Australians at War Film Archive

Robert Caporn (Ian) - Transcript of interview

Date of interview: 20th August 2003

http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/723

Tape 1

00:47 **Just to start with if you could give us a brief overview of your life from the very time you were born up to where you are now. Just don't go into too much detail 'cause we'll come back**

01:00 **and go into detail.**

Right, okay. Well I was born in Waikerie, South Australia on the River Murray on 23rd March 1921, and I don't remember anything of that. Went on from there, my family moved back to Adelaide and my mother and father had a shop at,

01:30 just outside the railway station at the Semaphore in South Australia, in Adelaide, and we lived there for quite a few years. I started school at Le Fevre State School at Glanville, just outside Semaphore. And at that stage my mother was running the shop and my father was working as a civilian at

02:00 Keswick Barracks in Adelaide and finally we – they sold the shop and he still worked at Keswick Barracks. And he was also doing sports reporting for the Advertiser newspaper in Adelaide. He used to report on the wrestling and all that sort of thing. Then finally

02:30 in 1932 I went to Colonel, a Government State school, after they sold the shop, and in 1932 we moved to Melbourne and he was made the Staff Clerk Central PMG [Post Master General] Department in Melbourne and we

03:00 lived in Bentleigh for a few months, and I went to Ormond State School, my brother and I. And then they rented a house in New Street, Gardenvale, near the corner of Martin Street and I went to Elsternwick State School and then Elwood Central School and then Melbourne High School. And then finished up in Melbourne High School in 1937 and with

03:30 Intermediate Certificate. And joined the Commonwealth Bank in 1938. And when the war started my father re-enlisted as an officer from the First World War he went back into the army straight away. And I was finally called up in the army

04:00 in 1941 – 42 and went into 3rd Divisional Sigs. And the Divisional Signals, the whole of 3rd Division moved slowly up through Queensland and finally went to New Guinea in early 1943.

04:30 And then up to Wau, and when the Japanese were at the bottom end of the airstrip at Wau and we flew into Wau in the DC3s. And then I was sent on a job between Wau and Bulolo, along the power line and while I was doing that I got scrub typhus and

05:00 I collapsed. When we got back to Wau, after about 11 days I got back to Wau and I was carrying some battery rounds off the big charger and I collapsed and they shot me around to the casualty clearing station and was then put a DC3 the same day and down to Port Moresby into the 2/9th AGH [Australian General Hospital]

05:30 and I was in hospital then from about March '43 until about August. Finally finished up after the 2nd 9th AGH in the 2nd 10th in Moresby when the Centaur was sunk on the way up to bring us home, had to wait for the Duntroon for another month, and came back on the Duntroon. And

06:00 then down to Greenslopes. I was flown down from Townsville to Brisbane and to Greenslopes, and then down to the Coastal Clearing Station at Burleigh Heads and I was there for about 3 weeks and then I was taken up to Brisbane and that's when I got taken into FELO [Far East Liaison Office],

06:30 in the Far East Liaison Office. And after the war – discharged at the same time as all the3rd Division fellows and then went back into the bank and gradually went through the bank and finished up the last 10 years as Relieving Manager

07:00 of Victoria. And retired in 1981 and been here ever since.

Okay good. We've got the same birthday by the way.

23rd March, you're joking. Well I never, small world again.

Okay, so you were born in '21 and grew

07:30 **up in South Australia. So tell me about those early years what were they like?**

Yeah.

So tell me about those early years, what were they like?

I don't remember anything of Waikerie of course, because we left there when I would've been about 9 months I think, 9 or 10 months. I'm not dead sure on dates there because I was a baby in a pusher, so I don't remember anything of it. My father was working on the fruit box up there, at the time. But

08:00 Adelaide, first I can remember is the shop, the Semaphore and the Railway Station just there, sort of outside the front door of the shop, and the steam trains filling up with water down at the big water tower at the end of the railway platform at the Semi, and the big long pier at the Semaphore. And

08:30 my father had an old Morris car… I've forgotten now, an old car anyway. And the first I remember really, is a funny story, was the old Doctor Bolland who lived about three doors away from the shops in an enormous great big grey stone house,

09:00 just before – in between the shops in Military Road, and he had an old Renault car and I let the handbrake off his car one day, when I was a little kid, and the Renault car finished up running across the railway line, and there was panic on Semaphore Road for awhile. Then I can remember starting school at Glanville, at Le Fevre, and I used to go from there.

09:30 My maternal grandmother didn't live far away from the school and I used to walk from the school down to her place each day for lunch. And then finally, when they moved to Colonel Light Gardens, it was to a new house that my father had bought at Piccadilly Circus, at Colonel Light Garden. And then we had four years there from 1928 till

10:00 1932, and I was at the school at Colonel Light Gardens, was quite good, and there were a lot of migrants in Colonel Light Gardens at that stage. It was a new suburb and a lot of English migrants and so forth but it was quite a good thing. And then when they moved over to Melbourne. The Melbourne business was -

10:30 we used to go – we lived at 10 Wheatley Road at Bentleigh and for the first 3 months after we came over here, late in 1932, and my brother and I went to Ormond State School. We used to have to walk the whole length of Wheatley Road up to Ormond. Then

11:00 I can remember my father used to do relief, or used to help at Bentleigh Post Office on a Saturday morning. He was Staff Clerk Central and he was a telegraphist so there was no worry. My mouth used to drop because he'd be standing at the counter talking to customers and the sounder would go for a telegram, and it'd all go into his

11:30 head and he'd never have to write it down and he'd finish talking to the customer the sound is going the whole time, and then he'd go down and type the telegram. It was quite staggering to watch him.

So you grew up with signals at an early age?

Yeah. And he'd been a postal telegraphist before the First World War. Because before the First World War he was Post Master at

12:00 Menham. And in those days they were Post Master Telegraphists, you know, the whole lot and that's how he got into signals in the First World War. But then we moved down to Gardenvale and then I went to Elsternwick State School

12:30 and was there until – that would've been '33 and then finished the 6th grade at Elsternwick State School and then went to Elwood Central, which was F and E Form, which was the old 7th and 8th grade in the State School, and did that at Elwood. And

13:00 then from there to Melbourne High in what, 1936 – 1937 at Melbourne High School and the – from that, as I say, I went into the bank and worked in what was, in those days, the old Bonds and Stock Department in

13:30 Collins Street. And when the war started, of course, they did all the War Bonds and so forth in the Bonds and Stock Department and that kept us very busy until… One thing, the Commonwealth Bank, we all used to laugh about after the war - of the 98 percent of the men in the

14:00 Commonwealth Bank at the beginning of the war, 98 percent of them enlisted all finished up in the army.

Of those that worked there?

Yeah, 98 percent of the male staff in the Commonwealth Bank finished up in the Services. In RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force] or navy or army. You know, different ones like Harry Knight for instance, was just one of us boys

14:30 when he came back, when we were all examiners in Savings Bank Melbourne, examining the posting of the ledgers and so forth. And Harry Knight was one of us in the line and he disappeared one day and we said, "Where's Harry?" And they said, "Oh, he's down at Government House." And we said, "Oh, what's going on?" "Oh," they said, "you'll see it in the paper in the morning."

15:00 And he went down to Government House and he was invested with his Distinguished Service Order. In the navy he was a skipper of a mine sweeper and he'd gone in single handed and cleared the mines of the Lingayen Gulf prior to the landing. You know, I just thought oh! But he finished up the Governor of the Reserve Bank.

15:30 **Why do you think so many people from the Commonwealth Bank joined up?**

I don't know, it was just the way we were. I don't know, I don't know whether it was patriotic or it was just that the fellows - I really couldn't pinpoint what it was. They all knew something. What they used to do with the bank was that they had

16:00 what they called the 'retreads' during the war, and the fellows up to 70 who'd retired already, they brought them all back to help during the war.

At the bank?

Into the bank, but mostly the Commonwealth Bank during the war was run by the women. And women tellers, and that was the first time women teller appeared. And

16:30 after the war of course, they were all taken off the counter and we had a few incidences where they did their lolly when the found that they couldn't go on doing what they'd been doing for the whole of the war.

Did their lolly? You mean they didn't like it?

They didn't like it, didn't like being taken off. But that's understandable, but it was…

Did most of those chaps come back to the Commonwealth Bank?

Oh yeah, there were one or two

17:00 who didn't but ones like the – the one that I can remember was Reg Topp who was my OC [Officer Commanding] of ACT [Australian Commando Training] Section in 3DS [3rd Division Signals] and he stayed in the army and he finished up as a Major in the Army Service. He was over in Washington and all that sort of business. Australian Military

17:30 bank in the Embassy in Washington. But the great bulk of them though, came back to the bank. A fellow that was Manager of the Hyatt, was a Military Cross winner from the Middle East. There was a lot of them you know, it was hard to find a fellow of my age in the Commonwealth Bank that wasn't an ex-serviceman.

18:00 **So in the 20s when you were growing up your father had a good job and I don't imagine many people had cars. Were you quite affluent?**

Oh reasonably, we didn't have – they never had money to splash around and when we came to Melbourne in 1932 he couldn't afford a car in Melbourne, and from

18:30 1932 until the beginning of the war we didn't have a car. We had one in Adelaide but when we came over here, no. It wasn't until – he didn't get the first car here until after the war and then there was no worry.

Was he employed right through the '30s?

Yeah, but sort of on and off in various jobs, but

19:00 he – I can remember him marching in Adelaide in the late '20s when the Depression was on, and I can remember going into Adelaide near King William Street and they were marching down – all the Public Servants were marching down, "Give us back…." whatever percentage that they'd lost – they'd all had their salaries reduced by 10 percent or something, I think it was.

19:30 Because that was, you know, we never without anything to eat and I never had to go to school in bare feet or anything like that but you didn't have it to splash you know.

What sort of food did you eat during the Depression?

Any – whatever the normal stuff there was, no worry there.

20:00 One of our delights was to go down to Port Adelaide as little kids, and when the trawlers came in to the Port Adelaide Bridge and the big fishing trawlers'd come in and they used to get a wire ring like that

with a couple of hooks on the top, and you'd go down to the trawlers at the wharf and they'd put the fish on the wire ring and

20:30 you'd get a dozen fish on the wire ring for a shilling. We'd have this beautiful fresh fish because they were still flapping when they pulled them out, out of the trawlers. From fish, good feed. We were staggered when we came to Melbourne and Melbourne didn't have fresh fish. It was always frozen fish in Melbourne and we couldn't believe it, you now. It was fresh always, in Adelaide.

21:00 **So your father was in World War I. As a boy, as opposed to what you know now, but as a boy what did you know of his experience?**

Well, we knew because he was pretty well involved with the army with Keswick Barracks and so forth, and we knew that he always marched on Anzac Day and so forth.

21:30 And he had a lot of friends who became Major Generals and Lieutenant Generals and whatever, who were in the army with him in the First World War. And you sort of always had that military, the military background there knowing what he'd done and so forth.

22:00 And he enlisted, first of all in the 32nd Battalion in South Australia, in 1916, and when they left Australia he was a Sergeant then and he… The Battalion was decimated in the Western Front. They went

22:30 into the trenches one night and approximately 1,000 men in the battalion. They came out next morning with under 200 of them left. They were nearly all killed and he was one of the lucky ones and…

Is that something he told you?

Yeah, and then because the battalion had to wait on

23:00 reinforcements they, at that stage a memo went round if there were any PMG telegraphers. They were starting signals in the First World War at that stage, and he being a PMG telegraphist he put his hand up to say he was and he was sent then to England and he went to Officers Training School in England, and then

23:30 went back to the Western Front in 1st Australian Corp Sigs, as a Lieutenant in the Wireless Section. And at the end of the First World War he was a Lieutenant in 1 Australian Corp Signals, and when the Second World War started he enlisted three weeks after it started and he was promoted to Captain pretty near

24:00 immediately. And the x-rays were done and so forth, and he was made Australian Military Liaison officer in Bombay and shot straight across – he went over in the Queen Mary to Trincomalee and then up to Bombay from there. And he was about something like a year in Bombay,

24:30 and the x-ray that was taken here before he went away, the chest x-ray caught up with him and there was a spot on his lung. And they hauled him back to Melbourne, and he was shot into Heidelberg and they – the first time the operation was ever done in Australia, they removed his lung. Removed

25:00 one lung and he was really upset because they took away his VX number and took him out of the AIF [Australian Imperial Force] . You know, he was VX 43369 and he was very upset. And he fought them over it. It took about something like six months I think. He had two V numbers in the meantime,

25:30 sort of business. And because he lost the lung they reckoned he was medically unfit to stay as a VX. But he finally got his VX 43369 back and he was promoted Major and made CO [Commanding Officer] – made Adjutant of Z Special Unit when they were at 'Airlie' [name of house] in South Yarra. And

26:00 he was there until M Special Unit was formed in Brisbane. And he was promoted Lieutenant and made CO of M Special and he was CO of M Special at the end of the war. So there's always been that – after the war he came out of the army and they had a Rehabilitation Section of what was then Social Security Department,

26:30 and he was then put, brought in as CO of the Rehabilitation Section of Social Security in Victoria. And Director of Social Security in Victoria was a fellow named Collopy, John Collopy and Dad was his second in effect, and he stayed there until he finally went out

27:00 when he was, I think he was 58, when medically the lung business caught up with him and he had to retire. But he was made a TPI [Totally and Permanently Incapacitated Pension] straight away and he lived till he was 86. He did pretty well. They lived at Upwey for a good many years and they finally sold the house there

27:30 and went up to Surfers Paradise. And that's why Heather and I used to go up there quite a bit with the kids because they had a house on the Isle of Capri, which was great.

He seems to have talked to you about World War I quite a bit and had – that's quite unusual for that generation. A lot of the men didn't talk about the war at all and I wondered how he spoke to you

28:00 **about it? Was it deadly serious?**

Well, he didn't go into specifics in the sense that he never told us individual things of what happened other than the sort of thing I knew. For instance, that he'd had trench feet which a lot of them got in the wet trenches,

28:30 with their feet in water the whole time. And he finished up in hospital in London with trench feet, not that it affected him after the war as such. But that sort of thing I heard about but I didn't really hear… you sort of picked it up, little bits of it over a period of time without him actually sitting down and going through a full story.

29:00 **Was he gassed? Do you know if he was gassed?**

No.

No.

No. He was lucky.

The spot on his lung?

No, no, he had pleurisy as a child, that was where that came from. It turned out that it was a soft melanoma. It wasn't cancer but they couldn't check it. Being the first time they'd done it in Australia, that

29:30 operation in Australia. A fellow named Officer-Brown did it at Heidelberg and it wasn't until they got the lung out that they found out what it was. He had a big scar around his chest where they'd opened it up. But oh no, he used to get very short of breath afterwards but remarkable the way he kept going.

Did he speak with a sense of pride about…?

30:00 Oh yeah, he never ever boasted about it but he – you knew what had happened and that was it.

He marched every year in the Anzac Parades?

Oh, he was always at the Anzac Marches with his 1st Australian Corp Sigs particularly.

30:30 **And did you go along?**

Oh, as a little kid we used to always be on the side watching.

And did they play two-up?

Not that I know of, no. I don't remember seeing it no. But it was just one of those things. It was just sort of accepted that he was ex-army and that was it. And he loved his – he played Lacrosse and he rode. He

31:00 stroked the South Australian Eight after the First World War between – when we lived in Adelaide, and he was quite proud, he was very proud of that, that he was the stroke of the South Australian Eight and the Kings Cup, thanks.

So when it came time for you to join up, how much influence did he have on

31:30 **you?**

Well not much, he asked when he went away – my brother was younger than me, and he said to me when he went to India, he said to me, "Don't you join up, you've got to look after Mum until I come back," and so I stayed where I was. And

32:00 it wasn't until he was back here that I was called up. And of course then, at that stage he used his influence – one of the fellows who was at Officers Training School at 1 Aust Corps Sigs in the First World War, Les, I can't think of his name now, he was the

32:30 Quarter Master of the 3 Div Sigs at that stage, Les Montague, and they'd sort of grown up together in the First World War. And Les asked for me, when I was called up, he asked for me to go into 3 Div Sigs, now that's how I got into Signals to start with.

Did your father think it was a good place to go in Sigs? Why did he think Sigs was so good?

Oh yeah. Out of the firing line

33:00 mainly. I mean you could get in to trouble as I did but you weren't in the front line. That's what it came down to, particularly Divisional Signals which were your communication lines between your Unit Headquarters and your Brigade Headquarters back to Division, and they weren't the

33:30 actual Unit Signals. The Divisional Signals were your ones at the back feeding all the communication between your front line units and your Divisional Headquarters. And the classic example was how we worked in Divisional Signals. Old General Savage always used to laugh about the fact that

34:00 at Wau and 3 Div Sigs the – at one stage they wanted the Japanese to think that the Divisional Signals

had completely lost communication and the 3 Div Sigs blokes so that it was done so it didn't

34:30 sound like it was engineered. They gave all the signal wireless section blokes the wrong frequency – gave them all the wrong crystals so that they didn't know who was where, and he said we thought that by doing that we would be able to have loss of communication for about 24 hours. He said

35:00 what we didn't realise at Division was that you fellows had been with one another for two to three years - you knew all one another's fists on the key, you all knew what you all sounded like. He said it took exactly 10 minutes and you were all back in communication again and he said it completely threw the whole thing.

How did you recognise each person's finger? What was

35:30 **characteristic?**

It's the way you key and each one has a different sound to it in the sense that it's the way the fellow does his keying, and you can tell if that's Ralph or that's Ken or whatever, and they just went up and down the frequency until they found one, and oh, there's Ken and got on to him that way.

So when you say you had the wrong

36:00 **crystals, would crystals meaning frequency?**

All the transceivers we had in the army were crystal so you were given one crystal in the morning and that was the one you used.

Oh, right a natural crystal?

Yeah, and the next day you'd be given a different frequency. Each crystal was a different frequency so that

36:30 you didn't know, the crystal was a little box and it had the frequency stamped on it, which frequency it was, but you didn't know until you got the crystal in your hand what frequency you were going to be working on. Whereas these days it's all manual control but in those days it was all crystal control.

Did you

37:00 **have a crystal set as a boy?**

Well, yes I did before – in Melbourne. I used to make radios myself. I used to make them and sell them. I used to go into Vealls and so forth, Vealls and Homecraft in Swanston Street, and buy the bits and I used to make the sets and sell them.

37:30 Even when I was working in the bank, just for something different.

So you were already pretty fascinated with radio and signals?

Yeah, just the fact that you could do it.

I suppose you grew up in Semaphore as well?

Oh yeah, yeah.

There were a lot of signals going on then?

But then of course by the time I was in signals the old signal flag business, the original Divisional

38:00 Signals they used to use, that had stop. It was all cable and radio. And ACT Section, A Section did with the radio Section, B Section was the cable laying Section, D Section was the cable operators. And the telephone operators manned the

38:30 switchboards and that after the cables were laid, and then M Section was the maintenance and so forth. On the radio I still talk to one of our M Section blokes who lives up at Gosford and he's on the radio and I've got my own bit of radio and we normally, two or three times a week, we still chat to one another.

Oh really, hand radio?

Yeah.

We're just at the end of the tape.

Tape 2

00:35 **Now can you tell us about your training when you first joined up?**

The training in signals was first class. I couldn't have done the job in FELO with the training 3 Div Sigs

gave us. The officers that we had in signals, from the CO

01:00 down, were all first class blokes and they all knew us personally and it was one of those things. We started off, when I went first into the army we went into Camp 17 at Seymour. While we were at

01:30 Camp 17 two of us were selected to go down to RMIT [Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology] , was Melbourne Technical College in those days, and Fred Johnson, who now lives at Mermaid Beach in Queensland, and myself were sent down to do the Signal Electrician course at Melbourne Technical College. And we were, all the army fellows

02:00 from various Divisional Signal Unit including 6th Division which had just come back from the Middle East. We were all billeted at Caulfield Racecourse in the grandstand. You wouldn't believe it, in July and August it was freezing. And we were three months at Melbourne Tech, and

02:30 we did the full Electrician course at Melbourne Tech. And we used to go in on the old four wheel trams from Caulfield Racecourse, not the bogey trams, the old four wheels. And our classic thing going into town in the four wheelers was we had them one day and we went up the whole length of St. Kilda Road, past Victoria Barracks,

03:00 with the brakes on the end platform of the old four wheelers. One end going down and then the other end going down and it went St. Kilda going, bang, bang, bang, bang, lifting the wheels off front and back – it went the whole way up Swanson Street. Over Princes Street making a hell of a noise and but –

03:30 immediately after that of course, they took the four wheelers off bloomin' business of taking the troops into Melbourne Tech and we got the ordinary bogey trams. We couldn't do it from then on.

What's the difference between a four wheeler and a bogey tram?

Well the old four wheeler trams were the little short ones with only four wheels on them

04:00 you didn't have two bogeys like you have on the normal trams.

What's a bogey?

You know, you've got the bogeys at the end of each carriage, each tram has a four wheel bogey underneath. You've got a four wheel bogey at the end of the tram which is a swivel so that it can turn and there's one at each end of the tram. With the old four wheel trams there were only four wheels on them,

04:30 two at the back and two at the front and they were short and you could lift the wheels off if it started to rock but of course, they were small trams and…

They were still cable trams?

No, no, electric and, as I say, we got the bogey trams, the full sized bogey trams from then on. But then when we went back,

05:00 Fred and I went back to Seymour and the unit was there for quite a few months after that. We did the driving courses and all that sort of business, as well as the telegraphy courses and learning the Morse Code and all that sort of thing. And our final driving test for instance was up and down from Mount

05:30 Buffalo. And from Seymour we went right up to top of Mount Buffalo in the days when it was a gravel road. Then the unit was transferred to Bonegilla and the division sort of, the whole division started to move up. Division Headquarters, 3 Div Sigs and all the brigades gradually started to move north.

06:00 We were at Bonegilla for a month, about a month or so.

Still 1942?

This would've been early '42, and then finally onto the trains at Bonegilla and all the trucks and transports and everything were loaded on the flat bed trucks on the trains and

06:30 we went up to Beenleigh in Queensland. In amongst all the Germans in Beenleigh because it's a strong German community Beenleigh, and then the Division was camped there for quite a long time.

Were the Germans interned?

No, no they were farmers there in the area. They were farming but you knew you were in a German area.

07:00 And while we were there the American Liberty ships were just starting to come in, in their numbers and a brand new Liberty ship, the Rufus King, ran aground at the south entrance to the Brisbane River and break her back. She was bringing out all hospital equipment

07:30 and she was only 3 weeks old, and the Skipper mistook the south entrance for the Brisbane River for the other entrance and came in, in a rain storm, and at full speed ran her aground, and she broke just

forward of the Bridge. And four of us were, three radio operators, myself as Signals electrician and backup operator

08:00 we were sent out onto the Rufus King as she was unloaded, and I got an awful lot of cigarettes off the bond store on the Rufus King which I sent down to Heather's father because he was a heavy smoker. And they took us – Number 2 Dock Operating Company had just come back from the Middle East, they did the unloading

08:30 and we were calling for the Lighthorse from Brisbane to come out. And when I was stationed on Stradbroke Island, and with a Medical Hospital unit who was supervising which stuff was to come off first and so forth, being hospital people, and I lived on Stradbroke Island at night and ate and messed with the Americans. And then you'd go

09:00 out on light craft, and then the seas, where she was, the two halves were about 100 metres apart at right angles to one another, the forward bit was facing inwards and the back half had broken off and gone at right angles, and there were 200 yards between them, the two, and you could look straight into the engine room of the aft bit. And

09:30 the thing being a welded ship everybody had said that the welds would give. And it was the thing that fascinated was that not one weld broke on the Rufus King. When she broke every plate on the whole, broke through a plate, not one weld gave anywhere as she split straight down through the plates and so forth. It was quite

10:00 staggering. And 'cause everybody said, oh you know, welded ships, the welds will go, they will never hold up. No weld gave at all. And but she was beautiful inside. You should've seen the cabins and so forth inside the bloomin' Liberty ship, we couldn't believe it. Talk about luxury and talk about going out each morning on to it. And the hairy bit was, the first time on was

10:30 really hairy. There was about a 10 foot swell and you were on a little launch and there was a Jacob's ladder over the side of the Rufus King. And Number 2 Docker are riding up to his set, a Steam Donkey Engine on the deck, to unload the cranes, and we had to step off the

11:00 small craft that we were on, a launch, and then wait until she got to the top of the swell and then step across and grab the Jacob's ladder. And then climb up the Jacob's ladder. And on the side, and then coming down was even worse because at night you'd come down the Jacob's ladder and you'd watch it and as she came up underneath you she'd be 10 feet down, and if you feel, you'd go, and you'd have to stand on the bottom rung of the Jacob's ladder and wait

11:30 for her to get right up to you and then you'd step back on to her. The first couple of days was really hairy but by the time we'd finished we could do it without really stopping to think. But then after the Rufus King we went to Landsborough, and the Division moved to Landsborough into the big rainforest at Landsborough.

12:00 And the locals all told them they shouldn't go in there, and we had an enormous storm while we were in there, with hail and so forth, and we did not have one tent left after that. And it tore the tents to shreds through the flys, the tents and everything, just wrecked them. One of our fellows finished up with a tree falling on him. He finished up in hospital,

12:30 but Frank's still alive now he's alright. And, but they finally - after we left there we went to Maryborough. We were at Maryborough with – and that was the first place where we ran into Americans in any strength. There were a couple of American Divisions around Maryborough and we used to go into Maryborough

13:00 on, you know, sort of time off and from there back to Nambour. And why they went back to Nambour I'll never know, but we finished up back to Nambour and that was the best bit we ever had, that we are at Mount Melaney. The 3 Div Sigs were at Melaney, out in the dairy country out the top of, the back of Nambour, and it was absolutely beautiful up there it was gorgeous country.

13:30 And we used to go down into Nambour on Sunday if we had a bit of time off. One day there was about half a dozen of us walking down the main street of Nambour and this great big burly fellow in an Ambulance Officer's uniform stopped us in the middle of the street and said, "Hey fellows, do you want to come home for tea?" And he was the officer in charge of the

14:00 Ambulance Station in Nambour. And he took the six of us down home for tea, and every Sunday we were in Nambour, we went to the Ambulance Station in Nambour for tea, about six of us. It was a great place. And then from Nambour we were trained again and that's when we went straight through to Townsville. And the gem on the train

14:30 going up to Townsville was, the Melbourne Cup was on, and the bloomin train I don't know where it was, it was around Mackay or Bowen or somewhere, and the train was a steam train of course, and a whole lot of carriages and then flat trucks with all the trucks on and so forth, a very long train. And

15:00 we're in the middle of the farm country and there was a farm house a way out on the left. You could see this little farm house in the distance across a wheat field, and the train stops. And the Engine driver and the Firemen got out, walked down through and we could see them walking down through and we

thought the whole Divisions held up you know, and the full train stopped, and what we didn't realise it was Melbourne Cup day. They went down to listen to the Cup down at the farm house.

15:30 They came back and we went on our way they came back and told us who won the Melbourne Cup.

Very nice of them.

The bloomin' train stopped for about an hour. Oh the Queensland railways really shook us. And any rate we got to Townsville and the – we weren't over long in

16:00 Townsville, and the Duntroon was in the Harbour and we were all loaded on to the Duntroon because they took a few trucks, they didn't take a lot of the trucks up to New Guinea and the Duntroon went on to – up to Moresby, and we had the three ships. There was the

16:30 Duntroon, the Gorgon which was the Burns Philp, there was a Burns Philp aircraft carrier, and the Warramunga, the destroyer, was the escort and we went all the way – it took as 3 days I think, 2 1/2 , 3 days something like that, into Moresby. And then we were in Moresby

17:00 only a relatively short time before we were taken up to Wau when, at that stage the Japs had just been repulsed by Commando squadrons that were at Wau, the 2nd 7th I think was the Commando squadron, had thrown them back off the airstrip. Because the airstrip at Wau was quite peculiar it was on a slope like that and the planes all had to take off down hill

17:30 and they landed uphill. And the old DC3s would stand at the top, at the top of the strip when they were going to take off. And they'd put the brakes on hard on the thing, they'd rev the motors to full power and you'd see the tail lift off in the slipstream from the engines, and they'd take the brakes off and just go boom and take off, a short run to get off.

18:00 It was the training…

What was it like when you first arrived at Wau?

Well, the worst of the fighting was over. The Japs had been pushed back to the bottom end of the strip down to the Bulolo River at the bottom. And we weren't

18:30 actually shot at but about a week before they'd been firing at them. We got out without that – our camp was alongside the strip, on the north side of the strip and you could see the big gold mining dredges down on the river for, you know, in the distance but nobody would go down there. But after we'd been there

19:00 for a little while we saw – one of the funniest things I saw there was when a Tomahawk fighter had been shot up over Salamaua way and he came back and he came over the hill at the back of the drome and said he was coming in. And there were 6 DC3s at the top end waiting to return to Moresby,

19:30 and this poor bloke, we could see he was in trouble 'cause he was coming round and he was flying like that instead of flying steady. And he couldn't get his wheel down. They'd hit him over Salamaua way and he landed her at the bottom of the strip on the belly. And I was standing alongside the strip at a water tap, filling up a kerosene

20:00 tin full of water, and I saw him go past and land right alongside, and he skidded to a stop on his belly and threw the canopy back and jumped out of the bloomin' thing. And he no sooner got out and it caught fire, and all the point five cannon shields in the thing started to explode. And the DC3s at the top end of the strip were suddenly getting little holes in their rudders at the top end.

20:30 Well they got out of there so fast I've never seen anything so funny in all my life. God they went for their lives. They finally towed him off.

They took off or just got out of the planes? Did they take off or did they just get out of the planes?

Oh yeah, they took off. They went for their lives, got out of it. But then after that I was – we did a toss up. There had to be a Sig

21:00 electrician and a couple of radio telegraphers and what they had to do was the big power transmission lines, the big towers between Wau and Bulolo - weren't being used because they'd blown up the power, the Commandos had blown up the power station and they wanted to use the

21:30 cables on the transmission towers as telephone circuits. So we had to go around and take off all the branch lines up to Eadie Creek, and so forth. Disconnect them so that we could use it as a telephone circuit. There were three of us and we had a big, long, wooden stick ladder which was as heavy as lead, and because we had to get the step ladder to get up to the point in

22:00 the towers where the ladder started, because there was a gap of about 10 feet between the bottom of the ladder on the towers and the ground, and you had to use the step ladder to get up to that. And so it took us – it's 11 miles air line between Wau and Bulolo, it took us 12 days to walk it because you're up and down like this.

22:30 .Cause all the towers are on top of the ridges naturally, and you had to go down the valley and up the other side to get to the next tower. It was a hell of a job.

Were you in enemy territory?

Well, the Japs were all around. We didn't see any but they were there and any rate when – what I didn't realise we were sleeping in the kuni grass at night

23:00 and it was the worst place we could've slept. We didn't know that and, 'cause we had never heard of scrub typhus, we didn't know it existed. And any rate when we got to Bulolo, at the other end, they had a jeep waiting for us and they drove us back along the bitumen road through the -

23:30 up the Bulolo Valley, back to Wau and we got back to the unit and the job was done, it was working. And any rate, a couple of days later I was carrying a couple of 150 amp hour, 6 volt batteries down to the big charger and I passed out. And I went out like a light and I came to with

24:00 the 2IC [Second In Command], Laurie Barber of 3 Div Sigs, he was a Major at that stage, and he was a solicitor in Melbourne, very nice bloke, and he's squatting on the ground. I'm the Private, and I came to and he's squatting on the ground with my head in his lap and he's patting me on the cheek and he's saying, "Wake up Cappie, wake up."

24:30 **Caring approach.**

Yeah, any rate they shot me round to the Casualty Clearing Station on the other side of the drome and the doctors said to me, "Have you got any pimples on you son?" And I said, "Oh yeah, I've got a big one under here, under my armpit." And he said, "Let's have a look." Oh it was a boomer. And he said, "Oh, oh right, you've got scrub typhus." I said,

25:00 "What's that?" And he said, "Well you're not going back to the unit son, you're going straight back to hospital." And the DC3s were on the strip and they shot me up to the strip and they got my pack from the unit, which was 300 yards away, it wasn't that far to get and there were a plane load of fellows

25:30 who'd been wounded. There were some wounded ones. They were all walking wounded but they were wounded ones, some malaria ones and I was the scrub typhus one. I was still walking, I felt alright you know, I thought it was a bit silly being sent back. And got back to the airstrip at Moresby and an American Captain had the roll of those that were on the plane and we're all standing around him

26:00 and he's ticking, he'd call the names and he was ticking as each one said 'sir here', you know, and he got to me, I was last one, and he got to me and he looked over the ledger to look for a stretcher on the ground and I was standing right behind him, and he called my name and I said, "Yes sir." He said, "You shouldn't be standing up." And he ticked me off. Any rate he insisted and they carried me into the ward at the 2nd 9th AGH and I felt

26:30 silly, I reckoned I could walk. Any rate I went downhill very rapidly at that point, from that point on, in two weeks I went from 10 stone to 6 stone, in two weeks and I couldn't eat and the fellow in the next bed to me used to try and feed me. He used to put his arm round me and sit me up in bed and try and spoon feed me 'cause I couldn't even pick up the

27:00 spoon. And finally, what used to happen with malaria, the temperature of the malaria goes up and down like a yoyo. If you graph it, it goes up and down like this and with scrub typhus it doesn't, it goes up and sits at about 101 and it just sits there.

27:30 And then it finally gives a spurt at the finish, it goes through to about 104 and usually that's when they died, and only 10 percent of those of us who got scrub typhus ever lived. 90 percent died. And when the thing, I went deaf and I couldn't hear, and

28:00 it was about 3 in the morning, I moved my head on the pillow and I heard the brush of my ear against the pillow, at about 3 in the morning, and I called out, "Sister I can hear." And she came racing into the ward, the night Sister in charge, she threw her arms around me and gave me an enormous big hug and she said, "Cappie, you've won, you've won," 'cause I could hear again. Any rate the girls were gorgeous, they used to, the Sisters

28:30 used to get me, because I couldn't walk, and they used to get me and hold my wrists, one each side of me, and they'd carry me out if there was a film on, out in the grounds of the hospital, they'd carry me out and sit me down, one each side of me and hold me up to see the film. But then I had to wait for the hospital ship…

29:00 **Interrupted…**

A comedy film - one night rather, when the film was on the Japanese bombers came over and the two girls, I didn't know them from Adam, you know, they were just Sisters in the ward,

29:30 they threw me under the wooden bench thing on the ground and then lay on top of me. Some of the girls, didn't know them from Adam but they were lovely girls. Any rate, we had to wait for the hospital ship to come up to clear the wounded and the cases off. And

30:00 while we were waiting at 2nd 9th AGH the Centaur was sunk on the way up, the hospital ship, so we were all transferred to the 2nd 10th AGH, the other hospital, and we had to wait another month there for the Duntroon to come up. We were finally all loaded on the Duntroon and there was ship load of walking wounded malaria cases,

30:30 and there were 5 of us, were scrub typhus patients and we were loaded on to the Duntroon and when we got back to Townsville we were all offloaded and the 2nd 12th AGH was on the beach at Townsville and we were – the whole ship load was

31:00 put into the 2nd 12th AGH. During the day all the names gradually were called out one after the other for the – to be taken down to Brisbane. All the others were put on the train to go down to Greenslopes Military Hospital in Brisbane.

31:30 Finally the 5 scrub typhus patients, we were left late in the afternoon or mid afternoon and then the other 4 scrub typhus patients their names were called out and they all were sent to Mount Isa for rehabilitation and I'm left, and I'm sitting in the hospital at tea time and I'm the only one there and I think, 'God they've forgotten me'. Any rate

32:00 the next morning the CO of the hospital, Lieutenant Colonel come in and said, "Caporn, pack your bags, son I've got to take you down to the drome." So I packed my bags and he took me down to the drome at Townsville and they put me on a Dakota and I was flown down to Greenslopes, down to Amberley, and then ambulance from there down to Greenslopes Hospital, and of course 3 days later

32:30 the troop train arrived with all the rest of them. And I'm sitting up in the ward on my own, they all start to troop into the ward and they looked at me and said, "You rotten bugger, how did you do that?" They had 3 days on a train and I'd flown down. Any rate, after about 3 weeks in Greenslopes I was sent down to Burleigh Heads to the 101 Convalescent

33:00 Depot at Burleigh Heads, which was right at the creek, where the creek runs into the sea at Burleigh Heads. A beautiful spot, you were right on the beach you know, it was lovely. And 'course Burleigh Heads to Southport, in those days there was a bit of bitumen going through the sand dunes and they were all for sale, the blocks of land, and it was just sand dunes and the big sign

33:30 posts that were on each block you know, 40 pounds a block, and we all looked up and said, "You've got to be joking, who'd pay 40 quid for that?" Little did we know. Any rate, finally after being at Burleigh Heads for 3 weeks thoroughly enjoying myself on he beach, the CO of the Convalescent Depot, a young Captain came and got me and said,

34:00 "Pack your bags son, I've got to take you up to Brisbane." I said, "What's going on?" He said, "I don't know," he said, "I've just received orders from Victoria Barracks in Brisbane to take you up. I've got to take you to this address in Windsor." And any rate – went up to – got into the staff car with him and he drove me in the staff car all the way up to

34:30 Windsor in Brisbane, to this beautiful old Victorian mansion at Windsor, up on the bluff, at a place called 'Kirkston'. An absolutely magnificent old home, right up on the bluff where the main north road and the tram goes around the bottom of the bluff before it heads north again, and Kirkston sitting right on the top of it. When I got there, there's

35:00 a few cement huts in the grounds and this beautiful old building and there's Dutchmen - army, navy, airforce - and Americans, and I looked at it and thought, what the heck's this, you know, never seen anything mixed up like that before. Any rate, I went into the building and a Captain met me

35:30 and said my name and I said, "Yes sir." And he said, "Well the CO will see you in a moment, take a seat." And I sat down and finally they took me into this room and there's this Naval Commander sitting behind the desk, John Proud and, John Charles Rookwood Proud, and he

36:00 said, he asked me a few questions about what training I'd had and what I'd done and he explained to me that he could requisition troops from infantry battalions or artillery regiments and he could just get them when he wanted them. But Divisional Signals because it cost so much to train us, he couldn't do it and he explained to me that a Divisional

36:30 Signalman costs about 1,600 pounds to train and as I was fully trained and had a group, a crystal as well as a radio operator would I like to join him. And I shook my head and he said, "Well I can't tell you what we do. If you come

37:00 and join us, if you're prepared to join us and you pass the security check," he said, "you'd be promoted to Sergeant immediately." And I thought, oh boy 10 and 6 a day against 5 and 6 you've got to be joking, yes, you know, and I said, "Righto." And he said well you'll just have to sit here, when the security check is finished in Melbourne we'll – I'll let you know. And so I sat on my tail

37:30 there for 9 days and apparently the Federal Police went into the bank in Collins Street and, 'cause they all said to me afterwards, "What did you do wrong? We had the Federal Police in here asking all questions about you." I didn't know anything about this up there.

Can I pause you there because we're at the end of the tape.

Tape 3

00:31 **Okay, it's recording, fantastic okay, look - now Colin [interviewer] moved over a few things. I'd like to avoid the war period so far, try and stick towards your pre-war life. Your schooling background, you went to quite a few schools all over. Can you walk us through some of the sort of traditions that these**

01:00 **school would pass through about Anzac. How was Anzac celebrated?**

Well, generally it was more so in South Australia than Victoria. South Australia, the Anzac Day and the business of singing a national song and so forth, was

01:30 very solidly entrenched in the South Australian schools and not in Victoria. Every morning the assembly at the school used to be out in the school yard and we used to sing the Australian song first up every morning, never missed in South Australia, and I was quite surprised when I came to Victoria and it wasn't there you know.

02:00 And…

Why do you think that's the case in South Australia?

Different Education Departments. And the different Education Departments have a different way of doing things. For instance the level of the various school curricula was different in the two States.

02:30 When I came to Victoria I was about 12 months ahead of the corresponding level in Victoria, in maths. I just sat back and waited for them. And English I was 12 months behind. The difference was quite staggering. As I say, the maths, mathematics

03:00 arithmetic, algebra and geometry, in South Australia was a good 12 months ahead of Victoria for a corresponding grade but English was way behind. So the two Education Departments were quite different. I virtually sat the first 12 months in Victoria with all algebra, arithmetic and

03:30 geometry and I waited for them to catch up to me. I was way ahead of them. But it was just the way the two State Education systems worked.

Now you lived in Adelaide is it?

Yeah.

Did they have much of a German population there in Adelaide?

No. No, all the German population was up in the Barossa Valley where all the wine making is now.

04:00 There was wine making then certainly but that was the German area because all the names up in the Barossa Valley are all German names. And not that anybody really took any notice of it. I mean it was just one of those things, and that's where the German migrants went. The two ones I noticed most were the Barossa Valley with Germans and Beenleigh in Queensland for Germans, but Victoria there was no

04:30 big German population in Victoria at all. And the two towns as cities were quite different, Adelaide to Melbourne you can't compare the two. Adelaide's very much a smaller town and they've got a different way of looking at things. For instance,

05:00 when we moved from Ormond down to Gardenvale the house my father and mother rented in New Street was next door to the Tracys. Now old Dick Tracy was Mayor of Brighton and he was the one that owned the 'New Idea', ladies magazine, he started it and

05:30 he and his family all lived next door to us. Now when we move, the day we moved into the house next door, Dick's wife, Mrs Tracy, came in to our place with a tray with morning tea and a whole thing and welcomed Mum and Dad into the house next door. My mother was staggered. She said that would never have happened in Adelaide in a mad fit, they'd have left you alone. But Melbourne

06:00 she came in and said hello. You know, just different, different city but the schools that I went to were all State schools. I never went to a private school and the Ormond State School, which was the first one in Victoria was only a short business. It was I think from September until the end of the school year.

06:30 And then we moved round just before Christmas down to Gardenvale and then my brother and I went to Elsternwick State School, that would've been 1933. And the old

07:00 teacher I had in the class with me, or it was my class teacher, there was an old digger from the First World War who had been badly gassed. And his – poor thing – his face used to blow up like this when the gas would play up with him even those years later, after the First World War. But he was a very nice bloke. And then from there my brother and I

07:30 were both in the same grade level but they suggested to my parents that my brother go to Gardenvale Central and that I go to Elwood Central and that's just what happened. I went to Elwood Central and my brother Duncan went to Gardenvale. And I used to walk down Martin Street and get the tram round to

08:00 Elwood and then walk across the canal at Elwood and into the Central school there. But Elsternwick State School always used to intrigue me because that's where I met Keith Miller, first cricketer, and Keith and I were – Keith was a year older than me and I can remember the school ground at Elsternwick State School, the cricket pitch

08:30 was parallel to the canal, the open canal in those days, and the school ground was right along the canal, and Keith Miller when he was, what he'd have been 11, I was 10 or 11 and he was 11 or 12 somewhere in there and the whole school would try and get Keith Miller out. We'd all bowl,

09:00 we could never get him out. He'd just keep belting the balls across the canal. And I'll never forget when we went to Melbourne High and one of the other – one of the teacher's at Melbourne High, the maths teacher was Bill Woodrift who was a test cricketer, and Bill Woodrift always used to make the boast that he found Keith Miller and we used to just look and say you've got to be joking, we found him

09:30 when he was 10 years old and we still couldn't get him out. But the schools, as I say, the curriculum level and the various subjects were different in the two States which was sad really because you know, you never do catch

10:00 up on that period that you miss for English, for instance. I never really caught up with that gap whereas maths I had no trouble with at all, it was easy and – but as I say, I found that the schools were very good. We had the Elwood…

10:30 I had two very good teachers at Elwood, both women and the first one in the F Form was, oh dear I can't think of her name now, and she, very nice old thing. Years and years later when I was manager of one of the branches of the bank,

11:00 she walked into the branch and saw my name and she asked the staff to get me and went out and there she was at the counter and she said, "Hello Mr Caporn, how are you?" And I hadn't seen her since I left school, you know. And this was when I was in my fifties and she never forgot. Just one of those very good teachers, knew me straight away, and the other one was the teacher at Melbourne High,

11:30 a funny little fellow who was my Form Master at Melbourne High, and a maths teacher, a superb maths teacher. And Tim Ritchie, he finished up Headmaster of Williamstown High School. But Tim, years and years later Heather and I were walking down Hampton Street with our boys, and we were walking

12:00 down, and he used to lived down the other side of Hampton and he's walking up the other way and I recognised him as he was coming up, and propped right in front of me and he looked at me and he looked at her and he said to Heather…

Yeah okay, you were talking about your schooling.

Yeah, well walking down Hampton Street and Tim's coming the other way and he

12:30 propped in front of us and he looked at Heather and said, "Don't tell me you married him?" Lovely fellow. He was a dead-eyed dick. He was a very good tennis player. A little fat roly poly but he could play tennis beautifully. But he was absolutely dead-eye dick with a piece of chalk and he'd be standing on the platform and – at Melbourne High School if you're on the

13:00 first floor or the second – the first floor of the big building there at South Yarra you looked out over Chapel Street towards the Electrolux Building, on the other side of Chapel Street, and if you started to daydream and you were looking out the window, you know, you weren't listening to what Tim was on about the first thing you'd get is a piece of chalk right on the end of your nose. He'd never miss. Dead-eye dick he was. All he would do is that and he could hit you there

13:30 every time. I'll never forget it, he'd always say the same thing, he said, "Why goest forth thou from the coast man, doest thine eye rest upon some beautiest form? Get on with your work." Funny old boy but a lovely fellow. He was one of those teachers who

14:00 had the uncanny knack of being able to tell a story that always explained what he was trying to get across. If he was giving you a maths problem and he could see that it wasn't going over, that the class wasn't getting it, he'd tell you some funny story, and in every case the funny story would always explain the bit that

14:30 he was trying to tell you. He'd have the place in uproar laughing but when you stopped laughing you realised oh, now I know what he meant. He was just one of those natural teachers. He knew how to do it without even trying, you know. And I wouldn't have missed him for the world. Whereas Bill Woodfull, the cricketer, was hopeless. As a teacher he was worse than useless. As a test cricketer, yes, but

15:00 not as a teacher. And my brother was at Melbourne High, was in Bill Woodfull's class and he didn't get anywhere near the business that the way Tim Ritchie could do it. It was one of those things. But then, as

I say, Melbourne High School was a very, very good school. And I played

15:30 Lacrosse when I was there in the school team, and then after the war time I played Lacrosse for Melbourne High School Old Boys when they were playing A Grade Lacrosse. And I played with them right up until the time I went into the army. And we used to go all over Melbourne playing on the Saturdays, you know. In those days it was a matter of going by train and tram to where you were

16:00 going, you know. But it was a – certainly it was a diversified business, it certainly wasn't one where we sat in one place and went to one school right there. It was Le Fevre at Glanville in Adelaide, Colonel Light Garden School in Adelaide, Ormond State School in Melbourne, Elsternwick State School in Melbourne, Elwood Central School in Melbourne and

16:30 then Melbourne High School. It was a few schools altogether but it didn't do us any harm, really. I mean you learnt to stand on your own two feet very rapidly. But it was one of those things but, you know, one of the things that I've never been sorry about it at all, and others have looked at me and said, "Gee how

17:00 did you go to all those schools?" It was no worry. But yes, when I went into the bank my father took me up to Collins Street. He was Staff Clerk in PMG Department for Victoria at that stage, and very nice

17:30 old bloke was the State Manager for Victoria at that stage, in the bank. And he took me up to see this – my father took me up to see this old boy at 367 Collins Street, and you walked into his office and the pile on the carpet was about that deep and beautiful oak furniture and so forth, in the State Manager's Office in Victoria. And Gordon Murray Shane

18:00 was his name, and he had a talk to me and then two days later I got the letter to say I could start. You were on probation for six months and that was different because there were all sorts – mostly the banks in those

18:30 days there was a good mixture of different schools, private schools and so forth that they all came from. Probably 50 percent of the staff, the male staff that was taken on by the bank in Victoria was either Melbourne High School or Scotch College and the other 50 percent was all the other schools in Melbourne. But it was, so I knew a few of them but not over many

19:00 that were in there. I went into this Bonds and Stocks Department to start off with, not in the general banking down below, on the 2nd floor, and in those days it was all hand posted ledgers and so forth. You had to hand write the things in, there were no – there were adding machines – but no

19:30 computers of course. And I was in there, in that Bonds and Stocks Department and when the war started all the bonds work and so forth and that, until I went into the army. When I came out of the army, I didn't go back into Bond and Stocks I went into

20:00 Commonwealth Bank Head Office in Melbourne, and that was in the ground floor at 367 Collins Street, in those days.

I don't want to go too much into the post war but what about say, for instance, with your schooling in terms of its history curriculum, did you study history? That was normally mandatory at that period wasn't it?

Oh yeah, yeah.

And what sort of history did they teach you?

Just English history and a bit of Australian

20:30 history, but it was mainly English history. We didn't get much else, and Australian history it was about 50/50 of those two.

What did you understand about the First World War?

The things that we were taught, that it was brought about by – I don't think anyone understood the machinations

21:00 at the back of it but the Sarajevo business with the Duke being assassinated and so forth and the Germans going in and starting it and they had to stop him. That was as much as we understood about it. And I mean, you're 9, 10, 11, 12 and you don't really understand what was going on.

21:30 But you know, it's just one of those things that's a bit hard to remember now what was the fine detail you knew. It was very much British Empire at that stage. When I was a

22:00 kid, you know, Britain had done the right thing and we supported her and that basically was the way it sounded and the way it came across to us. As we found out in the Second World War when it came down to the crunch we were left on our own. And

22:30 when the Americans came in, sort of back stopped and helped, but the First World War was very much a business of well we're a colony you do what you're told.

Did you believe in Empire? Do you still?

I think that it's good to keep the Commonwealth going together as a

23:00 Commonwealth not just an Empire. Now that's two different words, and the Empire is very much Britain being King Cocky and everybody else fall around and do what's necessary. Whereas a Commonwealth is an association of as near equals as possible and that's a different story altogether, and I'm very happy with a Commonwealth but

23:30 not too happy with anyone's Empire.

So are you a support of the Monarchy? The British Monarchy?

Yes, for England but not particularly for us. I feel okay, let her be there as the Queen of England and the titular head of the Commonwealth, but Australia

24:00 I'm of the opinion that we should be a Republic, but that's purely and simply a personal opinion.

Why do you see Republic as something that's worthwhile as opposed to the status quo?

Well it gives us -

24:30 to my mind it means that Australia is a country in its own right, finally. To have a Governor General is fine. I'm quite happy with a Governor General as such but again it's the business, he has overriding power as was shown by Kerr and Whitlam.

25:00 When it really came to the crunch he could throw them out. I don't care whether it's Labor or Liberal, the point was that an unelected man was able to throw out an elected Government and to me that's wrong, and any Government should be elected by the people themselves and they should have the final say.

25:30 **Okay that's a great answer. Your parents political leaning, what sort of background did you father and mother have?**

Oh, very much right wing and very much Empire. Very much so.

Tell us about your dad, how would he talk about these things?

Not much, didn't hear much at all but you knew it was there. You daren't question it. If we suggested otherwise our

26:00 heads were bitten off straight away. I mean you knew full well that's the way he thought and you just didn't query it, and that was it, and you sort of think 'oh well that's the way it is'. It wasn't the matter of right or wrong, you knew well, that's the way he thinks. Where Heather's father was the opposite

26:30 And he didn't have agreed with it all.

He didn't agree with the Empire?

No, he was the State Government Analyst in Victoria. The Forensic Science bloke that did all the murder trials, produced all the evidence for the murder trials, and he wouldn't have a bar of it. Nevertheless he

27:00 was – that's him up there, and the old boy with the bald head is one of the three of them standing, but he was very much against the idea that Britain could control anything.

So his persuasion changed as a result of his experience at Gallipoli was it?

No, no, he was never in the

27:30 First World War. He was in the University of Rifles Uni, Melbourne Uni before the war but he never went away. He was a teacher and he was married during the war and he never went away, but he just did not agree.

Right, what did you know about Communism as

28:00 **well before and during the war?**

Well you didn't take particularly much notice because it didn't impinge directly on us but we – most of didn't agree with it and that was it. Whether the Russians, they were our allies during

28:30 the war. But the business after the war you sort of thought well, that was more America and Russia, one against the other keep out of it. And that's why most of the diggers deep down didn't agree with Vietnam for that simple reason. That was America's show, let her fight it. Why should we be there. Whereas the other was

29:00 very much we were in it whether we liked it or not. But Communism as such, most of us no, you've got to be joking.

With Communism?

Yeah.

So you don't agree with that system.

No, no, no. I think if you're working on

29:30 a way of life you can't have – you've got to have a system very similar to our own where there's a properly thought out welfare system which looks after the ones that are unable to look after themselves, and you only get advancement

30:00 when there's an incentive in some form to be able to do it. And Communism seems to me any rate, to dampen that down. They do what they have to because somebody's telling them. But nobody's saying 'oh I'll go out and try that' in themselves, and to me you know, I like to do my own thing.

30:30 But that's why I couldn't stay in the army after the war, there's too much regimentation. Well, I had to but I got out as soon as I could. As soon as my points came round, I was out.

Yeah, before the war also how did the Depression affect you?

Not much. My father didn't earn much.

Your father didn't earn much?

No, he didn't earn much but

31:00 he earned enough to be able to keep us clothed and fed reasonably well, but he wasn't rich by any means. And the fact, when we came to Victoria he had to get rid of the car and the job here, Staff Clerk in PMG Department in Victoria wasn't

31:30 an overly big salary. I think his salary was somewhere around 400 pound a year, that was all. But we never went for anything, we never – food or anything like that. We got clothing and that. They had to watch themselves. They couldn't spend it willy nilly but it was there. We never starved or anything like that.

Did you ever go hunting for

32:00 **rabbits or anything like that?**

No, no, no. In those days Rabbitohs used to come round to the house selling you rabbits and they were cheap. The only time I went hunting for rabbits was with Heather's father and he was a dead-eyed dick shot, and he took me up North Road, up Wellington Road one day, way up to where the Cardinia Reservoir is. And he had a 22

32:30 signal shot bolt action rifle and we were way up in the paddocks up the top end. This was after the war and he saw a rabbits ears sticking up above ground level, and it would've been 200 yards to that rabbit and he got it first shot. Bing, and the rabbit went over like this. First time I've ever seen anybody shoot a rabbit, and boy he was dead-eyed dick.

33:00 I doubt whether I could've got it first shot but he did. But well, there you go. But no, never had to worry about that at all. It certainly was never a – we hear of the poor things going on the Bluey during the Depression and so forth. Right in the middle of the Depression in Adelaide for instance,

33:30 my father always had a car. He had a Model T Ford or a Model A Ford or something like that. I can remember once going up north of Adelaide in the old Model T Ford, he had a Model T Ford Roadster, and my brother and I used to sit in the dickie seat at the back, and they're going along and the floorboards on Model T Ford caught alight and

34:00 I can still remember it. I would've been about 4 or 5 at the time, and a farmer came racing out, he was ploughing in a paddock near the dirt road and he came racing over with his shovel and he was shovelling dirt onto the floorboards of the old Model T Ford to put the fire out. But oil had sprayed out from the engine and had got too hot under the floorboards and they caught alight.

It's amazing isn't it...

You stop and think 'oh yeah'. But oh no...

34:30 **Okay, so how old where you when you joined up the militia? What year was that?**

I would've been 20 – 21 somewhere round about there. Because we were married when we were both 22 in 1944. So it would've been 21 – 20

35:00 when I went in, 19, oh 19 to start with yes, that'd be right. I was called up when I was 19. See they couldn't call you – early on they didn't call anybody up at 18. There was a prohibition, it must've been under an Act of Parliament that they couldn't send 18 year olds overseas. But

35:30 the only ones that could be sent overseas were 19 year olds and above so that there was no point really

in getting much in the army, in the early days when they had plenty there. They only took the 19 year olds, called them up to start with. Later on in the war, as they started to run out, the 18 year olds, and I can tell you stories about what happened to them later on

36:00 in the war. And they were kept in Australia until such time as they turned 19 when they were able to send them overseas. But that was the way it was at the beginning. But 18 year olds, I doubt very much that there were many 18 year olds in 3 Div Sigs any rate

36:30 because most of us now – there are one or two that are older but at the last reunion they were saying, well the average age now of the fellows in 3 Div Sigs were altogether the 70 odd of us, or 80 of us that are left, the average age is sort of 82 now. Just one of those things.

37:00 I'm just in average age. There are one or two that are a bit older, a fair bit older but very few, there are a few younger but not over many.

Okay, we might stop the tape there.

Tape 4

00:32 **Okay now being in the militia you said, for the sake of the camera here, you didn't feel any offence about being called a 'choco' [Chocolate Soldier - militia].**

No, we never heard it really. We saw it in the papers but we never had and if anybody had've said it to us we would have said, blow you Joe,

01:00 'cause we really had no means of getting out. For instance, when we were at Camp 17, the 8th Division was all setting up at Puckapunyal and a lot of us said we wanted to go with them and they wouldn't let us. They just told us, no you can't. We had no option, you couldn't walk out otherwise you would be charged with desertion so you were stuck with it.

01:30 And so it wasn't a matter of just saying oh well I'm going out. I can walk out of this and walk into town and join up the AIF, they wouldn't let you. Once it got to that stage you were in a jamb, you couldn't have done even if you wanted to. So we just stayed where we were and finally, as I say,

02:00 we were at Maryborough, the army in its wisdom decided that they would allow all the militia units to transfer to the AIF and we all went over in a body.

Practically the whole Division went?

Oh yeah.

The whole 3rd Division?

Our colour patch went with the grey background straight away.

Yeah, so the 3rd Division basically

02:30 **became an AIF unit, it was converted to a…**

Oh yeah, by the time we got to Wau we were, I would say 90 percent of the Division was an AIF Division.

Was this considered hostilities only sort of…? Was it converted to a hostilities only type of…?

Oh no, no, you had to be trained properly and then you went in to where they were needed. And

03:00 at that stage Wau was at the point where it needed to be taken back and they were looking at taking back Salamaua and Lae, where the Japanese were entrenched. They were entrenched all along the north coast of New Guinea. And from Buna and Gona, Salamaua and Lae, Malalamai, Madang, Vanimo, right up to Hollandia in Dutch New Guinea and

03:30 all that north coast was under Japanese control, and we were all on the south coast and in the centre. And the thing was to get back the north coast ones. And the first turn around was Owen Stanley business with the 39th Battalion when they threw the Japanese back. There were two things - the 39th Battalion did a sterling job with the number of troops

04:00 that they had and the Japanese mucked their own nest up. What the Japanese did, as I found out when I was back in FELO later, was that they bought something like 6,000 carriers, native carriers down from New Brittain to Buna and Gona to act as carriers for them on the fight over the Kokoda Track down to

04:30 Moresby. And when they got them into New Guinea they virtually ignored them. They wanted to beat them into doing what they had to do. They'd just carry for them and so forth and not feed them. And of course, the obvious happened with New Guinea natives they just disappeared into the bush, like a mist, they were gone. And the Japanese had no carriers. And they were trying to

05:00 fight and carrier all at the same time, whereas we had all the carriers.

Is that what happened on Kokoda as well?

Yeah. They finished up they couldn't do it, physically impossible. And the 39th Battalion, that's taking nothing away from the 39th, they did a superb job but the Japanese were under impossible conditions and they brought it on themselves. I mean the thing I found when

05:30 I got into New Guinea with Bob Cole, the New Guinea native wasn't doing what he did for Australia's sake or for our sake. What he did was because we were looking after him and he knew that if we looked after him he would be alright. There were no flies on him,

06:00 he wasn't kidding himself at all but we looked after them. We made sure that we fed them, we gave them trade goods and we looked after them when they were with us. And they darn well knew we did.

What do you mean trade goods?

Well, they needed a few things. Now when we bought carriers, for instance, when I was with Bob. We had tomahawks, we had

06:30 tobacco the old black rolling tobacco, we had rice, we had salt and we had vitamin injections. Now the combination of everything, now when Bob and I started to move – here I'm doing a little bit ahead of the story, at this stage I'm with Bob Cole with FELO.

07:00 Now there were two whites and twenty police boys, now when we moved the twenty police boys couldn't carry everything that we needed, the radios and the trade goods and everything else, and we would have to hire the carriers from the village. Now it would take 40 carriers to take everything that we needed to take with us and we paid them in trade goods, tomahawks, razor blades

07:30 tobacco…

Razor blades?

Yeah, razor blades. Yeah.

Is that for them for shaving?

Yeah.

Okay.

…tobacco and salt 'cause they badly needed salt in the centre.

Why salt?

Well thyroids. Their thyroids, all the Highlanders were all very bad thyroid cases and the only way to handle the thyroids was to keep the salt up to them. And if you've ever seen cattle

08:00 licking blocks of salt, that's the way the used to do it. We'd give them a block of salt and they'd lick it like this. They'd go mad trying to get the salt down fast enough and… But provided you supplied them with the things they needed to keep them alive and keep them happy they would stay with you. They would never argue with you but do exactly what you wanted. And the police boys knew it and it was Bob and my

08:30 job to keep the police boys on side and get them doing, and we had to get into the villages and keep the villagers on our side.

Right now, you would've had a monumental task here?

Oh yeah.

There's something like 450 languages or dialects?

There's 450 languages. There's no dialects, it languages.

So they're totally different?

Oh yes, that's why one village can't talk to another. The

09:00 villages, let's go back to the business with FELO, when I first went in, now Commander Proud said to me, when they finished the security check, he let me know. Nine days later he called me in and he said, "You passed the security check, welcome aboard Sergeant." He gave me

09:30 my three stripes and he said, "There you are," and he said, "now this is what we do." And he explained to me the work that FELO did briefly and he said, "I'll be in touch with you when I want you." Now he didn't leave me for long. About three days later I think he called me in again and he said, "Right back your bags," he said, "I'm sending you up to Moresby. I've got a job

10:00 I want you to do up in the Sepik River and," he said, "you'll be flown up on the Empire Flying Boat." And

so, next morning I was taken to the bay off Brisbane and the 'Coriolanus', the big Empire Flying Boat was sitting there in the water and I got on the Coriolanus, oh you've got no idea, big lounge chairs and

10:30 everything. I thought I wouldn't have called the King Mantle and we took off in the Coriolanus, I flew from Brisbane to Townsville in the Empire Flying Boat, a beautiful trip. About three or four miles off the Queensland coast, about 6,000 feet the whole way in the flying boat. It was a beautiful trip and I've never had a trip in a plane

11:00 as pleasant as that one, it was gorgeous. And then stayed at the Toc H [Talbot House] overnight in Townsville, and the next morning onto a Dakota, and that was coming down to earth with a rush, and then up to Port Moresby. And I was met at the airstrip by the CO of the FELO unit

11:30 in Moresby and took me up to the house at the bluff behind Airlie Beach, which was FELO's Headquarters in Moresby and met Bob Cole for the first time, never seen him before, and he must've wondered what the heck he hit because he was an ANGAU [Australia and New Guinea Administrative Unit] officer before he went into FELO. His Regimental Number was NGX46

12:00 and he was a Patrol Office at Angoram on the Sepik River before the war. He was what, eight years older than me and he was a Lieutenant and I was a skinny city slicker, never been near the bush in my life other than the Wau business with Sigs, and certainly

12:30 never had anything to do with natives. And we were, the next day we went out to a Catalina sitting on the harbour at Moresby, with 20 police boys and the two of us, and we fly from Moresby along the coast and over the Central Dividing Range to the upper Sepik River near the Dutch border,

13:00 which at that stage was 600 miles behind the front lines. And he landed the RAAF Catalina and we landed on Lake Panawai which was on the south, it was a lagoon on the south side of the Sepik, opposite the junction of the Yellow River and the Sepik. Now the Yellow River where it joined the Sepik at that stage, that was 1,000 miles from the mouth of the Sepik River, and the Yellow River was

13:30 about the size of the Yarra in Melbourne only running at about 10 times the speed. And the Sepik at that point, a 1,000 miles from the mouth, was about ¼ of a mile wide. Bob and I depthed it with an outboard motor it was 38 feet deep and running at 12 knots that was the Sepik. ¼ mile wide, 38 feet deep and running

14:00 at 12 knots. A hell of a river, I've never seen another one like it.

There's nothing like that in Australia, is there?

No, no, nothing like it at all. And it's fresh water 25 miles out to sea at the mouth. It's an incredible river. And any rate we landed on Lake Panawai and the – Bob had – when he landed the Catalina he bashed the

14:30 leading edge of the wing, the outboard of the starboard engine he bashed it against a big tree trunk which was coming out from the bank and when we got out on the – Bob and I were still on board and we got the police boys out on to the bank and finally I'm standing on the hull of the bloomin' thing and the pilot – and we said, "How are you going to get that back to …?" When he bashed the tree

15:00 trunk about oh, 8 feet of the leading edge of the wing on the starboard side had been bashed in where he'd hit this tree trunk. And we all looked at the pilot and said, "How are you going to get this back to Moresby?" He said, "Oh, wait a minute," and he got up and walked up on top of the wing and he walked along the wing and he bashed his heel into the leading edge of the wing where it had all been bashed in and he looked at it and turned round to Bob and I

15:30 and he said, "She's alright," he said, "the main spar is sound inside the wing," he said. "She'll get me home." And she did. He turned around and took it off and back he went. And any rate when we landed there...

Just you and Bob?

Yeah.

No one else?

And 20 police boys.

Okay.

Any rate the [Colonel?] Moss troops which was a part of,

16:00 an offshoot of M Special Unit they were a crowd put in at the junction of the Yellow and the Sepik to act as the backstops for the parties, the Intelligence that were working in the Torricelli Mountains and along the Sepik River. And they were at the junction of the Yellow, and about 10 miles down stream they had an outpost down there. But

16:30 Bob and I looked at the camp, the MOSS troop's camp, and when you were sitting on the Sepik in a dugout canoe you could look up – the bank was oh 15 feet high, 20 feet high and the trees under the –

there was a canopy at the top of the trees, and in the tree trunks you could look in and you could see the tents inside,

17:00 from the river, and Bob and I looked at one another and Bob said you know, “If they come up here with boats or something they can’t miss it. They’ll know it’s there.” The whole idea of us being in there was that the Japs didn’t know that we there. And any rate nothing further was said. There was a Major Barlow in charge of the MOSS troops and Bob being a Lieutenant

17:30 and I’m a Sergeant, we had no say, he was in charge of the base camp. What we would’ve liked to have done is to tell him to get back in the bush and out of sight. And, but, any rate, Bob then did the ultimate thing he turned round and roared bloody rookies at me. He sent me up with half, 10 of the police boys I think

18:00 put us in a canoe and I was shot off up the Yellow River to go to such and such a village up the Yellow River. I couldn’t tell you the name of the village and he said, “Wait for me there,” and of course at this stage I couldn’t speak Pidgin. And I was having great difficulty in understanding the Pidgin because when you don’t know it, it sounds like a foreign language particularly

18:30 when the New Guinea natives are speaking it and when Bob was speaking it. Later on when I’d been in there about a month, I could follow Bob, but it was a bit hard to follow the natives and I was shot off on my own and 10 police boys I didn’t know. And finally Bob caught up with me a few days later and we started off on the job. Now what his job was,

19:00 I was only the radio operator and he was the actual bloke doing the work and he used to code all the messages before he gave them to me to send so that every night I would get on the radio down to Moresby and pass on whatever messages he had for them, as to what he’d done and what was going on, and we start to

19:30 walk. Well I suppose we were in there for 3 months and I would reckon that in the 3 months living off the land we must’ve walked about probably 500 – 600 miles and it was hard yakka at times, but I gradually got stronger even though I was so skinny but…

20:00 **Did you ever encounter any Japanese?**

No, no they were on the coast.

Why didn’t they come inland like you were?

That’s where they were stupid. That was the way the Japanese were. They didn’t use their head. The Japanese, what we found was the Japanese would not go into the bush, they would not break bush. If they had a track or a road, yes, they would go along a road but there was no way they would go and break bush, and

20:30 if they had to actually break their way through the jungle they wouldn’t do it, and all you had to do was to disappear into the bush and they’d never find you. And that’s all we did, we kept out of their way.

There were Japanese patrols around there?

Oh yeah, they were around and they would – what basically what they would do is that they would from Vanimo – now we were behind Vanimo and Baro,

21:00 now if they wanted work done on the coast area – say for instance they wanted gun placements made ground level to put anti aircraft guns and so forth or whatever, they would send one of the coastal natives into – bully the natives in the villages inland, bring them back as labourers to do the job.

21:30 Now Bob - we’d grab him when he came back, find out what he was doing and then Bob would do a business on the ground and find out exactly where he wanted the gun emplacements, where the Japs wanted the gun emplacements done and so forth. Then he’d do a coded signal, then I’d send the signal off and the next day the Mitchells’d come over and blast hell out of the bloomin’ place that they wanted to put gun emplacements before they’d even started.

22:00 They couldn’t work out what was going on.

But surely they must have known there was an allied presence in the south…?

Well after that happened 3 or 4 times they woke up.

So this is the south west New Guinea we’re talking about is it?

No, north east – north west I’m sorry. On the north side of New Guinea and you’ve got the north coast with Madang and Vanimo and Baro

22:30 and Hollandia just over the border in Dutch New Guinea on the north coast, and the Torricelli Mountains are the coastal range inland from the coast, and then the Sepik Valley and then there’s the Central Range and then there’s the south coast on the other side of that, and the Fly River running down to Merauke on the…

Merauke is it?

Merauke on the Dutch New Guinea side

23:00 of the south coast.

Now can I ask you a question because you must've been liaising with the ABDA [Australian British Dutch American] Forces, the Dutch Forces in Western New Guinea?

They weren't there.

In Merauke?

No, well they were around Merauke but we never ever saw them. They were – we reckon when we were coming out – I'll get to that later – but when we were coming out, to give you an idea of the distances involved, for us to walk out from where we were at the

23:30 junction of the Yellow and the Sepik down to Merauke down the Fly River would've taken us a month and a half walking. Now that's how far it is. So we never even knew they were there. And, but all that went on, we were walking up and down, the parties in there were old George Stanley who was an oil search

24:00 fellow who was in charge of, supposedly we were one party but he wouldn't have anything to do with us. And he had a young, John Conboy, a Private with him and he also had Ray Ah Song whose father owned the Ah Song stores in Madang. And young Ray

24:30 Ah Song was about 18 – 19, Chinese boy, and he had run back – when the Japanese landed at Madang he bolted on his own and come over the Central Range and he met up with Stanley and – no wait a minute, Ray Ah Song was with Aiken but Stanley was with John Conboy and supposedly was,

25:00 supposed to be Stanley, Conboy, Bob Cole and myself, but Stanley would never let us near him. Now if Bob and I – we met up with him once and he made us camp a half a mile from him. He wouldn't have anything to do with us. He was a Naval Lieutenant, a real kook, and we did our own thing. The only other party we ever met in there was the M Special Party of

25:30 Aiken, Lieutenant Aiken, Les Bailey who was the Signal Sergeant like I was with Bob, and Ray Ah Song. And we had one day with them at one stage and the funny story with that was that we – Bob and I were talking to

26:00 Aiken and Bailey and we didn't know – we hadn't been told about Ray Ah Song and suddenly Ray Ah Song walks into the camp and there were – they had 20 police boys and we had our 20 and both of us had 40 odd carriers each. And you can imagine the mob that was there and Ray Ah Song comes in with a lantana vine over his shoulder dragging something

26:30 behind him, and we said, "What have you got there?" This nice little Chinese boy and he's got this enormous python. You've got no idea the size of it, it would've been that diameter you know, and green and yellow, it must've been 20 foot long if it was an inch and he's dragging it behind him. And

27:00 any rate an enormous amount of meat on it and it was dead behind him. And we said, "What happened?" And Bob asked the Police Sergeant that was with Ray what had happened and the Police Sergeant in Pidgin explained to him that they were walking along and the python started to drop, come out of the tree on to the Police Sergeant,

27:30 he was going to drop on him, and Ray had a German Luger pistol like I carried, and he shot the thing through the head and they dragged it back. With all those natives there we thought oh this'll feed a lot of them with the size of this snake and we asked them, well you should've seen their faces, no way would they eat snake. Not on your life and

28:00 we wouldn't either but we were surprised. And the only native in the whole lot of what 40 – 80 – 100 a 120 natives, the only boy that would look at the snake was a boy from Mount Hagen in the Highlands in the centre of New Guinea. Oh yeah, he'd have some but none of the others, they wouldn't even look at it.

Were they

28:30 **superstitious about snakes?**

No not superstitious – snake, you know – oh no.

They must've been terrified of those pythons.

Oh yeah. But after meeting with Aiken and Les Bailey they went off on what they had to do and they were doing straight intelligence work and where Bob and I were doing counter-intelligence and finding out exactly what the Japs were up to. And

29:00 feeding them back, not saying anything but of course, what we didn't know was that the Japs had cottoned on to the fact there had to be, with what was happening, that there had to be parties in behind the lines at this stage and they sent a boat party in big canoes up the Sepik to look. And the outpost

down river

29:30 from the junction of the Yellow River, which was some 10 miles down river, opened fire on the canoes, these big canoes as they went past. They sunk a couple of them. What they fired on them with was a point 5 machine gun, an American point 5 machine gun, it was a big fellow. Any rate some of the Japs got away

30:00 and got back down the river again, and this was towards the end of our time in there. And the next thing Bob and I knew – we didn't know this had happened we found out afterwards – the next thing we knew was that the – we heard

30:30 bombs dropping and what had happened we found out afterwards – that night I'd got a signal on the radio that we had to report back to MOSS Troops Headquarters at the junction of the Yellow, immediately. Well it took us 4 days to get back there. We walked for 4 days to get back there. And when we got back there we couldn't believe our eyes as we came down the Yellow River and looked at where that camp was. It was all black

31:00 and burnt out and what had happened was the Japs had these little single float seaplanes, they had one float on them not like the American small seaplanes where they had the two floats. The Japs had the single float ones, quite small ones and they came up the Sepik River below tree level looking to see what they could see and they spotted the thing on the left hand side as they were coming up river. And of course they

31:30 immediately went back and they went up with the bombers and they bombed the juice out of it, you know. And any rate, when we got back there Bob and I were talking and he said to me, he said, "We've got to get them out," because the MOSS troops blokes weren't fit. They'd been sitting in the base and doing nothing, and physically they weren't up to moving very

32:00 far and if we were jumped and they had to walk down the Fly River they'd never have got there. So the first day after the we'd got back, there were the 4 days when we were coming back and Aiken and Bailey and Ray Ah Song as well, and Stanley and

32:30 his young John Conboy, the whole lot of us finished up back at the base camp, and I don't know how many MOSS troops there were, there were a fair number any rate. And the Americans sent up 10 Catalinas to bring out the first stage lot and they all nosed into -

33:00 they landed onto the Sepik itself and they all nosed into the bank and Bob said to me, "Geez if the Japs come up and see them all there they'll strafe them you know, and we'll have to walk out down there. "So," he said, "get your walking shoes on because we're going to have to walk if they jump us." And any rate, luckily we got them all out. The ten Cats with about 19, I think in each Cat,

33:30 that was the first day's lot. And they were American Navy Catalinas not RAAF they were American Navy and the Squadron Leader was an American Captain, a Forwarding Captain you know, and he was the first one to go of. And the Sepik at that stage, at that point goes past the junction of the Yellow River going

34:00 up stream against the thing, it does a full 360 degree turn against a 1,000 foot bluff and comes back on itself, so at that point you couldn't take off upstream with a loaded Catalina. So they had to take off running downstream with a 12 knot current, which means the Cat has to get up on a step before it could take off, and it had to beat the 12 knot current

34:30 and they could only do about 87 knots anyway. The American Captain, Bob said to him, "How many do you want?" This was the day they were taking off the first lot and he said, "How many do you want to take?" And he said, "Oh, 21." And any rate we piled 21 into the Catalina plus the Catalina crew and he went off way up stream as far as

35:00 he could go before the river did the sharp turn. And he turned around and the river went for about a mile and a half down stream before it did a gentle turn to the left and it was trees all the way down. And he took off and I reckon he fell back off the step about 4 times on the way down you know, get up and… And all the American pilots were standing on their wings watching and when

35:30 it came to the next one he said, "19 in mine, not 21." He said, "I don't want to crash into those blasted trees." And any rate the whole ten plane loads got off that day. And I was in the 2nd day and 3 Cats came up for us the 2nd day, and Stanley and Aiken

36:00 in a Cat and I was in a Cat with our police boys and so forth. And Bob was left on his own and being an old New Guinea hand, that wasn't his worry you know, he reckoned he was right so he shot me off on the last day with the last 3 Cats and then on the 3rd day he came out. That was on the 18th December when the first lot went, the 19th

36:30 of December I went, and then on the 20th Bob, on the 20th December '43, Bob was in the last Cat that went up to get him and I brought our lot back and went up to the FELO Headquarters at Airlie Beach on the bluff there above the big American Camp at Airlie Beach,

37:00 and we were there for Christmas. And Commander Proud, our dear old CO, he sent a great crate of beer up for us for Christmas. We had a lovely Christmas and then Proud was a hell of a nice bloke. I had to bring 15, I've still got the Movement Orders there, I had to bring 15 of the police boys down. They were some of ours and some of Aiken's and so forth,

37:30 not all of them and I had to bring them down to Brisbane. They wanted them to go through and look at all the factories and so forth, in Brisbane, and show them what we were doing and I had to bring them down. Well it was a DC3 from Moresby down to Townsville and then a train from Townsville. And Proud arranged for a sleeping car which was unheard in those days, on the Queensland railways. And he arranged for a sleeping car

38:00 taken up from Townsville and we did the trip from Townsville down to Brisbane in a sleeping car. But the funny bit before we got in the sleeping car was that on the morning, we stayed at the Top Gates that night and I had these 15 police boys on my own and by this stage I was speaking Pidgin reasonably well and we got on to the platform and the RTO [Rail Transport Officer] who was a youngish

38:30 Captain, he said, "Righto Sergeant," he said, "That's your cabin there, it's been set up specially for you." What I didn't see was a Brigadier standing just behind us and he'd been up on an inspection tour round New Guinea and he, after he saw that it was an old fashioned sleeping car on the train and he called out, after I'd been told that that was a sleeping carriage for

39:00 us, he said, "I'm not having niggers in the sleeping car. I'm taking the sleeping car that's it." And the RTO looked at me and he said, "Take them off down the platform Sergeant. I'll tell you later." And I thought oh, I thought we've lost our sleeping car, a Brigadier turning round and saying that to a Captain. The poor Captain had no hope, the RTO. After about ½ an hour

39:30 he went like this up the end of the platform, and he called us up and he said, "It's alright Sergeant you've got your sleeping car." And I said, "What happened?" He said, "Well I just mentioned it to the Genghis on the railway yards at Townsville and he said they gave him an ultimatum, either the FELO troops get the sleeping car or it comes off the train. He said, "You've got your sleeping car."

40:00 **That's amazing, really. That's a good one. The Brigadier actually succumbed to that?**

Oh yeah, if he was going to have the sleeping car it was coming off the train.

Amazing.

Any rate, going down sleeping on the train.

We're actually running out of tape.

Tape 5

00:41 **Perhaps you could tell us a bit more about your work with the natives in New Guinea?**

When I first went in there of course, with Bob, I didn't know any Pidgin and

01:00 he very slowly got through to me exactly what the Pidgin was and I got myself into awful strife there at times. Early on, in the first month we were walking along the track and what used to happen was that when we were going, if we didn't have a – with the carriers and the police boys

01:30 one would be, either Bob or I would be at the head of the line and the other one would be at the end and the next day we would swap over. I'd lead it one day and Bob would lead it the next sort of thing, and you'd have 20 police boys and 40 odd carriers some days in between the two of us. And not long after we went in we were going up a gradual

02:00 descent, it was well above the floor of the Sepik River and on the southern slopes of the Torricelli Mountains and relatively dry, there wasn't much in the way of bush. And the track went on up the hill it crossed a dry creek bed, like a dip down like that and up the other side.

02:30 I was bringing up the tail of the line and I had the Police Sergeant with me and we're walking along and the lines going – go up near the dry creek bed and they all went down the dry creek bed for about a 100 yards, crossed over and run back and went back on the track we're on. And I thought this is bloody silly, I had a machine – the normal thing I carried was an Owen gun

03:00 which was slung over my shoulder. I had a German, long barrel Luger pistol on my belt, and the reason for the German long barrel was that they were both 9 millimetre, 9 millimetre rimless ammo and then I only had to carry one lot of ammo, and I had a machete in my hand. And we were walking up and all I could see was a lantana vine across the track and I thought oh, you know, that's damn silly.

03:30 And I just walked up and the Police Sergeant said something to me and I didn't understand him, and it was some Pidgin word and I just walked up to the lantana vine and gave it a slash like this you see. What I didn't see and I didn't know at the time there was a wasp nest right along side it, like that there.

Gee, they came out in their hundreds and they were all over my face.

04:00 Boy was I ever stung. My bloomin' face came up like that, that night and Bob said to me afterwards when I caught up with him he said, "What the hell happened?" And I told him and he said, "Didn't he say something to you?" And I said, "He said something Bob, I don' know what it was." He said, "Was it binatang?" And I said, "Yeah, that was the word," and he said, "You silly bugger that means anything that bites." I learnt after that 'binatang' you watch out.

04:30 But you know, you learnt the bits as you go. The other bit was, you can still see them there, there's a couple of little pin holes there and Bob and I had American hammocks and the American hammock had a roof and mosquito net sides and you slung the hammock between a couple of trees

05:00 and then you used 6 fairly big sticks to hold the roof and then you had the zipper on the side to get into the mosquito net. And one night we were down on the Sepik River valley floor virtually, and what I used to do was after the boys had slung the hammock for us

05:30 and they'd put up the roof, they'd job a couple of long saplings about 8 feet long you see, and then ram them into the ground and hold the roof up with those. I used to go round them and make sure they were in. And the main reason for that was one night, not long after we'd started on the business, we had an absolute downpour of rain while we were in them and the boys had used

06:00 very thing saplings to hold up the roof . And of course, with about 10 gallons, 20 gallons of water the roof had collapsed and we both got drowned you see, so I made sure it was a decent sapling and I was well in the ground. This night they'd picked long stakes that had lantana vine wrapped around them and I'd got round to the third one, going round checking the roof

06:30 put my hand on it and grabbed it and started to push and I got bitten, and I felt it go in on the little finger there and you can still see the marks there where the fangs went in. It was a little snake and I flipped it off like this and I called out to Bob, "I've been bitten I don't know what with." And he said, "Well stand still," he said, "if it was a death adder you've got 30 seconds if you move so keep still." So he came racing over to me I

07:00 was – I had American gaiters on and he took one look at the American gaiters – the little snake and it was only about that long he said, "Ah well, you'll be alright it's a tree snake." He said, "You'll have a head tonight but," he says, "you'll be alright." And so he said, "I'll better get the stuff out of it."

07:30 And he sucked the poison out of the business and put some Condes crystals which he had on the bloomin' thing. And that night every heartbeat my head went out 20 feet sideways like that and then came back in again, it was nasty. But his gem trick in with the boys was, on the beginning of the 3rd month we were due for a drop

08:00 from a DC3 to go over and give us a drop of trade goods etcetera. And I sent off the message the night before for what we wanted and gave them the map position where the drop was going to be in the middle of a kunai grass area, at the point where we were. Any rate the drop time came and we went out into the middle of the kunai grass with the police boys, and Bob and I and the

08:30 DC3 came over and he was only up about 200 feet over our head, the cargo door wide open so he could chuck the stuff out and he went straight past. And we though, 'blimey he's missed us you see'. Any rate that night we didn't know what had happened and that night garamut drums, the big drums with the long sticks that they – what they do. A garamut

09:00 drum is a piece of tree trunk about, from about there to the wall, probably about 6 feet long. And it's all hollowed out with a slit about that wide along the top edge of it and hollow in the middle, and how they get it out I don't know, and the ends are sealed up, and when you bang it with the end of a big stick like that it's an enormous boom noise. You've got no idea it's a real noise.

09:30 And despite the 450 languages in New Guinea, one village can't talk to another even, even two villages side by side one can't talk to the other unless they use Pidgin or the garamuts. They all know the garamuts. And we heard the garamuts start at around tea time and we listened to this and the police boys came up to us and said, "Oh they've got the drop, it's at such a such village," you see.

10:00 And they told us the name of the village and they said it's about a days walk down. The next morning we set off and I was at the head of the line and the track split like this and the usual business, they bannist [?] off the left hand branch of the track with a banana tree leaf

10:30 and it's right across the track. So I looked at the bannist and I thought, you know, so I waited for Bob to catch up with me and I said, "That's the way we should be going from what you said but they've bannist it off and he said, "That's right," he says, "I think they might have it, the drop, they don't want us to go in." So he said come on let's go. So we kept on walking past the bannist with the police boys and so forth.

11:00 And we got to the village and a big house tamburan you know, 120 foot long with a great big thatched roof and the whole bit. Not a soul, the place was empty except when you touched the fire stones they were all warm. So we knew they weren't too far away you see. And I thought I wonder what he's going

to do. And any rate,

11:30 after about an hour one of the old men of the village came in with all his bows and arrows, bows in one hand and his spears in the other and he laid them down on the ground. Bob did the same with his Owen gun, put it on the ground. They got the wontok, the one that could speak Pidgin and knew the local language and started talking to him,

12:00 and did he have the drop? No, no, he didn't have the drop, you know. And so this went on for a while and finally another couple of the men after a half an hour or so, another couple of the men and they got younger and younger as the time went on and when it's starting to get towards evening the women and kids started to appear all back in the village you see. They were all coming back. The whole lot of them, no, they didn't have the drop.

12:30 Finally, one of the police boys came back to us and he'd been scouting around and came back with a bit of parachute silk and he knew damn well that they had it then and Bob sort of suddenly said something rapidly in Pidgin to the boys and the police boys got all the women and kids and they herded them all into the house tamburan,

13:00 the whole blinkin' lot. And then they put a police boy at each door at both ends of the big house tamburan, they put another couple of police boys under the floor, because the floor was about that high, just in case they lifted the fire stones out and came out through the floor. They put one at each fire stone so they didn't try that trick and he locked them up for the night. Any rate,

13:30 the men all looked dirty and we thought, and I thought, I wonder what the hell he's playing at and he didn't say anything to me. Any rate the next morning he let all the women out and the men all promptly disappeared and they came back with the whole blinkin' drop. I think only about 1 percent of it

14:00 was missing. And I looked at him and said, "Gee you're a cunning old fox," didn't fire a shot and he got the whole thing back. I thought you ripper.

It was depriving them of their sex rights.

Yeah, yeah sex was powerful I'll tell you. But it was beautifully done just quietly. He didn't tell me what he was doing first but when it was over I nearly had the hysterics with laughter, you know.

14:30 He was right on to it.

You mentioned a 'one talk'?

A wontok is somebody who can speak Pidgin and can speak the local language and they always call them the wontok. And the wontok is the man that can make himself understood no matter where he goes because he's got the Pidgin and his own lingo, so that between the thing

15:00 there's usually a wontok pretty near, in every village. Even though the rest of them don't probably go near the coast to speak Pidgin there's one of them in the village will have gone down and worked on the coast sometime, and when they do that they learn the Pidgin while they're down there. You might have to wait a little while for the wontok to appear but

15:30 usually there's one of them that you can actually start talking to and through him you get to the rest of them, but and you pay them for what you get from them. If you've got to use them as carriers you pay them tomahawks or razor blades or tobacco, tobacca as they call it, or you know, salt or whatever it is they want, if you've got it. And

16:00 you usually – Bob also had – one thing that was a big help, he had vitamin injection stuff. He had the liquid vitamins and every now and then you'd go into a village and you'd find a couple of the little kids and they

16:30 really were gorgeous, you know. Some of the little children running around with not a stitch on them and they're beautiful little kids. And every now and then you'd hit a village particularly in the centre of the Island where their vitamin intake is low and you'd see a gorgeous little child about so big and like fish scales all over their body, all their skin was like fish scales

17:00 and it was a sure sign of vitamin deficiency. And Bob would get the wontok and he'd talk to the mother and he'd get them over and he'd give them an injection into their arm. You know, within 24 hours usually or within 48 at the most, those fish scales had disappeared his skin was back to normal and they reckoned he was marvellous. I mean when Bob'd do that they couldn't believe it and

17:30 they'd do anything for him and that's all he had to do. The other thing they used to look at our feet and they used to think they were hilarious. When Bob and I'd strip off at night we'd be down the river somewhere and you'd strip off and have a wash and so forth, and you'd finish up with maybe a dozen or more women from the village not a stitch on any of them,

18:00 and all the kids looking through Mum's legs watching you. And they're all pointing at your feet because our toes are twisted over with the shoes and of course their's are spread like that. Their toes are all wide apart and they reckoned our feet were hilarious. And the other thing was the colour. And you'd get to a village that hadn't seen a white man before and in getting to that one, one of our police boys was a

Buka

18:30 Islander, now the Buka people from Buka Island, B-U-K-A, now the Buka Islanders are the only people in the world who are jet black, they aren't brown, they're not copper coloured like the Manus Islanders for instance, which are a lovely new penny colour, the Buka is black and I mean black, and you can't tell where the hair starts and the face goes, it's incredible. And

19:00 we had one police boy who was a Buka and he was really black and had the biggest fund of dirty stories in Pidgin that I've ever heard in my life. He used to have the boys in hysterics till 11 o'clock at night, but Khaki was his name and the Buka, jet black, and his name was Khaki, but Khaki would start to have a wash. Well

19:30 what the women would do, they'd see Bob and I strip and in the end they'd pluck up enough courage and one of them would walk over and do this and try and rub the white colour off your skin and it wouldn't work. And of course the Buka'd be 20 yards away doing the same thing and then they'd do it to the Buka and that would send him off. He thought that was hilarious that they thought we were coloured

20:00 and he was coloured. He thought that was great, rub the paint off him. He used to go into hysterics. As I say they were lovely. The boy that saved my life was the Manus Island boy, Peni, P-E-N-I, but he was the colour of a brand new penny coin, the most gorgeous colour. He was 21 at the time and I was

20:30 going across the Yellow River and with all the crocs and everything else and I started to get carried off downstream, and the water got into the top of the big American gaiters and with all the weight on I started to get pulled off downstream and Peni dived into the water and hauled me out, 'cause he could swim like a fish being an Islander. And he said to me, I said to him, "Thanks Peni." He

21:00 said, "No good me losing you boss." I said "Whaname?" He said, "Oh you good fellow boss me no lose you pella". That was the reaction of them to you, you know if you talked to them and so forth. I found them very, very good. They were never a scrap of trouble. They did what they had to do and they stuck by you. And quite honestly Bob and I

21:30 couldn't have survived without those 20 police boys. There's no doubt about it at all. They were very, very good. And they were always there when they were wanted, never gave a scrap of bother at all.

Tell us more about some of the Pidgin phrases that you used?

Well that's the card that FELO did, all the airmen carried those, and it's in case they were shot down

22:00 and that's got the English on one side of it and the Pidgin on the other.

Did you ever make a mistake with the language and use the wrong words?

Oh you can, very easily. The funniest story I ever heard, and I heard it at Wau

22:30 before I knew Bob, but I didn't realise the significance of it when I heard it at Wau but once I got the Pidgin I realised what it is. Now the skirt that the police boys used with the triangular bottoms on the skirt, that was the laplap. Laplap means a cover of any sort but the skirt that the police boys was a laplap

23:00 and the Pidgin word for milk is 'suesue'. Apparently, the story at Wau when I realised what it was all about nearly killed me laughing, the fellow in the charge of the – I can't think of the – the Administrator of

23:30 Papua New Guinea, before the war used to have to go on tours around the area and so forth, and of course, Wau they had to fly in with the big 3 engine Fokkers. And he went up on an official tour to Wau and the Mine Manager put on a big dinner for him at night. And the Mine Manager's wife noticed in the middle of this great big dinner they were putting on

24:00 in this big hall at Wau, that the milk was out on the tables, just in the milk jugs, just sitting on the tables – and you know, the covers for the milk jugs with the little beads around it that they used to use in those days – and she wanted the boys to go, one of the boys to go and get the covers and put them on the milk jugs, you see. So

24:30 she turned round to one of the boys and said, "Go kiss him laplap belong suesue." And he went off and that was fair enough, that was straight enough in Pidgin, "Go kiss him, catch him, laplap belong suesue." So off he goes and he was an awful long time and finally he came back into the room

25:00 and he's holding up her bra. That was right, laplap being Sue Sue. It broke the boys up because – but you see that's how you can get trapped with Pidgin, what you say. It's very descriptive language in that if, say for instance you're going along and you

25:30 want somebody to go ahead of you and when they get to a river and wait for you on this side of the river, "don't go over just wait for me there, I'll catch up with you later". Now in Pidgin you say, "Now you go for big fella walk now behind you come up along big fella water now no good you break in water you stop along hap i come and wait along me pella, me kissing behind." Now

26:00 to a native it's dead simple. 'You go along now you stop along hap i come' – now hap i come is half he come, now the half he come is this side, now if you wanted to go over and wait for you on the other side you say 'now you broke in water now you stop along hap i go and wait along me pella', that's the other half

26:30 and so you've got to sort of work it out. 'Balus' is anything that flys, bird or any – one of the boys Khaki we gave – what we used to do each night for food, was Bob'd give – we had one 12 gauge shot gun with us and we used to give one of the police boys each night in turn we'd give him the 12 gauge with one cartridge and say, "Go along kiss him

27:00 kolakong belong me pella." And away he'd go and he'd come back either with a flying fox or a blue pheasant was the normal one, and they were as tough as boots I must add both of them. And they'd come back and this night, Bob got the 12 gauge out with one shell and he gave it to Khaki this night, and Khaki the Buka he goes off sort of thing, and next thing

27:30 he comes back and he's got two blue pheasant and Bob looked at me and said, "Did you give him another shell?" And I said, "No." And he looked at Khaki and he said, "Whaname this pella?" And he says, "Me give him one pella cartridge now you come back two pella balus?" Khaki said, "Alright boss," he said, "now me go around tree," he said, "we see two fella balus. Now," he said, "me go round, me go round, we go round tree and we get one pella balus here, one

28:00 pella balus here. One fella shell two pella balus boss." They, you know, it was very, very interesting listening to them, and one of the funniest - the time I had them in hysterics was coming down in the train from Townsville to Brisbane and we were in this dining

28:30 car – not dining car in the sleeping car, and of course it had the end platforms on the old carriages. They were quite happy with aeroplanes, trucks, cars it didn't worry them one bit. They got in this train and we were going down through the cane fields down round Mackay, Bowen that area you know, and they said to me, "Why can't

29:00 the train dive off into the cane field." And I'm thinking gawd, flanges on the wheels and tracks and I'm trying to explain to them in Pidgin and my Pidgin was fairly primitive and I'm trying to get it across to them. Well, you've never seen anything like it, I had them in hysterics. I couldn't get it dead right and they knew I was having trouble and they're sitting in the bloomin' seats in the carriage and standing around on the end platform

29:30 and they were killing themselves laughing, tears were running out their eyes and they dying laughing. I couldn't get it dead right. As I say, they were very, very good and we never had any problem with them at all and they looked after us like old mother hens. But the language itself, you know, in Pidgin a saw

30:00 they don't – a saw is not a saw, a saw is 'pushing me go pulling me come all same axe'. Now you stop and think about, 'pushing me go pulling me come all same axe' you know, that's exactly what it is, isn't it. 'Pushing me go pulling me come all same axe'. Now a piano is 'dispilla big fella box now he got teeth belonging now you're fighting teeth now he cry out," that's a

30:30 piano, that's right, 'A big fella box he's got teeth you fight the teeth and he cries out'. Beautiful.

It's very complicated.

Oh yeah, but once you've got the way they think and why it works out that way, it's very descriptive. You know what it's all about. I think the gem one is the one since the war. Bob told it to me later 'cause there were none during the war,

31:00 there were no whirly birds, you know helicopters, but the Pidgin for helicopter is a gem, 'Mix Master belong Jesus Christ'.

Mix Master?

Mix Master. A helicopter is 'Mix Master belong Jesus Christ' and how true it is. But it's Pidgin

31:30 as I say when you've got – I found that I was having trouble at the beginning because I was thinking in English and then translating but towards the end of the 3 months I was – in talking to them I was starting to think in Pidgin and from that point on it was easy. But I still

32:00 had a bit of trouble following them speaking Pidgin if they spoke it rapidly because it sounds more like a foreign language than Pidgin because there' a lot of German words. There's German words in it, there's Malay words and there's English, most of it is English in a fashion. I mean you look at these

32:30 'the white man holding this paper is a friend of the Government' now that's 'the first thing'. Now 'dispel a master' now that's 'the white man', 'he given pass long you' that's this 'he give him pass belong you', 'he prend belongum' now 'he friend of the Government. Now it's there

33:00 but 'his plane has crashed and you must look after him so that he reaches safety', now in Pidgin it's 'balus belongum he bugger up', 'he bugger up pru' now he's not just bugger up he's – now the 'bugger up' is always either 'bugger up or bugger up pru or bugger up pinis', now bugger up pinis is finished.

33:30 So if he's bugger up pinis he's really broken up. Now 'you pella must look at good longin enough long master he come up me pella again' now when you work it all out it's explaining each bit as it goes. As I say, it's a fascinating language to

34:00 work on but the spelling of course is nothing like English. You've got to sort of look at it and think oh that doesn't look like English but it's pronounced phonetically the way it is there. "I" is 'he' 'E' you know, 'bulong' is 'belong'.

34:30 So as I say when you finally get it, it all starts to drop into place and you think oh , yes it makes sense but you sort of walk around it for awhile.

So it's a matter of getting into the mode of thinking?

Yeah, thinking that way, yeah. Thinking that you've got to explain everything because the way I worked it out finally was they're not used to all the,

35:00 well mechanical but not the mechanical but our way of doing things. So to get it across to somebody who doesn't understand it they've got to explain it in words that describe what's going on and that way it all starts to drop into place. It was like when the 10 Cats came in to take us out of the Sepik and the 10 Catalinas nosed into the

35:30 Sepik River the locals – all the police boys were fine they'd seen all that before the locals had never seen two things alike in their lives and they had 10 of them lined up. You should've seen their faces, it was unbelievable. I sat and looked and they were absolutely staggered that they could have 10 Catalinas lined up and everyone the same as the next one. They'd never seen that in their life before. The looks on their faces really

36:00 threw you.

They'd seen boats before and they'd seen planes.

Oh yeah, but no, they'd seen canoes, no two canoes were exactly alike. And if they made something they couldn't get two identical, but Catalinas everyone was the same as the next one, identical and that really got them.

So you were travelling through the bush

36:30 **what was your role exactly? What were you trying to find out?**

Our job was to keep the natives, in behind the Jap lines, wanting to work for us and stopping them working for the Japanese. And 'cause the Japanese use to use them as labourers and they'd send a

37:00 boss boy, as they used to call them, into villages over the Torricelli's if they were on Vanimo or Bout and Madang, and those places. And they'd send them back into the hinterland to get people from the back villages and down in the Sepik and the Torricelli's to come down and work for them as labourers. And if they wanted to build anything well they'd be taken down to the coast to do it

37:30 and of course to do it, to get them down they'd have to explain to the boss boy who was going back to get them, exactly what they were doing to do, and of course our police boys would try and grab them if a boss boy came back on that sort of job. And Bob'd build up a business on Vanimo Harbour or Bout Harbour or something and if they wanted

38:00 anything built he'd say to him what's where. And I would be given – Bob'd code it and do a signal back to Moresby and the next day or the day after the Mitchells would be over and blast hell out of it. Because they couldn't work out how they were finding out. And put they finally found out but..

I'll just pause you there.

Tape 6

00:33 **Alright, perhaps you can continue and tell us about the origins of it...**

Well I'm not sure of the actual origins of it but it was German New Guinea on the north side of New Guinea and then Papua which was the Australian protector on the south. The lingua franca in the German side was Pidgin and the Papuan side was Mutu, and that was the -

01:00 and that's nothing like Pidgin at all. And that area around Port Moresby the lingua franca was Mutu, but Pidgin now is the lingua franca right throughout New Guinea and New Britain. I'm not too sure of Guadalcanal, I don't think that is. That's more straight English nowadays.

01:30 But the exact – the different words in Pidgin that are mixtures of all of the others are all as a result of the change over from German New Guinea to Australian or British New Guinea after the Germans left, and then you finish up with a mixture of all the languages in it to make it up. And being rather

02:00 not sophisticated in the sense, that they haven't got the mechanical knowledge or the reasons for things working. Whenever they try and describe something to somebody who has never seen it before the Pidgin gets very descriptive because they try and put it into a picture to make it work.

02:30 But as I say, it's all very fascinating about the way it worked but finally when we came out there was – we sat and waited for about – oh down at the junction of the

03:00 Yellow and the Sepik after the Japs had bombed the MOSS troops base camp we had to wait. General Savige and Blamey on the other, Blamey wanted us to stay in and Savige wanted us out. He reckoned once it'd been bombed your effectiveness disappears because they know you're there. And Blamey wanted to keep us in and it took

03:30 them about 4 days to resolve the argument and finally Savige won and we were hauled out. It was one of those things we just sat and sucked our thumbs virtually while they decided which way it was going to jump, but it was all very interesting. Bob – I'll

04:00 give you the story of Proud on the way down. I brought the 15 police boys down with me and when we got to Brisbane one of the officers took them over in Brisbane and he took them around the factories and so forth, around the Brisbane area. Well the idea was to take those police boys and take them back to New Guinea afterwards

04:30 and let them loose in their own villages and let them tell them what's going on and what we were doing, and keep the morale up, that we were coming back because a lot of their home villages were well behind the Japanese lines. And, as I say, I took them down there, when I got to Brisbane, Commander Proud called

05:00 me into his office and he said, "Thanks for the job and thanks for doing it." And before I go on to this bit – the 3 Special Units were not subject to audit in the normal sense as all army units were. None of them were N Special, Z Special AIB [Allied Intelligence Bureau], Central Bureau, Alonges Bureau [?], none of those were subject to audit

05:30 at all, and we could get what we wanted in the way of stuff and the same with money, and so forth. He just said he wants it and he got it. He handed me, Commander Proud handed me a little army envelope, a brown envelope and said, "That's the Government's thanks for doing the job Ian," and he said, "put it in your pocket and have a look at it when you get out." And

06:00 then he said, "I've heard on the grapevine you're going down to get married." This was January 1944 and he said, "I've heard on the grapevine you're going down to get married." I said, "Yes." He said, "Well I can't have you, if you if you're going down to get married, I can't have you put on a leave train from Brisbane down to Melbourne," he said, "You could get offloaded, all sorts of things and we can't have you late for your marriage." And he had it already set and he opened the drawer of the table and he handed me

06:30 and he said, "there, an AA1 Top Priority Movement Order, you're transferred from Brisbane to Melbourne and they'll give you a leave pass from Melbourne office. Have a good rest in Toorak when you get there." I came straight down the train and I was here before you could blink and that was the sort of CO he was, a hell of a nice bloke. And when I opened the envelope outside, after I got outside there was 96 pounds in it on top of my pay. Just

07:00 96 quid he said, "There you are, that's the Government's thanks for what you did." Which in those days was really something I tell you. 96 pounds for three months.

A nice wedding present.

It was a very interesting show to work for but I didn't go back up to New Guinea again. What he had me doing

07:30 then was putting the – FELO had what 4 or 5 boats which they used for work around the Islands. They had a couple of 45 foot work boats which were big clinker built 45 footers made by General Motors at South Melbourne.

08:00 And they had a big grey marine diesel in them and you could virtually run them onto a coral reef and they had a bloomin' keel on them. There was no way you could hurt them you know. And then we had some 45 foot Lars Halvorsen, big launches. A squared chine ones made by Lars Halvorsen in Sydney and we had a couple of 65 foot ones and they were superb. The big 65 Lars Halvorsen had

08:30 three grey marine diesels in them and boy could they hike. And the grey marine diesels were very powerful 6 cylinder General Motors diesel engines and they were made specially for the boats. And what I had to do was when we got delivery of them I'd have to put the radios in the boats and check them and make sure they were right.

09:00 So I was sent down to the navy, RAN [Royal Australian Navy] small boats people in the Brisbane River and they taught me how to handle the small craft and that was quite interesting 'cause you learnt how to tie a boat up when there was a cross wind and how to get it away from the wharf when there's a cross wind and all that sort of business. And at the school

09:30 there I suppose I was there for about 3 weeks, well I learnt all the tricks of that. And the gem one was one of the Lars Halvorsens, we had the Indooroopilly Boys' College and the Brisbane River ran right round the Boys' College and they used to run the boats right up and we'd tie them up at the bank and the gem one was, the

10:00 was a HDML, the Harbour Defence Motor Launch, now they were built in America during the First World War and they had American fighter plane Liberty engines in them, and there were two big Liberty aeroplane engines with organ pipe carburettors on them. They were highly dangerous you know, but they were a big thing.

10:30 They were about 70 feet long and what had happened was one of them had came to us to have the radio fitted and it had sailed all the way across the Pacific. It had been picked up in San Diego after they'd taken it out of moth balls from the First World War and RN [Royal Navy], Royal Navy Lieutenant and a Royal Navy crew brought it across the Pacific to Brisbane and we couldn't

11:00 use it here until we had a radio in it, so it was brought up the Brisbane River for me to put the radio in. So Proud called me in told me what – he said, "That new HDML that's just appeared, I want the radio in Ian." "Yeah righto." He said, "Can you start it tomorrow morning, we got everything?" I said, "Yeah right." And we had a little dingy a little short dingy thing and I put all my test gear and all the antennas

11:30 and the 3 big boxes for the 3BZ radios that were – the AWA [Amalgamated Wireless Australasia] radios we were using and there were 3 boxes, receiver, transmitter and a speaker box and they all had to be bolted down to the bench in the HDML. And I got out to the HDML and when I was standing in the dingy the deck of the HDML at the stern was about level with my shoulders. So

12:00 I had the stuff in the – I lifted it out and put it on the deck of the HDML and then hauled myself up over on to the deck and I had – it was a stinking hot day and I had a pair of shorts and a digger hat and that was it. I'd bent down and picked up the stuff and my tool box and started to walk and this very Pommie voice from the Bridge said, "Salute the Quarterdeck,"

12:30 you see. Very Pommie English and I just went like 'this' and got on with what I was doing. That night Proud called me in and said, "What the hell went on today?" So I told him what had happened and he said, "Oh for God's sake Ian," he said, "he's still wet behind the ears, humour him will you." And that's the sort of CO I had you know, lovely fellow.

Did you find out

13:00 **who the person was? The person that you saluted?**

No, no, I had no idea. To this day I don't know. But Proud – funny man. Then one of the 45 footers I used to take them out into the bay at the end of the Brisbane River, take them right out and then check the radio from way out and then

13:30 come back. And by the time you went down the Brisbane River and out it'd be dusk before you were coming home, and the crew on the 45 footer this particular day I'd put the radio in, and I did the checks out there and they'd been having a lovely time with the beer while I was, oh they were pickled and there was no way they could've got that thing up the Brisbane River, and I was the only one left sober.

14:00 And we were coming back and following sea with the square chine on the HDML and of course, every time the wave came up behind it it'd slew your stern around and you had to keep at the wheel the whole time to keep her pointing in the right direction otherwise she'd broach and go beam on, you see, which would've rolled her over. Any rate, I'm coming in and I'm hooning this all the way and suddenly I hear 'hoot' and

14:30 there's a hooter goes behind and there's a blinkin' great Fairmile. And I don't know if you've ever heard of a Fairmile Sub Chaser - a Fairmile is about 120 feet long and it's got these great big English diesel engines in it and our 45 foot Lars Halvorsens they had a fair turn of speed with 3 grey marine diesels of about, you know, 400

15:00 horse power each, especially with the great big props that we had on. But the Fairmile could do about double that speed. And I'm coming in just following sea and the Fairmile passed me like I was standing still, 'hoot', and he just gave me a hoot as he caught up with me. But oh no, it was quite interesting with the boats and, as I say, that was the end of it as far

15:30 as I was concerned, you know. By the time the end of the war came I was back in Melbourne again and then they – at the end of Facilities when they went to discharge everybody I was sent to the Pay Corps because I was a Bank Clerk, they shot me into the Pay Corps in Melbourne,

16:00 to work out until my points came around for discharge. And when I got out to Royal Park on the day of the discharge all the Sigs blokes that I had started with they were all there because their points came at the same time you see. And the only part that saddened me a bit with that, what Proud had done he'd confirmed my Sergeant's stripes so that my deferred pay was as a full Sergeant.

16:30 And he made sure he confirmed it, I wasn't just acting Sergeant, I was Sergeant and the Signal, the 3 Div Sigs – I never really forgave the ones in charge. The WO1 who was a Warrant Officer Class One was

the Sergeant Major in Signals and we both got up to the table together, there were

17:00 two Officers doing the final pay, and we were standing alongside one another and I went out and with the full Sergeant's deferred pay and he was a WO 1 from the time I'd first known him and he went out with a Lance Corporal's deferred pay, you should of heard him. Did he ever perform but he was acting

17:30 WO1 and his confirmed rank was Lance Corporal which I thought was blue murder. But that was the difference between Proud and some of the others. You know, he made sure I went out with my full entitlement. But it was a very interesting show to be with in the sense that you knew a lot of what was going on and we had a terrific number of people

18:00 in it that were so different like, Albert Klestadt for instance. And Albert, I met him in Melbourne, he's here on this, I'll show you,

18:30 sorry about this I've lost the ones that I want – oh there. Now where are we, Albert Klestadt there and that's me there and that's Dov Notkin he was a Russian, and he was a German. His father was a – Albert Klestadt's father was a

19:00 German Prussian General and Albert was running the father's business which was an import-export business, he was running it from Kobe in Japan and Albert – before the Japs came into the war, Albert started to see the Japanese merchant ships coming into Kobe Harbour and being camouflaged and he smelt a

19:30 rat. And he went – took the business from Kobe down to Manila. And this was – by the time the Japanese had bombed Pearl Harbour and so forth, he was in Manila. And then he decided when he saw the Japanese coming down to the Philippines he went down to Mindanao, the Moro section of the Philippines were all the Muslim

20:00 population is now. And he bought an open boat there and he and six Moros sailed that open boat. He sailed from the southern Philippines down right through all the Archipelagos and Java down to just east of Darwin on the north of Australia. And of course the minute he landed,

20:30 a German National, he was gaoled straight away. And Proud was given all the Intelligence on whatever that sort of thing was happening and he immediately sent one of the Captains up to Darwin to find out. And when he found out that Albert had lived in Japan for six years he said to him righto – he brought him down to Melbourne and Albert was quite happy

21:00 to work for us and he spoke Japanese absolutely fluently, and he read Japanese having lived there for six years, and he stayed. Albert now lives up just the other side of the Yarra around the Balwyn area and he was Commodore of the Royal Melbourne Yacht Squadron for years. But

21:30 you know, he sailed that open boat on his own down right from the Philippines right through all the war, down into Darwin. You sort of think, blimey. And Dov Notkin, the Russian one, we used him for deciphering the Russian broadcast. And Dov was an engineer, a civil engineer. He did his engineering at Kiev University

22:00 and he walked, in the Depression time, he walked from Kiev through to England with his brother and they couldn't get work in Russia despite the fact that they were both engineers, and the brother went to South Africa and he came to Australia. And Dov was a real dag, a funny man and after doing that, you know,

22:30 walking right through from Russia, right through Europe to England, he's nobody fool but he was another very interesting character listening to him talk about what he'd done and so forth, but there were a lot of them like that in FELO. After the war, Albert Klestadt, what FELO used him for, at all the surrender ceremonies

23:00 in the South Pacific, Albert was the official interpreter for the Japanese Surrender Ceremonies on the battleships and so forth. Albert was always the one sent in to do the Surrender because of his fluent Japanese. And of course, we had a double check, we had two Japanese POWs [Prisoner of War] - Camp Tasman in Brisbane at Indooroopilly and they used to prepare the leaflets to drop

23:30 on the Japanese. They'd do the preparation but we had to double check on them because - Albert was able to double check 'cause he knew the Japanese so well he could do it, you know. So you weren't going to be lead off the garden path and then be told something you didn't want but it was, as I say, it was most interesting business to be involved with although I was around the edges of it.

24:00 You knew what was going on and you'd hear all the stories around the peripheral, and one day he got me to drive them from 'Goodrest' in Toorak just around the corner from Marne Street. 'Goodrest' was our Melbourne Headquarters and he said, "Would you take me into town?" Proud was down

24:30 from Brisbane and we picked up three others, there was Commander Proud, the Director of Naval Intelligence, Commander Long, Captain Mills who was an ex destroyer Captain in the Atlantic, and the MI5 bloke who lived at Government House. And we had to go to Government House and pick him up and take the whole lot

25:00 to J.B. Wares offices in Collins Street, up near Queen Street corner with three of them in the car. 5 o'clock at night it was and I'm driving the big Ford V8 staff car and I've got all this navy brass with the gold braid in their caps, you know, sitting in the car. And we got up to the corner, we came up Swanston Street and did a left turn into Collins Street and

25:30 all the people flowing down, 5 o'clock, after knocking off work, and I just sat and waited for them all to go past. And so an old boy had a flea in his ear, and I don't know what, that night - an older fellow, and he came dressed to the nines you know, and he propped in front of the staff car and he looked into the staff car and he just propped and he wouldn't move. And old Tubby Mills, the Captain Mills stuck his head out the -

26:00 wound down the window stuck his head out the door and well did he call him for everything. I've never seen a bloke scuttle so fast in all my life. He went for his life, Tubby fixed him. Oh no, as I say, you found out a lot of what was going on at the background, behind things. And the bit that I did behind the lines with Bob was the most fascinating bit

26:30 because it taught you so much about the New Guinea make up and the way they worked and what you needed to do to keep them thinking with us and staying with us, and it was just, you wouldn't have missed it for quids, it was just one of those things.

You mentioned you brought some of the police

27:00 **boys down to Brisbane, can you just elaborate on how that you thought that would help them? What were they supposed to see?**

What the idea was, was to show them all round the Brisbane area and I believe, at some cases, they took them down to Newcastle and showed them the steel works, very quickly, but to show them

27:30 factories makings cars and tanks and this sort of business, to let them realise that we weren't caught, that we were still able to produce stuff that would help the war effort. And believe you me, they had enough sense to realise that it wasn't a matter of showing them something that was out of their – again they knew that okay,

28:00 if they can do this then they're doing this other stuff for us. And it was then, the idea was to let them – bring them back to New Guinea and as most of the police boys came from villages that were well behind the Jap lines, to send them back, let them go back to their villages which they could do and let them

28:30 tell their own villagers that, look they're winning they're not losing, and that kept their villagers, all the ones behind the lines thinking our way. I tell you, it paid off because very rarely did you see anything behind the lines – well I never walked into a village that really

29:00 was against us when we walked in. They were mostly either neutral or you know, very much our way so you had no real problems with it. You could strike the occasional one or two villagers in a village which might be a bit, you know, the Japs had got

29:30 on side but it was pretty rare. And mostly the villages were very much our way and that was our job mainly to make sure the Japs weren't being helped by the villages, to being able to filter down into our areas and the Japs as a general rule wouldn't go off a track any rate, they wouldn't break bush. That was

30:00 the one reason we were able to survive because if the Japs ever got to Bob and I we'd just disappear into the jungle and just stay quiet. And for one reason we couldn't stand being near the Yanks for exactly the same reason because they couldn't shut up. And the Yanks would make noise no matter what, and we used to shut the trap and give hand signals

30:30 if you wanted them to come there and they were watching for the hand signals and so forth. But you just didn't give yourself away and the Yanks never ever learnt that lesson. They're just noisy, they can't help themselves. It's just one of those things they seem to have that business that if you're in a fight or

31:00 you're doing anything you've just got to make a noise about it and they just can't help themselves. Whereas Australians don't work that way, if you think it's my skin mate shut up.

What were your experiences with Americans other than that?

Oh, generally I don't know, they didn't enamour me at all. They were pretty cocky in some ways, but of course the ones

31:30 that I saw had a tendency to be the more senior ones and they were that way any rate. But I know my father had been up in the world a big way above me as CO of M Special and ALAN [Advanced Land Headquarters] Intelligence Bureau he had to go into McArthur's Headquarters quite a bit in the old AMP Building in George Street in Brisbane. And

32:00 he said it was ridiculous, MacArthur in there, he said you reckoned you were going in front of royalty. You know, he carried on like a pork chop as my old man's Commandant, but the Americans left you in no doubt.. See one of the things that the Special Units, 200 Flight which was a RAAF

32:30 Special Flight which was built or put together to enable the special units to work comfortably. Previous to that when Bob and I went in, in '43 for instance, MacArthur had to give approval for anything that you did particularly behind the lines and if he didn't want you to go in you just wouldn't get transport to get in there, whether it was by submarine which they had all the Subs

33:00 any rate. They had all the US Navy Subs all based in Fremantle, and if it was aircraft, RAAF he had control of so that you had to get the approval. Well what finally happened when Curtin finally agreed to them – the RAAF forming 200 Flight in Queensland. And 200 Flight was built, specially made

33:30 for the RAAF to drop the Australian Special Units into Borneo and Dutch New Guinea and so forth. And once 200 Flight was concerned, we were able to move a lot more freely than prior to 200 Flight being formed. As I said, before the American business with the Philippines

34:00 MacArthur said I shall return and he was very adamant that no Australians would be allowed anywhere near the landings. And that's why a lot of the Australians were side shunted across to Borneo to look after the oil supplies which certainly was needed. But it was a side show compared with the main events on Japan and he wanted that to be an American only affair, and he made dead

34:30 sure that the Australians didn't get near it. And he was like that right through. So I used to look at the Yanks and think, oh yeah as long as it's going their way they're happy but God help you if it's not. You know, they're a bit the same way, let's do it my way or else. And, but we found

35:00 that in doing the counter intelligence work that they would accept it. We found that if we found something out and if it didn't suit what they wanted to do it was just squashed, it never got any further. And of course they were also dead against Z Special in a way because Z was an offshoot of Services Reconnaissance

35:30 Department which was a British show, and they couldn't stand Z because they felt that Whitehall was trying to get their Empire back in the Far East and the Yanks didn't want that. If they could, they held Z off and it wasn't the fact because Z was just the Australian component of SRD [Services Reconnaissance Department] and the COs of

36:00 Z Special, nearly in every case, were Poms any rate and left one of them still here but one of them was sent back and then cashiered after he got back there. But generally you know, the only really Australian bit was FELO, which was FELO from top to bottom,

36:30 and was Australian. Proud had the direct ear of Curtin so that helped things and we had the fellow that was in charge of the Melbourne bit was Paul McGuire, the novelist, and he, after the war finished up – they were going to send him as Ambassador

37:00 to Ireland for a start and that fell through and I don't know what happened there, and he was a character in his own right, but he was a novelist before the war. But old Proud finished up – he came back to Australia as Director of Talks for the ABC [Australian Broadcasting Corporation] a few years before the war and then

37:30 got into – started FELO from that but he finished up as the Director of Broadcasting Corporation on Crete, after the war and then he got very ill. The Poms made him British Ambassador to China and he got very sick there and he finished up and died in Melbourne.

At the end of the tape.

Tape 7

00:32 **I recall there was some mention of officers in Intelligence Services having to wear cyanide pills around or carry for a specific purpose.**

Well, I personally didn't carry one but Bob carried them for both of us. It was, it always applied when you went behind the lines that

01:00 at least the cyanide pill had to be there just in case you were captured because you knew too much. And one way or the other, whether directly or indirectly, you knew too much to fall into the hands and in any case they'd behead you anyway so what was the point. The cyanide pill was there but I know Bob Cole had them, he had two of them, and

01:30 he told me before we went in, you know, if it really comes I'll slip it to you and take it, that's it. But it never eventuated you know, but it was there just in case. But when you see the photos of the beheadings in the book there, I mean, you can see why. You didn't ask for that in a hurry but it was always there.

02:00 **So you would've used it if necessary?**

Oh well, you wouldn't had much option if it really came to the point. And because they never got – if

they were captured behind the lines we were told quite definitely that you would never get back that they would kill you anyway so what was the point. The same when the Z Special tried the 2nd

02:30 raid on Singapore. I mean there was no way on God's earth that could work and they were all captured and killed.

How many of them were in that specific operation?

I don't know on the second one I wouldn't have any idea but all the Z people and ourselves, and I know my father told them you're asking for it to send them back a second time but

03:00 the silly Scotsman who was the Skipper he wanted to do it no matter what and it was just asking to be caught. I mean, I know the Japs were silly but they weren't stupid and if anybody tried it a second time they were gone. So you just didn't do that sort of thing. To do a frontal attack like that twice and it just doesn't work, Singapore Harbour was fine the first time but not the second.

03:30 But all the Senior Officers in the Intelligence Unit told him he was mad he should not do it and he still insisted. And a lot of the Z Special ones that were on the first raid refused to do the second one. The ones that were on the crate the first time they were asked to go back the second time and they said no. They could see

04:00 the stupidity of it.

When was this raid conducted?

I don't know, it was later in the war.

Okay.

The second one, the first one was early on and they blew up all the shipping in Singapore Harbour and they got away with it the first time 'cause they didn't – the Japs didn't think anybody could possibly do it. But having been proved that they could do it, they weren't going to let it happen a second time and they didn't, as it turned out.

04:30 **Now when you were charting those areas the villages in Papua you already had some understanding of course of the allegiance of some of the villages that were there but what about some of the ones that were not obliged to help you and sided with the Japanese?**

Well, we didn't know which villages were

05:00 which way, we had no idea. It wasn't until you got into them. Well Bob made sure being fluent in Pidgin and an ex ANGAU bloke and an ex Patrol Office,r he knew which way to handle them.

What's ANGAU sorry?

Australian New Guinea Administrative Unit – ANGAU.

Right and they existed before the war?

No, ANGAU was the Australian Army

05:30 Unit which took over the Administration of Papua New Guinea from the normal Civilian Patrol Officers. They all became officers in ANGAU to start with and then some of them like Bob, went to other units from ANGAU. But Bob went into FELO and where some of the others went I'd have no idea. Some of them stayed with ANGAU, but the ANGAU was the actual

06:00 administration of Papua New Guinea during the war, they ran it. They ran all the civilian control of Papua New Guinea.

So can you give me some sort of idea how many villages were under your sort of area of responsibility?

Oh no, dozens of them. We weren't responsible for it. What we were sent in there

06:30 for was to find out if any of them were supplying information to the Japanese, if any, to talk to all of them and trying to keep them on our side and that's all we did and you didn't find out until you got in there just to which way they were going to jump. Luckily 99 percent of them were right. And we didn't have any problem with them at all

07:00 other than the one I told you about where they pinched our drop. But I mean, that was look after me fella you know, blow you. It wasn't the fact that we were Australians they would've done exactly the same to the Japanese.

The area you were in was quite remote I take it?

Oh yeah, yeah, have you got the big map, can you get the atlas there?

07:30 The area we were in was the junction of the Yellow River and the Septic River in New Guinea, right up in the north - up towards the north west corner, not far from the Dutch Border.

So would you have come across any primitive head hunting tribes?

No

08:00 the head hunters were the Kukka kukas in the Central Highlands near Wau, but no. There were obviously may have been some about but most of them were not head hunters per se, like the Kukka kukas. The Kukka kukas, look out boy, they were little fellas but boy they were deadly but they were nowhere near us.

Did the Australians have problems with those tribes?

Kookas no,

08:30 no, not really just kept away from them that's all. Didn't stick your neck into it.

09:00 But, it's you know, most of them – all of the villages I went into with Bob, and he was the main reason for it I've got no doubt whatsoever, we didn't have any real problem with them at all. They

09:30 listened to what you had to tell them. Now provided you weren't telling them 'porkies' they were, you know, they were quite amenable to listen to reason. The thing that surprised me was that early on when we first went in there the -

10:00 what Bob used to do each night he would get one of the police boys and tell him to cook our tea. Now not long after we went in there he turned round and gave this boy the tea to cook and

10:30 he just disappeared and we, after about an hour, we found him sitting on the river bank about half a mile away, just contemplating. And he reckoned that Bob made some comment about Bob being a big head and etcetera, and that he wasn't going to listen to that sort of business and we -

11:00 next day bundled him back to Port Moresby. But we got all the other 19 police boys, we had him replaced in two days time, but we got the others around from the Sergeant Major one down, and said you know, now what's going on, and they told us in no uncertain

11:30 terms that he was wrong that he had no right to take it into his head that he would do so and so. And I'm sitting listening to this and I thought, gee you know, they've really got good brains on them. And they finally turned around to us and said if we think either one of you two are doing the wrong thing we're not going to jeopardise the whole thing by

12:00 causing trouble now. We'll wait 'til we get back to Port Moresby, then we will report you. And after that I thought, ah there's no flies on this lot. You know, it wasn't a matter of talking to a primitive native at all. They knew exactly what they were on about. I thought well, you know, it's just one of those things, you're

12:30 sort of talking to natives and you're not. They're not really primitive natives they've got a good head on their shoulders and they can think things through and they knew how to work their way through it. And I thought after that no… I'm not…

So you'd say that the Australians or the allied white servicemen tended to underestimate the natives? Their capabilities?

Well,

13:00 it was bound to happen I think, up to a point. Most of them knew I would say that, the average Australian serviceman, he knew full well that we couldn't get anywhere in New Guinea without the natives. I don't think there was any doubt about that at all, but just how precise and clever they were I found out just by listening to what was going on, you know,

13:30 but…

14:00 **Did you ever get a chance to capture any Japanese soldiers?**

No.

No POWs?

No, no, the only Japanese that FELO had that I knew of were ones that had been captured by the Australians and they were put down at Camp Tasman in Brisbane to prepare the leaflets, two of them that agreed to do. But they were the only ones that I ever had anything to do with. We never saw them.

Tell us about those two Japanese

14:30 **you…?**

Well they were at Camp Tasman in Brisbane at the Indooroopilly College and they used to do the preparation of the leaflets to be dropped on the Japanese during the whole of the conflict and they did the – made up the leaflets in Japanese of course, and then

15:00 they used to be printed. Whether they were printed in Brisbane when there was a big lot of them to be done that covered everybody or whether they were done in the Field Printing units which FELO had was another thing. That depends on where they were. But FELO had the ability to print in the field as well as back in Brisbane.

15:30 **I see…**

They had the Mobile Patrol Units, MPUs as they called them which was what we were, there were the Front Line Broadcasting Units where they had big amplifiers and they used to go down near the front line and try and talk the Japanese into surrendering and…

Did that work?

Not often.

16:00 And they were there though, just in case. There was the Leaflet Processing crowd and there was the Counter Intelligence crowd preparing the business of sending the – giving the ABC and the Army Signals Units the business of sending the

16:30 Counter Intelligence – the wrong Intelligence back to the - but

17:00 the business of getting it back through to get the ABC overseas broadcast to broadcast wrong propaganda to them, anything that would put them off. Now one of the things that I didn't find out about till after the war, and it occurred with another fellow who learnt flying with our oldest son down at Moorabbin and he was in -

17:30 he hadn't connected it altogether either, but he was in the New South Wales Line of Communications Signals Unit. Now that became 12 LOC [Line of Communications] Sigs and he and 4 others were sent up to Hay to the POW compound in Hay, where they had all the Italian and German

18:00 POWs at Hay, in New South Wales. And they were dumped right in the middle of the POW camp with a big 133 AWA transmitter, a 450 watt transmitter and they had to stay on the air 24 hours a day 7 days a week, not go off. And they were getting stuff up by Don R [Despatch Rider] by motorbike from Melbourne

18:30 everyday with the next day's work. And that was all coming from Goodrest in Toorak Road, our Melbourne Headquarters and it was all wrong information about Orders to Units in the field, which were all 'billarky' [nonsense], you see. And the Don R would arrive up there and they were told to do it. And what got this fellow

19:00 that we know, interested, was the fact that one day they used to do searches in the POW compound, in one of the searches they found a VANA [Victorian Authorised News Agency] notebook, you know a school VANA notebook, that one of the German officers had and there were all the signals they'd been sending and they searched him for a radio receiver and he didn't have a radio

19:30 receiver and they couldn't find one anywhere. And they finally interrogated him and said, "Where did you get this? And how did you get this?" And he said, "Oh it's easy, watch the lights dipping." It turned out that the power supply in Hay was right on the edge of being overloaded and this big powerful transmitter they had there for the army, every time they put the key down the lights dipped

20:00 just a fraction but they dipped and he was reading the lights blinking. And then Ralph finally put the thing together when he saw the FELO information from the Archives, he finally put it together that what they were sending they thought was practice was in fact the counter information that FELO was feeding them to send up north.

20:30 **Strange isn't it.**

Yeah, but you know those sort of things you – Ralph told us that when that happened a Brigadier appeared up straight away from Sydney to find out what was going on. You know, the most senior one up there in the Sigs was the Sergeant and he appeared up there and they finally gave them

21:00 a great big Ford V8 generator for the transmitter in the middle of the POW compound that wasn't connected to the town power supply, and once they did that of course all that light dipping in the town streets and everything else stopped.

Can I ask you on the topic of Germans, one of the veterans we interviewed beforehand spoke about German officers training

21:30 **Japanese troops in PNG?**

Oh yeah.

There was some German Military presence…?

That could've been too, I didn't know anything about that.

Like you know, advisors or a few officers?

Oh, could well have been.

Did you hear anything about that?

No, I didn't hear anything about that.

Nothing?

No, I heard nothing about that at all, no.

Was there any remanent German presence in PNG in terms…

Not that I know of.

…of colonist, you know, people who'd stayed behind, farmers…

No, oh yes there were, one of our Sergeants in FELO was

22:00 the plantation owner on New Britain and he was a real dag too, Bill Klotz, K-L-O-T-Z, and his father had been the plantation owner, and after the war Bill had just kept the plantation going, a big copra plantation on New Britain. And Bill had a glass eye and his favourite trick was to – you couldn't walk away from a New

22:30 Guinea working party and leave them to do the job. They had to know that you were watching them otherwise they'd stop. They saw no reason if you weren't watching them to keep on going. So what Bill used to do was take out his glass eye and stick it on the top of a post and say I'm watching you. And that made them keep going, but that was

23:00 Bill Klotz he was a real dag.

Do you think they actually fell for that?

Oh, they fell for it alright. He never lost his glass eye, they weren't game to touch it.

That's amazing. These are some of the things that I'm interested about the superstition of the natives of PNG, what sort of practices did you encounter and beliefs?

Well the house tamburan that I mentioned before when I told you

23:30 about the women being herded into the house tamburan, each village had a house tamburan. Now the house tamburan was a combination, it was the village council, the parliament, the religious house, everything all rolled into one and that was the centre of the village's being, in other words. And

24:00 they – Bob was always against the missionaries – Bob Cole was always very much "agin' the missionaries in New Guinea because they didn't substitute – they gave them religion but they didn't substitute that or they didn't include with that the running of the village as a whole and

24:30 They.. Little things like they insisted on them wearing a laplap but they never taught them to wash properly. As a result 9 out of 10 of the villagers would cover up because the missionaries said you've got to cover up but they never then told them – they didn't say now having done that you've got to wash yourselves. That never entered their head to tell them that. As a result the ones

25:00 that had been missionary people they were filthy - never washed themselves they were dreadful. To get near them you'd smell them a mile away. Yet the ordinary wild native people were never like that but they didn't balance what they were teaching with the things that kept the thing stable. And there were all sorts of things like that where -

25:30 there were no religions in the sense that we understand it, not at all. They had their own way of doing things and they'd 'Brus' up as they'd called it which was get all the feathers and everything else on them and look most fearsome but they never, except when they were having

26:00 a fight with a nearby village, it never went any further than that, it was a good way of having a good time. Generally, they were very good. Those villages we found on the southern slopes of the Torricellis, between the Torricellis and the Sepik River, very few

26:30 wore any clothes at all, that included the women. They just didn't wear any but nobody took any notice of it, that was it. But they didn't need to of course because the bloomin' climate was so warm that it was a darn nuisance anyway. But they – it was also so wet most of the time, I mean

27:00 the rain used to start at the same time every day in the monsoon season and look out.

Speaking of which you mentioned something about heavy rains…

Yeah

…and a roof collapsing…?

Oh yeah, well the roof collapsing was on the American hammocks that Bob and I had – the roof was like that, it was like a big bowl

27:30 and normally if you've held it up properly it was quite okay if it rained but if you got too much of course, the whole thing'd collapse on top of you and you'd finish up with all the water in your hammock because it'd break through, but that was pretty rare. We only struck it one night like that where it was very bad, very heavy rain. But generally you know, typical of the tropics, there's no twilight

28:00 as such, it's like somebody pulling the blind down, it's daylight one second and then 'boom' you're into black. The same with the rain in the monsoon hit 4 o'clock in the afternoon down she'd come. It'd happened every day the same. You could set your watch by it. And the most uncanny

28:30 bit we struck was – luckily we were right down on the river flats and a 'guria' which is an earthquake that came, and it was uncanny, it was the uncanniest feeling I've ever had in my life. What happened was normal in New Guinea. You've got the insect noises, the bird noises

29:00 and the trees rustling and everything going on. There's a background noise there the whole time. What with wind and possibly rain but certainly the birds and insects, never stopped, it was a racket the whole time and all of a sudden we were walking along doing our normal bit between villages at this particular spot and all the insect and

29:30 bird noises stopped and it's uncanny, you've got no idea – the wind stopped, the birds and insects stopped and it was total silence. And you sort of – what the heck – and I called out to Bob and said, "What's going on?" He said, "Guria mate, spread your legs apart." And I thought oh well okay, spread my legs apart and I'm standing up and suddenly the ground went 'poof' like that and

30:00 not a sound, it just moved a foot, 18 inches sideways and then 'boof' it went back the other way total silence again. And then with all the big 100 foot trees, and of course in that wet climate they're all surface rooted they don't need to go down for water, so the big 100 footers started to fall over and we're watching, I'm watching

30:30 the blasted trees and seeing which one I dodge you know, and this kept up for about I suppose, 15 minutes. We're dodging trees and the grounds going 'poom' like this and then 'vrrm' over she'd go again the other way. And then finally after about 15 -20 minutes I wasn't wearing a watch so I couldn't tell you exactly how long, and total silence when it stopped

31:00 and then the birds started and then the insects all started and back it all started. The bloody insects and birds knew that was coming. Now we didn't sense it but they knew 'cause they stopped a good minute before it started.

And this is an earthquake?

Yeah, and it just went 'voof' like that, the whole ground moved not bits of it the whole bit sideways like that.

Was it terrifying?

Oh did I ever.

31:30 It frightened the pants off me. But there was nothing you could do about it. I mean it just did it but the uncanny bit was the lack of noise. I mean because it was on soft soil I suspect that's why it was. It wasn't in rocky ground where rocks could drop. It was on river flat soil and it just moved and you sort of thought gee what

32:00 the heck ,but as I say, the uncanny bit was a good minute before it started was when the insects and bird noises stopped and then they all started again a minute after it finally stopped. The insect and birds knew and we didn't. We didn't have any idea until it hit us.

Incredibly sensitive creatures…

Oh yes, are they ever.

So did this engineer some sort of respect for the environment you were working in, the jungle?

32:30 Oh yes, you learnt to live with it and we lived mostly off the land. We lived off bats or pheasants or whatever and occasionally some sago from the sago palm if we could find some in the swamp, but that was most of the food. The only time we had a beautiful meal

33:00 was one time the police boys going along with the Owen guns at the ready and a wild pig came racing out of the scrub and he was a boomer, he was about that high, a big fat one, and an enormous wild pig and they shot him with the Owen guns, but it took some stopping. It took about 20 shells to stop him and they cooked him that night. They dug a trench and they got a

33:30 roaring fire going in the great big trench, they lined it all with stones and they got it very hot. They got the stones very, very hot and they just tossed him in and then covered him about that deep in banana leaves and he cooked all night and I tell you what he was the best pork I'd ever tasted. It just melted in your mouth, the next morning, he was beautiful, but that

34:00 was the best meal I had. But once only.

You know it's quite an amazing cultural encounter you've come across here.

Oh yes.

How would you explain that? That experience?

Well, one you'd never miss. Having done it, you wouldn't have missed it for anything. But the values are so different. I mean, a New Guinea native in the

34:30 hinterland where he's got very little contact, if any, with the whites, unlike us where the wife is the primary one for the man, she's not in New Guinea. The primary one of the man is his wild pig or pigs. They're the most valuable thing he's got. And the wife is very much

35:00 down the chain. And that takes some adjusting I tell you, the first time you strike it you know. He's more interested in what's happening to his pigs than to his wife. There the sort of differences you sort of hit and you think gosh. The city ones of course are different.

These are even people who had missionaries with them?

Oh yeah.

35:30 **They still value their pigs?**

Oh yeah, oh yeah, well you see the only meat they got was pigs so that – wild pigs – so that they – to be able to get a bird or bat like we did with a 12 gauge shot gun – well their bows and arrows was a bit far reaching but the pig, if they kept the pig in the pen, well they always had it. It was most important from

36:00 their health point of view that they keep their meat up to give them strength for their normal work.

What's the size of a normal village like in terms of people?

Oh well that can vary a lot you get anything from a 150 people up to 400 - 500 hundred. It would depend on…

Okay, they could be fairly large?

Yeah. Some of

36:30 the villages are quite bigm but they're ruled very much by the 'Luluai' who's the head man of the village and he rules it with a rod of iron.

So describe to me the social hierarchy of these people like you just mentioned?

The Luluai is the head man, then there's – next there would be – if there's a police boy around the police boy would be there

37:00 as well. Then the missionaries, if they're around, they would think themselves over the Luluai and they would tell you that they told the Luluai what to do, but don't kid yourself, the Luluai ran the place.

And how did he run the place?

Well he did it through the village council. He told them what to plant there, when to go and get the

37:30 sago out and all that sort of thing. 'Cause getting the sago out is a major job 'cause it's the major vegetable that they have but they've got their vegetable gardens if they're near a civilisation, but the sago palms in the swamps. The palm has a trunk about that diameter probably and it's all

38:00 straw, stringy fibre but the sago in between the fibres and they cut it down and then cut it into lengths of about that long and this thing about that round and then they mash it with a hammer and get the sago out of it and then they get two banana leaves, two banana leaves, and they squeeze it through that – through the banana leaf and filter it and the sago goes into the bottom one and

38:30 then they got a boat of about that long and about that wide and about that deep sago – a banana leaf full of sago solid and then they do their cooking from that, and I tell you what, it's tough boy, you need good teeth.

I'll bet. We'll just change the tape now.

Tape 8

00:35 **What I'd also like to ask you about is the area of operations you were involved in, you had a conglomeration of units here, M Special Forces operating your district?**

Oh yes, we all worked together.

And so did Z Force?

Yeah. If they were needed.

Could you explain to me how they were operating with you all?

Well

01:00 Z Special was mainly a fighting unit and they use to do the blow ups and all that sort of thing where demolition was needed or they'd have to frighten the daylights out of them for something. M Special was not the same sort of thing, it was more gathering Intelligence and that was

01:30 it. FELO was doing the same sort of thing as M but using that to provide Counter Intelligence and to provide the leaflets and so forth to drop on them, or to give them misinformation on radio and so forth, on what they'd learned in the field. It was, and the three

02:00 worked together quite well. We never had any bother you know. If we needed to work with the other unit it worked well. But they – Z got into some awful fights.

In your area?

Oh no, not necessarily in our area but all over they got themselves into awful fights, but they had to. That was the way they were set up and

02:30 whereas we were told to keep out of fights and to gather the information and keep it coming.

So were there any casualties in your area?

Our unit had, I think we only had oh that'll be in Proud's letter. I think there were only three that I can remember, 3 or 4 in a unit of 400 there were only 4 causalities, 4 killed. And one of them was

03:00 on a plane crash so you know we had – the way they'd set it up and what we were told what to do, we were told to keep out of scrapes. It was plain as that, don't do. If it look like getting dirty, duck for cover.

So what sort of equipment did you have?

Well, just depended on what you were doing.

03:30 The fighting side of it we had an Owen gun which was the sub machine gun like a Tommy gun and the little German Army Luger pistol which was the long barrel Luger. And the

04:00 long barrel Luger had a barrel about that long on it and it was a pistol but you couldn't fill it up with mud like you could an Owen gun. An Owen gun you could fill it with mud and it'd still fire whereas the German Luger you had to keep clean.

Why did you have a German Luger then?

Because the ammunition was,

04:30 for a German Luger, was the same as the ammunition for the Owen gun, it was the same ammunition. 9 millimetre rimless and they used exactly the same bullets. So we only had to carry one set of bullets, and we had two guns. Whereas if you took an Australian Army revolver instead of a German

05:00 Luger you had a different ammunition so you double your load straight away so we used the German Luger. And the Germans didn't know we were using the Luger pistols but that's the way it was. But we just…

Where did they get these supplies from?

Oh, just stuff that they'd pinched from the Germans that they'd knocked off and of course they didn't have to worry about the ammo 'cause we were making the ammo for the Owen here

05:30 and it was the same ammunition. It was an exact fit and it was no trouble at all. The German Luger was a beautiful gun but you had to keep it clean.

Did you have any case to use your Luger?

No, no.

You never used it?

No, no, except for having a shot at birds or something. No, as I say we weren't ever in the position where it was necessary. But we were always glad of that.

06:00 **What about the wildlife in the area? What sort of wildlife did you actually encounter?**

The worst things were the pukpuks, the crocodiles. You had to watch that in the big rivers and there were lots of crocodiles and boy they were big. From here to the far wall and around was the length of it, it was a good croc. He was a boomer. And of course, if you fired an army

06:30 303 at a croc the bullet would just bounce off him. The hide was – it wouldn't go in to him at all it would just ricochet off you could hear it whine when it left him. You couldn't kill him that way. The only way to kill a crocodile with a gun was through the eye. You had to be a dead-eye dick and get him right through the eye. Any other way and the bullet just bounced off and they were big fellas. And the

07:00 the cassowaries were big and you didn't argue with a cassowary they were big birds, and I tell you what, look out. And they were different to an emu, an emus a sticky beak and he'll come up and have a look and see what you're on about but a cassowary has got an armoured plated leg like a bloomin' mallet and if he ever kicked you, boy, look out. He'd

07:30 break every bone in your body with one kick and with a great big horn crest on the top of his head and we didn't mangle with cassowaries at all. And you've got the Birds of Paradise, there were lots of those but they were harmless the Blue Pheasants, they were harmless they were big birds like a hen. And of course, lots

08:00 of flying foxes and they were as dry to eat as you could ever believe but at least they were food and so we didn't have to carry food around. There were always plenty of snakes from the little right through to the death adder, was the most deadly one and he wasn't very big. The death adder was only about

08:30 that long when he was fully grown but if he bit you and you moved you had about 45 seconds, with an adult male you had about 45 seconds if you moved after he bit and then you dropped dead. Bob said one bit, he had a Pomeranian dog on the lower Sepik when he was Patrol Officer down there, and Bob said the little Pom dog was bitten on the back leg

09:00 by a death adder, down by the river and he said the poor little devil was gone in 20 seconds. He said you don't fight with a death adder. But the tree snake that bit me all he did was give me a headache, he was tiny. But generally the most deadly looking one was the croc.

Did you have any examples

09:30 **of the…?**

Oh yeah well I kept out of the road of the – that time when I fell in the Yellow River and Peni pulled me out the Manus Island boy and I was frightened a croc would've got me then and probably if he hadn't pulled me out they would've. But Bob showed me, he said, "Have you ever seen one of the local natives

10:00 kill a croc?" And I said, "No," and he said, "Come and watch this Luluai, he's going to catch a croc tonight." Now the bank would've been high as that wall down to the actual river flat on the river.

So you're talking about 10 feet the bank?

Yeah, 10 feet high and the river flat was down the bottom and probably 25-30 feet to the river edge itself,

10:30 and the river was the size of the Yarra down there and there was a big old croc down the bottom there and he was a boomer and the Luluai of the village came down and he got his tomahawk, and he got a log about that long and he sharpened it at both ends, to a spike. So that it was sharpened at both ends to a very sharp point.

11:00 And he tied a lantana vine around the middle of it and then he tied the lantana vine up to a great big tree up the top, to a tree trunk high up on the top of the bank. He went down and he had this thing in his hand, to this big croc, and I thought geez I wouldn't go near that big brute, and he smacked the thing across the snout and I thought geez he's gone, and any rate

11:30 the thing opened the jaws and the jaws came together like bang, you couldn't believe and Bob said, "Watch him, watch what happens." And anyway he did this a couple of times and the jaws opened and bang the jaws went and then he did one crack like that across the snout and the things getting ready to do a jump on him and he did that,

12:00 and he had a spike standing up and spike at the bottom and he just held it there and the jaws closed over that and he had him. It went straight through the snout top and bottom. And as Bob said to me afterwards, he said, "With a croc all the power is in closing the jaws. They've got no power to open them," That's why once the jaws closed if you hold the snout they can't throw you off because they've got no power to

12:30 even break a man's hands – grip on them. And he said once that penetrated his snout with that heavy log he said he was gone. He said, "He's dead."

So what did they do with the croc?

Oh they chopped him up for meat. But they had him and that's all they did just a spike through his snout top and bottom with just holding it there and letting him close on it.

13:00 And… not me I wouldn't do it but they did it without even stopping to think. But you sort of think 'oh gee'. But when we were with Aiken, the night with Aiken and Les Bailey, we had the camp set up and had a big

fire going and the boys came back and they'd found cassowary eggs not that far away and they brought the cassowary eggs back into camp and they went like this with them and they said, "Buba inside." So I put the eggs near the fire and they hatched overnight and out came these lovely cassowary chicks

and they were bright yellow and black stripes all the way down their body, with real chick down on them. They stood about that high, the top of their head a body about that and they were the funniest things, the three of them, they were the funniest things I've ever seen. The boys, the police boys, a couple of them had some kids rubber coloured balls and those damn chicks

were playing football with them, it was the funniest thing, two days old. They were kicking them all around they were hilarious and the finished up when Les Aiken went back to Moresby – when Aiken went back to Moresby with his party they took the chicks with them and carried them back by tying their legs together over a stick and carrying them that way and they finished up taking the chicks back to the Brisbane

Zoo.

They survived?

Oh yeah, they got them back to Brisbane. But they were the funniest chicks I've ever seen in my life. They were running around like they'd been on their feet for 20 years. They were incredibly fast on their feet. They grow into a thing 6 feet high. But other than that though,

the beautiful Bird of Paradise they were absolutely gorgeous when you struck them. If you saw a Bird of Paradise for the first time they were magnificent. The feathers on those are gorgeous. But as far as dangerous animals go – the most dangerous animal you could ever find was a wild pig and a big one. If you saw a big one

you kept right out of his way.

Have you had any close encounters with one?

No, I haven't but we were warned right off. A wild pig you don't argue with he's dangerous. He'll kill a man as easy as wink and so you just tangle with them unless you had a gun in your hand and preferably a 303 so you stop him. But normally an Owen gun bullet, it takes about 9 Owen gun bullets to stop him.

What about cassowaries did you have close encounters with them?

No, we saw them in the distance but you kept your distance away from them because they'd let fly with a kick and they wouldn't even think twice about doing it, and if they kicked and they hit your leg they'd break your leg straight away. 'Cause unlike an emu that has a leg about that diameter I suppose, the Australian emu. A cassowary's got a leg like that around the bottom,

around the ankle bit. And it's very, very heavy and it's a big foot and if he hit you boy, you'd know you'd been hit for sure.

Have you ever seen anyone get hit by one?

No, I've never seen anyone, one look at the leg was enough. Bob warned me, he said, "Don't get close mate."

What about monkeys?

No, no monkeys up there.

In PNG?

No, no. Monkeys are further over

towards Asia and so forth, but I never heard of monkeys in New Guinea. Java yes, Borneo yes, chimpanzees and that sort of thing on those Islands, but New Guinea itself, no.

Yeah, it's strange isn't it?

Yeah.

Now we were talking off camera before about the Dutch, now you said that

you had really nothing to do as far as your job was concerned to do anything with the Dutch…

No.

How far Merauke from there?

Oh we were a month's – where we were would be going due south – where the Fly River goes past Merauke and up towards the centre of New Guinea, we were north of the Fly River virtually. Now

to get to Merauke we'd had to go over the centre range down on to the Fly River, and the Fly River is a

terrible River and then we'd had to get down the Fly River to the bottom there. Bob said to me, he said, "If we've got to walk out the only way out would be down to Merauke," and he said, "you can look at a month and a half to two months to walk out." That's how long it would've taken

19:00 but he said, "Don't ask for it please."

Was there a major bee sting there in Merauke?

Oh, that I don't know, not having seen it I wouldn't know. But, I just don't know. You know, when Bob Cole got his Military Cross he was in – in that book you'll see the photo of them, there were four of them,

19:30 there was Bob Cole, Denning, Luloffs and I can't think of the other one. When the, Hollandia was of course in Dutch New Guinea on the north coast and the Americans landed at Hollandia and this was just after Bob's trip with me, he went back

20:00 with those three. And they were at the back of Hollandia in the mountains, at the back of Hollandia when the Americans did the landing at the bottom and I was down in Melbourne at the time. And Proud came down to me one day and he said, "Have a look at these." And there were the signals that Bob had been sending back of the number of Japs they'd kill on the particular days and they were

20:30 killing between about 15 and 30 a day. The Japs would get a fright with the Americans and they'd file back into the mountains and Bob and the other three were just sitting there waiting for them, and that's when Bob – after that job Bob was promoted Captain and given the Military Cross, Denning was given the Military Medal and the other two got Mentioned in

21:00 Despatches. All four of them were decorated.

There was only four of them?

Yeah. They were knocking off 40 a day. Sitting in the mountains as they were coming up the mountain they were just knocking them off as they fell back. Proud's comment to me when he showed me the figures the first time, he said, "It looks like a cricket match here doesn't it." It was true, I couldn't believe it.

Where did they get all their ammunition from?

Oh they had

21:30 plenty – in drops. They were just dropping the stuff to them and they were obviously in secure positions where they couldn't be seen and when they saw the bodies filing up the bloomin' steep hills to get back – try running away from the Yanks they were knocking them off as they fell back. They had no arms with them, they just panicked and bolted. And so they weren't taking prisoners they were just knocking them off and killing them.

22:00 But as I say that's when Bob got his Military Cross for that but I can imagine him doing it too.

Were they helped by the natives?

Oh, no doubt, no doubt because they had police boys with them.

Okay so they would've also taken …?

Oh yeah, I reckon, yeah. The police boys that were with us all had 303s. So the 303 would've been deadly. And

22:30 they each - all the police boys would've have had plenty of ammunition for their 303s but oh no, it was, that thing was very unusual in that Bob was sent in there for observation to see what the Japanese did to try and help the Americans in the landing and then the Japs panicked and bolted and when they bolted he was sitting there and he wasn't going to let –

23:00 do nothing so that's when he got involved in it.

With regard to the Dutch what contact did you have with them, at all?

Not much, I didn't no.

Did you have much at all?

No, the only time I saw the Dutch myself was back at Kirkston at Windsor in Brisbane, at the Unit Headquarters in Brisbane, at Kirkston and that

23:30 was at Windsor and they had Dutch working in there. Army mainly and one or two navy blokes but mostly NEI [Netherlands East Indies] Army. But other than that I didn't have anything to do with them at all no more than I had anything to do with the Yanks really, personally.

What was the Australian view of the Dutch soldiers?

Didn't have much.

24:00 to do with them.

What about you?

Oh well, I don't know. I was coloured a bit and Bob was too by the fact that they treated their colonial people very badly and we didn't have much time for that because there's no need for that at all, and they – the Javanese hated their guts and I

24:30 mean the Javanese didn't bolt they deliberately let the Japs through. It wasn't until they saw that the Japanese were worse than the Dutch that they tried to help. But they thought they were going to be – that this was good that they were going to get rid of the Dutch then they found out the Japanese were worse than the Dutch and that upset them a bit.

Can you tell us about for the camera about incidences

25:00 **of racism you saw with the Dutch? You were mentioning before about…**

My father's bit was the only bit that I knew about, I didn't strike it. But the Dutch – when the Timor – the Australians in Timor were being taken out my father was CO of M Special – went across to

25:30 Broome by Mitchell bomber and flew over to Broome from Brisbane to brief the pilot of a Dutch Catalina aircraft which was to go in and land an NEI Major in East Timor. And the NEI Major who was an Indonesian he was to bring the Australians – guide the Australians

26:00 down to the coast and I think it was there were two American submarines were on their way from Fremantle up there to pick them up off the coast and the operation was all in full swing. And the Sub were on their way and my father, he told me that he went across to Broome to brief the Dutch

26:30 Flight Lieutenant, or the Lieutenant bloke who was flying the Catalina and he said he walked into the briefing and took the NEI Major who was the one he was going to take in and the Dutchman took one look at the NEI Major and said, "I'm not taking a nigger and sticking my neck out for him, I'm going home." And he said he walked out of the room in Broome

27:00 went straight down the Catalina and took off and flew it back to Cairns. And he said if he'd been an Australian I would've court martialled him on the spot but he was absolutely disgusted with that. But that's the only instance I've heard of the definite bias that was there but we knew it was there but I've personally never seen it in action, but my

27:30 father told me that and I've got no doubts – I've got no reason to doubt him whatsoever. He wouldn't have said that, he said I would've court martialled him if he'd been an Australian and being a Lieutenant Colonel he could've. But you know, it was one of those things. It was there and the Indonesians to me, you know,

28:00 would've – if they'd been treated the right way there is no way they would've done the things the way they did. I've heard Australians say oh they're not to be trusted but I think that was a bit naïve. They weren't to be trusted because they were looking after their own interests.

28:30 And if you got in the way of their interests as they saw it well then look out. So you just didn't put yourself in that position and, but it was one of those things. Early on I can remember when we first were in Sigs when we were moving up north we were all told that we had to learn Malay but that only lasted for

29:00 what, three weeks to a month and then it was dropped like a hot scone. The army dropped it and I wondered why at the time and looking back now I can see why – they knew it wasn't going to work. It's one of those things you – other than the one experience my father had I've got no

29:30 personal knowledge of it at all but the stories, other stories you've heard of other people who've heard it there's a general feeling that the feeling was there sort of thing – no thanks. And you wouldn't necessarily go into Java – looking back at it now I would not have wanted to go into Java for FELO

30:00 telling the Indonesians that I was coming in to put the Dutch back in power. You wouldn't have lasted five minutes, just wouldn't be on. Didn't matter how good you were or what you were up to they had you so you just didn't do that sort of thing. The Australians kept right out of Java at the end. They weren't in there at all. They

30:30 were up in Borneo and British North Borneo and those places where the British Colonial Service was and most of them they were silly things they did at times but the head hunters were in Borneo and they were a law unto themselves anyway. I wouldn't have liked to mix with them either.

Speaking of which there

31:00 **was a tribe called Okyba [Orokaiva] in Papua New Guinea?**

No – what?

Okyba [Orokaiva] I think, they were apparently there was some story where I heard there was something to do with the deaths of these people a fair few of them were killed by Australian soldiers in a retributive act. Apparently they were egging the Japanese.

Oh that could well

31:30 be. There would've been some of them where the Japanese had treated them right and they'd gone over to the Japanese and we knew that that had happened in some ways, and that was part of the reason we were there to stop that happening where we were, Bob and I. But I never personally met a native who was vociferously pro Japanese.

32:00 You could tell occasionally one of them would look at you much as to say I believe you maybe but not outright but we knew that some of them existed. You sort of – oh interesting but generally they weren't around.

32:30 One village we kept on walking because we knew it was a bit dangerous but again it was the business of don't stick your neck out if you've got the ability to keep out of the way, but Bob and I did.

Did you think about the war as a just war?

33:00 Oh the Second World War, oh it was a matter of survival. If the Japanese had come down through the Islands and actually landed in Australia if that had ever happened I think we would've been in awful strife. Because our manufacturing and our supply of raw materials to a

33:30 fighting force would have been put in jeopardy straight away so that it was a matter of fight them or else we were in trouble. As I say, the Yanks, navy-wise was very good. Their navy was good and the only fighting men of the Yanks generally that you would put any trust in would be the marines but...

Why's that?

34:00 Because they were real soldiers. Whereas the normal – well the old story of 3 Div Sigs at Torakina. Now after I left them when they finished at Lae and Salamaua, after that was over they went back to the Tablelands and went on leave and then they went back up to Torakina, the American

34:30 Division – the 3rd Division landed and took it and took Torakina from the Japanese and they established the beachhead and then they were told to get back to the beach and the American Division was sent in to hold it and they were forced back down to the beach again. And that happened three times. 3 Div Infantry had to go in and take it back three times,

35:00 and it wasn't until the American Marines went in on the 4th attempt that it was finally held. The American Army was hopeless. But that was just the way it was. The marines yes, and the Americans generally and I've only got the reports of the 3 Div boys and that because I wasn't with them at that stage but they told me afterwards, they said it was a shambles.

35:30 They didn't really know what they were doing. But the marines finally fixed and when they were sent in to hold it they held it and there were no ifs or buts about it. But as I say, you know, the Americans certainly helped us much more than the Poms were able to do because I think the Poms were down to their boot straps at that stage any rate.

36:00 But the Americans of course had to save Honolulu and their west coast so they wanted the fighting here they didn't want it over their side of the ditch – it was simple. So they were a big help but it was very much as in their interests as much as ours.

Did you see yourself as fighting for the Empire or fighting for Australia?

No, fighting for Australia - blow the Empire.

36:30 Oh yeah – no, you were in the army for Australia there would have been some of them thought the Empire but not me I didn't think that way at all. I was there because Australia was in trouble.

What about the fact that you were in a Signals Unit, did you ever feel that you wanted to be in the Infantry?

No, no.

Why was that?

Well,

37:00 you had more control and you knew more about what was going on. The poor bloke in Infantry was facing the bullet that was all and he didn't know what was happening other than his bit of it was the sharp edge at that point. The Signal Unit was feeding the information backwards and forwards so you had the overall picture of what was happening as to why. And it

37:30 was, much as we couldn't decipher the messages we had enough know how in talking amongst the other Divisional people as to what was happening and why it was happening. It was a slightly different feeling. I had no desire to go into an infantry battalion or an artillery regiment at all it wasn't my cup

38:00 of tea.

Do you think there was a different mindset for people?

Oh yeah.

Different social…?

Yeah some - not social so much, the type of blokes they were. I mean in Sigs the biggest – you know I'd always – from school I'd always say the big blokes tended to be the bullies in a lot of cases. And what I found when I went into Signals

38:30 was that the biggest blokes in Signals were the big Sergeants and they were built like tanks, and the WOs and so forth, and they looked after us like old mother hens. They were marvellous. And so you reversed your thinking all together and we grew up together and you had a different attitude to what was going on as a result. We've got with the Sigs Unit

39:00 which is different to the FELO. FELO they were taken from all around Australia and overseas and after the war all dispersed back to their own areas so that there isn't a concentration of them in one area. Whereas 3 Div Sigs is mainly from Caulfield – Brighton and we've all tended to stay in Victoria, the bulk.

39:30 There are some of them that have gone to Western Australia and Queensland and so forth but as a result…

What battalion were you in sorry?

I wasn't, I was 3 Div Sigs.

Third Division Signals?

Yeah originally, and as a result we have a 3 Div Sig reunion in the city now each year and out of a unit of about 450,

40:00 even after all this time we can still get 70 to 75 there and still pick up where we left off – we're mates. Mainly because during the 19, 20, 21 period we grew up together.

Stop the tape.

Tape 9

00:36 **Now being in Signals what sort of information would you hear, you know we were discussing how the differences of mentality of people in the infantry and artillery what sort of information would you hear through conversations in Intelligence?**

Well nothing of any consequence. You knew, it was drummed into us that you were doing a job that

01:00 without the Divisional Signal Unit the blinkin' battalions couldn't operate and they had to get their instructions, and unless we kept the thing open and the communication circuit between the Divisional Headquarters and the army headquarters and the units the damn thing couldn't operate anyway. And that was drummed into us right from the start so you made darn sure of it,

01:30 you were able to always keep in touch with the others. And it wasn't a mindset or anything it was just the way they taught us.

Now when you were involved in operations around Lae, Wau and Bulolo you would've trailed behind the infantry right, in that way because you were setting up signal lines?

Yeah, well, yes, you were behind them, yes.

How far behind the front line would you be?

02:00 Oh well, the poor old B Section were right there. They were right in it laying cables whereas the radio blokes, you'd have one radio down with the battalion headquarters wherever it was and the ones communicating they'd be back with divie headquarters. You'd have 3 blokes or so down

02:30 near the front line and the rest of you'd be behind back in div. And you had to have all your maintenance done and that all had to be done where it was safe 'cause radios are notorious for giving up the ghost so you had to – your repair work had to be first rate. Your maintenance section had to be right on the ball and the B Section

03:00 laying the cable, of course, they had to be right down near the front line because they were dragging the cable to the front line so they could talk to them on the telephone. They were right in it.

Did you ever encounter booby traps or did Japanese soldiers bother you inside …?

Well they did between Wau and Salamaua the Japs tried all sorts of tricks breaking lines and that sort of business and the poor old B Section blokes had to go in with them

03:30 knowing that the damn thing was probably booby trapped and they had to repair it. They had their hands full the whole time and that was always nasty.

That never happened to you?

No, no.

You never saw any of that?

No, no, and being radio I didn't see it at all.

Well how did you deal with the possibility of being killed or wounded?

You didn't think about it. That's the only way.

04:00 Didn't think about it. I mean - well at that age you probably think you're indestructible anyway but it was no good dwelling on it, you just didn't think about it. Okay, if it happened it happened. You know it was a matter of a fait accompli. You couldn't – it was the sort of thing you can't dwell on, if you survived you survived if you didn't you didn't, that was it.

04:30 You knew darn well if you on a boat or a plane that the damn thing could crash or a boat could sink. What could you do about it, you had to do it.

What motivated you to take part in the war I mean apart from Australia's…

Well I was called up.

In the sense of you know apart from obligations which you were obviously willing to do apart from defending your country what were the other motivations?

Nothing really.

05:00 **Did you have a hatred for the Japanese?**

No, other than thinking they were silly. A firm belief that we'd win in the end any rate but you – I think most Australians had that belief, they couldn't knock us off if they tried. But it was you know, one of those things that you generally thought well it's got to be

05:30 done, it's a job it's got to be done and if you got your nose into trouble at times, what the heck. You know it was like, when we were coming back – when I was bringing the police boys back from New Guinea to Townsville we were on a DC3, in an American DC3 Dakota and we hit a storm on the way down. Oh boy being inside a DC3 in a middle of rainstorm is like being inside an empty water tank

06:00 you've got no idea, it's a terrible noise. And we were half way down and the American pilot came back and told me afterwards he hit a down draught in the old DC3 and there was nothing he could do. He said, "I had the wheel right back in my stomach and she still kept going down like a stone," with the wheel right back in his stomach trying to get her to climb

06:30 and she would not climb. He said she finally pulled out a hundred feet above the water in the Coral Sea. A hundred feet above the water she finally levelled off and stayed there. And he said, "You don't know how close you were mate." He said, "Neither did I." But you know, it's just one of those, it's happened so what, what can you do about it. Nothing you can do. The boys -

07:00 the wings – it was so wild the wind that the wings of the old DC3 were flapping like that. The metal was bending. And I made a comment to him, I said, "That frightens the living daylights out of me the wings going like that." He said, "Don't worry mate while they're doing that she's alright," he said, "when you panic, is when they go ridged," he said, "that's just before they break." He said, "As long as you

07:30 see them flapping she's alright." Learned something that day.

Yeah you bet. So what about the war elsewhere that was taking place in Europe and the other…

Well we didn't hear much about it. I mean you had no radio communication in the normal sense. I did with Bob Cole because the little radio we had

08:00 was on the shortwave band as well so we could listen to Radio Australia so Bob and I knew what was going on but in Signals our Unit – all the radios were just army frequencies so we had no idea unless an army newspaper came as to what on earth was happening. It was one of those things, if you thought you caught up with the bit that was going on, that was in that particular bit of

08:30 newspaper, you saw, otherwise you didn't.

So you felt that the war was going to be won? You thought from what you saw in the

newspapers that the war was going to be won?

Well what we were doing ourselves we were sure it was because we were progressing slowly forward. Now it was slow but it was happening we were going forward not backwards and we weren't being forced back into Australia

09:00 so we knew that we were winning and that was the main reason. We weren't being forced back we were going forward the whole time so we knew in ourselves that okay we're winning, slowly but surely, but we're doing it and hope to God it doesn't cost too much to do it. But it was, it was winning.

This may sound like a bit of a silly question was the

09:30 **war – I mean I'm not saying obviously the nature of the conflict and so forth, but was the overall experience of you being involved in the war an enjoyable one?**

Oh to a point, it was – I wouldn't have missed the growing up, period knowing all the fellows in Sigs for instance, from the time I first went in until I left them. I wouldn't have missed that growing up period

10:00 because it was an education and an experience and they were all very nice blokes and we all got on with one another very well. I don't know that I'd ask anybody to do it because I felt that part was good, because I think the rest of it was worse. And just for me, I liked being the boss not being told what to do all the

10:30 time and so that being a Sergeant in the army you were just, you know, one of the 'do as you're told jobs' and wouldn't have stayed, I didn't, I wouldn't have stayed in the army after the war in a mad fit. The idea of that hierarchy, stepped hierarchy not for me. My father loved it but I couldn't have a bar of it

11:00 and, but I was out as quick as I could. But it was, you know, horses for courses, some blokes liked it and some didn't. The actual overall experience was good but the method of getting there was a bit crude, put it that way.

11:30 **Did you dream about the war?**

No, no, never.

Never?

No, I had no frightening, I had frights a couple of times but I had no horror things like my father did, of his mate being killed alongside him and that sort of -

12:00 I never had that and so that I never had anything that I – something that I dreamed of 20 years down the track, and I know there are some blokes that have been in positions where that's been there and that happened to a lot of Vietnamese blokes, Vietnam fellows and that would've been horrible but luckily, touch wood. I've never had it so it wasn't there at

12:30 all.

So war memories like – are they strongest you have, the war memories?

Oh no, no, memories of work and so forth. I've got some very pleasant memories of that and you know, I had so many different sort of jobs bank-wise that you know, I did so many different jobs and that, that it

13:00 could never ever get boring and I met so many nice people, in the staff in the bank and in dealing with customers that, you know, I was more than happy to be there. And I think I visited every Post Office in Victoria when I was an Agency Inspector in the

13:30 bank, inspecting the Postal Agencies in all the Post Offices all the Bank Agencies in all the Post Offices. And I think I saw every Post Office in Victoria doing that and I did that for 10 years. And I saw some beautiful places in Victoria. I'll tell you what it taught me about Victoria, it's a beautiful State.

Before we go on too much about Victoria there was a few other questions I had to ask you on the war,

14:00 **what did you think of the concept of LMF, Lack of Moral Fibre?**

I've never struck it, never gave it a thought. You had a job to do and you did it. I never ever saw somebody or any bloke that I ever knew that refused to do something because it was dangerous.

14:30 When they were asked to do something they did it. I never ever saw anybody back off and it was just one of those things you had a job to do and everybody buckled own.

But did some people have problems coping with the pressures?

Wouldn't know, I never found one.

So you never come across cowardice, desertion even?

No, no, never.

15:00 **Conscientious objectors?**

No, no. Usually the conscientious objectors that we heard about finished up in the hospital units or in the ambulance units and they did that, now that was fair enough. I mean, they could get into danger but they weren't actually fighting. They had to get into some awful dangerous situations but they still did it

15:30 and as I say, I can't remember any one bloke that I ever knew in the army that ever backed off because he was frightened of doing something. It just didn't happen, not to me any rate or anyone I knew.

That's interesting…

It's just amazing when you stop and think about it, but it's true I can't remember one.

I think I've run out of questions

16:00 **to ask…**

Yeah, yeah, right.

But I'd like to leave it to you now, I mean is there anything that you haven't told us or that you haven't told anyone else before that you would like to say for the record about your experiences or…?

Well there's when I first went into the army in Signals. There I am there at Camp 17 at Seymour.

I'll take a copy of your photos. Just before we conclude on the interview is there something you'd like to say for the record on your

16:30 **experiences that you have not said?**

Don't know really, not the army stuff. I think you've covered pretty near everything that - you probably never seen but that is a bit of a

17:00 one off, I've heard of a lot of blokes in different units and I've never heard of a CO in a unit writing a letter like John Proud did to us when we finished, and that was his final letter to us and it was thanking us for the job we did.

17:30 And that was a two page letter that he did when he was at Moratai and that is superb. The fellows in Z Special said to me, "God we never got anything like that." And Proud, it's just the way he puts it and the way he explains it all and he's thankful it's all over. It's quite some letter that one.

Can I ask you one question, this will be my final

18:00 **question, what was your feeling when the war ended?**

Thank heavens it's over. That's it, that was all the reaction was, thank heavens that's finished I can back to work. But that really was it, I was glad – the feeling of relief was unbelievable. We're finally out of it, it's finished. We can now get back to doing something useful and that's exactly what Proud

18:30 says. The one bit there he says, "The ones in FELO that were lost were Vail, Hallett, Geogh, Murfield and Emanuel."

Yeah I read that.

Now, the Field Patrols, that was ourselves, now – his final bit was,

19:00 "It is one of the greatest personal regrets that I won't be able to thank each one of you personally and that we will not be able to gather together in one place and have a grand final burst. With detachments scattered half way across the Pacific this is not practicable. But for some, areas will close up quickly and others might take some months, but I want each one of your to take this letter as a personal letter to yourself. If we do

19:30 meet again we will, I am sure, make the most of the occasion. I am very proud of FELO and proud to have had the privilege of commanding a unit in which the individuals gave so much so loyally." You couldn't ask for more than that. Just a, you know a good thank you. But he said there

20:00 that the fighting's over, get back to making things not destroying. And he says that in the letter and it's true.

Interesting surname he has.

Oh yeah –

Proud.

A good Scot – oh JCR, John Charles Rookwood,

20:30 but his name was John Charles Rookwood Proud. Rookwood R double O K W double O D. John Charles

Rookwood Proud and he was a very nice man.

I think we’re just about to run out of tape, yes, okay. I’d like to thank you very much for this opportunity to interview you.

That’s fine.