Australians at War Film Archive

Bryan Wells (Lofty) - Transcript of interview

Date of interview: 21st August 2003

http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/696

Tape 1

00:40 **Okay Bryan if you'd just like to give us a general overview of your life to date.**

I was born in Ipswich in on 13th September in 1921 and my parents were farmers at a little place called Mutdapilly about 12 – 15 miles south of Ipswich

01:00 generally dairy and agricultural crops. I was first born in the family and I grew up on the farm in a pretty carefree sort of a way. My next sister wasn't born until 1929 so I was 8 years old before I had any other siblings in the family so

01:30 I was sort of a little disgusted having somebody come along and take up part of my parents life but I soon grew up and it was part of life. I went to school at a little country, one teacher school, well at the time it was called Normanby State School because that was generally - the area was originally knows as Normanby

02:00 when my Grandfather came to settle there and then they changed it later on to Mutdapilly to identify with the District. I walked to school about 2 ½ each way everyday. Pretty old rough roads, muddy in wet weather and sometimes we didn't go. Occasionally I rode a horse, I had an old pony I used to ride but not

02:30 very often. I had the distinction probably of being the only boy at the school of one time playing truant. It wasn't all my fault because we had a cousin came to stay with us because his mother was having another child and he was a couple of years older than I was and he decided on the way to

03:00 that he didn't want to go and I shouldn't go either. So another fellow was with us, young fellow, Bobby Anderson, he gave Bobby a hiding for some reason or other and we took off across the countryside and his idea was that we dispose of our lunch and we'd live off the land. We were in a fellow's bullock paddock and the only things that were there were bullocks that weighed about 200 kilograms

03:30 and we didn't have anything to dispose of the bull. So anyway about 12 o'clock probably it was we got very hungry so we thought oh well it must be about the end of school time and we headed off home and met my father on the track and he said what are you doing home from school, Mr Thompson sick, send you home. Oh no, no, come home normal time. He pulled out his little fob watch and he said it's only 12

04:00 o'clock by my time. So the sad apart about it was I got the hiding for playing truant and cousin got off Scot free. That was one of things in my life that I remember very well because it was a fairly severe beating. After that next year I got a prize for going to school everyday.

04:30 I never missed a day. However when my sister was born 1929 was about the beginning of the Depression and you know they always say Depressions people always turn to having babies so I had two sisters that were born during the Depression Years. And when I was 14 in 1935, Secondary School wasn't

05:00 generally available we didn't have very much money and my father said to me well you can stay here and work with me on the farm and have all the heartaches and there'll be no money available or he said you can go and get a job. So I went out and found myself a job with a local farmer and with handsome wages of 7 and sixpence a week.

05:30 Seventy five cents in today's currency but of course it bought a lot more in those days and he was a bachelor and I got my keep but he couldn't cook so I had to do the cooking. And the hours were pretty good from 4 a.m. to dark sort of thing. It wasn't 5 days a week it was 7 days a week so the first month I worked

06:00 I got 30 shillings and I bought myself a pair of boots because I was sick of running around in the prickles with bare feet. But however I didn't stay there very long. I got an offer of a job with another farmer a bit further up the road and he was giving me 15 shillings a week and keep so I progressed

along the line and

06:30 about 1936 I went out to Clifton on the Darling Downs and I worked there for about three months for various people and the money was quite a bit better there. You got 30 shillings or 2 pound a week and your keep and the I came home again and I had an uncle who had sold a farm but the people of had bought it couldn't meet the payments on it and he

07:00 reclaimed it and I went to work for him in early 1939 and it was a fairly big place by those standards. It was about 500 acres and I was milking about a 100 cows and just at the time when war broke out a few days after he dropped dead and I was sort of -

07:30 I'd just turned 18 at that stage with the mortgage at the bank and one thing or another I was left sort of manager of the place and with the shortage of money I brought my mother and two sisters over and they helped me and Dad used to come and help me occasionally. I got six pound a month and keep for the family for that

08:00 and that went on until mid 1940 and the bank got a more senior fellow in to look after it and didn't take him to undo all the good work I'd done when the beneficiaries of the estate come to get it wound up there were no cattle left on the place and very little of anything else so they didn't get very much out of it.

08:30 But in the meantime, a lot of the fellows in the local area had joined the Army and I was pretty anxious to join up but my mother was a little bit, being an only son I suppose, she was a bit protective and I wasn't 21. They sort of required parent's consent so my father obtained a job for me at Dolby and I went out to Dolby

09:00 and I worked there on a wheat property for a bit over 12 months. My 20th birthday was coming up so I'd written to my mother and I said you know despite your objections I said I think I need to join the Services and so she agreed and that was my 20th birthday present, I joined the Services. So I had a

09:30 little bit of a problem when they had – I had my medical examination and I had bad tonsils and they were reluctant to accept me unless I had them removed but my father was friendly with a fellow named Captain Yates who was the recruiting officer at Ipswich at the time and he had some conversation with him and they agreed that they would accept me because I was a fairly good

10:00 physical specimen. That they'd accept me and the army would remove my tonsils. So on the 20th October 1941 I was marched into the recruiting depot which was then at the Royal National Association Showgrounds and I spent my first night probably out of a soft bed in the

10:30 bitumen floor of what was later the Eagers Car Show Room during Exhibition weeks. Pretty hard night it was too. The bitumen was very hard there wasn't much straw in the pally house. But anyway I was only there for a couple of days and they put me in the 112th AGH [Australian General Hospital] which was under the McDonalds stand at the

11:00 the Exhibition Grounds in preparation for having my tonsils removed. At this stage the green slopes hadn't been completed so it wasn't operational. So the arrangement was that I was to go to the Ear Nose and Throat ward at the Royal Brisbane Hospital to have the tonsil operation. But apparently they became infected and I had a couple of trips

11:30 over there for an examination and they wouldn't do them so it was about three weeks before they did them. Any they were successfully removed and in early December then I went out to Redbank to what they called it the 7th Training Battalion, and where they trained all the recruits

12:00 and started my training. Well we were only there a couple of days and of course then the Japanese entered the war but at that stage there was a lot of uncertainty and they quickly got people together and put us on draught and we were supposed to go to Malaya to the 2/26th Battalion and complete our training over there.

12:30 However in the meantime there was an outbreak of mumps and measles at Redbank and lo and behold I got both of them so fate probably I didn't get to Malaya. A couple of fellows that were with me at the time they did and well one of them that I knew he survived but I don't the other fellow did.

13:00 So goodness knows what might have been my fate. As a consequence, there were a lot of people sort of in limbo where the AIF [Australian Imperial Force] troops were still in the Middle East, hadn't come home. They didn't get home here until about March I think of 1942 so they formed all we people who were in limbo into a

13:30 pioneer company under command of some First World War officers and some of us, all of us went to Goondiwindi actually, originally to establish the camps that were built out there. So we built – or the fellows that with me built most of the camps in the Goondiwindi area.

14:00 However I was only there about a fortnight and they wanted some chaps to come back to Brisbane because they were having some problems clearing the wharves of the various equipment that was arriving and they brought about 130 of us back to Brisbane and we were camped on the Eagle Farm or

Ascot Racecourse as it's now named and we

14:30 were set to work on the wharves. When we went down – we were under command of an American actually. They'd arrived in the meantime, an American Quartermaster by the name of Captain Yonkers [?]. And the first day that we arrived at the wharf it was just literally covered in drums and drums of petrol and there was no way they were getting them moved so they brought

15:00 a convey of trucks in and we 130 fellows slaved for some days. There was no forklifts or anything in those days. Every drum had to be rolled up skids on the trucks and stood up and they were taken out and stored in the forest country behind what is now the suburb of Strathpine. Probably many thousands

15:30 of drums that were stacked there and then of course there was a steady supply of ships coming in with various types of military equipment, trucks and tractors and one thing and another and most of our fellows could drive so we drove the trucks out to Belmont where the wool [(UNCLEAR)] used to be and they parked them all out there until they were ready to send them all out

16:00 to the various Unit. So we were there till a bit over three months we were doing that and the remainder of the Unit came in from Goondiwindi and went out to Markham Park actually on the corner of Murphy Road and we had a camp there for

16:30 a short period of time and we didn't do any work there we just did training. And then I think it was late July or early August they broke us up and sent us on leave and when we came back from leave we were despatched to the 18th Infantry Training Battalion at Tenterfield.

17:00 We went out there and did some fairly strenuous training in the Tenterfield area and the – as you know Tenterfield is pretty cold and the camps weren't real warm places so we used to relish the night marches with all our gear on. We'd perhaps march 30 miles in a night

17:30 sometimes and carry a fair bit of equipment but we didn't complain much about it because it was better to come and sleep through the day when it was warmer rather than trying to sleep in the cold at night. There were no hot showers only cold showers available but they used to have a mobile shower unit used to come around about every fortnight and they'd set up their showers in the

18:00 paddock and all these naked men'd be rushing around having showers and frolicking in the luxury of the showers. Food was a bit scarce, we dug up rabbit warrens and made some rabbit stew for ourselves. Quite an amusing incident happened while we were there the camp headquarters

18:30 on the road, London Bridge, and it was on part of a stock group and of course they always had a sentry in front of headquarters and one day somebody came through with a mob of about 1,000 bullocks and the sentry was a fellow named Murray Jones, he was a Sydneyite [from Sydney] and he wasn't accustomed to the ways of the bush and he was faced with

19:00 a 1,000 bullocks trying to protect the flagstaff outside headquarters and he abandoned it in the and the bullocks got caught up in the wires and tore it down and he got quite severely reprimanded for leaving his post. I can always remember him saying well what did you expect me to do charge a 1,000 head of bloody bullocks with a rifle and bayonet.

19:30 I don't think he got any detention for it but he got severely reprimanded. Anyway we were there till about October I think we entrained and nobody knew where we were going - a lot of speculation. We got on a train and we got to Main Junction railway yards and they shunted us in one end and out the other. And oh there was speculation as to where we were

20:00 going anyway next thing we were heading north. Once we got to Caboolture we knew we were heading to Townsville. So we got to Townsville and we were at a Staging Camp at Oonoonba just outside of Townsville. We were there quite some days. We had some day leave around town and we got on the -

20:30 it used to be the Bass Strait ferry, about 6,000 tonnes I think to Taruma and left for Port Moresby. We got to Port Moresby about the 26th of November. It was quite a pleasant journey actually. One of the few pleasant ship journeys I had because it still bunks and sheets and it was provisioned by the

21:00 shipping company and we quite enjoyed I think about three days we were on that. When we got to Moresby we were taken out to Murray Barracks and allocated to various units and most of them were units that had been on the Kokoda Track and most of them had been fairly

21:30 much decimated. So they – I was allocated to the 2/16th Battalion actually which was Western Australian unit and settled in there and was quite happy with them actually. They were a good bunch of fellows and we did some training around Moresby. Experienced some air raids which was

22:00 something of a surprise to us. They weren't – the bombings weren't intended really for the camp areas they were looking for the airstrips. So people used to – I used to always think it was quite amusing, you'd be in your tent lying down with your tin hat on you now. What protection that was going to give you was

22:30 minimal. Sometimes if they – some of the bombs were a little bit close because we weren't that far from

the airstrip. Some people used to take off for the slit trenches and all in all it was pretty safe in the area where we were because they were either looking for the airstrip or the harbour and

23:00 anyway Christmas, Christmas Day I think it was they came around to the mess hall and asked any Queenslanders if they'd like to join a Queensland unit which was the 2/9th Battalion which was in a lot of trouble in the Beachhead area of Buna. And

23:30 I think there were 10 of us in all with the 2/16th Battalion and we said yes we'd like to because I already had some mates who were in the 2/9th Battalion although I didn't know at that time their fate. One of them had been killed at Milne Bay and a couple of others had been wounded and when I got there they weren't there anyway. So on the on

24:00 the early morning of the 28th of December 1942 we were taken out to the airstrip and we were loaded into, in groups of 10, we were loaded into Lockheed Hudsons and bombers that had been striped down to carry 10 people and their gear and there were three in all that carried 30 people. And

24:30 went with 10 people and their gear they were pretty overloaded and it was a pretty hairy takeoff from the airstrip. Being my first flight I was watching out for the trees at the end sort of thing and saying are we going to clear them or not. Anyway we got up okay and we'd already had a 10 seconds instruction on how to use

25:00 the waist guns in the plane. They were Vickers guns but there was no crew for them and we were only airborne for about 10 minutes and they said they'd have to return to the strip because there were Japanese fighters operating in the Pass which was the Pass in the Owen Stanley Ranges and they had to use that because the planes weren't equipped with oxygen so they couldn't fly over the 10,000

25:30 feet altitude mark so we came back again. Later in the morning we had to do it all again. But this time we got through to the airstrip at Dobodura which was the closest to the battlefront. When we got there, there was some more air activity and the pilot said to us when he landed,

26:00 as soon as he got to the end of the airstrip and he slowed down to throw our gear out and jump for our lives because he wasn't going to be caught on the airstrip so we did that and fortunately at that stage the Dobodura strip was still just Kunai grass that hadn't been paved and wasn't so bad jumping out on it and I think we all escaped any injury so

26:30 we gathered up our gear and under instructions we were pointed in the direction of the battlefield and we had to march for about 14 miles I think it was through mud, [(UNCLEAR)] and swamps to get there and we duly arrived at 4 o'clock in the afternoon in a pretty exhausted condition because the weather was very

27:00 humid and hot and it rained in the late afternoon. However we arrived in the area of the battalion and this was my first experience of battle I suppose and maybe it's different in a Unit that goes together into battle but when you come as a reinforcement to a unit that's

27:30 already in action and you come into a battlefield it's a fairly traumatic experience to see the dead and decaying bodies. Fortunately most of them were Japanese. They had removed for burial all of our own troops but the stench is probably something never forget

28:00 in your lifetime coming on it in that situation you know the smell of decaying human flesh is a different smell than other smells that you might experience in your lifetime however it was something that we'd volunteered for and something we had to

28:30 accept. So we were taken to an area where there was a cookhouse. We were given a meal of bully beef [tinned meat] and carrots and mashed potato I think it was and somebody said to me of Corporal Randell'll take you to your position. We were taken up to an area in

29:00 Giropa Plantation was where the battle was taking place and it was a separation between an old airstrip and a new airstrip at Buna and there was a putrid swampy creek that ran up one side of it called Simemi Creek and the part of it where I was taken to was

29:30 at the mouth of Simemi Creek at the top end of the Giropa Plantation and I was introduced to a couple of fellows there and Tony Randell said these blokes will look after you just do what they tell you. By this time it was just about dark and over the other side of Simemi Creek was quite a lot of activity with small arm

30:00 fire and grenades and mortar bursts because the 2/10th Battalion was attacking what they called the Old Buna Strip which was just across this Simemi Creek. However it settled down through the night and we had a rotation of an hour on and an hour of with your

30:30 foxhole mate to be on the alert and I don't think I slept much that night but the other fellow did. But an hour is not much between sleeping and waking really if you're complete exhausted like they were because they'd been there for 10 days

31:00 previous to that and had been in very severe conditions and probably hadn't had much sleep and a lot of anxiety over the period. However, we did fire some shots through the night but there wasn't apparently

any activity on our side of the Simemi Creek at that time.

31:30 And anyway when it became daylight in the morning to my surprise hanging in the tree above me was a parachute. I said to the fellow, I said, “What’s that? “Oh” he said, “that’s a parachute bomb”. I said “Has it gone off?” He said, “No but the parachutes holding it there”. I was pretty pleased that it was well entangled in the

32:00 tree. We moved around a bit from there that was 29th and 30th and there was no further activity in that area anyway. So on New Year’s Eve we were pulled out and I think at that time the battalion could only muster about two platoons of men which included

32:30 the reinforcements that had come at the same time as I did and they took us around to the old strip where the 2/10th Battalion were being decimated also. I learnt then that one of the chaps that had gone with me a fellow named, Eric Knight, who was a married man too.

33:00 He had three children, I’d met his wife in Brisbane not long before we went away. He’d been killed the first night which was very sad for me because we’d been pretty good mates. However, that was part of war I suppose, life and death and you had to carry on. Anyway on New Year’s Eve we had most of the

33:30 day we didn’t participate in any fighting and then on New Year’s Day the 2/12th Battalion arrived from Goodenough Island and they moved through and relieved the 2/10th Battalion and we had some light tanks, General Stuart tanks which were actually

34:00 reconnaissance tanks, they were fitted with radial aircraft engines and there cruising speed was about 40 miles an hour but they’d were trying to adopt the – well they were the only ones available actually and they had adopted them for use by both the infantry however, they were not entirely suitable although they did a marvellous job with the

34:30 2/6th Armed Regiment because they had no communications means outside the tank itself so for directions we had to [(UNCLEAR)] fire very light pistols at the target we wanted them to direct their fire on or you had to go up behind the Tank and bash on the hull with

35:00 your rifle butt until somebody stuck his head out and then you’d tell him what you wanted to do. And movement was a little bit fast for infantry people and sometimes they used to get a little bit ahead of them and I think there was one occasion when unfortunately this happened at the 2/10th Battalion and when the tank turned around he became disoriented and he fired on the

35:30 2/10th Battalion men with some serious consequences. At the end of the old Buna strip the Japanese had a 75 millimetre naval gun which they probably were using for anti aircraft defence and also for land defence and it played havoc with the three tanks

36:00 that they had there on that particular day because it knocked them out. Or if it didn’t knock them out it severely disabled them and so they lost the use of those an as the supply of tanks was pretty limited I think that the 2/12th Battalion only had the use of about two tanks in their forward

36:30 movement. On the afternoon of the 1st of January 43 they moved us into a position in front of – there were two bunkers of Japanese left at the end of the old Buna strip and the mouth of Simemi Creek. And we were moved into position so that we would

37:00 take them on the morning of the 2nd January. So we took up positions during the night or the late afternoon and there were some sniper operations because one fellow was killed shot through the head and two other chappies who were fairly adjacent to me Bernie Graham and a fellow named George Hassell were both shot in the face but not

37:30 seriously they didn’t leave the lines actually. We took up position during the late afternoon, settled down for the night with instructions not to move out of our positions during the hours of darkness and anything that moved would be considered to be enemy and we were to eliminate them. And

38:00 this was my really first encounter at close quarters with the enemy and I suppose you’ve got to give him ‘A’ for courage in the position that they were in because there was no way in the world that they were going – they played gramophone music in those bunkers during the night. And on occasions whether they were outside the bunkers or talking through the firing slots or not

38:30 they yell out ‘Aussie bastard no fight’. We didn’t do anything about it because we knew that if we fired the muzzle flash would reveal our positions and some of them were out moving around during the night and we did fire some shots whether we killed any during the night

39:00 I’m not sure. However, when daylight came we had to advance on the two bunkers. They were fairly big ones. We had an Office with us from the 2/12th Battalion. I think it was Angus Suthers, he had a brother

39:30 in the 2/9th Battalion too, Captain Suthers. And Angus said to me, he said, well the method of disposing of these bunkers at that stage was to – they had a tin which they filled with amanol and tied a – strapped a hand grenade on the top of them with a 4 second fuse and somebody had to go up and toss it through the slot into the bunker and the explosion of course would

40:00 concuss anybody that was inside. I was handed one of these and Angus Suthers said here Wells you take this we'll give you covering fire and your throw it through the slot. It was something I wasn't expecting and I didn't envy the job but anyway I managed to get there and get it in the slot and achieved the objective and

40:30 survived. I don't know who did the other one but that was literally the end of the action at Buna in respect of the 2/9th Battalion. We stayed there until the 5th of January I think it was and then we were ordered to –

Tape 2

00:33 **If you just want to continue from the last campaign there and carry on.**

As I said the action at Buna was completed on the 2nd January 1943 and at that stage I think there was something like 74

01:00 men left in the battalion after they'd absorbed something like 80 or 90 probably more reinforcements during that early period but a lot of it also was through disease like malaria and scrub typhus and one thing and another. Although on

01:30 the – and I'm probably fortunate that I wasn't there on the 18th of December when the original attack went in they lost 69 men killed and I think 141 wounded on the first day. So that was probably something to be thankful for. Anyway after a couple of days of cleaning weapons and tidying ourselves up and

02:00 reorganisation on the 5th of January we set off for a place called Soputa which was about 14 or 15 miles from Buna on the rout we had to take. Along with the Units of he 2/6th Armoured Regiment we trudged through mud and swamp

02:30 most of the day before we reached – and I think somebody had said you know they thought Buna was bad with its conditions but the march from Buna to Soputa was far worse actually. However, we did settle down at an area at Soputa for a few days and received, I don't know how many

03:00 reinforcements. There was probably in excess of a 100 new fellows came in there and three officers and some of the fellows that had been corporals at Buna who had survived were promoted to sergeants and W.O. [Warrant Officer] Jim Jessie was put in charge of a company. The whole battalion was restructured.

03:30 And a couple of days after that we moved out to an area beyond Soputa on the Sanananda Killerton Track area where they – we set up positions on the bank of a small creek there and the Japanese were in occupation on the other side of the creek

04:00 And we had artillery barrages brought to bear on the positions for probably 3 or 4 days I suppose it was. And some of them were a bit scary because we were getting tree bursts. They were trying to bring the artillery in as close as possible to

04:30 us and we were getting tree bursts and 2 or 3 fellows were slightly wounded by shrapnel but not severely. However, we did some reconnaissance work and I went on two recce [reconnaissance] patrols over the creek into where the enemy position was supposed to be. In daylight we couldn't find any sign of them being in occupation although

05:00 there was evidence that they had had positions there and that they were probably coming back to them during the hours of darkness. So with this in mind on the 12th of January they had the rest of the brigade the 2/10th and 2/12th Battalion in position and on the morning of the 12th I think it was or maybe the 13th of January they

05:30 decided then on the push for – to take the Beachhead at Sanananda. The 2/9th Battalion was given the job of penetrating through the swamp actually to Sanananda and trying to outflank the Japanese positions. However, when we did cross the creek the first morning we were met by fairly

06:00 heavy hail of fire and there were quite a number of casualties. A fellow, one of the Officers, Joe Grant who'd just come back to the battalion, a battalion member who'd flown back from Moresby with me the day I went in he was killed.

06:30 There were probably some others but they were the fellows that I knew. A chap who had been hit by some shrapnel during the artillery barrage, when he went up over the creek bank a big fellow by the name of Bob Sands who came from Maryborough and Bob got a burst of machine-gun fire right through his buttock and he

07:00 was taken out. He wasn't incapacitated altogether and anyway he went back to hospital and he came back later and he used to always say when he went to the shower anybody for a game of draughts because of the skin grafts he had on his backside. However,

07:30 another chappie, Lennie Teece, he came from Beaudesert, they had – family had dairy farming in Beaudesert and Len got hit through the head. He had quite a nasty wound and I think he was probably not conscious of what he was doing. He stood up and he got a burst of machine-gun fire through his shoulder and I went to him and unfortunately

08:00 I didn't cop the same treatment as he did. So I did manage to get him back to a stretcher bearer and I never saw him again until many years later. He came to a reunion and he said thanks mate. I said, I didn't think I was ever going to see you again but I said I only did what I could for you, you know. However, that confrontation didn't last very long

08:30 apparently the Japs just up and cleared out. So we moved on up this Sanananda track which was mostly ankle, knee deep in mud and water and we had been issued with 5 days provisional rations. You know tin, dried fruit and all this sort of

09:00 stuff that were emergency rations actually they called them. And we had to carry additional ammunition, everyone had a couple of bandoliers besides his normal ammunition ration and generally carried a couple of extra hand grenades. Another fellow and myself

09:30 Eade, I never knew what his Christian name was. We called him Speed because he was a slow mover. We carried a Boyes anti-tank rifle, which weighed about 36 pound and a box of I think 10 rounds of ammunition for it and besides all the other gear so it was pretty heavy going. Ad at night

10:00 we'd settle down in the swamp and find a log to sleep on or a tree fork to hitch yourself into. We weren't generally able to get any sort of a fire going to make any tea but in these emergency rations and probably was the first time we'd struck them was instant coffee. We could make it with cold water

10:30 and that gave you something to drink anyway that was – apart from the warm water that you had in your water bottle. So we struggled on through that sort of conditions and apart from a few straggling enemy who were in very poor condition

11:00 and mostly had dysentery and weren't even wearing pants, we didn't strike very much resistance. We got within a short distance of Sanananda Beach. I think it was probably on the night of the 18th of January and we took up some positions in some fairly

11:30 unpleasant swamp which was the best that was available in the area. And they brought an artillery barrage down on the beachfront during the night. But in the early hours of the night - it was gathering storm clouds during the day and in the early hours of the night there was these crashes of lightning and thunder

12:00 and it started to rain. Well I've experienced rain but never like this. It just poured and poured and poured. Well in the period of time they recorded over 10 inches of rain but the ferocity of the storm itself was unbelievable and then there was the crash of the artillery

12:30 it was a pretty hairy old night because the water kept rising and rising and I was up to about my armpits in it and some of the little fellows we were hitching them up in trees and we wondered what was really going to happen to us. Anyway, we survived the night and the next morning in the early hours preparation was made for the final attack on the beach. And

13:00 we had to – when we came out of the swamp we came on to a creek and it had a bridge over it made of coconut logs if I can remember correctly. Anyway, we stormed across that and there were some Japanese there but they didn't put up a lot of resistance because they were in a fairly poor condition and some of the were

13:30 wounded and I think we took about 10 prisoners there but we did have a couple of casualties in the final capture of the Beach Head. And we – one part of the battalion went up to the left towards Cape Killerton and we went down to the –

14:00 7 Platoon that I was with, we went down to the river mouth which was Giruwa River I think it was and we took up positions on the point at the river mouth between that and the creek that was behind us and the sea. And we established positions there and they brought a Vickers gun crew and put them there because over the other side of the river the Americans

14:30 were pushing up from Buna where the brigade had left off and there were still Japanese left in the area. They were pushing them up into the trap at the river. So there was still some activities over the other side of the river but they didn't come across. But during the night there were some Japanese barges that were coming in evacuating

15:00 people and they used to throw hand grenades out on the beach to guide the barges in. The second night we decided we'd throw some hand grenades so we guided a Barge into the position into the front of where we were and he came right into the beach and lowered the ramp and was yelling out "hoia hoia" you know whatever it was in

15:30 Japanese and of course what he got was a – 3 or 4 blokes with a Bren guns and a bloke with a Vickers gun so we actually disabled the barge and tiny Franklin who was the corporal of the Vickers gun crew

he was awarded the Military Medal later on for that action.

16:00 That was I think the 22nd anyway the declared that the hostilities in that particular area had been completed on the 22nd. But we did do some patrolling because there was some rumour that there was a Japanese hospital in the swamp somewhere behind where we were. We went out in search of it but

16:30 the water beat us and we didn't find anything. Although I think some other Unit did pick up some area where there had been a hospital but there was no occupation of it. And we just remained in those positions for a few days. Anyway on the 26th I'd become so infected with malaria and I was evacuated

17:00 back to the CCS [Casualty Clearing Station] at Popondetta with malaria and I was delirious there for a couple of days before I was evacuated to the air strip and we were flown out to the 2/5th AGH [Australian General Hospital] at Port Moresby. I got back to Moresby I think

17:30 3rd February I think before we got back there. So it was you know almost a week before you got to medical attention and this was one of the problems they had with wounded people or anybody else apart from the field operation of field ambulances and CCS and that. There wasn't hospital accommodation available for wounded for some days

18:00 really and as a result of course a lot of the more severely wounded lost their lives before they got to hospital. However I was in hospital for – I think it was March before I got back to the unit, early March and I was only back there a few days anyway and we came home

18:30 to Australia. We came back to Cairns on a Liberty Ship. Liberty Ships were fairly quickly put together and we were accommodated in the forward hold with a rough ladder down to the hold and we were only out of Moresby a few hours and we struck a cyclone and I tell you what it wasn't

19:00 very pleasant down in the hold. The seasickness – she used to plunge down into the waves and the propeller would come out of the wave at the back and shudder and then she'd come up again and strike down. They had – the cooking facilities was a steam cooker up on the deck and you'd go up and the wind howling and the sea spray

19:30 breaking over the decks I don't think – people went up but they didn't eat generally, only the real hardy ones. I didn't eat anything between Moresby and Cairns. I was very thankful it was only a couple days, only a couple of days trip. So we disembarked at Cairns and we got on the train up to Kuranda and we went out to Camp at Ravenshoe

20:00 at Milne Stream Falls. There was a camp set up there and it was quite a pleasant place actually. The Milne Stream Falls area was good for bathing and one thing and another. And we didn't do much for the initial period that we were there and then those who had come back from New Guinea were given

20:30 home leave. I think I got home in early April. I was home one day and I got Malaria so from the farm I was taken to Ipswich to the hospital and then to the camp hospital to Redbank and then on the hospital train to Warwick. They had a

21:00 2/12th AGH I think had moved into Scots College at Warwick so all the sick and wounded were being taken out there away from the city area. And had a bit of a funny incident there that ended just the other day sadly.

21:30 Actually, I was in the bed and I had my hat hanging on the end of the bed and it had the 2/9th Battalion colour patch on. A young lass came up all smiles one morning and she said to me 'do you know Captain Suthers?'. I said 'oh yes, I know old Granny'. We called him Granny because he was such a great fellow

22:00 and he looked after his troops like they were his own family, you know. And she just smiled and never said anything and walked away and she came back the next day and she said to me, 'do you know who I am?'. I said 'no I've never had any occasion to ask who you are'. She said 'I'm Mrs

22:30 Granny'. They'd only been married 5 or 6 weeks I think at that stage. He got married after we came home. Anyway we became life long friends after that and Gar Suthers is still one of my friends but Beryl died 5 or 6 weeks ago. Anyway,

23:00 from the hospital then they had a convalescent depot at the golf course, I was there for a few days. And then they sent me home to continue my leave. And that was in May and the last day of my leave at home I decided I'd get married.

23:30 My wife's parents and my parents thought it was a silly idea but anyway we thought it was a good idea at the time. So I went back to camp and I made application for leave to get married and they were very generous and they gave me 3 days leave without pay. So we got married on the 14th of May, that was the day we'll always remember our wedding

24:00 date because that's the day the [HMAS] Centaur was sunk [(UNCLEAR)] and on the 17th of May I had to report back to the leave and transit depot at Redbank and I was on the train back to the Atherton Tablelands so we had 3 days honeymoon leave without pay.

24:30 And so we went into further training. I had a further couple of – I had another bout of Malaria I had a period of time in hospital at Atherton. And we were still in the camp at Ravenshoe in this period, yeah. Anyway in August

25:00 of 1943 we were going – we were on our way back to New Guinea on the [HMAS] Katoomba. We got back to Moresby I think around about the 9th of August in 1943 and took up the training very heavily in that

25:30 time as a matter of fact they trained so much and the conditions were fairly arduous and the conditions were so humid there was quite a bit of sickness in the camp and they decided to have a medical examination of the whole of the Unit and they found

26:00 out that a lot of the fellows were suffering from berri berri through probably lack of diet in vitamin C mainly I think was considered to be the main cause of berri berri. And it was quite amusing actually they – the medical team – well they just seemed to be like big safety pins they had – they just pinched your skin and poke it through

26:30 and you didn't feel anything. So then they said oh he's got berri berri you know, there was no feeling in the flesh. Anyway we went into a period of about 3 weeks of light duties for the whole of the Battalion and we were given a special diet of oranges and everything that contains vitamin C and vitamin C tablets and we were soon back in the routine.

27:00 In late December there was movement in the area and the push was being made against Lae and up the Markham Valley and Ramu Valley and the 25th Brigade had gone in, in the

27:30 early assault on that. And the 9th Division of course was home again and they were making the amphibious landings at Finschhafen and Scarlet Beach. Our Brigade then was prepared to be flown into the Ramu Valley area and

28:00 for some reason or other I was called aside and told I wasn't going that I'd been selected to make up the left out of battle group which happens when all units go into action they select a number of people who,

28:30 I don't know, through the wisdom of somebody thinks that you'd be good material to reform a Battalion if it got wiped out. So I was left out and on the 1st of January the Battalion went to Dumpu in the Ramu Valley and consequently took part in the actions on the Finisterre Ranges and Shaggy Ridge. Whereas I was

29:00 left behind and I was sent to the New Guinea Training School and went through all the various training programmes they had there on field manoeuvres and one thing and another. Anyway I came back with a distinguished pass. So it probably wasn't altogether wasted and then we just sort of settled into a camp routine

29:30 where we prepared supplies to be sent forward to the fellows that were in action and received any wounded people or sick people who came back from the front line and despatched people who were sent back again sort of thing. So that was the general routine. In the meantime, I got appendicitis and

30:00 I was hospitalised again in a convalescent camp for some weeks. And by that time the action was over as far as the battalion was concerned on Shaggy Ridge. They'd lost a further 21 of our fellows were killed in action up there and quite a number were wounded.

30:30 But they came back direct from Lai to Brisbane I think. They may have come to but we again came back from Moresby on the [HMAS] Manoora – the Yellow B Group came back to Townsville on the Manoora and we disembarked at Townsville and then we got on a

31:00 troop train that brought us back to the leave and transit depot that was then at Kalinga Park and we were reequipped with new clothing and one thing and another there and sent on leave. And fortunately this time I didn't get sick I was able to enjoy my leave.

31:30 Unfortunately before my leave was over my father passed away suddenly. And probably fortunate for Mother and the girls that I was home on leave at the time. Anyway I went back into camp at – then the battalion was camped at Strathpine actually which was

32:00 nothing like it is today. It was just a hotel and a store and a railway station I think was about the only thing – oh and the school at Strathpine and of course they had an airstrip there at the time too. I think they were operating some of the first Spitfires that they'd bought were operating and where the airstrip was, today the call it Spitfire Avenue

32:30 actually. We were there for some weeks. We did a divisional march through Brisbane and it was quite good actually. We used to get quite a bit of overnight leave so I used to see my wife quite regularly and go to the pictures and all

33:00 the activities that were around at the time. Though it was to come to an end and we went back to the Atherton Tablelands and this time we were camped at Kairi on the site of Tinaroo Falls, where the Tinaroo Dam is today actually. It was quite a good camp site there it was

33:30 quite good in that we had the Baron River there for plenty of swimming and recreational areas were established around the various crater lakes on the Tablelands. So we had much inter-company competition with cricket and football and what have you. And

34:00 there were the familiar of Wallaby Bob McMasters. He was one of our Battalion members and he was of course, became an International Rugby Union player after the war and Bob was in our Battalion football team and a fellow named Jack Reiher he was Queensland representative and Ronny Moss was a St. George halfback

34:30 and he was also a good cricketer he actually played Sheffield Shield Cricket after the war and so there were all sorts of activity in that respect and just on Wallaby Bob I went to his funeral a fortnight ago actually. He dropped dead at a rugby union dinner in Brisbane when they were about to make him a presentation which was

35:00 pretty sad but I always skite that I had the honour of packing down in a scrum against him in a company football match. And the fellow who gave part of the Eulogy at his funeral the other day said he was known to be the biggest, roughest, toughest, bastard in football so -

35:30 I thought well that's a bit of an honour. No, these were – the training periods and the camaraderie that we had within the battalion was excellent. It was a good battalion and I omitted to say that when we came back from New Guinea

36:00 after the first tour of duty we were reinforced by a motorised unit that had been disbanded and they were a wonderful lot of fellows actually. They hadn't seen any action but they would – they had been together for a long while so they

36:30 sort of had this camaraderie and companionship that was sort of an essential part of an infantry man's life and I made some very good friends from that and some of them 60 years down the track I'm still friendly and this is something I think that's peculiar to no other arm of the armed services like navy or air force

37:00 in an infantry battalion you go into a tent which is probably about a section size with 8 or 10 fellows and you live and die with those. The importance of an infantry battalion is the people that you're going to be with because you're going to live and

37:30 die together. So you've got to be supportive of one another and this is something that, as I said, doesn't happen I don't think so much in other arms of the service because they get reposted to other areas and one thing and another but this doesn't happen. So, if somebody doesn't get killed or get sick and gets boarded out or something, you're with the same

38:00 blokes for 3 or 4 years probably, mostly a lot of the fellows and so this was the sort of companionship that lives on. You never forget those fellows and we're still good mates. But of course unfortunately now there's not many of us left. But that's again of course is life. But so

38:30 the training part of it, the manoeuvres and one thing and another is perhaps to some people monotonous and to other people its pointless but it brings people together and that's what the infantry unit was about in those days. It's

39:00 probably changed a bit now with technology and that but at that time we had probably the most sophisticated weapons that were available and during our stay at Kairi in the Tablelands we had a visit from the Governor General who was the then Duke of

39:30 Gloucester and I had the honour of taking one of the squads that was presented to him on the actions of the bazooka which was a very modern and sophisticated weapon as far as we were concerned because it was the first time we'd seen it.

40:00 It was an anti tank weapon in lieu of the Boyes anti-tank rifle which wasn't very effective anyway against armour that was any heavier than a sardine tin probably. And it was very cumbersome to carry about whereas the bazooka was more or less a lightweight weapon and the bombs

40:30 that we used for it came in packaged cases which weren't so hard to carry. So they had all these sorts of things, the advent of the Owen gun as against the American Thompson submachine-gun which was heavy and cumbersome and its ammunition was heavy and the Owen gun was light

41:00 and dependable you didn't get stoppage like – we invented, well probably all the units did too. We strapped two magazines together so you'd just fire 28 rounds or whatever they held and then just reverse it and you had another 28 rounds readily available. You didn't have to dig somewhere to find it out. These were all the sort of

41:30 innovations that were made in the field probably and were adapted later on as universal until they changed the weaponry completely.

I might get you to stop there.

Tape 3

00:33 We continued training on the Tablelands and fairly extensive Jungle Training more so than probably we'd done so for awhile and we weren't too show what the purpose of it was but it was part of the system.

01:00 Myself and some of the fellow went and did some training courses on various aspects of army life. Weapon training, well mostly field tactics really because by this time I'd been promoted to corporal and I knew that the Sergeant

01:30 we had, Albert Crust, was going to be boarded out and I was in line to become platoon sergeant. When he left, the terrain of course was pretty rugged and thick jungle country and wet and slippery, leaches galore

02:00 and we had periods of 5 and 6 days training in those conditions and then we'd come back to camp and clean up our gear and do some routine training with weapon instructions and target practice in the various ranges around the place.

02:30 At this stage, they were looking to lighten the load of the Bren gunners and they brought in a cutdown version of the Bren gun with a shorter barrel and a few other modifications to it and they used our short range to demonstrate to the brigade

03:00 and divisional people the effectiveness of it and I not naturally forget this because I was selected to man the machine-gun for the demonstration and it was only a 25 yard range and they hung a sheet of half inch plate steel in the target area and I got on the mound

03:30 and I was to fire the gun and the brass hat and red capes and everybody was sitting serenely around and of course I opened up with a short burst and when the 303 hit the plate of course they sort of disintegrated and the fragments from it, they didn't affect me because I was directly behind it

04:00 but there was fragments arriving in the spectator area in large amounts. So there was quite a scattering of the hierarchy from their seats for a few minutes until we rectified the situation. And the – I don't know – I didn't actually see any versions

04:30 of the modified weapon later. Whether they declared it not successful because the Bren gun, although it was a terrific weapon in itself it was an extremely accurate weapon which might sound strange when you're trying to kill somebody with it but it didn't have a cone of fire whereas where you covered a

05:00 number of advancing people like some of the other weapons did. It was actually too accurate a weapon for infantry man's purposes. In lots of cases it was a beautiful weapon for fixed lines of fire or anything like that but the favourite weapon of course for large

05:30 scale use as what you might term as killing fields was the Vickers gun but it was more cumbersome and required a crew. It wasn't a suitable weapon for an infantry section or a platoon to carry because it was water-cooled or course and you could – it would – it had a high rate of fire and it had

06:00 a very large cone of fire but the base plate, tripod and what have you were fairly cumbersome parts of it so – weaponry to carry. The rifle companies weapon was the Bren gun and the Owen gun of course

06:30 and the old .303 rifle which was a bolt action with a 10 shot magazine and they were of course unstoppable because they had no part they were all hand operated but by the today's standards of course thy were too heavy

07:00 for the modern day soldier and well probably too slow too. But anyway we continued on with our strenuous training programme and introduced also to flame throwers which is a fearsome weapon

07:30 you're talking in this instance about burning people to death with sticky napalm thrown on them on fire but desperate times need desperate things to obtain your objective I expect. We were also introduced at this stage to

08:00 an infantry tank, the Matilda Tank or course which was designed more for use for infantry, slow moving had communications attached to it in the form of a headset and microphone where men could walk along behind it and talk to the crew and direct

08:30 fire or direct it on a different course at any time so we did quite a bit of training with them. This went on till about May 1945 and Albert Crush our platoon sergeant was duly boarded out and

09:00 I inherited 7 Platoon A Company as acting sergeant from that period on. In about 27th May 1945 we boarded Tank Landing Ship American Number 471

09:30 at Cairns for – well when we boarded it destination was unknown but when we were settled down on it we were headed for Morotai in the Halmaheras. We had a B Company I think it was or C Company on the open deck on it and they had

10:00 separated A Company into 3 Platoons and what have you and we occupied the Tank Deck on the LST [Landing Ship Tank] and this proved to be a stroke of genius as far as we were concerned. The LST 471 had 2 huge floating pontoons welded and chained one each side of it that were

10:30 to be used at a later stage for wharf facilities after the landing which was to be at Balikpapan. After about 24 hours out into the Coral Sea we encountered quite a fierce cyclone I think on the second night probably it was the – one of the

11:00 pontoons with the force of the wave action of the sea was dislodged from the side of the LST and of course we had all weight on one side of a flat bottomed craft. They were – they only drew 2 foot 6 of water they were practically flat bottomed. Like the crew said they were torpedoed once and he said the torpedo went safely underneath and the crew went over the

11:30 side. But so we were down on the tank deck fortunately. I was in a bunk that was underneath the bumper bar of a giant Diamond T Tank Recovery Vehicle and the back of a D8 Caterpillar Tractor which was chained down by the blade but not by the back and it was going backwards and forwards and the truck was going this way and that way but

12:00 at least I was dry but when this pontoon came off the ship went over at a pretty precarious angle and everybody was worried about abandoning ship. I was that sick I said I'm not getting off this one to get on another one. I think most of the fellows were in the same boat. There were only one or two fellows -

12:30 one fellow was a Swede actually who'd been out here and joined the Army and another fellow was a chap named Rudd and he was miraculously – neither of those two were sick. I think everybody else was so sick they didn't really care what happened. As a matter of fact there was an Englishman called Don Bosguard and he was in a bunk under a tarpaulin and nobody

13:00 missed him for two or three days and when we found him he was so dehydrated from being sick we thought he was going to die. Anyhow he did recover and we continued on our journey. It was quite amusing really there were no bathing facilities on board or laundry facilities for your clothes and people used to tie a bundle of clothes

13:30 on a rope and throw them over the back of the LST and let them churn along in the wake of the propeller and then when the dried of course because of the salt water they were pretty stiff and uncomfortable. They had salt water showers on the deck and they issued us with salt water soap which wasn't very effective. So of course every time you went through a rainstorm

14:00 everybody be up on deck with their lifebuoy soap and you'd just get nicely soaped up of course the rain'd stop. There were a whole lot of blokes racing around with the lather back into the saltwater showers. We got to – I think we got to Morotai about the 13th of June and Morotai

14:30 is pretty close to the equator and it was extremely humid and the fellows had been board these LSTs for some couple of weeks or more but the main objective was once we got ashore was to get some movement into them but owing to the humidity and that the route marches were

15:00 pretty restricted. And they moved us into a disused or an abandoned coconut plantation to establish our Camp site and there were coconut husks and rubbish on the ground and many feet, a couple of fee thick and we got trucks and cleaned it all up and put tents up. I'd never seen so many

15:30 snakes in all of our lives and I don't think anybody else had. I don't know who venomous they were probably some of them were but we had camp stretchers and mosquito nets so when you went to bed at night you tucked them in firmly but your haversacks and your boots you stuffed with socks and anything else you could find so when you got up in the morning you didn't put your foot into a little

16:00 Joe Blake sort or thing and checked all your haversacks out in the morning. They were up the palm trees and everywhere. Well I suppose they were probably disturbed from the habitat too when we removed the vegetation so they were looking for somewhere to hide themselves. Anyway we did some short marches they were

16:30 restricted to about 20 minutes. Americans had a perimeter just passed where we were camped and there was still some Japanese occupation on the island it was a fairly big airbase. There was a lot of Liberators stationed there and they were bombing various parts of the Borneo area and Brunei and those places Labuan

17:00 in preparation for the landings. But the Americans had a picture show there and they reckoned the Japs used to come and climb the trees and watch it and the Americans sort of didn't do anything about them really. They were mostly I think Negro [African American] battalions that were doing the guarding in the area and I don't know whether they were

17:30 keen on having a confrontation with them or not and it wasn't up to us to decide on any confrontation. However we weren't there very long and on the 26th of June we boarded the HMAS Kanimbla which had been a converted Merchant Ship

18:00 been commandeered by the navy and we did some manoeuvres around the bay at Morotai. We had a

trial landing from it. Although we didn't land but we had practice on the scrambling nets to get down into the landing craft

18:30 and they ran us out and then we had to climb back up the scrambling nets to give us some idea of what we were to encounter on a later day. And over the next couple of days the tour assembled at Morotai and I suppose this is something probably one of the aspects of the war that I'm pleased I

19:00 took part in was the flotilla of ships that were assembled and landing craft and one thing or another because this was the first time that the 7th Division was going to fight as a division. Previously there had been two brigades, in serio[(UNCLEAR)] and the

19:30 18th Brigade which was originally the 6th Division and been brought and placed with the 9th Division in Tobruk so that – and then they were allocated to the 7th Division so they were always separated in the original struggle in New Guinea the two brigades went on the Kokoda Trail and the 18th Brigade went to Milne Bay

20:00 and then to the beachhead and so they never fought as a division until Balikpapan. So they were assembled on all these transports but also they were assembled with a complete Flotilla of the 7th Fleet including Australian Ships, [HMAS] Shropshire, [HMAS] Arunta, I can't remember

20:30 the names of all the other destroyers but the Shropshire was the cruiser that went with us, American aircraft carriers we had the lot. So it was a great sight sailing from Morotai to Balikpapan in this assembled fleet. The Kanimbla had been stripped so the

21:00 sleeping accommodation was board bunks but it was quite comfortable I suppose with a couple of blankets and the kitchens were still being provisioned by the companies that chartered them to the navy and the food was good in fact the food was so good that there was huge

21:30 supplies of bacon and eggs for breakfast. Everybody – one morning we had 900 of the 1200 odd people who were on board on sick parade with diarrhoea and all sorts of complaints because of the food but anyway there was enough time elapsed by the time we were in sight of Balikpapan for the 1st of July landing that everybody was

22:00 mostly back on their feet. We made preparations in the early hours of the morning of the 1st July which I think was a Sunday if I remember rightly and we assembled ourselves on our deck areas ready for the landing and it was a fairly

22:30 traumatic site to look over to the land and the pounding of the shore defences of the Japanese that was taking place and the bombing by the Liberators and the shelling by the heavier cruisers and the rocket batteries that were being fired it was sort of

23:00 gave you the impression that when we got there, there would be nobody alive and of course Balikpapan was the site of one of the biggest oil refineries in the – well in the Southern Hemisphere anyway at the time and to deny the Japanese the advantage of perhaps releasing oil down on the beaches and firing – of course their main objective was to

23:30 destroy all the oil tanks which was quite a farm of them on the what they called the Parramatta Hill overlooking the Balikpapan foreshores and the flames and smoke that was belching out of these tanks was just fantastic you now. Over – at daylight we were down our scrambling nets and into the barges and forming

24:00 up in our landing formations on our different allocated areas of the beach and there were some expectations that as we approached the beach that there might be some attempt by the Japanese to bring artillery or what have you to bear on us because it was acknowledged that they did

24:30 have some naval guns placed in caves on the hillside that they could bring and out and that they may not have been destroyed by the naval barrage and the bombing that went on previous to our landing but apparently mostly anyway that either they had been destroyed or the crews that were going to man them was so concussed

25:00 by the bombardment that we didn't encounter –only a few light artillery shells on the run in to the beach. And when we got onto the beach it was deserted in the area and we formed up then in our Battle formations and waited for our allocation of tanks to come ashore.

25:30 We were – A Company was allocated 3 tanks and probably 1 in reserve I'm not too sure about that. One to each platoon which is 3 platoons to a company. We had 2 tanks that were firing conventional ammunition and one tank was

26:00 fitted with a flame thrower which was a formidable weapon had it have been used. However, when they were in position we lined up in our area where we were to advance along the front. One of the companies was to the left of A Company. A Company had a position around the middle

26:30 and we were to go forward into an area known as Santosa Barracks which as Balikpapan had been occupied by the Dutch of course prior to the occupation by the Japanese they had quite elaborate

barracks for their troops there but in the bombardment and that of course they'd been completely destroyed but they still called it the Santosa Barracks

27:00 area that we moved in to. And the morning was fairly uneventful just I suppose small arms fire and we didn't suffer any casualties. However, in the afternoon the 2/10th Battalion which was up on our right flank had run in to some

27:30 resistance and they'd called for the air strike or whoever called for the air strike and they used American Hell Cap Fires [?] off the aircraft carrier. We had orange plastic markers which were so wide we put out in front of us and they had a big arrow head on them and the aircraft was supposed

28:00 to come in and follow the arrow heads but the Americans for some unknown reason came in from the other direction and they fired behind the arrow heads which were our people and they were firing rockets and God knows what not at our tanks and fortunately we weren't in the main fire area but the 2/10th Battalion suffered numerous casualties

28:30 and they got a strike on their battalion headquarters and the sad part about it was that in the initial attack the Air Force fellow that had the radio for liaison with these people I don't know whether he was killed or his radio was knocked out and we couldn't stop them. They just kept on

29:00 coming. So that was a tragedy in itself. But as I say, the 2/9th Battalion as far as I know suffered no casualties in that particular encounter. Later on in the afternoon as we advanced along towards the oil refinery and the wharf area we –

29:30 the tank that I had with my platoon unfortunately lumbered into a bomb crater with only the turret sticking out of it and was rendered useless for the rest of the period until it was recovered. But I had a little incident there that the two platoons, one was, well I was in the centre platoon and one was on the left and

30:00 9 Platoon was on the right, 8 Platoon was on the left I think and we had a young officer with us who hadn't seen any action and he was a Duntroon graduate actually and he instructed me to form a perimeter around the tank and guard it while he went and got some further instructions as

30:30 to what he was supposed to do. I tried to argue with him that we would need to move forward that if we left a void in the middle of the advance, if there was any resistance that the platoons on the left and the right would be vulnerable to attack. Anyway he insisted to stay and guard the tank so

31:00 anyway as soon he was gone I disobeyed his orders and I took the platoon forward and he came back later on and he sent me to was then Major Suthers for disciplinary action and quite to my surprise

31:30 Major Suthers said to me he said, "Loftie" he said "if you hadn't what you did I would've been very disappointed in you". So that was a feather in my cap. Incidentally, before the landing to try and avoid any incidences of sea sickness in the run in to the beach

32:00 we were all given sea sickness pills and they had a fairly dramatic effect on some people in that they dehydrated them badly and I think about the 3rd day I got so sick I had to be taken to the CCS along with

32:30 2 or 3 others but these sea sickness tablets they said were the cause of it but I was only there overnight they pumped some fluids into me and I was okay. But in the meantime, the battalion had reached its objective and without any further hold ups or casualties. And there was a place over the other side of the bay

33:00 where the Japanese had anti aircraft defences and they decided there could be some enemy located on the far side of the bay so the battalion was – in the early morning the battalion was taken over in alligators with a couple of tanks on barges to occupy the

33:30 area called Penadjam which was on the other side of the bay. Well no previous reconnaissance had been done on the place and fortunately the alligators which were propelled by their tracks were able to negotiate the mud but when the barges stopped when they thought they were on firm ground they unloaded the tanks

34:00 and to our knowledge the tanks are still there buried in the mud. They just 'poompt' out of sight. Fortunately the situation didn't warrant the use of tanks. And I was reunited with the Battalion the next day and we just formed perimeter around these anti aircraft positions which weren't

34:30 occupied and we did patrolling around the area. There were villages not far – Indonesian Villages, the population were mostly Indonesians but I don't think at that stage it was under British or at least Dutch rule and we did

35:00 patrols through these villages and there was evidence that the Japanese were still active in the area because we had Dutch guilders as our currency and when we tried to buy anything from the villagers they wouldn't accept it. They had Jap invasion money and I think they were frightened to take the Dutch currency in case that when we went away and the Japanese came back

35:30 if they saw that they had Dutch currency that they would be in a certain amount of trouble. So we didn't have any Japanese invasion money so we couldn't do much trade with the other than anything they gave us. We didn't encounter any fighting there but in the positions where we were there was jungle area out in front of

36:00 these anti aircraft positions and of a morning just about as it was to break day the noise was horrific of thousands maybe millions of monkeys screeching in the trees and it was something we hand never encountered of course in our environment here and

36:30 the outcome of this was the this officer that I'd had the previous problem with when we used to do stand tos and I went around the back of one of these anti aircraft placements and he was sitting on the ground crying and I said to him "What's wrong Charlie?" Oh he said I don't know what's out there he said there could be anything out there. And I said as far

37:00 as I know there's nothing out there except monkeys. So then it was my turn to go to Major Suthers and I said I think we have a problem. I said our officer is in a state of disarray and he's not able to perform the duties that he's supposed to and I said I don't think it's appropriate for the men

37:30 to have someone in that condition and he came up and had a look at him and within 10 minutes he was gone. And I never say that man again until I was in Sydney in 1947 and walking out of Wynyard Station and here he is as large as life "Hey, hey Loftie, how are you going". But that was I suppose the nature of what can happen to men in areas of battle and I never held

38:00 it against him. It could've happened to anybody it could've happened to me perhaps I don't know.

Tape 4

00:33 **If you could just continue on from there.**

So anyway after a few days at Penadjam we went on the Riko River was the main waterway there and we were sent up – we went up on a couple of barges up to an area on the Riko River

01:00 and there was a village just up the road a bit from where we landed and we established a permitter there and we sent out a patrol from there. I didn't go on it, it was only a small fighting patrol and when they came into this village, they were let into this village and there was a party of Japanese that ambushed them

01:30 and one fellow got badly wounded in the knee, a fellow Bluey Bray, but he got out in some kunai grass some tall shrub of some description before he couldn't go any further. They tried to recover him but they couldn't get him at the time

02:00 in the daylight. So they went back again at night to try and get him out but the Japanese had set up a perimeter around him and used him as a sort of bait. They didn't get him that night. The next day they used artillery barrage around the area he was pretty close to and they sent in a

02:30 fighting patrol and they found him but there were no Japanese there at that time. And he'd survived quite well. He was a drover in civil life and he couldn't read or write he was quite illiterate but he had a lot of common sense and it'd rained through the night and we had what we called a gas wallet

03:00 that we used to put our valuables in to protect it from the moisture and he'd held this up during the night and collected enough water to get himself a drink with it. Although he was badly wounded, and – yeah our doctor was Doctor Copeland and he was a bald headed fellow and he looked like for all the world like Mahatma Gandhi. We called him

03:30 Gandhi. He treated Bluey and the only anaesthetic he gave him was he put a lead pencil in his mouth and said 'bite on that Bray'. And oh God it must've been painful because Bluey bit on it and bit the pencil in half and then they gave him a stick. Anyway they got him patched up and we took him back and we put him on a -

04:00 we carried him out on to a Barge on the river and they took him away. So he never recovered enough to come back to the battalion and he went back to – he came from Forbes – he went back to Forbes. I went down through there a couple of years ago actually and I tried to locate him and I found his daughters were running a haberdashery shop in Forbes and the said no he's

04:30 gone to a nursing home but I heard quite recently that he'd died. So he was a good character for a knock about country fellow. Real country Aussie, you know boil the billie, cook a steak on the shovel or anything like that you know. There were lots of those sorts of fellows. So anyway we continued to patrol

05:00 around the area and another fellow Frank Tranter, I took him with me one day and they wanted us to go further up the river. So they got one of the local inhabitants in a Prowl which is a vessel that's cut out of a log and it's got about that much free board. They put three blokes

05:30 in that and two of us were fairly big blokes and this bloke paddles away. And the Riko River was fairly well inhabited with crocodiles and Frankie Tranter and myself we sat with grenade in our hand all the time ready to drop over the side. Anyway we went quite a distance up the river and eventually after it got away

06:00 from the tidal area there wasn't a great deal of water in it and it was very much clogged up with logs and timber so we couldn't go any further in the craft but we got and we patrolled up the road for quite some miles but there was no sign of any enemy in occupation

06:30 anywhere so we came back and reported. Somewhere out beyond that area – this area was the local inhabitants were Dyak natives and they were very savage type of people but they were not very sympathetic to the Japanese apparently and the Japanese were fairly wary of them and yet they were

07:00 quite good to our blokes because we had some Z Force fellows – you've probably encountered in you – you know what they are, they are people that were dropped behind the lines with wireless sets and wireless sets weren't as sophisticated as they are today so they were fairly bulky and these people sheltered them and looked after them so we recovered a couple of fellows that had been out there later on.

07:30 After that we abandoned that place and we came back and took up a place near another little village. There was no activity there and after a few days we went back to Penadjam and we just got back there

08:00 and established and I think about 1 o'clock in the morning it happened. We looked over the bay at Balikpapan and there was star shells and things going everywhere. And somebody said oh God they're being attacked and pushed out but then the message came through that the war was over – that was what it was all about. I think it was about 1 o'clock in the morning they said we were going to get a beer issue.

08:30 That was a very welcome message for us so I was a bit concerned that if we got a beer issue what might happen with some of the wilder blokes who might say – I knew that there were several fellows in the Platoon who didn't drink.

09:00 So I gathered all the weapons and all the hand grenades and I put them in one place and I put these 4 or 5 fellows on guard. I said, now don't let anybody come near this humpy tonight. So I got all my blokes through alive. But there were several people killed at Balikpapan on the night that war was declared over just through

09:30 misadventure really, throwing hand grenades, firing off weapons and all that sort of thing. Anyway we stayed in the area for a couple of days and after that they were starting to bring the Japanese troops in and we went back over to Balikpapan and established a camp there

10:00 on the hill at the Tank Farm. We had quite comfortable quarters there. We got six man tents and had a Mess established, a sergeants mess, officer's mess, ORs [Other Ranks] mess and then of course the business of demobilisation of the unit started

10:30 and some of the original people who were long serving and others who had families and one thing and another were of course the first to be returned home. And I think the first of them left sometime in September. I was selected to go in November but in the meantime

11:00 the Company Quarter Master Sergeant who was in A Company was one of those who was to be demobilised and I got promoted to be Quarter Master Sergeant and then when it came my turn to go the colonel said you can't go we've got to hand over all this material to the Dutch before we leave. So I

11:30 was stranded with half a dozen fellows with battalion headquarters to hand over the material. So I think I left Balikpapan in about the 13th January 1946 and we got on to a Liberty Ship that had brought a

12:00 contingent of Frenchmen to Vietnam where another war was starting and they came through to Australia to be reprovisioned and they pick us up at Balikpapan unfortunately and when we got on board they had no provisions. We got one meal a day for the trip home to Australia. However some fellows who were left behind

12:30 were more fortunate that they'd had a Fleet of DC3s. The old biscuit bombers had been sent to Singapore to repatriate prisoners of war and they weren't needed and they flew back via Balikpapan and picked up the remnants of the our people who were there and they were home days before we got home. I got back to Brisbane on the

13:00 25th January 1946 got of the Liberty Ship at Hamilton Wharf, not a soul in sight. I got on a tram, went into the leave and Transit Depot and reported and got leave and went home. That was my welcome home. And I always

13:30 said that - they had a Victory parade in Brisbane August 1995, 50 years after the war and I considered that my welcome home. Mm. Anyway as I'd been married during the war and I'd been a farmer before I joined the army I was in a bit of a quandary as to what I

14:00 would do with my life. My wife was a school teacher's daughter and I didn't know if she was going to be suitable farming material so I decided seeing as I had a little bit of rank I got the offer of staying on in the army with the lines of communication signal unit. It was domiciled at

14:30 Victoria Barracks for their equipment but there camp was out at Indooroopilly where the Long Pocket Golf Course is at the moment so we went out there and I went into the Q [Quartermaster] store there for awhile and then the regimental sergeant major got out of the army and seeing as I had a bit of

15:00 experience in that line I was acting regimental sergeant major for the rest of the period of time and president of the sergeants mess and all that sort of thing. So I wasn't really doing much only – well I had quite a bit of leave and that and saw quite a bit of my wife but the rest of the time I was spending most of my time in the sergeants mess and I was sort of

15:30 a bit suspicious that I might be coming an alcoholic so about October 1946 I was sort of put under a bit of pressure was I going to continue in the army or was I going to get out and I thought under the circumstances it was a good time for me to leave so I was demobilised on

16:00 the 30th October 1946 and went home and had a little bit of a break trying to make a decision on what my life was going to be after. So I had a very good old friend of my wife and myself and he suggested why don't I try

16:30 the post office. Well I suppose I had some brains and some common sense but I hadn't really had a first class education and when you go into a public servant sort of situation I though well am I equipped educationally to go in to it. Anyway I decided yes that's what I'd do. So I got a temporary job over the

17:00 Christmas period at the postal delivery at Corinda and I seemed to handle that alright so then on the 2nd January 1947 I was offered a job as a postal assistant at the local post office at Harrisville and so I took that up and I seemed to fit into it alright and managed what had to be done.

17:30 Had to learn to be a telephonist and clerk and all that sort of thing. At the time there was only an acting postmaster there and they were having trouble getting the position occupied on a more permanent basis. So one of the district inspectors as they were called then was in charge of the

18:00 area he came out and he gave me some encouragements he said you seem to be handling the job pretty well for a man of limited experience he said if I was prepared to put you in as acting postmaster do you think you could handle the job. Well I said if you're willing I'm willing. So he put me in and he said you know there's going to be a lot of people who are more senior to you and they

18:30 may appeal against you occupying the position. Oh well I said that's up to you, I said you're putting me here. Anyway I occupied the position for about three years before a permanent person was appointed to it and I stayed there until 1954 and I got a transfer to the metropolitan area

19:00 and started my metropolitan service at Clayfield. From thereon I prospered from one position to another and enjoyed the job immensely. I got put on metropolitan relief service and in that instance you went all over the place and you met people

19:30 and other employees and postmasters but I used to enjoy the counter work that was involved with it and the rapport I had with the customers and that and something I was pleased I had settled on really at that time. We -

20:00 my wife's parents were still teaching. Her father had retired but at that stage because of the shortage of teachers they'd reemployed him at Humpybong School at Redcliffe and my mother-in-law was employed at the Scarborough State School so we moved into originally rented premises at

20:30 Redcliffe but I had bought a couple of allotments of land one at Scarborough and one at Clontarf and we made the decision to sell the Scarborough one and build on the Clontarf so we did a lot of procrastinating I suppose over

21:00 over what sort of a house we were going to build and that. My wife wasn't one to make quick decisions so I took the bull by the horns I suppose you could say and I said I'll build the house myself. Even though I didn't have any building experience I had a bit of knowledge of building so I drew up a plan and talked to a couple of fellows. We had a cousin who had a sawmill at Redcliffe at

21:30 the time and I talked quantities and one thing and another to him so after we got the plan approved by the council I set about to be a postal clerk and a builder. So I used to go to work and I'd come home at night and have my tea and by this time I had a car too of course

22:00 and I'd got down to the allotment which had a garage on it and I'd had the electricity attached to it and I only had hand tools, hand saw, brace and bit and one thing and another and I cut up the frame of the house according to plan at night between about 7 and 10 o'clock at night. Went home, went to work next day, came back did the same thing again until I got to the holidays

22:30 in March 1958 I think and I got a fellow to put the foundations the stumps and everything in according to plan and then I took my meccano set bits and pieces out and put it together. Well within about 7 days

of having the foundations set I had the roof on. I was pretty proud of myself. Then

23:00 of course the holidays ran out and the finishing work was done by hurricane lantern at night and putting up bits and pieces and nailing up ceilings and one thing and another. And used ingenious methods to – somebody said you can't get those sheets up on the ceiling on your own and I said well I'm going to try. So I made

23:30 a gantry that I could lift the sheets up against the mat and nail them on. It took me 12 months or a bit over 12 months I had the foundations were set on the 11th March was the day I can remember that because one of my nieces was born on that day and Anzac Day the following year we moved into it.

24:00 Painted inside not outside, everything in place and we lived there and my wife's parents died at various times. I think her mother died about 1969 and she looked after them. We didn't unfortunately have any family of our own and

24:30 then her mother died in 79 that's right because we made an extension of the house in 1979 and she died during that period. I was quite a comfortable little home. And my wife was an

25:00 enthusiastic gardener and it was enormous allotment for those days you know the quarter acre block, you now well ours was more than a quarter acre block. We had trees and shrubs and things everywhere and she enjoyed the gardening experience. I didn't mind it either weekends and I become a mad football

25:30 follower I used to spend all Sundays chasing the Dolphin's Football team around the various ovals and cursing them because they could play in grand finals every year but apart from one they only ever won one in 1965. I'm still a member of the Dolphin's Rugby Leagues Club

26:00 that's some 40 odd 50, 60 years later. I'm still interested in it although I don't participate in it any longer. I took to lawn bowls actually after I retired but I'm getting a bit ahead of myself here I suppose in that I suppose in my working lie as I said I was very satisfied with my job and

26:30 I got selected for most of the special establishments of post officers over the years like royal visits. I did two Royal visits. I was the postmaster at two royal visits and looking after mostly the Press people that part of the

27:00 establishment too was the provision of correspondence to the royal yacht it was generally berthed down at Newstead. When the Newstead wharves were still there and the fellows used to deliver the bags of mail down there. I never really had any audience with the Queen

27:30 or any of the Royal Family I was just sort of in the background but the briefings for the days proceedings were always done in the area where we were and the teams of correspondents and people used to come back in the late afternoon and lodge their press telegrams and they had telephotos they used to use then

28:00 it was pretty primitive equipment there was no computers or they were using teleprinters at the time was the means of communication although there was still some Morse transmission of telegrams in the country offices in those days but in the bigger places they were generally equipped with teleprinters and of course they used to put the messages onto a tape first and then they used

28:30 feed the tape in that used to just rattle it off. In the early stages I wasn't a teleprinter operator, it wasn't until 1972 when I was 50 years of age and went to training school and passed a touch typing test and was able to operate a teleprinter and with these big fingers of mine I tell you it wasn't a very easy task but I did

29:00 make it and I went to the Royal National Show where they had a post office. I went there for 17 years I think. I saw the Shows put together and pulled apart. I was postmaster there for probably 8 or 10 years so I had a lot of privileges in that area. Had a

29:30 special Ecofay [?] Conference at the Broad Beach Hotel at Broad Beach in 1959 and I was down there for almost three weeks I think. A special Philatelic Exhibition in post office at City Hall in Brisbane in 1959 was the

30:00 Centenary of Foundation of the State Queensland and I conducted it. I got a letter of recommendation from the Director General of post and telegraphs for my work there and so all in all it was a pretty satisfactory career. I had quite a period as -

30:30 I was more or less known as Mr Brisbane I used to man the information counter at the main GPO and there wasn't many places in Brisbane I couldn't direct people to or help somebody in some way. At one stage Queensland Housewives Association gave me a Courtesy Award and I was presented

31:00 with it at the City Hall in Brisbane along with others from various services with morning tea by the Queensland Association, Housewife's Association Chairperson Gabby Horan, so no it was quite an interesting life but eventually I finished

31:30 up after I had been to the training school and obtained my certificate as a [(UNCLEAR)] operator. I went then to instruct in the training school and in 1975, I'll go back to 1965, I was working at the Fortitude Valley post office and

32:00 they established at the GPO [General Post Office] the postal facilities were run by the accounts branch not by the post office's branch and in 65 they decided that all post offices should be run by post offices branches and that the accounting branches didn't really have the experience to conduct the business the way it should

32:30 be conducted so they established a post office and they built a new postal hall at the GPO and it was opened in November 1965 and I was one of the ones that was selected to go there and experience the traumas of establishing a post office under those conditions which although we had experience in

33:00 operating post offices under normal suburban conditions it wasn't the same operating them at the GPO. It was a different kettle of fish. So we had some teething problems but we got over them pretty quickly and in January 1966 I was

33:30 elevated to the position of information officer so I then didn't have any job on the counter I had to deal with the public coming through the place with all their problems and direct them to where they needed to go and in February 1966 if you were old enough you would remember that they had the introduction of decimal currency

34:00 and I was stuck at information counter on "D" for Dollar Day in 1956 and I think I handled somewhere in the vicinity of 2,000 phone calls for the day various enquiries about how decimal currency would affect their postal facilities and what they had to do with the LSD [?] Stamps and all this sort of thing. I couldn't talk when I went home that

34:30 night. But probably that was one of the most dramatic days I had in my postal career yet I handled it without any great drama I think. It went off pretty well actually but there were still lots of days after that, there were many enquiries

35:00 about the changeover to decimal currency and postal facilities. Costs of sending articles, what they had to do with the stocks of materials they had on hand all this sort of thing. It was all set down standard practice and if you followed the written instructions you couldn't go far wrong. I got a fairly

35:30 or I had a fairly good reputation for probably using common sense in lots of areas and I got called upon by many postmasters who were probably considered to have far more experience and be far more senior to me throughout the state and they used to ring and ask for decisions on various

36:00 aspects of postal business and it amazed me in a way that they had books of instructions one was called the postal guide and the other one was postmasters instructions and I used to say can't you read the book, oh but I can't find it. But I said it's got an index, No, I can't

36:30 seem to find the subject that covers it. So I didn't tell them what the answer was I went to the relevant paragraph of whatever is and I said now open your book at paragraph so and so, page so and so and said now read it. I said can you make a decision now? Oh yes, yes, it's quite simple when you read it. I said.

37:00 you know I said I've had to do that. I've even had chief of the postal services fellow rang me up one day a chap named Bob Butler and he was a very nice fellow and a very good friend of mine over the years and he opened up his conversation he said, "You make very many decisions above your station in life".

37:30 I thought of God what have I done wrong, you know I thought I was in for a roasting. I said "Yes probably so" but I said "Have I made a wrong one?" "Oh no" he said "you haven't". He said I want you to make one for me. I thought that was a fair sort of a feather in the cap when a boss would come along to a subordinate staff and help him make a decision. so

38:00 it made me feel pretty good about my career. Anyway then of course Australia Post was formed in 1975 we were separated from what was previously the old PMG [Post Master General] Department and I was instructing at the postal training school and the principal of the postal training school came to me on

38:30 probably it was about the 28th June because Australia Post was to be established on the 1st of July and he said to me you're not to come here on Monday you're to report to the GPO. I said "What for?" and he didn't know and I didn't know. But anyway I reported to the GPO on the Monday 1st of July

39:00 1975 and I became part of the administrative area of the newly formed Australia Post. That of course was another feather in my cap. So I thought you know I only had an ordinary state school education and never even past a scholarship examination and I thought well I haven't done too badly in life so that I finished up my career

39:30 at the administration area of Australia Post on the 1st February 1982 and I've had nearly 22 years of very happy and pretty useful retirement actually. Mm.

40:00 I've been involved with a few organisations of course as you realise I'm living here in this area I belong

to the Freemasons. I've been not a good lawn mower but I've been a keen lawn mower for nigh on 20 years. I've been involved on various committees associated with bowls. I was president

40:30 of a social bowling club which was one of the oldest social bowling clubs in Queensland if not in Australia called the Waterloo Social Bowling Club and surprise, surprise it was formed at the Waterloo Hotel on Commercial Road [(UNCLEAR)] but now it's a – it was predominately a men's club

41:00 originally but it's been over the years graduated to a mixed bowls club and it's still operating very successfully. We have about 120 members and we have monthly outings to various established clubs and twice a year we have a 3 day bus trip away to a

41:30 club, Lismore or Warwick or Tenterfield or somewhere and have a great old time for the weekend bowling and seeing the sights around the local areas. A matter of fact I am now recently become associated with another club called the Peninsula Social Bowls Club which was established at Redcliff and enjoying some further new

42:00 acquaintances there and going on a 3 day trip to…

Tape 5

01:35 **Can you tell me what your opinion of the .303 [rifle] was?**

Well it was a very reliable weapon. We could always depend on it firing. Not like some of the automatic actions, I think at one stage during

02:00 the Buna campaign I picked up an American automatic action rifle and after a couple of shots I found it wouldn't fire and I threw it away and resorted to my old .303. No doubt it was a weapon you probably had to concentrate on your actions more than just pulling a trigger for an automatic one but no extremely reliable.

02:30 **How often did the blokes pick up American weapons or Japanese weapons?**

I don't ever remember anybody picking up a Japanese one not to use as a weapon. There was probably one or two fellows who may have picked up but I don't remember though many people resorting to an American rifle thought look for 44s more for souvenirs or something of that

03:00 nature and nobody wanted a Thompson submachine-gun. I got one at one stage and I was detailed to it and I asked immediately if I could revert to a 303 because I couldn't get any reliability out of the Thompson. It had a 101 stoppages I think. You only had to throw it a grain of sand and it'd stop firing. No doubt they had

03:30 drum magazines for them I think that held something like a hundred rounds. It had a lot of firepower if you could keep the firing. They also had a normal straight magazine and it held probably around 28 to 30 rounds but this didn't over come the stoppage problem that they had because they

04:00 I don't know they had them in the dessert too so they apparently had greater problems even there maybe than they did in the wet humid conditions. But we picked up an Owen gun that had been buried in the mud for God knows how long because I think it was the 2nd Div Cav [2nd Division Cavalry] had been issued with them when they went to Sanananda and

04:30 this was one that had probably been left there by somebody who'd got killed or discarded or something. We picked it up out of the mud and somebody – and it was encrusted in mud and somebody pulled the trigger and it fired. So I mean they had no stoppages whatsoever.

What about other - he equipment the Australian troops were issued with was it all satisfactory in your opinion?

Well yes I suppose we

05:00 didn't know of any other equipment. We had our weapons pouches, we had our haversacks and mostly in those conditions we stripped down to the lightest weight we could carry in respect of equipment. You had your webbing belt and your brace with your pouches on and your water of course which was an

05:30 essential. Your haversack you had your shaving gear and toiletry essentials. We cut our towels in half to reduce the weight content. Blankets were cut in half. We had half a blanket and a ground sheet of course which was an essential piece of your equipment for trying to get some shelter and your tin hat and that was about it.

06:00 You kept your weight down to the least possible amount.

So how many water bottles did you carry and how were you resupplied with water?

Only one water bottle. Oh well they had some form of water cart at strategic points as you would realise

of course most of the water had to be

06:30 chlorinated although in the Sanananda campaign we did dip water bottles from streams but later on we found out that there were some unacceptable bodies floating in them further down but was too late. But we did carry chlorine tablets with us that we put in the water when we dipped them from streams like that but there was a good deal of course of

07:00 dysentery and other complaints that eventuate from the water supply probably in lots of cases.

With the heat and humidity and conditions how long did it take you to go through a bottle roughly?

Oh well you had to be extremely diligent in your usage of it and you wouldn't

07:30 put it up and drink till it was empty you know you'd just take it in small lots mostly try and make the bottle last a full day. I had a bottle that had a hole shot in it and it didn't last a day. I obtained another one because there was plenty lying about and they were an essential part of course of your equipment.

08:00 Lots of times you used them for shaving in the morning and your little splash of the face and that and for drinking purposes throughout the day.

How did you feel when you found a bullet hole in your water bottle?

Well I wasn't too sure what had happened because I'd been in a prime position on the ground for some time before it happened and the water bottle had absorbed a fair bit or heat and I wasn't too sure whether it was

08:30 blood or water for a few minutes. Then I found out it was only water I was pretty thankful for it.

Generally how did your clothing and boots and weapons stand up to the sort of conditions you had to deal with there?

Yeah well the weapons they were durable, like your rifle was durable. You had to make sure you oiled it and cleaned it and

09:00 kept it in good condition because that was an essential part of your life really. Clothing of course eventually under the conditions of volumes of perspiration and one thing and another rotted away. The stitches rotted and your boots – Australian army boots were a pretty good product actually. They were generally fairly

09:30 substantial and the pair that I had on when I arrived at Buna and by the time I'd got through all the mud and slush to Sanananda I think I came out barefooted because well my feet had swollen in them I probably had to cut them to get them of and otherwise they deteriorated anyway to an extent that they were no longer considered to be footwear but

10:00 they were pretty durable.

A few chaps that we've spoken to reckon the soles were made out of cardboard?

They got pretty heavy yes, they were thick leather soles. They made some improvements to them later on along the track but they were probably the fairly early ones that had come from the dessert really and they were

10:30 probably more suitable for dessert warfare than they were for jungle warfare.

So in that regard was there a mix match of equipment that should've served separate purposes but were being adapted for what was required?

Yeah well possibly yes we had canvas gaiters. Later on we went to an American style one that laced down over the boot top but the loose strap canvas

11:00 ones were the original ones that we had but they didn't sit down tight over your boots of course and they'd work up your legs and that. But they did serve their purpose I think for the time being anyway.

Was there any other American gear you had or would've liked to have had or...?

No I don't think there was at that stage, no their water bottles were aluminium probably a little bit lighter than ours.

11:30 Ours were enamel but I don't know their capacity of theirs was as quite as great as ours. It seems to be a smaller one and anyway the attachment to our webbing equipment was more suited to our requirement than they way they'd just attached them with a hook type arrangement on a webbing belt of some description and it wasn't suitable for attachment to our equipment

12:00 no.

You spoke earlier of actually being trained to use a flamethrower as you said one of your tanks in your Company had a flame throw attachment. Can you ever recall the Australian using

flamethrowers in the Campaigns up there?

I wasn't present when they were used but yes they did use in some instances.

Do you know whereabouts they would have used those?

Well we didn't have them until we went to Balikpapan so it was probably at some instance at

12:30 Balikpapan. Maybe they just used them on suspicion that there was someone in the foxhole or whatever they were trying to clear out.

You also mentioned that there was a Swede in the Army with you. Can you recall any other nationalities fighting in amongst Australian forces?

We had a South Sea Island fellow, Bobby Longbow, Bobby was a lovely little fellow. Extremely

13:00 fastidious about his hygiene and always clean and clothes were always clean. I remember him saying one day, I don't know how it came about and he said 'gee you whities stink'. We were probably as clean as him but he had a keener sense of smell than we did. But we had a couple of

13:30 might I say half cast indigenous people with us. Georgie Hassell was one such bloke that I can remember in our Platoon and they were all good fellows. They were good soldiers.

The Swedish bloke did you recall his story and how he ended up being…?

No, no, I don't really know his name was

14:00 Swenson and I don't know – he'd probably migrated out here at some time. He wasn't very old, he was probably a young fellow and probably joined up out here – a sense of adventure probably and that's probably what we all thought. Hand us a gun at our ages we were invincible and unindestructible all that sort of thing but we found out that wasn't the case, mm.

14:30 **And besides the anti-malarial drugs you were given did the army supply you with any insegrocol [?] was that unheard of back then or?**

When I first arrived in New Guinea in 1942 there was no anti malarial drugs issued on a regular basis. The treatment, my first treatment was liquid

15:00 quinine which wasn't a very palatable medication but after we came back from New Guinea after the first [(UNCLEAR)] we were issued a daily issue of atebrin which was apparently a repellent of malaria because I, after the three incidents of malaria that I had

15:30 I never had anymore after that but it was one that was given and strictly supervised and anybody found not taking their atebrin was very severely dealt with and we were issued with repellent and long sleeve and long trousers and any time after sunset if you were caught out without

16:00 your long sleeve shirt and trousers and your repellent in your pocket it was good night nurse and down to the cooler and they were extremely strict on that because malaria was one of the main causes of decimation in the numbers of people available for service in the front line. There were probably more people

16:30 with Malaria or gunshot wounds or anything else after probably the Buna Sanananda campaign anyway.

Can you tell me what it's like to have malaria?

It's a long time ago but I think I can always remember it. You've got the feeling of being extremely cold and you can pile blankets and blankets on and you still can't -

17:00 then all of a sudden it breaks and you come in a terrible perspiration and you become fairly delirious in those stages of it and then after that sweating period goes away you're alright until probably 24 hours later and it recurs again.

Did you often see blokes in the line that were still fighting that were suffering quite badly with Malaria?

Oh yeah

17:30 yes, that was quite common. In the Sanananda campaign because of the lack of medical equipment and attention that was available nobody was evacuated from the line unless they had a temperature in excess of

18:00 103 Fahrenheit whatever that is in Celsius today because of the inability for them to be evacuated from the area you know. And there were quite a few fellows who struggled on there with advanced malarial symptoms and there was always the danger I believe

18:30 that if you had malaria and it wasn't attended to within a certain sort of time, it developed into a cerebral malaria which was fairly fatal it affected the brain and in most cases people died from it. There was also of course quite a few cases of scrub typhus in the area. That was mainly I think attributed to

fleas

19:00 that were carried on the water rats and that, that were in the area. We had two or three fellows that had it. Frank Rollston who lives a Mackay at the present time, I think he had a very – I'd been wounded – he had a fairly bad does of scrub typhus it almost cost him his life. He never came back to the unit after

19:30 Buna.

What are the symptoms of that?

Well I don't rightly know I never experienced being with anyone when they developed it but it was probably high temperature and vomiting and that sort of thing that accompanies that sort of thing.

And dysentery was a fairly common thing too wasn't it?

Oh dysentery was pretty rife. I was probably fortunate I didn't perhaps what I had

20:00 was more diarrhoea than, than dysentery and I recovered from it fairly quickly after a – well the treatment for it was a packet of Epsom salts and a couple of Sulphurmelomite tablets after you'd cleared your bowel out and it was uncomfortable for a couple of days but yeah.

And how was the quinine when you were taking quinine, how was that administered?

Well

20:30 the first lots that I had of it was just liquid poured in a medicine glass and down the hatch you know. But they did have quinine tablets too that they gave you when they got you to a certain stage of recovery you just took the the quinine tablets but the initial doses were pure liquid Quinine.

How did you find the American crew on the LST?

21:00 Well we didn't have a great deal to do with them. They manned the galley with the food and the first few meals we had on it we thought was great. Well we struck this cyclone and everybody wasn't feeling too well and by the time we recovered from that we found that they were

21:30 a pretty queer lot of cooks. They made their own bread but it was good for the first couple of times and then I don't know it seemed to have a sweetness or something about it. You know they'd make a fruit salad and then pour a tin of green mint peas into or something all this sort of thing and they had curries and

22:00 that were – they had tins of jam poured into them. They were sweet curries which we didn't particularly like. I like curry but I don't like sweet curry. I don't know what ingredients they had at their disposal you know they may have been making up the best they could with what ingredients they had but another

22:30 point about the meals on the LSTs was that to get to the galley and the serving point we used to have to come around the back of the galley and come up the side and when you came up the side was where the diesel exhaust fumes were most prevalent and by the time you got to the serving point you didn't want to eat anyway in a lot of cases.

23:00 I don't know whether that was part of the business or not.

You mentioned earlier you talked about Alligators, can you tell us about those?

Yeah well they were – well they've got these APCs [armoured personnel carriers] today, where they put the person in line and they transport them but they're on normal tracks. The Alligators had a - track probably was about that deep and set like a

23:30 paddle – set on a paddle they acted like a paddle wheel on a paddle steamer, they propel the vehicle through the water.

That was American piece of equipment?

Yeah, they had some fire power on them. I think they had a 50 millimetre machine-gun and another like machine-gun on them, yeah.

Where there other nicknames for other vehicles

24:00 **being used?**

Oh well then they had the six wheel rubber tyred ducks, they called them, yeah. They were quite prevalent. They were fairly slow in the water but effective. They used those for all sorts of purposes. Like they were good for supplying people in remote areas probably where they could use a waterway and then a roadway

24:30 or a track to get stuff to them whereas the other vehicles – couldn't use it. They used them – I had a mate in one of the units that was operating the ducks. They used them on Balikpapan Harbour for

refuelling vehicles for the Catalina flying boats and all that sort of thing. So they were quite a useful vehicle.

So in those last Catalinas there was obviously a lot of American

25:00 **presence and American equipment and that used up there?**

Well yes we had – the Americans were mostly amphibious people that were attached to their 7th Fleet that went with us to Balikpapan and although some of them went away to the actions that were going on around the Philippines and north of that some of the equipment stayed behind with us, yes, with American

25:30 people operating it.

So what was the level of interaction between the Australians and the Americans in that regard?

Well we didn't, as an infantry battalion we didn't – apart from being using this transportation we didn't have much interaction with them. The barges that took us into the landing were all manned by Australian Naval people.

What about the relationship with the artillery, obviously

26:00 **they're doing a pretty important job for you guys?**

Yeah well the artillery – there's always lots of barter between artillery and infantry fellows – call them drop shorts and all this sort of thing. But you've got to remember in war – they call it friendly fire – and I don't know what's friendly about it when somebody gets killed but

26:30 still this was part of the thing. They didn't always have accurate grid maps to use and they were doing it by observation with Forward Ob [observation] Officers and that and they did a hell of a good job under the circumstances and I've got

27:00 nothing but admiration for the observation officers and their signallers that were with them because they put themselves in great danger to try and make sure that they were giving us the support that we needed. And in those days there was no, there wasn't radio communication, the signallers had to run

27:30 cables and they were at risk with enemy action just running the cables and getting them to a point of observation where they could be effective you know. We had a fellow at Buna, an artillery observation officer, he had broken arm, he had his arm in plaster and he was up in the upper branches of a great tree directing

28:00 artillery fire and the snipers used to fire at him and we used to hit the ground and he used to say 'they're not firing at you they're bloody well firing at me'.

Can you tell us a little about that communication system like the Tannoys and that sort of thing, Tannoy cable?

Yeah well we had a signal section of course and some of those were attached to each company and they ran their

28:30 cables out as we advanced forward. They had to – theirs was a job I didn't envy cause besides the normal equipment they had to carry to protect themselves they also had to lug these great reels of cable and run it out. In lots of instances when you got into a position where there was a battlefront of course and the enemy would penetrate

29:00 behind your lines they'd cut the cables and these fellows would have to go out in all sorts of conditions and try and find where it had been cut and repair it and of course in lots of cases they lost their lives because the enemy was sweating on them coming to make the repair. They knew where they'd cut it we had to find where it was cut, you know. So I had great

29:30 admiration for them. They weren't only our own battalion signal officers, either they had some brigade signals who used to keep communications between battalion and brigade and then they had divisional signals which they kept operations up to date between division and brigade and so on down the line. They were probably a bit further

30:00 back. Some of them that were back out of the battle area perhaps were at that stage – not perhaps they did have some form of wireless communication. I don't know how effective it was. We had great big backpack 108 sets we tried to adapt to use within Battalion operation but they were not very successful. They were cumbersome and

30:30 unreliable and the first use of the walkie talkie was in use at Shaggy Ridge in early 1944. They took walkie talkies to Shaggy Ridge but as I said I wasn't there but from reports I heard they weren't all that successful either that they

31:00 got interference from not having direct line of sight sort of thing with them. They didn't work – although they did work to a degree but they didn't work real effectively. We had them at Balikpapan but we didn't

use them a lot because we weren't in a particular area of heavy fighting. We did use them for some of our

31:30 communications.

Can you recall any of the army chaplains being out there?

Yes, I had a couple of good mates that were army chaplains most of all a fellow named Joe Phillips who was a Roman Catholic padre. He and I had a great mateship really. I didn't belong to his

32:00 Church and he was a – he wasn't a young man, he was probably in his early 40s. He was - belong to the Carmelite [(UNCLEAR)] Order. Never wore socks, he always wore sandals, no socks and we had a marathon run one time and

32:30 Joe lined up in it. He didn't win but he wasn't last either. And no he was a wonderful bloke and as a matter of fact a funny thing a couple of years ago I listened to Macka [Ian McNamara] in Australia all over from the ABC [Australian Broadcasting Corporation] on a Sunday morning and there was a fellow from the Korean War and he was talking about the

33:00 big push that was there and the cold winter and one thing and another and he said you know we had a bloody priest Father Joe with us and he said he was a Carmelite and he said we had three pairs of socks and a pair of boots on and he said he was getting around in a pair of sandals and no socks. It was the same Joe. And he died last year in South Australia, I think he was 91 or 92 when he died. I got a

33:30 very good mate, cost me a lot of money actually, because he lives just outside of Gosford, it's a place called Blue Bay, Padre Roy Wootton, and we – I just sort of knew him, he was based with the 2/12th Battalion but he used to come at times to the 2/9th Battalion to give services for the

34:00 Anglican people and take the inter-denominational services and I didn't link up with him again until probably 12-14 years ago. We had a Sanananda Memorial Day at the old Wacol Barracks which was called Sanananda Barracks and they established a Memorial

34:30 Plaque there and we had these services he came to one of them and we palled up again there. So anyway when I went on this boat trip it had started in Sydney and we got on in Brisbane and I presented myself on the Saturday morning it was that we got on here in Brisbane and the receptionist when I went onto the boat oh she said,

35:00 Mr Wells you're in cabin 4375 with the padre. I said what the hell am I doing in a cabin with the padre? I never said anymore I thought God I was going to have to curb my language and say my prays at night. Anyway I got down in the cabin and here it was Padre Roy Wootton. And we had a great time together we talked

35:30 at night and reminiscent and he said a prayer for us and we went to sleep about midnight every night. I've seen him fairly regularly one place and another and when I went to Perth a couple of months ago, I went on the Indian Pacific. So I flew to Sydney and I got the train across to Central Station and I was there about half past eleven 12 o'clock and the train didn't leave till 2.30 and who's

36:00 waiting on the Station for me but Roy Wootton. So we had a couple of hours together there and – and another one of the widows, one of our chaps, Joe Randell, she came too. So that was very much appreciated by me to have somewhere there to talk to and that for the couple of hours that I was waiting for the departure of the train. But no they were generally good fellows. I had two

36:30 cousins actually, one was an army chaplain and the other was a chaplain on the [HMAS] Shropshire. You wouldn't know by my lifestyle but a background of strict Methodist we sort of fell off the water wagon along the way somewhere. But no they were good fellows just the same.

You hear lots of stories of soldiers who aren't normally religious suddenly finding religion when they're on the front line.

37:00 **Can you recall stories like that?**

Yes, probably so. I was a little bit the opposite although I didn't lose my faith altogether I couldn't understand why if God was so good and looked after everybody why was he letting so many beautiful specimens of manhood be slaughtered they way he was you know. It's

37:30 probably hard to understand but on the other hand I didn't lose my faith altogether. Well what faith I had you know. Still got to believe that there's probably somebody out there that has something – no – but yes a lot of people did place a lot of faith in their religion, yeah.

38:00 We had Roman Catholics probably more so, they regularly attended whatever services were available. We Cularthumbians as we call ourselves we just went when it was a compulsory parade.

What about the Salvos [Salvation Army], did you see much of them?

Oh yes,

38:30 yeah well they're a different story. It didn't matter where you went there was a Salvationist there with an urn of coffee and a packet of biscuits. I met a fellow at a funeral a couple of years ago and he was one of the padres that was on Shaggy Ridge and they

39:00 said that he was that far forward in the battle front that they weren't too sure whether he was making coffee and biscuits for the Japanese or the Australians. No, they were one of – the 2/9th Battalion had a Salvation Army padre that was originally with the Padre McAway and

39:30 he was I believe one of the only Salvationist that was ever knighted. He became Sir Archibold McAway and his phonogram is in the Australian War Memorial. He carried that thing and I believe in Tobruk he played music for the fellows and he also

40:00 always carried some Red Shield paper and a pencil and he'd hand to a bloke and say 'Did you write home today son'. And the fellows that were there, I was sorry later that I hadn't at some time met him but he was apparently a marvellous character and caring man. But no we had

40:30 a chappie, I can't even remember his name, he ran a very good Red Shield hut when we were in established areas and he was always there with his coffee and biscuits when we were in action – never failing, you know.

Just change tape.

Tape 6

00:32 Just getting back to the subject of Padre Wootton he always said that he had a record that he really wasn't proud of and that he had been accredited with burying the most servicemen of any padre who had served in the AIF some 400 odd souls he buried. And in lots of instances he buried them with his own

01:00 hands. He was a very, very marvellous man actually.

Talking about the Salvos sticking pen and paper in the hands of soldiers telling them to write home, can you tell us about letter writing in your situation?

Well I was a fairly prolific scribbler actually – the were the occasions when it wasn't probably

01:30 possible to write a decent letter but I always tried to write a letter home especially after I got married because I suppose wives become very anxious people but I always tried to get some sort of a message to my mother especially after my father died.

02:00 And my wife being very prolific writer too she never knew when to stop. The letters used to come and they think my return ones weren't that big but then we were fairly restricted to what we could write so it was a matter of just letting people know at that

02:30 that period of time you were still alive and well. I think it was, it was very important to them too. They were probably living on a knife's edge especially for people who were in infantry battalions and reading casualty lists in papers periodically and wondering who was

03:00 sort of going to be next, you know. So it was one of the essential parts I think of life in the Army. I know some people who – we had a fellow with us Bob Firs and Bob he was a single man he had a mother, but he used to let his mother know he was still alive. He'd write, 'Dear Mum, Everything's going well, and then he'd get the

03:30 scissors and cut the rest of the page out and write on the bottom your loving son Bob. Mum'd get the letter and think the censorer had got to it you know. But I don't think, I can't remember anytime during the whole of my overseas service that I ever had a letter censored but I was always pretty

04:00 careful not to put anything in them that was offensive to the censor.

How often did you get mail?

Fairly regularly after we were out of action, you know, my wife used to probably write something every day but may not have posted it you know. Perhaps a couple of times a week sort of thing. So when we were in back areas I got

04:30 regular mail and I'd have odd notes from people I'd kept in touch with.

You spoke earlier about the Dyak people, up there and their hatred for Japanese. Where you aware of the bounty that the Dyaks were being paid for Japanese…?

No I wasn't aware that they were being paid of a bounty but I wouldn't've been surprised. Especially

05:00 when they were – after we'd dropped the Z Force [Services Reconnaissance Department] fellows into

the area they were probably very appreciative of the protection that they afforded them and no doubt they, mm…

A lot of the Australians up there suffered pretty heavy losses. How do the men cope with such heavy losses?

This is something that

05:30 we often discuss still and that there was no form of counselling in any sense and we seemed to counsel one another. People you know your best mate's alongside you, he gets killed, you don't and you

06:00 console the chap as best you can but then you still had something to do so you couldn't just wander around and not think of what you were doing otherwise you were going to be in the same predicament as your dead friend you know so it's something though we still wonder about and of course the

06:30 therapy for wounded people or people in that – was cigarettes. If a man got wounded the first thing you did before you bothered about his wound was light a cigarette and put it in his mouth you know. And lots of us who didn't smoke before we joined the Army learned to smoke because it was part of the culture. I probably had had a few smokes before I'd joined the Army but I wasn't a

07:00 addicted smoker. I even got to the stage of smoking a pipe at one stage and then I didn't know where to put the pipe so I just kept on smoking it all the time until I got sick of it and threw it away. So you know you had lots of ways of consoling one another and say you know, oh well you know what a good bloke Joe Smith was and what good times you had together but he was gone

07:30 and they got on with their life. You've got fellows like Tommy Clarke, Tommy was a corporal and I – you know you didn't know blokes with courage like him, in the midst of a battle he'd been wandering around. At Buna he'd been wounded four times and he was still wandering around directing his fellows what to do. It wasn't until he got hit

08:00 the fifth time that they managed to get him to go out of the place and he was probably consoling people and not worrying about what was happening to himself, you know. But I don't know, I would say that there probably isn't a fellow that goes into battle that doesn't experience some type of fear. At

08:30 some point in time. In the heat of the battle it seems to go away. You concentrate on what you've got to do and try and stay alive and hope everybody else can too but it doesn't always happen that way.

It sounds like a cliché but can you tell us how important that whole mateship thing is?

Oh well, it's extremely important because

09:00 you can't fight a battle on your own, it's a team effort. Unless everybody in the team is clear and that with one another you can't have someone in that team who says I don't like that bloke sort of thing and not perhaps offer him the protection that he needs to do what he's got to do. No it's

09:30 really part of an infantryman's existence I would say, mateship and comradeship. Your life depends on him and his life depends on you.

You told us before how you saved a bloke that'd been hit and you dragged him back to help. Did the tables turn did anyone ever do anything to you that you think…?

Well fortunately I was never in that

10:00 situation, I came out with a whole hide apart from the water bottle incident. The almost missed thank goodness.

And was the flow of information on the battlefield like where were you going next, what your objectives were things like that? How was the flown, was it good?

Yeah it was probably some concern at times in that communications got

10:30 it muddled and by the time it was passed down the end of the line the situation was the reverse of what it was when it started up with the first message you know. But no well the method of communication of course within the

11:00 platoons and in the sections involved in it was mostly by word of mouth and hand signals. You know you used a lot of hand signals, forward or halt and all this sort of thing and of course that depended too on the visibility. You'd have to hope everybody was within sight or the next bloke could pass the message on but no it did become befuddled at times.

11:30 **Earlier when you were speaking of the horrific conditions you were fighting in was there ever that thought why are we fighting over this geography why are we fighting in this location?**

No I don't think there was that thought you were just wondering why you were the ones that were selected to fight in it but once you were there well there was no turning

12:00 back, you had to just keep on going. I don't know they say that the conditions unde which we fought at

Sanandanda were probably the worst of any conditions in any theatre of war during the whole of the conflict and I can't dispute that as far as the conditions that I encountered. We never had anything like it.

12:30 There was no chance of any comfort whatsoever at any time. You couldn't dig a hole and get into it and say well – you know if you had somewhere you could dig a foxhole you could make yourself reasonably comfortable for the night and that but you couldn't there because there was no way because of the conditions under foot that you could dig a hole if you could a log to camp on or a tree with a big enough

13:00 fork to perch yourself in well then you re comfortable for the night sort of thing. The only consolation was probably in those days that we were in there we were not probably under any great danger from attack by the enemy it was only a matter of continually moving forward till we caught up with where he was able to

13:30 establish himself, you now.

You're tall fellow did that work in your favour or against you.

I wasn't very thick – no probably not. I was pretty handy for a few of the shorter blokes but I helped to put them up in tree branches and that when they needed to. I could still get around whereas as they'd been bubbling under the water.

14:00 No I don't think it was any great disadvantage. I think that you learned to keep your head down and I always said that I could get behind a blade of grass and camouflage myself pretty well if need be.

Would you have any idea what temperatures you were operating in, in New Guinea?

Well I suppose it's a bit

14:30 to say like that it was 90 degrees but the humidity was the killing part of it. It sapped all your energy and the perspiration and that was horrific all the time but I don't know what tropical temperatures are probably around about the somewhere between

15:00 35 and 40 probably, with probably anything between 90 and 100 degrees of humidity you know. So this was one of the things, see Balikpapan was only 2 degrees off the equator. So there was no hot days, no cold days at Balikpapan they were all hot days. There were no cold nights. Generally in the northern beach heads of New Guinea

15:30 although it rained incessantly while we were there. The rain wasn't cold it didn't affect you like you were had a hot day and sitting in cold rain all night. The rain that you had was sort of lukewarm. More or less so – that was one of the things there, when the fellows went to Shaggy Ridge and they were fighting in altitudes of around 12,000 feet or something I

16:00 think it was, up on Shaggy Ridge well they were distressed at night time in the cold. They had to have pullovers flown in for them and blankets and things you know because they couldn't endure – they went there with just a half blanket and a ground sheet to lighten the load but they -

16:30 **Going back to Australia, it seems by some of the stories that I've heard that some of the moving around within Australia of troops was rather logical did you ever feel that? Or was there a method to their madness?**

I don't know maybe some of them did, we didn't seem to have that sort of situation

17:00 like when we – well maybe when the fellows came back from the Middle East they landed them in South Australia and they went to Woodside well then they moved them from there to Tenterfield and then from Tenterfield they moved they moved the Brigade to the Kilcoy area for purposes probably

17:30 giving them some experience with some type of jungle warfare which was prevalent in the Jimna Ranges but apart from that when we came back then from New Guinea we went to Ravenshoe in the first instance and then we went on leave and then we came back to there and we remained in that same area until we embarked again for New Guinea.

18:00 They did exercises out as far as Mount Garnett and most of that was for endurance, marching and keeping particularly fit that way but then we embarked then for New Guinea and we went to a camp and

18:30 established it there and we never left it until we were sent into action. No I don't say – it may have been some unit's experienced. We didn't particularly experience any undue movement.

Some of the old army adage hurry up and wait did you ever encounter any…

Yeah well this is right, great coats on, greatcoats off was the saying they had in our Battalion. It happened in the Middle East somewhere and

19:00 when they were going to Syria or somewhere after they'd come out of Tobruk you know and oh no well we used to always say if there's going to be a panic let's organise it. But a few things like that you know

rumours, rumours and all sorts of things like that. Generally we coped pretty well with it I suppose.

Now your honeymoon, 3 days long

19:30 **is that correct?**

Yes that's right.

Three days for a honeymoon that seems…

Spent it – well we had two nights at Redcliffe at a place called the Anchorage Guest House. Very, very shy bride and groom we didn't know much about life really not like today's society. We had our two nights there and my wife went on the train back to Harrisville, I stopped of at

20:00 Redbank. I had to borrow – I think my mother-in-law lent me 12 pounds 5 shillings to go on the honeymoon. I didn't have any money. I often said to her later you were very anxious to get rid of your daughter weren't you. But anyway we stuck together for 59 years and 7 months.

Now when you got back to

20:30 **Brisbane at the end of the war, how did it end up that you were the only fellow that hoped off the boat there?**

Oh I probably, I may have exaggerated but there was no one there to meet us. We just made our own way to the leave and Transit and told where it was and get there the best way possible you know.

Did you wife know that you were going to be back at that date or?

No, no she didn't know but I

21:00 got in touch with her fairly quickly and she came to Brisbane. We had a friend who lived at Tennyson. She'd taught with my wife's parents and her husband was also in the army he was in Bougainville actually I think he came home later than I did and my wife used to come and stay with her while I was in the Brisbane area and she used to

21:30 come into town. She was a pretty fearless little lady actually because in those days the place was swarming with Yanks [Americans] and blackout and one thing and another and she used to come into town on the bus and she'd wander down through the streets and meet me and wander back up to the bus at night. You never thought of being molested or anything. I mean people wouldn't do it today. I was

22:00 in a hospital situation and in building with a storey bridge I forget what it was. She caught a tram to the valley and walked over this storey bridge and down the steps under the bridge and in blackout conditions and never hesitated really.

Can you tell us about the reunion when you got home to see your wife?

Oh well

22:30 I suppose it's a long time ago. There was a lot of emotion I suppose being safely home and not having to go away again. It was a great relief for everybody concerned. I suppose we had many, well we did, have many loving nights

23:00 together over the next few weeks while I was on leave. Unfortunately that was a period when – that was the first lot of leave I had after I'd been married was the period in which my father died. That wasn't the end of the war that was in 1944 so that sort upset my equilibrium a bit

23:30 because I was pretty fond of my father even though I hadn't had a great lot of time with him because I'd left home immediately after I left school but I always had that sort of relationship with him that when I came home it was always there you know. He taught me how to drink beer and enjoy it.

24:00 and so on.

After joined the army and before you went overseas you used to get out on the town a bit didn't you?

Oh yes we used to have some fairly good nights around the city area we used to come down from Redbank of course when we were training there and have our nights out on the town and we used to catch the paper train

24:30 home. There used to be a paper train used to be shunted into Roma Street Station and used to leave the station in the early hours of the morning and it'd just get you back to Redbank if you ran from the station to the parade ground. You'd just be in the last row for the early morning roll call. If it was late you missed out and then later

25:00 on when I was with the 7 Pioneer Company and we were camped at Ascot Racecourse. Of course we had some pretty rugged old times around the city in those times but well we were generally fairly conservative we never caused any trouble not like some of the people. They had a quite a brawl at the American

25:30 canteen at the corner of Creek and Adelaide Street one night and one of the Australian fellows got killed. Some hand grenades and bullets flying. We used to go to the various dance halls the Trockadero and the Nesco House and Palm Grove and we used to have a reasonably good time. Beer was a bit hard to come by.

26:00 Later on when I had been with the battalion and our headquarters when we were on leave was the Globe Hotel. And the fellow who owned the Globe Hotel was fairly sympathetic towards us and he probably had some relatives in it. He used to more or less close it down when we were in town. We drank all his beer quota for him. You could in there one day and pay 50 bob for a shout and then

26:30 you'd go for the rest of the week and you wouldn't have to shout.

Can you tell me a little about Captain Yonkers and the mischief you got up to under his watchful eye?

Oh yes, oh well he was the American quartermaster sergeant he was very a very liberated sort of fellow in as far as we were concerned because we were doing a lot of work

27:00 that was probably saving him a lot of time and a lot of money and we had a quite a few fellows who were inclined to be a bit light fingered around the wharf area and we had an international utility truck attached to us and it used to bring hot boxes down with the food in. Every time he'd come down

27:30 with the hot boxes he used to go back with a 44 gallon drum of petrol in the back of it or a case or something or other that had been pilfered and when then got pulled up at the gate by the American MPs [Military Police] Yonkers said leave them go he said they're saving us a fortune. The blokes used to sell the petrol at the gates of Eagle Farm Racecourse out of dixies

28:00 to the taxi drivers. Somebody with this great case of stuff they'd pinched it one time and when we got it back and opened it they thought it might be food or something and it was a case of a gross of American army boots. They didn't know what to do with that so they just dumped them somewhere on the racecourse.

28:30 But no he was a good fellow. He smoked these big Cuban cigars and – but he never lit them he only sucked them. We had a fellow with us named Foggerty and Foggerty said to be one say gee whiz I'd like to get one of those cigars when he's finished with it. So anyway he throw one away one day and Foggerty picked it up and he said well there's nothing wrong with it.

29:00 I'll cut the end of it I can smoke it. So he cut so much off the end of it and lit it up – nothing. Apparently Yonkers had sucked it so long that he'd taken everything out of it and there wasn't any flavour of Cuban cigar or anything in it. It was just like burning a stack of leaves. I'll cut the end of it I can smoke it. So he cut so much off the end of it and lit it up – nothing. Apparently Yonkers had sucked it so long that he'd taken everything out of it and there wasn't any flavour of Cuban cigar or anything in it. It was just like burning a stack of leaves. I learnt something from that because I used to like, later on used to

29:30 like to smoke an occasional cigar. I wasn't a cigar smoker I used to love the smell of them actually until I worked with a fellow later on after the war who never stopped smoking them. He was a dirty smoker, he used to flick the ash under the counter and everything was covered in cigar ash and I never wanted to see or smell a cigar ever since. I lost all

30:00 desire to smoke a cigar or have anything to do with them.

In the same vein of what you've been talking about what was souveniring like on the lines?

You mean in action? A lot of fellows were keen on souvenirs. I adopted the attitude if you picked up a lot of stuff you had to carry it and you had enough stuff to carry as it was. Probably unless it was something of great

30:30 value I wasn't very interested in it. Some of them got some things but then a lot of the stuff had to be handed in anyway because it had some intelligence value or something of that nature. Like binoculars and that sort of thing that might've been something to souvenir or of value they were handed in because they were of use

31:00 for our own purposes but also gave intelligence in lots of cases because they had markings on them. Some places they picked up a lot of surgical gear well that's not much good to the ordinary fellow. Japanese swords they were fairly much sought after. Pretty hard to come by to get any that were decent

31:30 and then again you had to carry them. The one I got, I didn't take it off any one they had a heap of them at Balikpapan after the war. I just said I'll take that one and brought it home. I found out it was valueless anyway because it was made in the Philippines by some Japanese naval unit made them in the Philippines. It's quite well made and it's quite sharp still even

32:00 60 old yeas later but it's got no value.

Was there any drama bringing those back into Australia?

No not when we came home no we didn't come through any form of customs actually.

So with the souveniring that was done was there any barter sort of swap thing started up because of that?

Oh yes in some instances there was. A lot of stuff – we had a Japanese flag that was captured at Milne Bay

32:30 and all - a lot of the fellows who were with the battalion at the time autographed it and it's part of our museum so they weren't – those things weren't kept by individual people they were handed over so that they became communal property. They had a book apparently at Lopcombe Corner when they were in England the 18th Brigade

33:00 was one of the only brigades that went to England and the shopkeeper at Lopcombe Corner kept a notebook on everybody who came in, all the Australians from the 2/9th Battalion who came in and most of the original fellows signatures were in that book and a fellow named Peter Murphy I think it was went back to England after the war and he went to Lopcombe Corner to the storekeeper and she gave him the book and he brought it back and we immediately

33:30 put it in the museum. So you know anything like that was of a communal interest to all the members of the battalion they weren't kept by the individuals and rightly so I think. But probably some fellows kept like me with my horseshoe has no communal value to anybody else and I don't know where it is. It's around here somewhere.

Can you tell us a little about that horseshoe?

Well it was on the first day at Balikpapan actually I didn't kill the man he was dead when I got there. Of course naturally you went through them to see what they had of any value intelligence wise or anything else and he had a horse shoe and a nail clipper. I've got the nail clipper in there still. It was German made one too actually.

34:00 It's worn out now after many years of clipping toe nails and one thing and another but I still kept it there and that was about all he had on him that was of any interest to me. I think he had some letters which I handed over to the I Section. I don't know of anybody else that got anything of any great value.

Can you describe what it is exactly?

34:30 What's that?

35:00 **The horse shoe?**

Oh it's just a small size horse shoe about that big and it's got some cherry blossoms or something engraved on it and Japanese characters that the fellow told me you know – good luck – well it wasn't a matter of good luck it was goodbye and it had a couple of little stars on it. One of them I think must've come lose and it's fallen off it was

35:30 screwed on to something or other. I just kept it as a paperweight around the place for years.

Did you ever meet fellows that had come back from the Middle East fighting up in New Guinea?

Oh yes a lot of the fellows in our battalion had been in Tobruk. They were rats of Tobruk. There was

36:00 I suppose at the time I joined the battalion probably the majority of them had been in Tobruk or otherwise if they hadn't they were reinforcements to the battalion immediately after the Tobruk siege and some of them had even participated in the first battle of the 2/9th

36:30 Battalion, which was at an Italian fort called Giarabub.

Did they ever talk about their previous exploits or did they ever make comparisons between the Middle East campaign and the Pacific campaign?

Yes they did because it was a contrast of conditions like in Tobruk the modus operandi they did all

37:00 their patrolling and everything at night time and they lay low all day they never exposed themselves during daylight hours. Whereas when they came to the jungle we didn't move during the night we did everything during the day time so it was the opposite completely. In the desert you could

37:30 apparently observe your enemy at work or at play or whatever he might be doing over great distances but in the jungle you couldn't see anyone 10 feet away you know. You couldn't see your mate a lot of the time if you were in thick jungle and spread out at all. I think somebody wrote at one time in the desert

38:00 they mustered their armies and the generals got on the hill with their binoculars and watched the results of the battles. Whereas in the jungle nobody new what the result was going to be until the final outcome.

And were there any World War I veterans amongst the chaps up there?

Yes we had, I don't know how many there were altogether we had one in our Section, Jim

38:30 Little, Jim had spent two years in France in the First World War put his age back to join up in the outbreak of the Second World War. He was a corporal, they called the Little Corporal because his name was Little. A great fellow he was and then after the war he had problems because he put his age back and he got married,

39:00 when he went to get married, or he got married during the war and when he went to register for repatriation benefits he had to go and get his age corrected. He died a few years ago actually. We remained good mates and he died in a nursing home just close to where I was living. But he was, I think he died just a few days short of his

39:30 95th birthday so he was made of pretty tough stuff. Fellow Bill Bolton he was the company sergeant major at headquarter company he was a First World War fellow and I think he was even older than Jimmy. He was about 45 or something like that even in Buna and Sanananda and he was one of the

40:00 toughest bits of old leather I've ever seen. He was a really tough character and a great character.

Might just stop there and change tapes.

Tape 7

00:35 **Was there anything you wanted to carry on with there?**

We were just talking about First World War fellows. There was a chap in my section a fellow named Joe Anderson and Joe wasn't a young man but he was a pretty tough man and he was a character who was very

01:00 fond of a little drink and a gamble and he was in my tent at Moresby and he decided he'd make a brew of his own and he had I suppose about a 5 gallon jerry can what the army used to have attached to the vehicles for carry petrol and he was brewing this stuff up and he had

01:30 it under his – in the tents where we were, we'd made bunks of saplings and put palliasses over them and he had this brew under his bunk and it used to bubble and gurgle all night long. You'd think it was going to explode. Anyway he eventually got it to a consistency where he decided he'd drink it. I

02:00 don't really know what it tasted like because I wasn't game to try it but he was a character unto himself Joe. He tried to enlist again after he came home in the Korean contingent because he was having wife trouble but they told him he was too old to go away and he

02:30 was a painter by trade and I went to Dalby some years later and I went into one of the hotels that I used to frequent when I was working out there and I said to the fellow behind the bar I know that bloke that's asleep over there in the corner. And he said for Christ's sake don't wake him up. So Joe must have been

03:00 pestering the life out of him but there was an incidence at Moresby where a fully laden bomber crashed onto I think five trucks laden with troops that we waiting to enplane to go to Nadzab. It was only about 500 or 600 yards from where we were camped and it went off with a terrific crash

03:30 and the explosion of the bombs and I think something like about 90 of the 120 odd blokes that were in the trucks were killed which was very tragic. And Joe was in the next bunk to me and I could hear him screaming they're here, they're here and not a stitch on just his mosquito net he went straight out through the mosquito net and he was racing down the gully with just

04:00 this mosquito net wrapped around him and daylight in the morning it was one of the – despite the tragic sight it was one of the funniest sights I've ever seen. This man streaking through the dawn wrapped in a mosquito net.

I can't imagine how it would affect everyone knowing that such a tragedy like that had happened. Does it take a few days to get over it.

Yes that was,

04:30 that was one of the great tragedies because I believe later they found that there was some sabotage involved with it. That somebody had tampered with the fuel lines on the plane involved and most of the crew were killed. I believe there were two in the tail section of the plane which broke off when it hit the trees before it landed on the

05:00 trucks that survived but I don't know how it would affect them, they were American. But yes it had a profound effect on us for a long time after to think that so many men could've lost their lives in such a tragic circumstance, you know. But it's altogether different than going out into the field and getting killed one at a

05:30 time sort of thing.

We've heard a bit about jungle juice being brewed at different places. Was there any sort of situations where drinking was a bit out of hand or where certain people were drunk quite a bit because they couldn't handle it?

I don't know about see well all of the two tours I did of New Guinea there was no beer available there

06:00 was no beer issued. So the only beer or the only alcoholic drinks you could was what you made yourself and myself I wasn't and I'm still not – I would never brew my own beer I always say leave it to the experts. There were a lot of people who did, yes. And at one stage we captured an American still

06:30 actually in a patch of jungle and they had quite an elaborate set up of distilling it. They had a pump primus sort of a stove and all the gadgets that went with it and they were using apricots and sugar mostly to [(UNCLEAR)] so we loaded it all into a truck and it went back to the camp and the

07:00 fellows that had it they brewed it out and it came out in beautiful clear spirits and it was almost like methylated spirits you could put it in a saucer and throw a match in it and it'd burn. And I had a chap that was in a tent with me at the time and he got overindulged [(UNCLEAR)] and I wasn't too sure that he wasn't going to die. He was a fellow named Bluey O'Neil. He was one of those freckled faced

07:30 redheaded fellows. I've never seen anybody with the colour like he had but anyway he did survive. I don't know whether he ever drank jungle juice after that but there were incidences in the air force also where they added de-icing fluid into the drinks they made to give it alcoholic content

08:00 and that was fatal in some of the incidences. Navy blokes used some sort of spirit from the submarines and this sort of thing but mostly our fellows were restricted a fair bit because of the lack of material to brew it with and to bring it to any sort of decent drinkable state but.

08:30 yeah some of them tried potato peels and dried fruits anything they could get hold of they tried to – they say potato peel - what they make Vodka out of potatoes, so I suppose they thought they were going to come up with a brew of vodka but I'm afraid I was never guilty.

I suppose the Aussie's [Australians] couldn't do much with bully beef?

They call the cook

09:00 a bastard, who called the bastard a cook, but it was not the bully beef really, bully beef was really good tucker. You could do something with bully beef. It was M and V [meat and vegetables] and some of the other concoctions that they had that were must unpalatable and at once stage they put out a substance they called dehydrated

09:30 mutton. Nobody could do anything with that. I think it was - we suspected it was sawdust that was swept up off the floor of a sawmill, it wasn't mutton at all. It was terrible stuff and they didn't continue with its use. They had a lot of dehydrated potatoes. They weren't very palatable either but at least they were filling.

10:00 Good of rolled oats was a good stickler for morning breakfast. There wasn't a lot of fresh beef available. In he early stages we had quite a bit of fresh beef after we got to Balikpapan. But that was after the war was over really but they got regular shipments of frozen

10:30 beef there and it come home in pine boxes, frozen in pine boxes and they had the – the pine was probably green when the boxes were made and you used to get a woody, piney, turpentiny taste through some of it not all of it. Plastic wraps and that weren't readily available in those days

11:00 as they are now. But no, even so some of the cooks we had could spoil good beef cause we had a sergeant cook who was trained by the catering corp but a lot of the offsiders they used in the kitchen were misfits in the Battalion who couldn't learn good exponents of drill or

11:30 they were sloppy in their clothing, their bootlaces were always undone or the epilates were always hanging down. And they'd say righto silver you go to the kitchen you're a cook. When they got there they couldn't even open the oven door let alone cook anything but still that's what they finished up as. Under guidance of the Sergeant cook who wasn't always there. And then they drank all the essence of lemon and vanilla essence that came in and then we never got any

12:00 flavouring in anything because that was their means of obtaining their alcoholic drinks.

Did the men generally just accept what they were given or did they sometimes sort of put in a complaint?

Oh sometimes they made some fairly staunch complaints about it and almost got to rebellion a couple of times.

12:30 **Do you recall the meals that it almost got to rebellion?**

No I can't particularly but I've got an idea it might've been at the stage when they were experimenting with the dehydrated mutton and a few other things like that. Another thing was egg powder wasn't real palatable either. But thee wasn't a lot of occasions when they raised

13:00 great objections to it. Probably most of the sergeant cooks we had were fairly conscientious and wanted to make the best of what was available for us. The coffee wasn't recommended. It was always a very, very unpalatable brew as far as I was concerned. So I used to

13:30 stick with my black tea. Dog biscuits or army biscuits as they call them they were – you had to have good teeth, they were as hard as cement but they were very sustaining whatever was in them, they kept you going.

14:00 And hat some of us used to do and I did quite regularly when I could do it was you'd break them up the night before in your dixie and if you keep them away from the ants, soak them with some water and if you could get hold of a tube of condensed milk, squeeze it over them and you had beautiful porridge the next morning. They used to make good porridge but just eat an army biscuit

14:30 was a task really. It was pretty hard.

Did you think about good food a lot or even dream about good foot?

Well I suppose I could say this hear but when army fellows got together to talk, they talked about their stomachs and what they could put in it or what hung on the end of it.

15:00 That was the conversation, was foot.

You're quite a tall man, did you find that the food you got kept you going?

Oh yes, yes.

Was it harder for the bigger men than the smaller men in terms of energy?

No well I don't know that – I was tall but I was a couple of stone lighter than I am now actually. I wasn't a very big framed

15:30 man. I don't know that I required more food than the smaller blokes. As a matter of fact some of the smaller blokes could eat more than the big fellows. You wondered where they put it but they did.

Speaking of dreams, do you recall what you dreamt about when you were away? Did you dream of home or were you too busy to dream?

I can't really remember dreaming during that time.

16:00 The funny thing is since the war I've dreamt a lot and in all of my dreams I've always been fighting Germans and I never fought any Germans. So I only fought Japanese but they've never at any stage come into my dreams but there's always been Germans and I don't know why that is. I couldn't

16:30 explain it but I don't have any problem with it now. Something that's past and I dream of better things now.

You talked about you know when you heard the war was over and the men were all given a beer issue and you sort of organised men to put their weapons away and stuff. Can you tell me a bit about that night? Just sort of give us a sense of what the feeling was, what the mood was, funny things

17:00 **as well as maybe disappointing things?**

Well the feeling was of great jubilation that it was over because well most of them or a lot of them, well I'd been in the army four years at that time some of them had been in 5 and 6 years and the fact that they had survived was a great relief to them

17:30 and mostly we sat around and drank our beer and talked about what we might do after the war and we had a Torres Strait or Cape York Aboriginal with us. He wasn't in our but I can always remember one of the fellows relating to this and they were talking

18:00 what they were going to do after the war you know. Some of them had jobs that they were going back to and others had plans that they might start up by themselves and they asked him what he was going to and he said "I'm going back to be a bloody black fella", that was his response. And he was a good soldier, he had been an extremely good soldier

18:30 but he had no ambition of bettering his lifestyle after the war, you know.

Did you get a sense of why he'd joined up at all?

Why?

Yes.

Yes I suppose it was something you didn't place a lot on but no, he joined up – I joined up

19:00 because well at the stage I joined up the country wasn't in peril because the Japanese hadn't entered the war at that stage and I probably as a sense of adventure perhaps and loyalty to the country and the

thought of the fellows that I knew that had

19:30 enlisted prior to my enlistment and thinking well you know why should I be here and they're over there sort of thing. I suppose mostly that you wanted to serve your country an do your bit towards the effort that was being put in to rid the world of the tyranny of Hitler and

20:00 those people.

But the indigenous soldiers that you knew, did you ever ask them you know why they had joined?

No well, I wasn't closely associated with any of them other than Bobby Longbow. I don't really know, I didn't ask him why he joined. He was a South Sea Islander actually. Why he joined I don't know probably this was more

20:30 or less a sense of adventure or maybe he had some other reason but everybody was there to do what they could. I would say I'm no hero I just did what I had to do and we did fairly well I think and we were pretty proud of our battalion and had a lot of pride in it. They had a

21:00 good war record.

Can you tell me a little bit more perhaps describe in a bit more detail the jungle training that you had in Australia and whether that fully prepared you for when you were in combat?

Yes well I didn't go to Canungra Jungle Training School I missed that. A lot of people went there. And I had the opinion that when they came from there that

21:30 some of them were broken souls [(UNCLEAR)] they over did the things that they did. But we trained under normal jungle circumstances in north Queensland it was very thick jungle that we trained in with the

22:00 'Wait awhile' bushes. If you know sort of lawyer canes with prickles on that holds you back at every movement sort of thing and we did quite a lot of it. In some places we had specially prepared courses where you went along a track and the had spring loaded silhouettes that would jump out in front of you

22:30 and you had to fire at them and all this sort of thing. You know real action type, that's what they were looking for the immediate reaction to anything that might come out in front of them and the conditions generally of course were uncomfortable because it rained a lot and

23:00 the jungle floor was always wet and damp and leeches would – go along and your boots would start to slosh on your feet and when you took your socks off your boots were full of blood you know. So you sat down with a cigarette and put the hot cigarette on the backside of the leech and till he came out

23:30 and that was a ritual after nearly every training stunt. We roughed it mostly with cooking facilities established wherever we were. Sometime they used to bring prepared meals in hot boxes but not very often. You just

24:00 cooked what you had in the field and lined up and grabbed it and went back to what you were doing. There were no night shelters. If it rained it rained and you huddled your groundsheet in the rain and it was a rituals with our people, our colonel, you had to be clean-shaven in the morning whether your liked it or you didn't.

24:30 We learnt to shave with cold water and blunt razor blades. Razor blades were a bit short too. We had all sorts of methods where we used to try and sharpen them. They had – somebody had put out a thing with a leather strop on you could be a razor safety blade in it and strop it and other people used to get bottles and cut the tops of them with

25:00 a hot string dipped in kerosene and just burn the string and dip it in the water and the top'd fall off and you'd rub the razor blade on the curve of the bottle inside and that would sharpen them, yeah. But they were never real sharp and of course they'd rust overnight in a lot instances and you'd have to do something to get the rust of the edge of them before you shaved. We all had the old

25:30 stainless steel mirrors in our wallets and pulled it out and it had a hole in it and hang it on a little twig on the tree and see blokes standing around shaving. Some people used cut throat razors. I couldn't use a cut throat razor I never seemed to get it the right way on my face.

What about later on did men worry too much about shaving?

26:00 **Where there still some men that sort of were finicky about that sort of thing.**

Well they were with the unit we didn't have any option. It was shave or cop a penalty for not shaving. In the Sanananda campaign we were allowed – that was the only instance that I know that we had dispensation from shaving. I went I think around about 5 or 6 days without

26:30 a shave but I'm one of these persons not like Peter [interviewer] I can't stand hair on my face and I was desperate for a shave but probably not everybody. Somebody grew a moustache once, there was hell to

pay about because you had to get permission to grow a moustache. And he'd grown a moustache without permission.

27:00 Anyhow when he grew then he had to get permission to shave it off. There was always some sort of problem that arose.

Back in Australia in your jungle training were there some men that they just couldn't cope with that kind or conditions and climate and if so what happened to them?

I don't know of anybody who

27:30 couldn't cope with it completely. They didn't have much option. It wasn't something that they gave you any option with well none of the fellows that I was associated with got out of it unless through some form of illness or inability to do it. But at

28:00 some time or other they all did it. It wasn't an option you had not doing it.

What did you see that made you say that some of those other soldiers had been overtrained in jungle training? What was it that you saw that made you say that?

Well maybe overtrained was not the right word but they'd been put through courses

28:30 that weren't later experienced you know like being thrown into rivers with full packs on and all this sort of thing that they instigated at Canungra. I suppose it was part of their discipline and part of the more rigorous training they used to get them into physical condition. But there were a lot of things

29:00 that they seemed to relate to me that weren't relevant in our situation, you know.

Do you recall any other things?

No not particularly. They seemed to give them a lot of exercises crawling under barbed wire and one thing and another. Well that wasn't bad because you had to

29:30 learn to belly crawl for lots of purposes other than – we didn't experience a lot of barbed wire or that but you had to do this in the order to conceal yourself in a lot of places. It meant that you had to crawl close to the ground for long periods of time and you had to be in a fairly good

30:00 physical condition to maintain that sort of movements with the equipment that you were carrying. Always ensure that your weapon was clear of any dirt and one thing and another so that it was in order to fire immediately you needed it and that sort of thing yeah.

30:30 **You mentioned one of the parachute bomb hanging in a tree in one of your previous stories, were there many of them hanging around? Just unexploded hanging around?**

Well no there were probably several in the area but most of them had reached the ground and exploded but some of them I think they weren't Japanese ones they were ones that had been dropped by our own

31:00 aircraft on the Japanese positions before we'd occupied them. And they were sort of a daisy cutter they exploded above the ground and injured people in the legs and more so than probably anything else.

31:30 **Could you just talk a bit more, I think before you were talking about Sanananda beach and when there were 10 Japanese prisoners were taken? Was that were you were?**

Yeah, yeah, well there may have been more and I just estimated and we just passed them on the way and somebody tended to them later. Some of them were wounded and had to have medical attention. Some of them were in pretty bad condition through lack of

32:00 food and one thing and another. And I don't really know what they did with them after we passed them by but they weren't in any condition to cause us any problem at that particular point in time. I don't know that it was contrary to their code really

32:30 to be taken prisoners it was an honour to die rather than be taken prisoner. They didn't really have probably the means of taking their own lives. Perhaps they'd lost their weapons. I don't know I didn't have any close association with them.

Was that Japanese code something that the Australian soldiers

33:00 **found impossible to get their head around?**

Yes well for instance at Buna every Japanese had to be killed they wouldn't surrender even though they knew there was no means of escape for them they wouldn't surrender and as a matter of fact two of their Officers at

33:30 the very end of the action they committed suicide in front of us rather than surrender to us. They slit their stomachs open and let their stomachs fall out. It was something that was a bit sad in a way that people would do

34:00 that. I suppose it was something that was instilled in their culture that it was dishonourable to surrender to an enemy. Not to live to fight another day. That's of course is one of the reasons why they were so cruel to our fellows that were taken prisoners in that they

34:30 considered that because they'd let themselves be taken prisoners they were dishonourable you know and they didn't deserve any treatment and of course they didn't abide by the Geneva Convention. We probably - well Cowra breakout was a case in point

35:00 I think where they sort of felt that they were better to be killed than be posted as prisoners of war in their own country but drove them on to do what they did do.

You spoke early of an officer

35:30 **having a bit of a breakdown, the Duntroon officer, did you find that was a common thing amongst men?**

No it wasn't a common thing but I only heard of another instance where they said a fellow had broken

36:00 down and this was at Balikpapan actually where we weren't under any pressure. His reasons for it I don't know. It's very hard to put a finger on it probably. There were some instances probably earlier and some reference as made to it in.

36:30 the siege of Tobruk but those fellows were under extreme bombardment and air attack and one thing and another and probably more susceptible to that type of illness and but it wasn't prevalent in the battalion from when I got there

37:00 maybe some of the fellows that were in the early days of Buna fighting when it was particularly heavy may have experienced it but I never heard anyone discuss that anybody didn't do their duty.

What about fellows just like, I guess this is where the mateship comes in, someone is sort of a bit

37:30 **homesick do fellows sort of make an effort and notice those things and try and cheer each other up?**

Oh yes, yes, no, no there was plenty of that went on that you'd encourage a fellow to come out of his melancholy mood. Yeah that was quite common some blokes would devise some means

38:00 belaying his doubts and one another thing and another. You'd start a card game or something like that. And say oh come on let's go to the swie [?] game or the two up or dice or something and lose a few bob or something like that. They come back and start talking about something else. Yeah, they'd get away from it generally.

Did you ever witness many

38:30 **practical jokes that got played?**

No not a lot I suppose there were some I think at one stage when they had bath time at Port Moresby with the hot showers and one thing and another that came around somebody ran along the back with a tin of boot polish and plastered everybody up with brown boot polish after the shower unit

39:00 had left the place which wasn't appreciated by everybody. Oh there was a few little things probably that I can't just put my finger. Somebody'd hide something of somebody's that he was desperately in need of. Put him into a panic and 'where's my webbing belt or something' and then at the last minute when

40:00 he was in real stitches 'oh is this it here' but no generally they didn't play jokes on people that might have upset them in any way. Some people probably were more easily upset than others just by talking about something. Sometimes people were a little bit thin

40:30 skinned sort of thing and they thought he's having a go at me sort of thing but most cases they weren't, no.

What about jokes about the enemy? Were there any sort of making up jokes about the enemy at all to relieve tension?

Oh there probably was I can't think of any specifically at the moment. I think they probably - people who fought in the Middle East probably

41:00 had more of it than we people who only encountered the Japanese because there was not much to joke about not only the conditions under which we fighting you were fighting a different type of enemy you know and I don't think anybody considered it to be joking matter I don't think.

Okay.

Tape 8

00:33 **When you did that demonstration of the shorten Bren gun, what was your impression of that weapon?**

Well we were only looking at it for its light and weight and whether it still obtained its effectiveness and it was a little bit hard to tell -

01:00 that was the only time I've every used it and I was only using it on a short range and yes its firing was effective but whether it would've been effective as a field machine I'm not real sure and at the time I'd been promoted and I wasn't using a Bren gun as a

01:30 weapon I was carrying an Owen gun actually but it would probably have been as effective but I don't know that it would have altered the cone of fire as from the normal size barrel or not I'm not too sure because it was really only a shortening of the barrel and a few other

02:00 slight modifications just to bring the weight down and probably being a bit shorter would make it easy to carry rather than the long barrel but they – I can't remember I don't think that they were ever brought into general usage.

I know shotguns have been used in sort of close quarter general warfare, do you know if there was any use of shotguns at that time?

02:30 Never saw on.

What was the reputation of the Japanese soldiers before you actually got there to face them yourself?

Well I'd spoken to fellows who were with the 2/16th Battalion they were the first fellows I'd spoken to who had actually been in contact with them. They had a great respect for them as a formidable

03:00 fighter and a cunning fighter. The big thing seemed to be with their cunningness and their use of fireworks rather than firearms to create situations and their usage of spear type weapons and one thing and

03:30 another. They were painted at that stage from the people who were on the Kokoda Track to be a pretty fierce some enemy.

Can you tell us about an instance where you may be accidentally camped in a creek bed?

Yes. The first night we were in Moresby actually we were taken to an area near the 2/16th

04:00 Battalion and we weren't allocated lines and we just camped where it looked like nice flat grassy ground to sleep on. I don't know how many of us were there probably 20 or more. And through the night – first of all we had an air raid and we didn't know there was an ack ack gun located a few

04:30 yards away from where we were camped because it was dark and this thing opened up when the search lights came onto the plane and we got a hell of a fright we didn't know whether they were coming down or going up and then later on it rained fairly heavily through the night and most people were inundated with a bit of a flash flood in the creek. So there was quite a bit of a scramble and

05:00 turned out to be quite an uncomfortable night.

I'd be interested to hear more about Ern Rambell?

Ern, Ern was a – he was a fairly exceptional bloke he came from Suerena [?]. I don't know for sure, he was connected with the Sugar Industry, I don't know whether he worked at the mill at Suerena or

05:30 but I know that after the war he became a cane inspector, they used to inspect the cane and various – I don't know what there complete functions were but he was at a place called Camilla just south of Suerena. He was a fellow of exceptional character. He was a wonderful character of a fellow. He was a

06:00 fellow that was calm under all situations, never any panic. Seemed to – from your first contact with him he seemed to be a fellow that always put you at your ease you know. As if to say you can't come to any harm if you do what I tell or the fellow that I put you to do what he tells you and that.

06:30 He was a fellow I felt very comfortable with and he was promoted and he went away to OCTU, Officers [Candidate] Training School and he became an officer but he didn't come back to the battalion. Most fellows who left the battalion to go to Officers Training School went to another unit when they came

07:00 back. I don't know whether it was probably the fact that they would be too familiar with the fellows that they'd associated with over a long period of time. Although one fellow, Wally Freud he was another good fellow, he did come back to the Battalion. But Ernie was a fellow that I kept in touch with, well all of his life. He died,

07:30 I think he died on Christmas Eve about 6 or 7 years ago. I got word, I got a phone call Christmas Day to say that he passed away suddenly. And he looked to be a bloke who was in perfect health so you never know what might happen to you. But no he was a great fellow. His wife was a lovely woman. When we used to go north we used to go to Suerena and stay

08:00 with them overnight and take you around all the places and show you the places of interest. He was a pretty keen fisherman actually. We used to always have good feeds of fish when we went to Ernie and Beryl.

What was the army system for replacing officers that had been either killed or taken out of the line?

Well some,

08:30 not a big lot, some were promoted from the ranks within the battalion at one point in time. I think it was from the Milne Bay a couple of fellows were promoted from sergeant to commissioned rank and stayed with the Battalion but mostly they were allocated through from

09:00 various places from division and brigade to the battalions later on with the – in the instance of the reinforcing by the disbanded motor company that we got at Ravenshoe they came with their officers and NCOs in tact so

09:30 we got quite a few officers from them. It was something I was a little bit discontented about in that when I went to the battalion in Buna in 28th December I went there as a corporal and immediately I was marched into the battalion I had to revert to a private. They didn't – this was policy of course so there was nothing I could do. I didn't find

10:00 out till later on when the pay book was marked I had been demoted sort of thing. But I didn't particularly worry about it because I applied myself pretty well and it wasn't long before I was on the way up again. But I hadn't reached any rank when I came back and all these fellows from the motor company were there and they'd all retained their ranks.

10:30 Some of the fellows that I served under had not seen any active service at that point in time and you just felt a little bit slighted in that respect. But it wasn't something that worried me and I just went about my business and worked my way up the scale again so I finished up on top of them anyway. It's something I've adopted

11:00 all my life, even in my working life in the public service that they promote fellows on seniority and not on their ability in lots of cases and I just accepted it. I just said well I can go on and prove I can do the job just as well or better. It was something, no, it didn't particularly worry me.

You were telling us earlier

11:30 **about in the battle of Sanananda where you dumped a particular weapon. Can you tell us a bit about that?**

Yeah, well there was only two of us that were carrying it and I suppose we weren't Robinson Crusoe because other people were carrying additional supplies of other things but ours seemed to be the most arduous task of the lot.

What weapon was it?

12:00 Boyes anti-tank rifle and they were fairly substantially sized weapon and they're about six foot long and weighed 36 pounds and well in the conditions that we were travelling in we couldn't see that we were going to encounter any tanks or anything it might be any use to. So I

12:30 said to Speedie, one day I said I think I'm going to slip and drop this. And saw a nice deep looking hole and I slipped and dropped it. He said what will we do with the ammunition. Well I said it's not much good to us now I said throw it in after it. Nobody noticed it anyway, they were all too busy with what they were doing but the only incidence was the night of the barge incident when somebody was

13:00 calling for the Boyes. And nobody knew where it was.

So what was the, like I know you're responsible for your own weapon what happens then in responsibility for weapons that are perhaps lost on the battlefield.

I don't think there was any record as to who was carrying it. It was just something that was divvied when we started on the exercise. And nobody, you had responsibility

13:30 because you'd signed for your own weapon but in those circumstances nobody had signed for this it was just allocated to you to carry it. It was lost in the wilderness.

Can you tell us how the win at Sanananda buoyed the spirits of the men there?

Oh everybody was – well it was a situation -

14:00 if you were a car you'd say you were out of petrol. Nobody had anything left in them and it was my

contention and the contention of a lot of others if they Japanese would have been able to land a 1,000 fresh troops in the area all would've been lost because the whole of the troops insofar as the Australian army

14:30 were concerned had been extended to their limited. They had no energy left in them. They'd spent every ounce of energy they had and they couldn't have contended with a counter attack of any description and there wasn't at that stage any other troops available to have reinforced them because they'd committed

15:00 everybody that was capable of fighting to the fight and there was no doubt that we were very jubilant to have reached a stage where – well I think the phrase was 'the bastard's gone'.

Can you remember ever hearing of the Atom bomb being dropped?

No

15:30 not after the Declaration of the end of war. We didn't know we had just heard in that thing that a bomb had been dropped on Japan that had ended the war. It was called an Atom bomb.

Going back a lot earlier can you actually remember when you were in Australia before you joined up, can you remember the declaration of war then?

3rd of September, certainly can.

What was your recollections of all that?

16:00 Well we were sitting in front of the radio in the farmhouse and Robert Menzies you know as a result of so and so we are now at war.

What sort of effect did that have on the family?

Well I was younger of course - I wasn't born when the - but it did have an effect on my parents because they were adults during the

16:30 First World War and had connections and associations with different people and people who'd been killed and one thing and another. Yes it had a dramatic effect – not again because it was only 21 years after the signing of the armistice. I didn't have the same

17:00 dramatic effect on me although I knew a lot of returned soldiers but I hadn't been privy to the casualties and that that had occurred. I'd spoke to various ones and I knew that so and so had been at Gallipoli but they were probably like we were they didn't talk about it in

17:30 as much as the horrors of it they just talked about it with more or less the lighter times or the better times. They didn't talk about the horrors.

Do you think it was that the retelling of the better stories, the happier funnier stories of World War I diggers [servicemen] that made a lot of young blokes in World War II sign up?

Yeah, it probably did. Because like people

18:00 of the opinion later on even we came home you know when all these old diggers get together all they do is sit around and glorify war. We didn't talk about the war we only talked about the good times we had. And what happened here and what happened there and what happened when so and so got drunk and feel out of the truck, or something like that. And that's probably what the First World War diggers did but people who didn't

18:30 participate didn't know and then probably in the outbreak of war a lot of them talked to people of my generation of these sort of things and that sort of thought well you know it's not such a bad place to go after all. But that wasn't the only reason probably that people enlisted because it was hard times and people couldn't get work.

19:00 It was something where they were taken and looked after. They were given I think 5 bob a day to start with and it was increased to 6 bob a day, and a place to sleep and eat and medical attention, dental attention. That was an attraction for lots of people who couldn't get work. Other people probably had debts they couldn't meet and get away from them.

19:30 Probably some people had domestic problems they wanted to get away from. There were all sorts of things. You met people and you know why are you here and one of those things was the thing but – the fellow, who wrote that book, In the Footsteps of Ghosts, Bill Spencer, and he put it very aptly, we were children of the Depression and we learned to

20:00 share things with people like in the farming community where we were. We went and helped the next door neighbour do something, he came and helped us do something. If he killed a beast he shared it with us and if we killed one, we shared it with him and all that sort of thing. That was part of life and I think this was what created such companionship

20:30 among fellows that they could get together and support one another like they were doing in their normal everyday life. And it goes to make a good unit if you can get people that'll do that. You don't

want somebody that's pulling against it. Some of them were wild colonial boys. They didn't like the discipline probably

21:00 that the officers had to impose upon them and some of them took dislikes to some of the officers but they were only doing what they had to do because you've got to have discipline. You can't have an army that hasn't got any discipline. I would say it's like your life even though you live it yourself you've got to have some form of discipline

21:30 in your lifestyle otherwise you don't succeed do you.

So after you initially told your mum you wanted to sign up she said no it was another two years was it before you…?

Just about two years.

How hard was it for you in those two years?

Oh it was pretty rough you know you'd have a bit of an argument and say I'm going to join the army. I probably wasn't going to because I had responsibilities on the

22:00 farm job. I probably needn't have joined up because it sort of - production of primary products was more or less a protected industry you know but it was something that I thought that I needed to do and she got around to understanding and agreeing to it in the end. I didn't

22:30 particularly want to just run away and do it and defy my parents because I was brought up in a good home environment.

Did you hear about the sort of things - white feathers and that sort of thing for blokes…?

Yeah.

Did you have any experience of that at all?

No there was none, not up to that stage there might've been later on after the Japanese came into the war. I'd heard about it in the

23:00 First World War but I didn't know anyone that had been sent one or anything, no.

Can you recall where you were or how you heard of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor?

I was at Redbank Camp, yeah, it was announced there pretty well immediately and we went into what you might call panic mode.

23:30 Everybody was allocated slit trench arrangements and fire hat duties and it was only a couple of days after the Declaration of war they had drills of you know get into your slit trench. Fortunately I had fire duty on the hut because I remember the first time they went down to the slit tenches they had about four feet of

24:00 water in them and they made them get in.

Can you tell us how that affected the mood in Australia?

Well it wasn't probably too bad in the early days but when it got into the January area and the Japanese were having so much success with such

24:30 rapidity things became to be looking fairly glum and everybody was starting to think you know what's going to happen to us. Well the Yanks were just arriving but they didn't have any equipment assembled quickly most of their planes were coming

25:00 crated and they were carting out to Amberley and assembling them out there. The navy had been fairly decimated in the Pearl Harbor episode and we didn't know what backup they had because at the same time they committed themselves to the European theatre also and

25:30 the troops that did arrive here eventually and we encountered at Buna and Sanananda in New Guinea they were absolutely, well you could say useless because they were untrained and poorly led. [General Douglas] MacArthur was pushing everyone to the limit trying to get a victory well he got his first victory at Milne Bay.

26:00 That was the first defeat of the Japanese on land by any forces up to that point and then they were successful after - well Blamey made himself very unpopular because he called the fellows on the Kokoda Track cowards and which would have thought was quite unfair at the time and

26:30 but then they reassembled and were able to get back to Kokoda so that was also a victory but he wondered, McArthur wondered at any cost to clear the Japanese from the Beachhead. He didn't care what it cost. That cost Australia a lot of lives in that period from November to the fall

27:00 of Sanananda in January 43 yes.

What was the opinion by the Australian troops towards McArthur at that time?

Well I don't know that we'd've formed a particular opinion of him but later on we weren't too sure of his – when we sat down and analysed it we weren't too sure of his capabilities or his

27:30 mode of operations of putting us into some of the positions that we were put into. They pushed on regardless a lot of the places I don't think were properly equipped for the job but he didn't seem to have a great

28:00 deal of regard for the lives of as long as he could record a victory. But then the sad part it wasn't an Australian victory it was allied victory which to this day doesn't give us a great deal of credit for a lot of the fighting that was done in the early stages of the Papua New Guinea campaign.

28:30 Later on when we got better organised and had campaigns, well the Balikpapan campaign, I don't really know why it happened. The only reason I could see for it was that they just wanted to keep us battle hardened in case they had to either go to Japan and fight to

29:00 take Japan or they were going to send us to recapture the Singapore Malay area. The Japanese that were in the Halmaheras and Borneo no they weren't going anyway they were only going to sit there and starve to death anyway because by this time their shipping lines had been cut and they had no means of resupplying them. Well

29:30 maybe they could've lived off the land and it would've been fairly difficult for the local populus under their cruel regime sort of thing. But there wasn't any great need I don't think for our participation you know.

You hear a lot about the shift of alliance for Australia between Britain and the US [United States] during World War II do you have any comment on that?

Yeah well

30:00 I think the position of the Brits [British] was pretty tough of course at the time. They were fighting for their lives in the Western Front and the desert and America was not at that stage going to participate. It was only the fact of Pearl Harbor that brought them into it and changed the

30:30 attitude so probably the Britans adopted the attitude that they had to save their homeland so they had to fight the Germans and what they had in Malaya was all they could spare. I think probably we got the idea that we had been abandoned

31:00 by them to a certain extent but then of course then they'd lost their main battle fleet in the early part in the sinking of the two battleships in the early encounters off Malaya so yes there was a bit of a feeling we weren't getting any support from them. But there wasn't much we could do about them. And then

31:30 Churchill was fairly adamant that the troops that were coming home from the Middle East that were to participate here were to be sent to Burma. He didn't – they ran in and out of Colombo, Ceylon as it was then I think a couple of times before [Prime Minister, John] Curtin made the decision that they were definitely coming home to defend

32:00 our homeland so yes it created a bit of uncertainty I think.

In your opinion if the Japanese had've successfully taken New Guinea was Australia next?

Well I don't have any doubt and if they had've been successful at Milne Bay they would've because they would've immediately launched an attack on Port Moresby

32:30 and the people on Kokoda would've been doomed anyway and once they got Moresby I don't doubt they would've assembled an Army there and attacked the northern part of Australia anyway. Whether we could've – the fact that the Americans had come whether that would've diverted them from that train of attack I don't

33:00 know but yes I think that they may've tried.

How much did the conditions change once war was declared over? Was it an immediate thing? Or was it a gradual thing?

No it was fairly immediate. Well we were vigilant for a few days after just in case. See we weren't too sure whether the message had got through to the Japanese.

33:30 You sort of still had to keep your vigilance up in case that you might've encountered a pocket of them that hadn't been informed. But generally they started to come in and surrender and we established a prisoner of war camp at Balikpapan and a matter of fact the fellow I was talking about Bob McMasters, and Bob was a fine specimen of a man and

34:00 he was one of the Sergeants that was in charge of the prisoner of war camp at Balikpapan and they had great respect for him because of his overpowering statute. I went down to visit him a couple of times at the Camp and I wasn't little fellow myself and walked through the huts and the areas where they were

in and they used to bow and scrape

34:30 to you and we used to think this is the way to go. It was the boot was on the other foot. Still I had a lot of bitterness for them at the time and the things that they did and that and I suppose you can forgive but you can never forget. I don't know that even to this day I trust a Japanese.

35:00 Maybe my trust is misplaced but I don't think I'd ever make a friend of a Japanese.

How about the personal mood change when you finally realise you're not going to die in this Godforsaken place?

Oh, yeah well I suppose it was indescribable really. A matter of elation and no more of the discipline

35:30 was relaxed and yes it was a great feeling actually. I suppose like a bird being let out of a cage freedom of flight sort of thing. All you anticipated was your getting home and getting on with your life or making some arrangements to get on with your life. Some people

36:00 maybe - a lot of them didn't have anything to come home to. A lot of them took to drink and one thing and another which was a shame. We had a fellow Noel Connors who was the RAP [Regimental Aid Post] Sergeant he was probably the next best thing to a doctor you've ever seen. There wasn't anything he couldn't do or treat or anything but

36:30 he was a gambler too I suppose. He came home and he gambled away any money he had. Doctor McGreggor who has been the medical officer that he served under for a long time thought the world of him and he provided him with money when he was short of money. He used to come to the GPO and there would be a money order there for him and he'd have to

37:00 give identification to collect it and of course he knew me so I always had to identify Noel. He came in one day, he came in to where I was and his current fad was snuff. He had this great big tin of this snuff and he pulled the lid off and spilt it all over the damn place, oh God. But it was a shame to see a man with the capabilities that he had, get himself into

37:30 that condition and he eventually took to drugs and many years ago he died from the effects probably from an overdose of drugs. But there was fellows like Woodby Young and Staff Murdoch they were gamblers and drinkers and they came home – Whimpey used to run the two up game and he came home with quite

38:00 a lot of money and he came home and Tommy Burns he'd be before your time – he was one of the up and coming fighters. There was a film made about him he came from the Lamington area or somewhere down there and Whimpey went to the Stadium and I think he put all the money he ever owned on Tommy Burns to win the fight and McPatrick knocked him out in the 1st Round or something you know but they were those sorts of fellows.

38:30 I saw two blokes that came home from Buna after doing all that fighting and surviving and they were going home on leave, one fellow lived in north Queensland, Claire Hanessey and the other fellow Porky Edwards lived in Adelaide and they went to a two up game and for one spin of the penny they put every penny they had in their pay book win or take all.

39:00 And I think Claire won it and Porky was penniless and had to get to Adelaide on his leave. But he had mates they provided him with money. He came back and gambled again and all these sorts of things. And to think that people who were on 6 bob a day you'd wonder where the money came from. On the boat going to New Guinea on Manoora I saw blokes playing and they had up to

39:30 3,000 pounds on the table in front of them and this was coming from blokes who were supposed to be on 6 bob a day. Some of them had probably gambled elsewhere and had won money and they brought it along and [(UNCLEAR)] somebody else had won it off them. It just went on and on, they were born gamblers. They'd gamble on a fly crawling up the wall you know not think anything of the amount of

40:00 money they were gambling. I used to look in my book every time looking for my 3 bob a day or whatever it was I was getting and say oh I can't afford that. I got very generous along the line, one of the Officer's Batmen I used to pay him to do my washing. I think it was only 6 sixpence for a shirt and a pair of trousers or something like that. He had access to an iron so he used

40:30 always look a bit taper when the other fellows wouldn't. The Colonel's Batmen, Rangy Muely, his name was George. And when he went to the Middle East after they'd come back from England and the standard greeting apparently of the Arabs [(UNCLEAR)] in Egypt was apparently 'Hi George' and every used to say to Reg 'gee whiz a lot of these people around here know you George'.

41:00 They'd changed to Rangy R-A-N-G-Y, and if you called him George he'd fight you, yeah he was very adamant about that. He was the colonel's batman. He ran the two up school and he never washed the colonel's clothes he paid somebody else to wash them and he used to wear the colonel's clothes and one day he got caught

41:30 out because he had to deliver a message to the colonel who was somewhere in the field and he was sent away and he had the colonel's safari suit on, no rank or anything on it. He delivered the message and

the colonel looked at him and he said ‘aren’t they my clothes you’re wearing Muely?’. Rangy said ‘yes sir’ never hesitated. But a good bloke a wonderful bloke.

INTERVIEW ENDS