ambushes, how to look for things in different situations. I mentioned earlier when you are patrolling, looking for signs and this that or the other. And,

11:00 reaction under certain circumstances, with the Japanese great method of attack was to hold the position in front of them, against you and move a group quickly around behind you to the flank side. Which was unsettling because suddenly you're not only dealing with people in front of you, and then suddenly there behind you or at the

11:30 side of you. And they used that in reverse. We used to do that in reverse, where if you were attacking position in the front, other troops would be diverted to the flank, side of the flank as quickly as possible and it surprised the Japanese, and it took them by surprise. So it worked in reverse. But there tactics earlier in the peace apparently, from the historical point of view, surprised the

12:00 Australians and it was a real surprise because suddenly they were behind you or at the side and created confusion. Then you had to split your forces to deal with them.

Did the guys ever talk about the differences they found between the Middle East and…?

Yes they did because desert warfare is so different, wide open spaces, these

12:30 carrier machine-gun, carriers too, is part of their tactics. They were moved quickly by trucks when they were going to different positions. For example on the North African Coast Line through Bardia, Tobruk right through to Benghazi and Gaza. They had a different type of fighting all together. They would use waddies, in other words gulleys apparently, along the coast-line

13:00 and you know, having to get up and down these gullies. And although initially they were fighting the Italians, the positions were heavily fortified with barbwire in front and, what they call enfilade [raking] fields of fire where machine guns are set up to criss cross so you not only got obstacles in front of you

13:30 like waddies, then you've got barb wire, then you've got people firing diagonally opposite. Very difficult. But the Aussies [Australians] surrounded it pretty quickly, with their dash and bravado.

What sort of reaction did they have when you came in and said that you felt 7 foot tall?

Well, well you didn't say that. You felt that and well some of the, we called them

14:00 old soldiers, they just took it in their stride. Oh here's another reinforcement. And really until you went into action, you were still a reinforcement. And they were very blaze about things. But again protective and great

14:30 mentors.

What other sorts of things would you cover in your training, like anything to do with landing or physical fitness, and can you tell me about those sorts of things?

Well we did all sorts of training including, what we call amphibious landings, or often referred to as invasion training off Port Douglas and Trinity Bay. We did, the whole division did training exercises landing from the [HMAS] Manoora

15:00 in this case, into landing barges that's going down a rope ladder into landing barges and then landing on a beach then taking defensive positions. And it's interesting I'm a catholic and over here at St Elizabeth's, there's a relieving priest who was a prison chaplain, same age as myself, he worked in the Commonwealth Bank, I'll go back a little there. He was in the navy during the

15:30 war and was on the Manoora when we did our invasion training off Port Douglas and Trinity Bay. And he worked in the Commonwealth Bank after the war, then saw the light and joined the priesthood. And we were swapping notes recently about that training exercise off Port Douglas, and I was explained to him that the one I was involved in we landed about dusk and dug in,

16:00 protecting a road, leading from down the coast and just about dusk something flashed across the road, and someone said "What the hell was that?" They said it was crock. So in the infantry you do night pickets, 2 hours on and 2 hours off. You're on guard as it were, looking into the darkness for the enemy or whatever. 2 hours looking and 2 hours off where you supposed to have a sleep.

16:30 But in the jungle or the bush, there's noises going on all the time, could be animals, pigs, and your first reaction, particularly in action, what the hell was that. You're peering into the dark what the hell was that. Could be the enemy could be a pig, could be an animal, because the Japs are so cleaver at moving gup and even delousing the booby traps and General Adachi the general, that was interviewed after the war and

17:00 he said they were trained to pinch them as they were, if they weren't' going to attack to sneak up in the dark and pinch the hand grenades. They'd be gone in the morning. Pretty good because they were trained specially to do that. And coming back to the training again that's one aspect, amphibious training, the landings. The jungle

17:30 training force, rebarches, which were in one case, 50 miles. Then at the same time we had a bit of leisure and they had a 6th Division race meeting at a place called Herberton near Ravenshoe. The local farmers led horses, somewhere, I don't know where they got them, the got pushbikes, so they had bike races, horse races, and some of the blokes had been jockey in

18:00 peace time and some had been good horse riders. So we had a series of races and it was interesting the fellow handling the public address systems would often call our "Private So and So you're wanted down at the starting point for your horse race". He was doing something else, because there was athletics, sprinting, high jumping the whole bit.

18:30 We had a big day and at the finish of the day they fitted the 100 yard sprinter, champion and he was a South Australian sprint champion, the best bike rider in the races they had against a horse over a 100 yard. Who would you back?

The horse.

I backed the horse, you know who won? The horse, and the reason is it just prompted and took off and gathered them in

19:00 in about 60 yard. The sprinter was leading, because the bikerider couldn't get round up but the horse won in easily in going into the 60 yards. It was interesting. Then we had some swimming events off barges at Trinity Bay, yes Trinity Bay again, swimming from the barges into the beach. I remember racing against a Tasmanian, and I though I can beat this bloke and,

19:30 he was smaller than I, we were very fit, and he beat me into the beach, and I often, well I haven't seen him, I've only seen him once since the war, and I often remind him of it. Lining up swimming into the beach from the barges. So a full days carnival. Because some of the blokes had been good lifesavers before the war. In fact one of my footballer mates from the battalion side was a

20:00 former junior Australian Surf Belt champion. He was like a shark in the water, if we went surfing he'd catch a wave swimming backstroke and just roll over like a pupas and ride it into the beach. Poetry in

motion in the water. What else did we do in terms of sport. They were big events, oh football, even tough I was in a Victoria battalion, they were proudly

20:30 Victorian, but they had to absorb reinforcement from New South Wales, from all states as a matter of fact. And initially they were totally Victorian, but they had to absorb reinforcement because of the casualties and, they had a very good Aussie [Australian] rules football side, but with the reinforcements we had a good rugby league side. And we played rugby league against other battalions and other units and the hardest of course were the New South Wales

21:00 Battalions, because they were very strong. And, we played against I remember, only reading in the paper yesterday, against the great Wallaby players from the past, there was one name Colin Windom and I played against him on the Tablelands, and he was about 14 stone and I was about 11 stone, big fellow good footballer. And the only way I could

21:30 tackle him and handle him was to move up quickly to grab him. Because once he got going he'd run straight through you because he was a big powerful bloke. But I watched his career after the war and he went on to become a great Wallaby, breakaway, great forward. What else did we do on the Tablelands, football, the sad feature of the football side was that one, two, three fellows got killed when we went

22:00 into action. And that's the sad part of war that one time you're training and, enjoying company of one another whether its football or what it is. Kevin Carr was called Punchy Carr because he was the heavy weight boxing champion of the brigade, and that's about five thousand blokes, so he was good but he was a gentle giant. One of those fellow with a lovely nature and not an aggressive person. A

22:30 lovely fellow. He got machine-gun burst in the stomach one day when we were in reserve our platoon and when they carried him out, he passed on the stretcher and I jokingly said, we used to use the term oh he's got a homer, meaning that he'd be sent home, if its not a major injury but at least his going home. So I said "You've got a homer Kev" and he was

23:00 near death then, but that bloke was so powerful he wanted to relieve himself and I went to help him of the stretcher, and he was so big he said "I'm right, I'm right" and he got off the stretcher, relieved himself inside the jungle and he died soon after. Kevin Punchy Carr, great fellow, gentle giant. The next bloke was young tearaway from Coonabarabran and he was just a bit younger than me I think he was in '43,

23:30 a real tearaway. Rouge young fellow, full of up and go. He got killed very early in the piece when he attacked up a hill and he came to a Japanese in a weaponry, looking up and he stopped, just froze look down at him and the Jap shot him. And that was a tragedy because I went to visit his parent in Coonabarabran on the way to Canberra, Maree use to live and

24:00 work in Canberra. And I called into see them and they had great plans for him. They owned a little farm and one of his brothers was a POW [prisoner of war] in German and one had been through the Middle East and was still with the 16th Brigade, and they were devastated that they'd lost Con Hemisy. And the next bloke was Arthur Billis from Mackay and

24:30 another great footballer. They talk about footballers with great hands and feet, meaning they side step right or left, great hands, vary seldom drop a ball. And this fellow was that kind of bloke and he, got killed early in the piece too in an ambush and got caught in an ambush. They were three fellows, oh and the fourth fellow and I always think of this fellow,

25:00 on Anzac Day in particular, is that coming through. Nutty Clark, I did an NCOs course with him where I was in the same tent as him and he, he and his wife had produced a little baby boy, by the time he came back from Middle East and between the time, he went to Wau and,

25:30 this was his pride and joy and we younger unmarried blokes used to say "Oh dry up", because he was always talking about the boy, what he was going to do what he wasn't going to do. And that poor fellow got killed early in the piece. And I used to think about his poor young widow, young baby left. We were single, most of us, and certainly we would have been greatly mourned by our families, but he was a young man with a young baby and

26:00 a wife, widowed very early in the piece. And that's the tragedy of war that you see people like that lose their lives. And that's the sad part of war. So when my little granddaughter, is now born 1 year. I took her down to the Anzac March, and she said "Well what do you mach on Anzac Day for Poppa?", and I said "Just to remember my mates,

26:30 who are not here". And that's what it's all about really.

I just want to go back a little bit from there. I was just interested when you said that you'd make the (UNCLEAR) landing from Manoora and you'd dig in, can you walk me through the

27:00 **exact precedent?**

Well it's a case of we were in an amphibious landing, to take a position or organise a position for future activity. You set up the defensive position, that is you did weapon pits, and sight them to defend a

particular situation. In this case it was a costal road, where the direction would be that the enemy could come along this road,

27:30 either by vehicle or even on foot, because they did regularly. So the idea was to set up an defensive position by sighting your weapon pits, which you had to dig, to defend that position to the best of your ability, using the maximum, use of the land or the situation where you were placed. So that's part of the training, part of the training.

You mentioned earlier that you saw a

28:00 **crocodile?**

Someone saw a crocodile, because in that part of North Queensland, there are crocs they come in off the ocean in some cases. So jokingly not many people slept that night when you did you're 2 hours on and 2 hours off, you were looking for, or supposedly sleeping with one eye open because you'd hear a rustle in the bush and hell, is it a bloody crock. Could have been nothing a little animal or

28:30 some sort foraging around in the dark. But you didn't know.

During your training would you have played games in a lighthearted way?

Well you played soldiers, because often they would set up an

29:00 enemy force, your own men, to attack your position, where you're training in a defensive position, they'd set up an enemy to attack your position. And this was nighttime or daytime or wherever, to train you in the tactics. So we played soldiers a lot, ambushes, setting up an ambush, your own men setting up an ambush where you were on a patrol, deliberately to teach you the trick of the trade as they'd say. This was all part of the training.

29:30 **Can you take me though some of those big long route marches that they'd take you on, what would you do, how far would you go?**

Well normally after an hour or so, you'd have a spell, just to recharge you batteries, as it were. And then keep going, and it was over different terrain, heavy terrain, rainforest, which is like the jungle, quite deliberately, or even the

30:00 to where you move from a few miles from open type land through rainforests. Sometimes they were arduous conditions, deliberately, and that's part of the training to toughen you up. And it did, it did because some fellow might drop out through blisters or, knee problems,

30:30 or what have you. But as far as possible they expected you to complete the course, part of your training. And sometimes a force a group out on minimum food conditions, just bully beef and biscuits, as distinct from the cookhouse preparing a meal and being bought by truck to a point where you might be to give you lunch.

What

31:00 **was the bully beef like?**

Terrible, but you learnt in all sorts of things, to try and soften it and make it more edible.

What sort of things would they do to it?

Well they bought biscuits, where you could soak them as far as possible to soften them up and make a sort of a porridge out of them. That was one way, because they were hard biscuits. The bully beef was just out of a tin

31:30 and cold, so if you could heat it up, it was more edible warm then it was like soft.

When I hear biscuits I think, you know Arnott's biscuits, where they sweet?

Oh no, no they weren't sweet, they were just hard biscuits. Designed with some energy content I suppose and they were just hard biscuits.

32:00 **I guess overall did you enjoy this training part?**

Well I did because I said my objective was to serve in the infantry and, for me to have been disappointed or objected to would have been wrong, except that I did object one day when our company commander who was a distinguished captain, in a company there are 3 Platoons, with an officer in charge of each platoon

32:30 and a platoon sergeant in each platoon and three sections in each platoon, with a corporal over ten men. The company commander was a captain, Military Cross winner, in the first New Guinea campaign. And we were doing a training exercise and just stirred the boys up, he came around with a shanghi. He said "If I see anyone slacking here, your likely to get hit with this shanghi." And I said

33:00 "If you hit me with a shanghi, you'll get hit too". And that was a cheeky things to say to the company commander, and he just grinned and said "Settle down son, settle down son", I said "I don't want to lose

a eye or be injured before I leave Australia". And he just looked me in the eye and said "Settle down son, settle down son".

What's a shanghi?

Oh I see,

33:30 just a fork, stick fork with rubber bands. We used to have them we were kids, and you could fire a little rock at anything, and believe me it could hurt. It had two rubber bands coming out with a thing around it and you could put your stone in there, and pull the rubber bands back and bang.

And he was going to fire them at you?

He said "If I see anyone slacking around here there likely to get hit with one of these", and that's when I said what I said,

34:00 and I was a little bit surprised, I thought he'd really rear, because he was a tough character and a good Sergeant.

You must have made some good mates in that time can you tell me about them?

Oh yes made some great mates, because in a situation where your life depends on the bloke in front of you, behind you or to the side of you, you're

34:30 so dependent on them, and you form great mates. And that's the meaning of mateship in the sense of serving in the infantry, because you're so dependent on your mates that's where this great tradition of mateship comes from. They got to support one another, other your in big trouble, big trouble, because in the event of running into hostilities,

35:00 you were dependent on one another. And it so terribly important. And it s part of the training rule that reinforces the teamwork, you've got to operate as a team really, and this is the theme of the training too. Which is highlighted in the automatic response, you gave, when you were in trouble.

35:30 You were trained to these specific things or react in a certain way. And on top of incentive where you might do something of your own leg, quick and lively, that's where the mateship came in.

So by the end of the training time how were you feeling?

Good, very fit and ready to go as we were, in

36:00 that the aim of the training was to fit you physically and equip you to do the tasks ahead of you. I was quite confident, quite confident.

How were the other guys reacting to heading off again?

The same excepts that the older blokes who'd been through it before, had reservations, and that's very easily understood, because some of them were married men, and even though,

36:30 if they weren't married, they'd been through a tough 9 months campaigning, and they faced the possibilities, or knowing that someone was going to get killed and they did. And tragically, these fellows like Nutty Clark as we called him, and Kevin Carr and those fellows did.

Did they ever talk about people that they'd lost in the Wau campaign?

Yes they did and the fellow who served

37:00 in the Middle East they'd talk about some of the their great mates that they'd lost.

How, like what would they say about them?

In terms of respect that he was a great solider or he was this that or the other. And they great respect, great comradeship and those 39's who enlisted early, you know they formed a great bond amongst themselves, they were Victorians and they were very proud of their

37:30 Victorian battalion. A lot of them came from the Western District of Victoria. So almost the bulk of them initially, and there was a great bond between them and great respect. So it wasn't unusual at all. One of the great soldiers of the 2/6th Battalion was a fellow names Joe Gallet, his father was

38:00 a Minister in the Menzies Government, and got killed in a plane crash when, a plane with other Defence Generals, crashed in Canberra on the side of a hill, and, Joe was a highly educated man, university educated, Sorbonne University in Paris, became a journalist just before the war and

38:30 was a dashing solider who distinguished himself in the Middle East. There's a famous painting in the War Memorial of Joe lying back in dug out they'd just taken from the Italians where several wounded, himself included, lying around and, he was one of the colourful character of the 2/6th Battalion. He finished up being

39:00 moved to, the Second Front in Europe and featured with an English battalion in the invasion of Europe. Subsequently he became a politician, and also the Australian Minister for Greece, later on. And he was

of the character of the battalion, and a great solider.

Just on training,

39:30 **back at that time, do you think there are things they could have gone through with you and they didn't, any sort of reflections on that training?**

I don't think so because the officers were very professional, in that they had done their training skills too, but over and above that, where they had been in action in the Middle East, they were battle hardened after the Wau/ Salamaua

40:00 Campaign, for 9 months, January right through to September, they were experts in jungle warfare. And I don't think you could teach them much in terms of jungle warfare. They'd knew what to expect and they knew what the training programmes should be, and it was, done along those lines of their expertise and any other knowledge that was feed through from what was going on then and later.

Tape 6

00:38 **So the training was good but can training ever prepare you in some respects?**

01:00 Not totally because if you hadn't been in action before how are you going to react, each person will probably say to themselves, mentally, how am I going to go, because it's a different situation when someone is firing at you with the intention of killing you, it's a different situation to training where you're pretending, you're playing soldiers. So yes, this is where the training

01:30 comes in that your taught to react to a given situation, attack, defence, patrolling what have you, then how do you react in the real situation and that's where the training comes in, because it, reinforces sort of in your mind what you've got to do. If you hadn't been trained, it, you'd probably tend to panic

02:00 because you're not in control of the situation, really. I mentioned when, I was in a situation where on a fighting patrol where we were looking for trouble. Now normally we would have held that front position and moved quickly to the flank, to not only surprise them but to,

02:30 use the tactics in which we'd been trained. But we had to retire because, a fellow named Frank Rankin, was seriously wounded. I though he would have died, but fortunately he didn't, but the action was abandoned. The same when we got strafed by the Air Force accidentally, instead of going on with the attack we had to abandoned it again, to get the wounded out quickly. Now what would have

03:00 happened, was the strafing would have finished and we'd have moved in quick and lively whilst they had their heads down, or were recovering from the bombing and strafing. But we didn't but on the other hand we had to react and improvise stretches, buy using shirts and cutting a couple of poles and using shirts as the, for the stretcher and get wounded

03:30 out quickly. So yes, training is all directed towards a response in a given situation and without it you'd be in trouble.

How were you reactions at this stage?

Well in the first incidents one of apprehension, because there's lead flying everywhere

04:00 and luckily it hasn't got your name on it you survive. Because you don't know. You know fellows were wounded in different situations shoulder, or leg, or more seriously in the stomach. In the case of Kevin Carr, my footballing mate he got burst of machine gun firing in the stomach, no chance. I saw another situation again

04:30 our platoon was in reserves backing up where a distinguished solider, he was a Military Medal winner at Wau/ Salamaua and they said he had no fear. He got shot through the heart and when we pulled his body out you could hardly see where the bullet went through. And what had happed he'd come up a track where the Japanese were, and they were in a hut and he was peering into the hut and he couldn't see this Japanese, he was sitting

05:00 back in the dark, and of course he fired at point blank range, and he got shot through the heart. And when we recovered his body you could hardly see where the bullet went through. Another officer who got killed early in the piece, Lieutenant Erry, was a schoolteacher and he, he was a leader of men, a school teacher, and a very enthusiastic

05:30 fellow, he got shot early in the piece and didn't survive very long. Unfortunately a fellow that I took over from as a section leader in 18th Platoon was a 39er who died right towards the finish of the war when he fell down a cliff face as it were. Some of the track around the side

06:00 of the ridges were pretty steep and on a patrol, this fellow slipped and fell and landed on his head and got killed. Now he was a '39er and, a well know highly respected solider in D Company, who had lost his

striped when he over stayed his leave in Melbourne, with his wife when they came back from Wau/Salamaua.

06:30 Now he was training me when I joined the battalion and a very experienced solider. In the Middle East Joe Gullet, the famous solider of our battalion, said this fellow who served in the Salvation Army before the war could land a hand grenade on a sixpence or a five cent piece. He was so accurate. He was such a good solider and so accurate with a hand grange.

07:00 He threw over arm bowled it to get height and position. And he got killed right towards the finish of the war. Another tragedy because he left a wife in Melbourne.

Well you went to training so you finished up with your training and you were set to go, so tell us about what happened before then?

Before we

07:30 left, well we concluded all our training and a 6th Divisional parade down at, where were we, Herberton.. Toowoomba, where [General Thomas] Blamey reviewed the parade, General Blamey, the famous General Blamey and, with the division on parade you have about 20,000 men and it was interesting to see the protocol,

08:00 as they call it, where he arrives in great style with his staff, and inspects the parade and they have a big march past, knowing that there going off to New Guinea. And it's quite impressive in the sense of seeing twenty thousand blokes assemble and some very distinguished soldiers amongst them. That would have been the most

08:30 impressive assembly of troops that I saw because we had our brigade parades of 2/5th, 6th, and 7th Battalions always impressive with a good band, but the full division parade was impressive, quite a spectacle.

And did you have some leave or?

Uh, in some cases, they did, I mentioned that I hadn't been home for 2 years and got

09:00 sent home just as the war finished with mostly '39ers, who hadn't been home for quite a while. Yes in that case I didn't but some did and then we got our marching orders and drove down to Cairns where we embarked from Cairns, for Aitape. Initially we were, we didn't know where we were going and we got on board and then found out we were headed for Aitape,

09:30 which is in North West New Guinea, on the other side of Wewak. The Japs were holding from Wewak into Bigarck [?] right out to the Sepik River and back into Warraby.

Since you didn't have any leave to go back to Gundagai?

Not then but I did before that. I did before that.

Can you tell us about that?

Yes, well it was great to go home and see my family and

10:00 cause I had younger brothers and sisters and they were growing up and keen to hear stories of what you were doing in the army and meeting a lot of old Gundagai people that you knew so well. Re-visit the old hometown, and everywhere cause as I've said earlier, growing up in Gundagai was great because you knew everyone, you were involved in all the activities going on

10:30 and a great lifestyle, great lifestyle.

What would people say to you about your service?

Well see I the case of Bluey Malloy, when I went home, he didn't go because he was at, Cowra, have you heard about the Japanese breakout of the prison camp. Well some of the, they called them veterans then, because some of them were Middle East fellows and some of them had been in the

11:00 Wau/Salamaua Campaign and Meggsy was one of those. They were sent down to siften the older guards, and who were jokingly referred to the olds and bolds, because they were older men who'd been, most of them, a lot of them in the First World War, or might even have been passed and not acceptable for front line service. But they'd sent them down to stiffen the guards because

11:30 there must have been hints of a possible breakout, and it did occur, it did occur, they broke out and they killed a few people, but as Megsy told me later there job was to round them up quick and lively. And they did, quick and lively.

And were people proud of you in town, in Gundagai?

Yes well they all are in those country towns, they know that some,

12:00 had a big investments from Gundagai and a lot of the Riverina boys, that's on the edge of the Riverina, went in the 8th Division, and they lost a lot of good blokes in Malaya as result. A lot of them who were

mates growing up together, and just it was just coincidental, that when they enlisted they went to the 8th Division and a lot of them got lost in Malaysia, blokes I know well, older than me but I grew up with

12:30 them and, quite a few of them died in Malaya. So at the Wall Memorial at Gundagai, there's my dad's name C V Harrington, mine and my brother Alan was a, just at the end of the war he enlistment in the air force and he went to BCOF [British Commonwealth Occupation Forces] Japan and my dad myself and Alan are on the Wall Memorial,

13:00 yeh

And did you catch up with any mates while you were in, before you left? This last trip to Gundagai?

Yes a few but not many because a lot of them were in the services, or even in reserve occupations, as I said but mainly in Sydney where once they were man powered which is where they used, they could not be released, for example my wife's brother was a engine driver during the war

13:30 here in Queensland and he wanted to enlist with his mates, no way in the world they'd release him so he drove trains all over Queensland, to Mount Isa and all around Queensland transporting troops and, and he was quite annoyed that he couldn't enlist.

Did you get to talk to your mate John, before you left?

14:00 Malloy?

Yes.

No I didn't see him he picked this up at, in New Guinea because he was in Cowra when the break out occurred and as I said there job was to, track them down in the countryside, which they did. And he came up to the battalion after that when we were in New Guinea. And he was in a different battalion, sometimes they do that deliberately, although we've had

14:30 two brothers in one of my, in D Company, not in my platoon but in the next platoon, there were two brothers. And sometimes that's not good because they can both get killed. There was a case in another platoon, two brothers, one was a Military Medal winner a decorated fellow, his brother got shot in one of the accidents, got wounded, and his brother pulled him out. Now they both could have got killed,

15:00 it would have been a critical loss to their family. And it did happen sometimes, did happen. But the Army preferred not, but if they insisted, they would allow them but they preferred not for them to be tougher. Particularly in the infantry.

Tell us abut the train trips down to Gundagai on the...?

Well that's interesting because on troop trains

15:30 blokes were used to sleeping anywhere, on the floor, on the seat in the old trains that they had in those days, even the luggage racks if they were big enough some of the weren't big enough, they were small, you might put a suitcase, but when they were big enough, you'd find some bloke asleep there. In the corridors, and that was interesting, I remember coming up to, I forget wether it was Tenterfield or some where along the way, where the

16:00 troop train, called a troop train, pulled up and there was a pub across the road, on the other side of the road, so they streamed over there into the pub and the publican had some beer but not a lot, they drank the pub dry and then when the train driver wanted them to get back on board, were ready to go, he'd toot toot, you know and the guards would sing out "come on get on". They had difficulties getting them back on the train. They'd had a good session at the local pub.

16:30 But on another occasion I pulled up at Tenterfield about 4 in the morning, bitterly cold, and the Salvo's [Salvation Army] where there with their cups of coffee, and you know they used to say "Thank God for the Salvos" because they did a marvellous job. With bits of writing paper, even writing letters for fellows, the odd bloke, who couldn't write, you know you'd get the odd fellow who'd be bought up in hard times in the bush or somewhere

17:00 and they would write letters for you. And always had a cup of coffee or you know good word, they had tremendous respect for the Salvos.

Well the story that was told about, after rugby league in Inverell?

Oh no Ingham.

Ingham, sorry.

Ingham or Babinda my memories getting, shot on me we went down

17:30 to play some engineers, a unit of engineers, it could have been Babinda, and after the game we got into the local pub and beer was short in those days, with some of the publicans had a few kegs each left, and a couple of boys decided to pinch one of the 5 gallon kegs and, put it onto one of the trucks that we

came down in. And they were down on their hands and knees, they lifted it from out the back, you can just imagine down on there hands and knees rolling it along quietly,

18:00 and they came to a big pair of boots. And they looked up and it was the local sergeant, and he was a big man, and I suppose he looked about 10 foot tall, but he had a great sense of humour and he said to these two blokes "You put that keg back exactly where you found it, and I haven't seen you but I'll give you one minute." So they promptly put that keg back and carried on. But he was kind enough to do that.

18:30 Instead of giving them a boot up the backside.

What was some of the things you'd say as a stir up, in a rugby league game, against the engineers or whoever?

Oh well they called them the greasers, just like the union blokes said, "Here this bloody greasers, you know you couldn't beat time". And that sort of thing and stir them up but of course they'd come back with "Bloody Infateers, with nothing between their ears, you're easy boots".

19:00 But, well they were all pretty fit, and we saw some, in the Victoria battalion they had a great Aussie Rules side, one bloke was a top, AFL [Australian Football League] player from Melbourne and they had some ding dong games amongst the Victorians but surprisingly one day in a big betting game the 2/11th Battalion from Western Australia, beat the 2/7th

19:30 Battalion, which was the top team in the comp they had. And the Victorians bet up, big betting and the Western Australians beat them. It was surprising because it, they were the good footballers over there, good footballers, and it was a real surprise of a day.

How was the difference between the states at that stage?

Pretty keen, because the Vics [Victorians] there very

20:00 proud of their state and there such mad Aussie Rulers when I joined the tent, when I joined the battalion, they nearly drove us, another chap and I from New South Wales, and they nearly drove us mad, talking football, day and night. They'd argue about the grand final, in 1932 or 1948, not '48, '38, who kicked the most goals and there were big arguments going on and a book called Millers Guide, which had

20:30 all the results over the years. And the results from the games, who kicked the most goals and points, what the crowd was, and it would be the arbiter, they'd bet one another and they'd finally get down to I'll bet you so so, 5 quid or whatever, and that would the arbitrator, they'd get out Millers Guide and refer to it to see who won the bet. But they lived ate and spoke Aussie Rules.

And what about

21:00 **the tension between different states?**

Well we played the 2/3rd Battalion Rugby League, and they beat us 12 to 8, that's when I had a game against Colin Windon because he became a great Wallaby player. Big and strong because they wanted to trash those Victorians, and they didn't thrash us, it was a good close game but they beat us and,

21:30 that interstate rivalry was still there.

Tell us about whether you noticed much of an American presence in North Queensland?

Not greatly, although, you use to see signs all the time, seeing the aircraft were flying,

22:00 the big bases, they built big bases, around Queensland and Australia, but in Queensland in particular, and there presence was evident all the time for example when I was in Thursday Island, an American motor torpedo base, these are very fast torpedos base armed with torpedos on either side, very fast they could get in get out quick

22:30 and lively. They used to come in to refuel and get supplies. And they lived well, we used to see them staging through in flights of say twenty, thirty aircraft on the way through the Moresby and Furbert [?]. They would land in Horn Island, regularly. You would, I mentioned there was a

23:00 Liberator in the water it had been bombed up and couldn't get off the strip. You were seeing these spectacular Kittyhawk fighters coming through regularly, and the Lightning, there were more or less reconnaissance planes they were very fast. Reconnaissance planes with twin motors and very sleek bodies. The blokes that pranged when his engine cut out, they use to come thought

23:30 to often escort him the, the fighter, Kittyhawk, fighter planes and Thunderbolts, they were, Thunderbolts had a thick engine and because they were powerful engines and horrific roar when they took off and landed. So yes the presence was there all the time, because they really moved in. Once they decided to use Queensland, in particular as a base, they

24:00 moved in and this is where the recovery came from there. The big industrial complex that they are, they moved in the big machinery here, we hadn't see them, lay down air strips quick and lively and, with, what do they call it marsden matting, its like steel matting so they could put a strip down quick and

lively and used it quick and lively. And so masses of equipment were moved in quickly.

24:30 I don't remember, except going past the, what they called Camp Columbia out at Wacol, it was a very big camp. They had another called Camp Cable on the way to Mount Tamborine, at the foot of Mount Tamborine, they called Camp Cable, anyway in that area big camp, and

25:00 they had a big camp on the Ascot Racecourse where they had what they called the big canteen, with was called a PX Store [American Canteen Unit], but they had everything, everything, silk stockings for the ladies, and that was a big thing with the Yanks [Americans], they said they were over here, over dressed and over sexed. And they were able to give any of the ladies some silk stockings, chocolates, whatever, and magnificent canteens.

25:30 **What did you think of them?**

Well, pretty brash but historically and you know we've got to say that but for their support we would have been in great trouble. Because eof the weight of there effort, at sea and I don't think as much on the land although they were heavily involved with Guadalcanal in the Solomon's.

26:00 Our fellows were better in New Guinea, but the tremendous military might, played a big part, big part.

Okay, tell us now about New Guinea, well go back to there?

Yes and that's interesting in the sense that you do submarine picket

26:30 whilst on board, whilst your travelling, because there's always the possibility of a submarine popping up, so all around the ship they had lookouts and you would do 2 hours on 2 hours off, just looking at the sea, looking for periscope, or a submarine, that might be sitting up top. We didn't see any but it hadn't been all the way. And also we did some PT training, you had lecture

27:00 courses, of what to except when we landed. They explained to us, we were taking over from two American divisions, that were going to move out as we moved in so we had the back load, their equipment onto landing barges, so it would be a quick clean swap, and that's the way it worked. When we arrived, the ship anchored, off shore and there were

27:30 scrambled nets going down the side of the ship, and with our gear we climbed down the, into barges and were transported into the beach. Now battalion areas were designated and we set up our tents and at the same time back loaded American equipment. And that's when we knocked off a lot of hundreds and dozens of cartons of food and hidden in the sand and as we erected our tents.

28:00 Good scrounging great example of Australian scrounging. They were puzzled at the finish of the day, where's all this tucker gone and a big emu parade right through the camp looking for where it was hidden, and they couldn't find it.

Tell us about how you managed everyone, organised that?

Very skilfully because there were teams

28:30 to move whatever, you were given a designated task to remove that pile of food, all in cartons, down to such and such a barge. They were what we called the beach masters, you know he directs the operations. This equipment in to that barge or this food into that barge and he called the shots as you moved it up to the beach and,

29:00 some of the boys, would take some but not all. Then we'd organise each other so that a team would do this and the other team would, they would pinch this, this collection of food and quickly get it, some of them would be digging a hole straight away, get it buried quick and lively. And back to the next job.

I'm just kind of interested in

29:30 **how organically it kind of happened. Do you remember how started whispering this idea?**

Oh very soon, you know, the Australians could see that dear they lived well the Yanks, they lived well. They were well supplied with better food than we had, more of it and, you would notice this all the time. I noticed it at this island when they came into replenish. There was even ice cream in one case and

30:00 it was flown up from Cairns, they knew that they were coming to pick up supplies and make a torpedo base, a squadron of them come roaring in and quickly load up refuel and out. And we watched them doing this and there was ice cream amongst some of it. You never saw ice cream and you never saw some of the other articles of food, which they had. So quickly blokes realised look, we can get

30:30 some of this pretty quickly, and live well for a few days anyway. And they organised it quick and lively. Dominated, one, two, three, four you do this, you do this and away we go.

Do you remember a main instigator?

No I don't to be quite honest, because see the blokes in the Middle East they were pretty sharp, they'd been in the Army a long time and if they saw an opportunity like that, that take it quick and lively.

31:00 It was probably one of the boys, although there's a fellow named Father Ryan, Bob Ryan he was a distinguished solider, won a DCM, a Distinguished Conduct Medal in the Wau/Salamaua show. He was a most deceptive bloke, a slow moving bloke, but when I watched him on the football field he was a different man, the way he moved and how he anticipated things.

31:30 The same fellow had a very quick brain and he was deceptive in that sense, I didn't think he could move the way he did, training with him because he didn't like training, he was that sort of fellow who hated regimentation but in action he was a leader. He would just take over straight away and that's how he won his DCM fronting 120 of them fronting about a thousand Japs and,

32:00 he won his Distinguished Conduct Medal by the way he operated, and I reckon part of it was in his brain, he was such a thinker. He was the sort of bloke how would organise something quickly.

What food did you steal?

Oh jees, I really forgotten, but it was so much better than what we had, the old bully beef and biscuits,

32:30 and stews sometimes it they could meat to them somehow from Malaya on the other side you would have some stews. But nothing compared to the Yanks.

How were the American's set up, you know when you arrived?

This is interesting in contrast to the Australians, they set up perimeter, 2 Divisions that's, there could be forty thousand men

33:00 they established a semi circle perimeter around Aitape which was a big village, and virtually didn't move outside it. And certainly I don't know whether, well later they did they knew they'd be going onto the Phillip Islands, but they didn't they just sat in the position, in their position. When the 6th Division took over we started patrolling straight away, in all

33:30 directions, I said I went up to the Sussano Village and another group went in land to a little place and then, others from 2 other brigades they moved out to other villages to find out what was going on. So that when they did move into action they had a fair idea of what was in front of them. They started patrolling straightway.

34:00 **Tell us about your first patrol?**

Well my first patrol was, yes Sussano Village, I'll show you a map later. Its west towards a place called Hollandia and that was interesting in that the intelligence reports were the Japs had moved back into the hills of the coast and they knew we were

34:30 coming obviously. And moving through the villages on the way we were seeking information of when they were last there, how many, what were they like, how did they treat them. Making that intelligence report as we went, looking at they layout of the land, some, we went along the coast, though sometimes you had to cross rivers and some of these were

35:00 reasonably wide and if the tide was running, you'd could be swept off you feet. So we were looking at the conditions of the terrain and when we got to the edge of Sussano Village, it was a beautiful lagoon and a beautiful village you could see across the water. And when we decided to go we could see when we got into the village, a magnificent village and a real anti climax when nothing happened when we were

35:30 surrounded by hundreds of very excited native, that had come to see, come and see we didn't know what it was but a real anti climax because there was no, nothing there except this church which they had restored. So when I saw the reports of the tsunami or tidal wave I realised the extent of the tragedy because it wiped out, it cut off a thousand people just in one, big swoop right back through the village and destroyed there

36:00 lifestyle in one hit. One hit. The next patrol I did was with Captain Edger who went to the Indian army from there, he was a career solider and he, yes he retrenched from the Indian army, probably his request, and we did a patrol to another village in land again talking to the

36:30 natives finding out how long since the Japanese, had been there when they left and numbers, how they were treated etc. Filling in information reports for the intelligence people so they could build a picture of what was going on and where.

How did you communicate with the locals?

We learnt a

37:00 smidgen of pidgin English to make ourselves understood, it wasn't easy because they speak quickly like the French and naturally amongst themselves they just carry on as we do in English. So sometimes you had to repeat the question, or ask again why or when, how to understand. They understood,

37:30 but and sometimes they'd look at you very quizedly, and say this blokes a bit of an idiot, because they were so use to conversing in pidgin with say the Europeans that were there before the war and during

the war that spoke pidgin, it was just a matter of course, just like you or I conversing. And I remember doing a patrol once when we were in action where this,

38:00 village chief called a Liberwine [?] and this old gentleman had broken his leg badly in earlier times and his leg was bent. It hadn't been fixed, it probably just mended the way he broke it and he was a cunning old devil. And he knew where the Japs were and one, he met us on a patrol one day and I think his son was with him, I gathered the impression it was his

38:30 son, but he led us to fairly close to where the Japs were, and I suppose sensibly he disappeared, and he was gone, the invisible man. He was gone and I could understand that because when the shooting started you'd didn't want to be there. But he was a cunning old devil. He was a interesting man because he used to talk occasionally about the

39:00 tribal fights that went on, they used to fight over women and territory, their gardens, they all had their own gardens and, you know this tribe, do not interfere with their gardens. I imagine he'd be a pretty fierce old warrior. They put on a great sing sing for us at Aitape before we went into action, where they put on their ceremonial dances, get dressed up in their

39:30 ceremonial gear and very spectacular because its colourful and noisy and interesting from, to look at their culture, in putting on a big party in other words, a big sing sing they called it and they sang and danced and carried on and it was great to see. It was their way of saying thank you.

Tape 7

00:37 **I've just got a couple of little questions. The first thing is, a couple of times you've mentioned the intelligence member who was with you, the guy that was shot in the back, that time, I'm interested in**

01:00 **what there role was?**

In an infantry battalion they have an intelligence section, and simply their job is sifting the information that is brought into them, goes to enemy dispositions, numbers, situations so that the command structure, and usually that's the battalion commander in the case of a battalion intelligence sergeant,

01:30 when his planning his objectives, he's got to know as much as he can about enemy dispositions and locations, strength to do his planning. And that's there job, just as now in Canberra you've got the intelligence sections, there job is to sort out all the information that comes into them, and prepare it for the government, or whoever.

02:00 But in the battalion, that was basically their job. Because in the command structure, in the battalion you've got about one thousand men roughly with an intelligence section, so that the commanding officer, has as much information as he can, and coming over the top of that, say in the desert campaigns, where it could be brigade defences or action, you've got brigade

02:30 intelligence section and combining with from the battalions they try and get an overall view of what's going on so that the command structure can make their decisions based on the best possible information.

Also just going back, to the first camp that you were at. Where you sort of doing any extra training and

03:00 **stuff at that time or was it straight into?**

Which one are we talking about, the…?

The camp you had taken over from the US [United States]?

Oh at Aitape, where the 6th Division relived two American villages. Yes training continued because they weren't immediately into action, the 6th Division Commander I suppose was planning their future moves. In the meantime, you were sitting around doing nothing,

03:30 so training continued, again route marches, because in the tropics it was so hot and uncomfortable with rain and you're constantly wet from sweat from rain and movement and the tropical fevers. That was a big part of the training too, was taking your Atebrin or whatever you've had to take to combat malaria.

04:00 And just coming back to the health point, I had a severe bout of dengue fever on Thursday Island, and I was delirious for days and, it was more severe than some of the malaria, cases I had and I had a lot of malaria after the war, but the training continued. Not so much parade ground training, although they did

04:30 mount a guard each night just for, ceremonial training, because the guard would be mounted say at sunset and it would mount a guard right through the night where fellows would do 2 hours on and 2 hours off. Just peering into the darkness, watching for something. No risk on

05:00 the beach head where we were but a different situation once you got into action, where you had a weapon pit which you dug and sleep in that or near that, right near it, 2 hours on and 2 hours off. You very seldom slept because of the noise and you didn't know what it was. And as the engineers who wrote this book I'll show you later, says only the soldiers themselves would

05:30 understand the nervous tension that you endured, in action, because you never knew in the defensive position at night time, 2 hours on 2 hours off, and peering into the dark, you didn't know what was going to happened, and then patrolling, whether it was a fighting patrol, or reconnaissances you never knew what was going to

06:00 happen. So you were living on your nerves, all the time.

Just something you mentioned there the different kind of medication you had to take, what where they and what did they do?

We were taking Atebrin, which is, gave you a yellow appearance, I'm trying to think of the medical word, jaundice, you almost looked jaundice because it had a yellow compound, in it and it sort of gave you a

06:30 yellowish look. Atebrin. I did take quinine sometimes, was another one and oh it was a bitter liquid, if you took it in liquid form. And later a drug called Tralugene [?] came off the market, but, we took it faithfully, but I still finished up with dengue fever and a lot of my mates with malaria and after the

07:00 war for months, months, and a couple of years, had heavy effects from malaria in hospital. I remember sitting on a railway station in the Sydney, shivering, I couldn't stop shivering, shaking. And a lady on the end of the seat, I think she thought I was drunk and she kept inching away, moving away.

Did most people take the medicine quite happily?

They did yes because of the consequences if you,

07:30 malaria could kill you and there were other tropical fevers. A friend of mine, who's still here in Brisbane, he got, oh my memory, I'll think of it in a moment. He very nearly died, but they evacuated him to the coast and then to a hospital in Lae and he survived. Scrub typhus, which you can get in the

08:00 jungle. So it was important, and the training was very strict in terms of taking your medication, because usually it was given to you and you were watched taking it, which was a good idea because of the consequences, if you didn't.

What was your first time in action, when you know…?

08:30 In, in, ah, when I ran into the Japanese man face to face. And that was a surprise and as I said I don't know who got the bigger surprise. And their reaction was so quick, just jump off the track which lead into this village and boot through the jungle. They were firing quick and lively and

09:00 there reaction was so quick, and.

Can you just describe that for me again what?

Well I was on reconnaissance patrol where your job is to find information, not get into trouble and not looking for a fight. And the idea was, in this case, we knew there were Japs fairly handy, we had to find where they were. And we got into this village

09:30 which was so quite, beforehand, and we didn't know if it was empty or not. Some of the villages were deserted because of Japanese had pulled back. We had got into the village through the jungle quietly and when I walked around the corner of this hut, straight bang into this Japanese. Luckily I had an iron gun, a machine gun,

10:00 which was handy but they responded so quickly that it, were lucky we could have got killed or someone wounded.

What was your reaction when you saw him?

Oh well I instinctively you freeze, but again if you'd been taught to react quickly, because poor old Con Hennessey, didn't and Con died as a result. And that's what the

10:30 older fellows will tell you too, instant reaction other wise if could be you. So that was the first one. And the next one, Bruce was the one in the stockade, where there was a fighting patrol looking for trouble to take, capture anyone that we could, and let us right in, luckily only Frank Rankin got wounded

11:00 in the back, and the casualties could have been heavy because they were right in, as we fanned out in a line to move forward and they opened up and the casualties could have been heavier.

Did you suffer any, I mean after that first time in action was there any?

No, stress in the sense of

11:30 fear or, mental worry, we'd been trained to react to different situations and that was part of what we were in. You'd leave with post traumatic stress, and it does happen and I used to adopt the attitude mentally, being a bit fatalistic, if I'm going to cope it I'm going to cope it, I can't do much about it

12:00 because you'd worry yourself sick, trying to protect yourself as it were, so I used to adopt the attitude, what's to be will be. And let's see what happened, yes.

Was there any amongst you or any of the other guys any sort of lucky charms or you know?

No, I can't remember any except that a few

12:30 blokes were quite nervous, and that's very understandable because your very life was on the line and it is very understandable, depending on the nature of the person, some people were quite edgy and other quite blasé. But I know a couple of blokes were quite nervous and a bit worried. And its very understandable when you

13:00 see the fellow too that you know so well, you know your mates and you keep wondering will I be next, will I be next and gratefully it wasn't in my case.

Does it make you think about death a bit more?

Yes, it does because, I class myself as a Christian and yes, you did think,

13:30 about the possibility.

What sort of?

In the life thereafter. What, what was going to be the prospect on the other side.

So did you use your faith to...?

Yes, I call myself a practising catholic, and I always believe in prayer

14:00 and we'd pray and jokingly say you could become a Christian because they frighten hell out you. In action, because it's a frightening, horrifying situation of people being killed in warfare like that and when you saw some of your mates killed, it gave you food for thought, whose next, whose

14:30 next?.

Did you ever talk about this sort of feelings with the other guys?

Oh yes, the blokes were pretty realistic and honest, and the colonels idea was not to take unnecessary risks. He didn't want to see men killed taking unnecessary risk, unnecessary provado or silly acts. Because he'd been through it in the Middle East and he got wounded in the

15:00 Wau/Salamaua campaign and he knew the consequences of being wounded seriously to the extent that he could have died or been killed outright. He didn't want to lose anyone.

On the occasions when you did lose people was there any amongst the group, any sort of rituals that you'd observe?

Oh yes, it was a sad time where, they were usually buried in the jungle, sometimes a

15:30 pardre, might be somewhere around, because each battalion had a padre, we had an Anglican padre and if he were anywhere around he would conduct the various ceremony but most times he wasn't because we were in action and the person would be buried, and usually an officer or senior NCOs would say a few prayers. And

16:00 that was it. So traumatic in the sense that your farewelling someone's who's dead and a few minutes ago or an hour ago was right alongside you.

Did you have any way, which you developed of dealing with that personally?

I did in the sense that I was a Christian

16:30 and I believed in the life after death, and it my hope always was that, you know that there not suffering any longer, if they were badly wounded, that they died rather than die a slow death then again I had that fatalistic attitude, what's to be will be, and you could

17:00 worry yourself sick but you didn't worry about it too much, because you'd be thinking all the time that you might be involved in, or might be a statistic.

Did when people close to you die, I guess give you an extra motivation?

Yes as I said

17:30 three fellows I played football with, good mates, died and terrible loss to their families, and losses as good mates. It made you realise that it was a possibility of what might happen because there were here today and gone tomorrow, or here now and gone a few minutes later, and

18:00 that's the tragedy of war, I've always said it's a shocking and at times frightening experience and one would not want to be involved at the end of the day it's not to say that if my country or my family were threatened I would do my upmost to defend it. But I could understand

18:30 some people didn't want us to become passivates, not wanting to be involved in war of any sort because even if there country was invaded, because of his beliefs, but because it's a shocking frightening experience.

Did just dealing with this loss change your attitude towards the Japanese at all in either a negative?

In one sense, it

19:00 did occasionally where bodies were interfered with, you do read of some cannibalism and some bodies were found that were, that had been interfered with, had meat cut of legs, backside and some fellows said that they wouldn't take any prisoners after that, I didn't see it

19:30 happen that way, but it was recorded that it happened in some cases, because of the nature of the brutality which occurred and, some blokes said categorically they were prisoners.

How was that for you personally at this time?

No I didn't say that personally because where we could capture someone that could be used by the

20:00 intelligence people, with interrogation to find out all more about units where they were, disposition was, how many etc. And what particular units so they built up this story of what they were up against.

I've read that some people say that the Japanese were great jungle fighters or something like that, what was

20:30 **your…?**

Yes they were, they were skilled jungle fighters and fanatical and there ultimate destiny was to die for their Emperor, that made it really tough, for individuals to fight because death was an ultimate end for them. And they were very clever at camouflage, they had come out to the

21:00 far east to Malaysia and a lot of them were sort of battle hardened and they gave a tough, yes tough opponents.

Can you tell me about when you were sent into the mountains pushing the Japanese back?

Yes, the 17th Brigade and this 2/6th

21:30 Battalion, were given the task of operating in the Torricelli Mountains, which looked the Sepik on one side this mighty river in New Guinea which flows for a couple of hundred miles on the one side, we could see it from where we were, back to the coast on the other side with this mountain range in between. And it was tough going because I think I said before you got to the bottom on one ridge and then you had to climb up the top of the next one and when you got

22:00 there if you were moving forward, down again, so it was very demanding physically. And I often felt sorry for the older blokes, who were feeling the effects as it were of the physical strain of carry on. Because if, we used to take turns in carrying the Bren gun for example, to take the load of the Bren

22:30 gunner, whose job it was to operate the Bren gun. And some of the older fellows really used to feel it and it was physically demanding because you were hot through with sweat, and the temperature in the jungle, rain and, wet most of the time. And a physically demanding job.

23:00 **And so you were pushing forward?**

Fighting from ridge to ridge as it was just like Wau/Salamaua, because it was described as one of the most hideous places in the world. Just a series of ridges where the natives had built there villages on the top of these ridges, with narrow paths, and they had used that in their early tribal fights from a defensive point of view, so they were very hard to get at if they were

23:30 defended and it was tough going. And the idea was to push the Japanese back towards Wewak, because after the 2 sister Brigades on the coast took Wewak, captured Wewak, they pushed inland then to try and met us.

When you were moving forward, ridge by ridge, this might seem like a strange question, but you weren't going back

24:00 **to a camp you were pushing forward so were you setting up new?**

You just lived where you were, you know little bit, your own little tent or even sometimes, occasionally a two man tent, but you camped where you were and then moved on. In the case of the platoon, that's about thirty men, you'd be in a

24:30 defensive situation wherever you were, where you dug in your weapon pits and sighted your defences, as you moved on. And that went on all the time you were moving forward, being supplied by air drop because, in the early stages there were no airfield, after they captured a couple of important places, with the help of the natives they cleared

25:00 a landing, and made an airstrip where DC3's could come in and, they could bring in supplies, take the wounded out and that, made a big difference. Then again, we captured a couple of little landing strips where little planes like a Piper and little Austers could land in a very short space of land. They were important strategic points and that's where I hurt my back where

25:30 we were going to take this position overlooking the little airstrip, they did take it later on.

At the camps that you set up, when we talked about landing you'd dig firing, would you do that around each camp?

Yes, each position, you took up you had to be thinking ahead

26:00 of the possibilities of if you were attacked, so you had to take up the defensive position, so therefore you were looking for higher ground, you were looking for a position which could be defended if you were attacked so you had to sight as best you could accordingly to where you were.

26:30 **Can you tell me exactly how, how you moved through these, from ridge to ridge, was it like a jungle?**

Single file usually, because it was usually single track going up the ridge to the top and down the other side. It was usually single file in the mud, slipping and sliding, one step forward and three steps back, with great difficulties at times depending on the

27:00 grade, so in the mud and the rain, difficult terrain. Some of the most difficult areas of warfare to operate in because of the nature of the country. So hilly, so demanding physically and then in terms of attack and defence,

27:30 very difficult.

On these ridges, how heavily wooded was it or was it quite open?

Mostly, wooded, I'll show you some photos later where you get open areas, which often the natives would clear for there villages and, but mostly jungle where it was difficult to see the enemy,

28:00 easy to set up an ambush and, if you were in the defensive position you needed to clear what we called a field of fire, knocking down the scrub so you could see ahead.

Was it intense fighting the entire time you were moving forward or was there periods of respite?

Yes periods of respite, because

28:30 if say a platoon was heavily engaged for a particular battle or incident. They might need to be spelled so, when I was in D Company, you'd have 3 Platoons, so another platoon, would take over and leap frog and, so on so that the same troops were not committed all the time, all the time. The same with a company

29:00 is 3 Platoons and jungle warfare didn't allow for a company to operate as a body, you know all together, about one hundred and twenty blokes, because usually a platoon of thirty, or a section of ten because of the nature of the country. But yes certainly they would be spelled in the sense of not being committed every day, of the whole time they were there, yes.

29:30 **And during the time when you were pushing forward, what did time feel like, was it slow, did time go fast?**

No it was slow in the sense of movement wasn't fast because of the nature of the country so it was a hard slog of gaining territory, because of the nature of the country. Not like

30:00 open warfare, where I said in the Middle East where they would use trucks and Bren gun carriers and move quickly from one position to another. It was a slow hard slog, in jungle fighting.

You mentioned that you were wet all the time, was there lot of rain and fog about?

Yes, everyday rain would come in at different times and almost every day and because of the country,

30:30 where you were up and down, you were sweating all the time and rain on top of it, so you were sort of wet most of the time.

Did the rain restrict visibility?

Sometimes, yes, because, say in the jungle where visibility is restricted and yes, it did, it could make operations

31:00 difficult. In the rain, in the jungle not easy to operate in.

Did being wet all the time and wet clothes and wet boots, did you start to get any physical effects from this?

Yes, some blokes, as is normal to were subject to dermatitis, skin complaints, rashes,

31:30 so but the very first opportunity where you could wash your clothes in a creek or somewhere, and got a bit of sunshine and you could dry them out quick and lively and, it felt great, but, you didn't have any showers for a week or so. Yes some blokes developed serious skin problems, others not so

32:00 serious, even when you first went to the tropics, prickly heat, where you just had this prickly feeling all over your body, prickly heat they call it. It took a while to adjust. But tropical fevers, tropical diseases too, were common, I mentioned scrub titis, which is a serious illness, malaria. Other

32:30 tropical fevers were common, several succumb to that.

You mentioned that when you were like on top of the ridges there were villages, were you trying to capture?

No the villagers lived there that was there home and in some cases they had deserted them or been taken over by the Japanese and

33:00 a lot the natives hid in the bush. And when the villages were retaken they would move back in. Because they had there culture of their gardens, it was a feature of each village, having the gardens where they grew, what they called turrums, sweet potatoes, that was the staple food, and that was there territory and their culture. As soon as they could they would move back in and

33:30 that happened fairly regularly.

Can you describe on of these villages?

A series of huts, usually on the top of the ridge, and in terms of there culture and previous lifestyle they were defensive positions too because they were higher, they commanded a view usually up one side of the other side and that's where they

34:00 lived and built there gardens on, usually on the side of the ridges and farmed them regularly. And that's where they got their food in addition to food, which they might buy, or exchange from neighbouring villages. Bananas and ack-ack material because they had that trade between one another. You had the Sepik further down this famous waterway,

34:30 on which a lot of goods travelled by boat up and down, so some of them would go down that far trading and then bringing food back to their villages. But I didn't get down to the Sepik, but you could see it from where we were, it's a mighty river, Runs for about 200 miles.

Would you as you went along the ridges, would you stop in at these villages at all?

35:00 Most times we didn't because they had there own lifestyle where they would have fires in their huts, not being unkind but they were very smelly and sometimes the pigs would live in there too, you know the village pigs, and we didn't find them conditions for living in, we would rather set up our little tent and camp

35:30 on the fringe

Could you speak any pidgin [pidgin English]?

I forgotten most of it now, you know they used to see aeroplanes and they'd say "barlouis he come, man belong meri" a man's wife or girl, man belong meri [native woman] become and it means his got a wife that fellow.

36:00 I forgotten most of it was a long time ago.

So did you eventually get to Wewak?

Yes, they captured Wewak the two brigades, on the coast, captured Wewak and I flew home from there, no I didn't fly home from there, I flew into Wewak from the airfield that they established called Hayfield

36:30 into Wewak, and caught a ship home from there called the Katoomba to Sydney Harbour and that was a eye opener, because we came into Sydney Harbour very early in the morning, so those of us on board got up early to see the Harbour as we came in early in the morning, and it was a great site. Such a beautiful Harbour.

When was it that Wewak was taken?

Now

37:00 because I wasn't there I was in Torricelli Mountain but it was before, I'll have a look in the battalion history, I think the war finished in August, May, June, or even a little earlier because the two brigades

pushed along the coast and they could transport people by road, and they pushed

37:30 hard and they captured it a little bit earlier than they expected, I think.

So how did you time in the Torricelli Mountains end?

When the war finished.

When did you hear about the war finishing?

They, the radio communication was strong, you know the evidence was that the war was coming to a close and it did so the radio contact between

38:00 units and for example D Company, was in contact with Battalion Headquarters and, if, this is where the signals came in if a platoon was out on its own, they would have a signaller signal attached to the radio who could radio back to Company Headquarters, so they knew where they were and what was going on. So

38:30 when the word came through of course jubilation.

How did you celebrate?

“Marvellous, wooh hoo, hallelujah”. Yes.

When you heard that the war had finished did you hear about the bomb?

Hiroshima, yes but of course that was, you know, that

39:00 was famous news in the sense of, journalism or I’m trying to think of the word, terrific news wasn’t it. My brother Alan went up in the air force to (UNCLEAR) and he said the devastation went for miles just flattened. So you can just image the consequences of an atomic war, you’d hope that it never happened.

39:30 Never happens, we just hope that they can reign in the North Koreans there getting very baligent and dangerous so.

Did you ever question with your brother seeing that devastation did you ever wonder if it was worth it?

Well a lot of the historians are saying that had they, had to invade Japan then the loss of life would have been enormous, from the allies point of view

40:00 and the Japanese point of view, because they would have, defended there cities to the death, I think. And an American, distant relative told me, he was in the American navy and he said that’s what they mean, they would have fought to the very finish and the loss of life would have been enormous on both side. So in one sense it bought

40:30 it to a holt, but horrific casualties and consequences you know for the civilian population.

Tape 8

00:37 **Just tell us you rank again when you arrived in New Guinea?**

Corporal, humble corporal

01:00 in a Section of 18 Platoons of D Company of the 2/6th Battalion. A Section Leader has about ten men under him and, in terms of jungle fighting, it means a bit more work, because of the nature of the country, the country doesn’t lend itself to large numbers of men being involved in one particular action,

01:30 so it meant a lot of section fighting, platoon, fighting that about thirty men. Because you can cover the country quicker. A Company has about a hundred and twenty men in it but you can’t use them all at once, sort of thing, so it meant section and platoon fighting mainly.

What would you think about when you were

02:00 **out on a platoon?**

Well you’re thinking of the task in hand, you’re given a particular task, say whether it’s a fighting patrol, or reconnaissance patrol, or whatever, you’re thinking of the task in hand because if your in action, you’re not sure what might happen, you’ve got to try and anticipate what you would do in the event of something happening, and

02:30 be eternally vigilant on your toes, as it were, to anticipate. I mentioned before and you know what I’ve read by this 6th Division engineer that the nervous tension, can only be understood by the person that’s been involved.

Would there ever be times where you perhaps daydream at all?

Ah,

03:00 not really, except I remember one night on a brilliant moon light night I was thinking of a pre war existence, of things I used to do when I was working and family. And in the sense yes, I was drifting off. Now you couldn't do that very often because, I mentioned you did 2 hours on and 2 hours off, in the middle of the night you're peering into the

03:30 darkness, you've got to be vigilant all the time. You know there was a classic case of the Japanese sneaking through a permitter which was booby trapped, got behind on of the defensive positions and pinched a blokes shirt and trousers, which he'd hung up to dry, and he was on the way out and tripped a booby trap and got killed, but he had this

04:00 blokes shirt and pants. And that's how good they were in the sense of getting through your defences in the nighttime. And General Adachi in the post war interview said they were specially trained to de louse the booby traps and even keep the hand grenades to use against us, or delouse the booby traps before they attacked in the middle of night.

Did you set up some booby traps?

All the time in front of our defensive

04:30 position overnight. Yes all the time.

Describe an example of some?

Ah, hand grenades were used as the explosive devises. The pins were removed, and they were tied down and wire was extended to the next booby trap, the next grenades, and the next one so you had a perimeter surrounding your position. So if one was

05:00 kicked it would pull them all down and off they'd go in a chain reaction. And within a fairly close proximity, they are pretty deadly. So you had to be very careful handling them so once you released the pin, took the pin out, and that's what I mentioned early, Slogan Aubery, broke the Olympic record when delousing them he kicked the, accidentally kicked the wire, and know that they were going to

05:30 go off very quickly, he came hurtling up the track at a hundred miles an hour.

You mentioned the airdrops, can you describe them in just a bit more details of how they operated?

Yes they trained us to mark the air drops with, you can image two big creases of white cloth, criss crossed in the shape of a cross, we'd clear a section of the jungle, put this cloth down, and that was the aiming point for the

06:00 pilot, in his low flying run, because he used to bank over and the supplies would be pushed out of the aircraft, to toxicate down, he'd fly low when doing that, as low as he could, and those supplies would then be picked up. Now occasionally as I said they would go in the direction of the enemy, which you couldn't do anything about.

And, you mentioned

06:30 **when you ran into the Japanese man, face to face you were on a reconnaissance mission, can you describe to us and the feeling that, what it was like?**

One of terrific surprise because, the purpose was to find out as much as I could where the Japanese where, if they were in a particular village, or defensive position, without them knowing we were there. And it was a very quite

07:00 approach, we'd got right into this village. There was no sound coming from it, which indicated that it might be a dig, a lot had moved out. So there was no indication that they were there, until I walked around the corner, slap bang into this, man.

What was the feeling like, no just in this one, but going out just, was it just yourself or was it someone else with you?

No in the case, two other with me.

What was the feeling like

07:30 **just a few of you heading out by yourselves?**

Well you're thinking you've got to be on your toes, all the time, because only three of us. You could walk into an ambush, you could walk into in the case of a village, where I may not have run into him but got into the middle of the village and then be surrounded if there were several of them around. So you had to be on your toes mentally all the time. Try and anticipate what might happen.

08:00 Again you're living on your nerves because you're trying to anticipate what's going on. And try and find out as much as you can.

Was the view of the Japanese, maybe not the best, people taking prisoners and this kind of thing, describe how that added to your, the pressure of fighting. The pressure of fighting in the fact that you didn't want to be captured?

08:30 Exactly because, you didn't know the outcome, there were a few instances where fellows were found butchered, and I mentioned that a few of the blokes said that they wouldn't take prisoners after that. I didn't see it personally but it was reported to us, and no one wanted to fall into the hands of the Japanese.

09:00 Possibly because of interrogation, they had badly treated in some cases, a lot of the natives, badly treated them. And you didn't know what the outcome would be so again it was a matter of vigilance trying to avoid that.

Did you feel like you guys would always fight to the death?

Yes, because you're very life depended on it.

09:30 Very life depended on it and I come back to the remark that I made earlier, this engineer that wrote the book, I'll show you before you leave. But Australians were the princes of comrades, because of there support for one another in tough situations. And it was that way.

Did you notice the physical beauty of the places you were fighting?

In some cases I mentioned

10:00 the Sussano Village episode, a magnificent village, beautifully clean, coconut trees fronting the ocean so they lived near the ocean and in it. And as distinct from some of the villages, which were, as I mentioned, because they had fires in the huts and pigs sometimes lived in them and the dogs, they smelt heavily,

10:30 a hut that you wouldn't want to live in really. From a westerners point of view, or Asian point of view. It was, one feature that was most attractive. The other angle was from the Torricelli Mountains where we could see the Sepik River, and this is a famous river in New Guinea, which goes for a couple of hundred

11:00 miles. And there was a lot of, navigation up and down it, trade, and transport of timber and what have you, and I had read about this even as a youngster, about this famous Sepik River, and it was interesting, we weren't close enough to go and see it, but we could see it from where we were. And the other aspect was that German miners had been in, where we were

11:30 fighting, in the 1914 and earlier, they were terribly industrious in that they had built airfields and flown, what they call Youkers, or Junkers aircraft, in with mining machinery and re assembled the machinery in there, and did mining operations. In a couple of cases we cleared roads, which were over grown, they were a chain

12:00 wide, built so that they tapered to the side for drainage, and they'd become over grown. And when they were cleared by the villagers, they weren't bad roads. You could jeeps along them and trucks once they got them in there. So, there was a lot of history there, a lot of history.

Describe the sounds that you were hearing?

The sounds of silence, we come back to Simon and Garfunkle, The sounds of silence,

12:30 because in the jungle you notice noise particularly, and that's a clue sometimes, as I said when we got into that defended stockade position, we heard chopping, quite clearly and distinctly, so someone's there. Birds, you know how birds here, if they see another enemy bird they start screeching and chanting, sometimes that too

13:00 would alert you too to something. But the sound of silence was a dream because any distinctive noise you heard straight away. So talking, you heard pretty quickly if you came near a defended position and they were talking, you'd hear it pretty quickly.

So did you feel that your senses were?

Sharpened, yes they were sharpened and it was a good thing because you're depended on your senses a lot.

Did you find that you had any

13:30 **extra senses?**

Well in that sense of, your life depending on seeing and hearing and anticipating, you were on edge, on anticipation of what might happen or not happened, or what you could see or hear. Heightened I would say because of the dangers.

14:00 **In New Guinea what were the best of times?**

The best of time was, from my point of view, I'd read a bit about New Guinea about explorers, a famous fellow named, Champion and Jack Hydes, and I was always a bit fascinated about it because, these explorers had gone out into

14:30 the jungle and amongst the tribes who were pretty ferrous in some cases, the cook a coobers..? Head hunters, they were very brave men and I was fascinated to be in the country that I had read about. The Sepik I'd read about not that I was able to see it in this case personally. At least go and have a good look at it but the

15:00 experience, a bit of a feeling that those explorers would have felt, when they were there. They were in a very dangerous situation, where they were going into native country where there were fierce warriors, and various tribal divisions and they would have been living on their nerves a bit too. So it was interesting to be involved in that country that I'd read so much about.

Did any of the local indigenous

15:30 **people tell you about their fighting?**

Yes because they would have inter tribal fighting and it's pretty vicious, and they'd fight over dowries, how many pigs, they gave for this woman, or someone was pinching food out of their garden and they challenge them. They'd be jumping up and down and screaming and fighting with arrows and axes. Yes the tribal fights weren't not uncommon they said. Demarcations disputes on

16:00 territory, pinching of food, women. Never saw any of it because we were busy fighting and never saw any of it.

How were your relations with the local people?

Very guarded because I mentioned the Japanese, the native fellow that got executed, in some cases the Japanese recruited

16:30 them, other cases at the point of a gun, where they were just conscripted into cargo carrying, but you weren't quite sure sometimes, if you were in a particular area, you weren't quite sure whether they were for you or against you. And you had to be careful, very careful.

We might have covered this a bit, but what were your worst of times?

Worst of times were

17:00 in, you know attacking situations where you were trying to take a position, and not knowing what the outcome would be. As I mentioned, after Arthur Billies got killed in an ambush, and a surprising situation where you just walk into an ambush and you're gone. Kevin Carr got killed with a machine

17:30 gun burst in the stomach. Con Henesy got killed when he froze looking at this Japanese man. Nutty Clarke got killed, he just got shot, which killed him. Greg Smith the fellow who got shot through the heart and this, happened fairly regularly, where,

18:00 you didn't know what the next situation would be.

What were your coping strategies for these situations?

My coping strategies was the fatalistic one where, what will be will be, because you could be a nervous wreck, if you though too much about it every day, you know whether, what's going to happen tomorrow. That's the way I mentally coped adopting the fatalistic

18:30 attitude, what will be will be.

What would you pack with you?

We'd pack, a tin of bully beef and biscuits, and you had your water bottle. A change of clothes, a shirt and jungle greens. You had your hat, you didn't wear a tin helmet, because in the jungle it was ridiculous,

19:00 so your hat and that was about it. Really,

Was there a wound that you particularly feared above all other wounds?

No I didn't, you know I saw quite a few of the wounds and, no I didn't

19:30 think along those lines, just adopted the fatalistic attitude.

Now tell us about your nickname how you got it?

Well I didn't have a sort of a separate nickname, expect that I was called the boy from Gundagai because I came from Gundagai and at the drop of a hat after a few beers, or the odd barbeque we'd had I would resite "The Road to Gundagai" and they used to call me the boy from Gundagai. Yes. And my family laughed because I got to a

20:00 function now and I resite "The Road to Gundagai"

How does it go?

Well it goes like this “As I was going down Conroy’s Gap, I heard a maiden cry, there goes Bill the bullocky he’s bound for Gundagai, now I bet that poor old bugger never earned an honest crust, and the better poor old bugger never drove a wood through dust. now Bill got bogged at the five mile creek, the lashed and swore and cried, if Nobby, that’s his favourite bullock doesn’t get me out of this

20:30 I’ll tattoo his bloody hide, so Nobby strained and broke the yolk and pocked out the leaders eye, and the dog sat on the tucker box five miles from Gundagai”. My family laugh when I do that, have a few beers. Yes.

How did it go down with your mates?

Good, really good because we’d have the odd barbeque in the bush and there was always some good singers,

21:00 and characters that would tell yarns, some very rye ball, and songs they’d sung from the Middle East about Queen Freda, the Queen and, it used to go down well.

What were some of there songs?

Oh well that rye ball one was Queen Freda, it was a very rude one and the others were just the standard Army songs Bless them All and

21:30 blah blah blah, “Kiss me Goodnight Margaret, Sergeant Major”, “What’d you join the Army for, you’d be bloody well barmy, ah and the old standards of that time. So they’d have a good old sing song in the bush. Just build a log barbeque and away they’d go.

22:00 **What was the humour like?**

Pretty good because Australians adapt to any situation whether its tough or, humorous, and they've got a reputation for doing that and, it was a bit of a safety valve I suppose because, it was a tough life in infantry and they, Australians have a reputation for adjusting well to

22:30 any situation.

Did any of you every hear Tokyo Rose?

Yes, on the broadcast she was famous as was the lass in the Middle East, and I’ve forgotten her name. They used to broadcast when they were in Tobruk, the Rats of Tobruk. But Tokyo Rose was, well known.

What did you think of that?

It was a good propaganda,

23:00 sort of telling everyone your doomed, you’ve got no chance of getting out of this, bridge of hollow.

You’ve told us when you heard the bomb drop and all that, tell us about coming home?

Well, it was the start of a new era, the war had finished and you had to rehabilitate yourself and everyone did. For some blokes

23:30 it was a unsettling time, they couldn’t seem to settle. But I got straight back into the public service, initially. And I met my wife here in Brisbane and occasionally she came to Sydney, before we got married and, we got married in June, 21 June 1947 and I moved to Brisbane.

24:00 When I asked to move up here they sent me to the Income Tax Department where I worked for about 12 months, before I joined the Commonwealth Bank, by public exam. They were wanting males, probably to replace the loses that they sustained during the war to build up there male content again, because the women did a great job in the bank during the war, I believe they carried a lot of the jobs. So

24:30 in, October ‘48 I joined the Commonwealth Bank as an ex-serviceman, entry by public exam. Which some other, or many other fellows who came out of the army, the navy or the air force would join the Commonwealth Bank.

And tell us about work in the discharge office?

Ah, in the discharge office it was, hectic, because blokes were wanting to get out of the army as quickly as possible and get back into civilian life. And

25:00 those of us, many of us that were clerks were sent in there to help speed up the discharges and it was helpful in the sense that blokes wanted to get out as quick as possible. As I was but I just had to wait until my points came up.

What were your duties exactly?

Well the, finalising the discharges involved going thought there records and seeing

25:30 that they were eligible for discharge under the points system and then finalising their records, you know closing off there records where they had to have before that a medical. Before they discharged that there pay was up to date, that there equipment had been handed in, you know that everything was okay for them to go.

And how would they earn their points?

By,

26:00 time of enlistment, for example I was enlisted in January 1942, fellows had been enlisted before me, had more points than I had. The '39ers had enlisted in '39 or '40, they were the longest serving and therefore had the most points. First in first out.

Did you miss any aspect of the army life?

Not really because I was anxious to

26:30 get back into civilian life, get going. I didn't want to be a permanent solider, some of my mates did they joined what they called BCOF, British Commonwealth Occupation Forces, and went up to Japan and stayed in the army. Some of them went to Korea as part of that group and were very lucky to survive because it was pretty hectic campaign.. some people don't realise but the

27:00 research of it, he was in three big battles up there and lucky to survive.

Were you interested in politics after the war?

Always interested in politics after the war, even now, not to the extent of standing or being committed to a particular party, but very interested to read about it and take interest in politics here. Keen reader on politics.

You didn't want to get back into it?

No, no I didn't because I

27:30 started with the bank and worked my way through and made a manager in 1966 and retired in 1982.

Did you suffer any consequences from the war?

As part of my career?

No, no, bad consequences?

Yes, I had a lot of health problems. Severe lower back problems,

28:00 really severe, which meant as I said major surgery in 1963 and again in '71. I've had hypertension, since just after war, and I had a lot of malaria, but hypertension and that eventually lead I think to heart surgery 8 years ago and prior to that, they call them TIA's [transcient ischemic attack], they call them mini strokes in other words.

28:30 I was having trouble walking from a health point of view, which they encourage to walk a lot and I like walking. But with these two screws in my left toe, I was having a lot of troubles and I finished up having two lots of surgery. Then I think it's a result I developed severe tendinitis here where they had to open it up and, clean it out. What

29:00 else, I've got 10cm of severely ulcerated oesophagus, which I have to take a lot of medication. I think the nervous tension sort of bought that on because right from after war, I was taking Mylanta and had grade four pains in the stomach, a bit like an ulcer, but it was, they diagnosed it originally as hiatis hernia,

29:30 which you get reflux feeding back and it got worse. And then it was diagnosed as severe ulcerated oesophagus causing the reflux. Its still there but medication, if I knock it off, I get these horrific pains which are like an ulcer in the stomach, but with medication its being handled.

What about any, bad dreams

30:00 **or..?**

No, no I had no post traumatic stress in that sense. Yes I think a lot about it. I often think back on the situations I was in, would I have done it differently than what I did. You know the loss of the mates that you had, good mates, and service in the Army, I often

30:30 think about it but not to the extent that it causes me problems.

Apart from those what other personal changes did you, did the war bring you?

Responsibility, because it was particularly noticeable in the bank where we as serviceman gave the Commonwealth Bank, and I say this, not lightly, a real good kick along because army, navy and air force

31:00 personnel would come into the bank as serviceman had been used to reasonability and action, in the sense of planing something and achieving it and it really lifted the bank, the bank achieved tremendous growth in the ‘50’s and ‘60’s and became the top bank in Australia. I actually give it partly to the drive of the ex servicemen that

31:30 joined the bank. And I don’t think that’s overstating it because there were many good officers in the bank that weren’t ex-serviceman but the ex-serviceman were used to responsibility and drive.

And what about the Anzac tradition you can tell us about?

That’s a feature of the Australian serviceman,

32:00 when you read the history of the First World War the casualties were enormous and the bravery was enormous. And it seems to follow naturally that the efforts of the Australian serviceman in the Second World War were the same, they had tremendous efforts in lots of areas, tremendous bravery and, it’s a reflection of the nations psyche,

32:30 I think the traditions that are run through he bush and the pioneers and, the initiative that they show. As that engineer, said “Prince of Comrades and great Comrades”. And he’s right in my experience, says it’s right. And its not skiting. The Yanks might blow their trumpet but I

33:00 think, Australian compare more than favourably with any service people in the world.

How did you feel about your role in it?

Well I was very proud to have served eventually in the 2/6th Infantry Battalion, which was part of the 17th Infantry Brigade of the famous 6th Australian Division. It was the first voluntary Division formed at the outbreak of the war and

33:30 had a great record of service, and I’m very proud to be part of it.

And have you talked about the war with your family?

Not a great deal except that I’m the Queensland representative of the 2/6th Battalion, in fact I’m a life member, in fact I’m a life member of the 17th Infantry Brigade. Because of efforts organising event and get togethers and hospital visitations and what have you. Helping

34:00 widows with pensions and what have you. Currently I’m President of the 6th Division Association for Queensland. And as a result of all those activities, my families been involved over the years sort of supported me in what I’ve done.

How do you feel about the depiction of the war in films, TV [television]?

Not happy about it

34:30 at all because I call the Gulf War, Baghdad War, as a TV war. I don’t like, I don’t like a war at all put it that way. But the way the Americans are depicting it, it’s a TV war. Where there sending cameraman and reporters in with the troops especially for TV coverage, you know,

35:00 ratings as it were. It’s not good, its glamorising warfare in one sense which is not good. I don’t think. I know the public wants to know what’s going on but I would hate to see war glamorised.

What’s your strongest memory of war?

My strongest memory is the loss

35:30 of mates, great fellows. The tragedy of war and the loss of human life. Old Eric Abraham who’s the old ANZAC [Australian and New Zealand Army Corps] who died last year, said “War was a total waste of humanity”. And it is, irrespective of whose involved. You know people are killed and it’s a waste of human life.

Have we learnt lessons from war?

36:00 I hope we have because war should be the last resort, that’s not to mean that we shouldn’t take our stand on issues but it should be a very last resort, in my humble opinion.

So have we won the peace?

It’s difficult to say because if you look at the moment North Korea is quite a threat and if

36:30 some stupid, person starts throwing atom bombs around, nuclear bombs were in big trouble because of the tremendous damage that would be, and it might trigger other problems. See you’ve got the Pakistanis and the Indians have got nuclear bombs, Koreans, North Koreans who are very beligent and it’s

37:00 dangerous, very dangerous, for humanities sake.

Do you have any final words, things we haven’t covered or anything you would like to add about your life your service?

I've mentioned that I was very proud to have served eventually in the 2/6th Infantry Battalion as part of a great Australian division and to have served my country. But I'm very grateful to

37:30 my wife and family, and you know I met my beautiful wife here as a result of the war in the sense that I got caught here in Brisbane on the way home and we have two beautiful children, and grandchildren. And my wife has been totally supportive of all I've done. I use to work very hard in the bank, taking work home at night-time and weekends and that sort of thing, so to build up

38:00 the bank's business and my wife has always been terribly supportive. Always saying of course that you're stupid that it's not helping your health, but a mans got to do what's his got to do an it's the nature of the beast as they say. I was a workaholic, and I was totally grateful for there support. We've got two

38:30 beautiful children, my sons a highly qualified emergency physician and my daughter a lovely girl has two sons, one has a masters degree in science and is teaching English in Japan at the moment, that's ironic. And his brother is an apprentice painter and decorator. And Tony's children all, I think the eldest girl finished high school last year and is going to

39:00 Uni next year and the other two are at school. And we are very proud of them and grateful to have them. So to wrap up I'm thankful to you for this interview in terms of recording it for prosperity. Am I able to buy a tape later?

INTERVIEW ENDS