

# Australians at War Film Archive

## Frederick Crane - Transcript of interview

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<http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/743>

### Tape 1

00:41 **Let's go back to your childhood tell us about where you grew up?**

01:00 I was born in Swan Hill on 5 May 1918. And we lived on farms at Lake Lookout and Comatook [Sp?], Cannie and then eventually moved back to Beverford and started school at

01:30 Beverford and then we went back to Nyah, and those days our schooling was only 8 grades and you only had 1 schoolroom, 8 grades in it and 1 teacher. Teachers today have got nothing to complain about I don't reckon.

02:00 I didn't do the 8th grade because during the Depression years the '20s to early '30s very bad years, I mean nobody had any money, plenty of droughts. I left school when I was 13 and I got a job in a butcher shop and I learnt the butchering trade. Slaughtering, I had to do their own slaughtering and everything like that,

02:30 I did that for 5 years, I got me certificate. And then I got a job, a chap had a chaff cutter, so I got as a young fella, travelling from farm to farm travelling right down from Pymont Hill to Kerang right back up to Ouyen, all around the Mallee and the 4 brakes to look after.

03:00 So I did that for a while, then was very short of course, I mean if you didn't have a job, there's no such thing as the dole those days, so then eventually I joined the AMF [Australian Military Forces] part time,

03:30 once a fortnight, you go to the Swan Hill Drill Hall, 7th Battalion, that's to get extra money. I spent all me life on the tractors and then of course war broke out and eventually I went to the war.

**So you lived in a lot of different places during your childhood.**

04:00 **What were they different farms that your family moved to?**

Dad moved around, he married my mother at Beverford and I was born at Swan Hill and then we went down to Lake Lookout and Comatook [Sp?] and Kenny and back up to Nyah, I spent most of me life at Nyah really, most of me life, I mean I came back when I was 5 and then started school at

04:30 Beverford, then I finished at Nyah School.

**So what sort of farming did your father do?**

Fruit blocks and wheat farming, mainly wheat and more droughts than good years, those days. You didn't have the choice of crops like you have today. You grew oats, of course, you cut them into

05:00 sheath of hay for chaff for horses, you had no tractor, only horses and they just moved around from place to place and eventually they settled down in Nyah and moved permanent then. They had a fruit block there. 'Til he died and then Mum sold up and went moved to Queensland with me sister. So, I don't know

05:30 wherever your parents went, you went.

**Was your dad in the First World War?**

No, he joined up but some or other he had a motor bike and broke an ankle and he didn't get away, he got chucked, he broke his ankle or something to do with it.

06:00 So he didn't go away. No I was the first one, my 2 brothers and I christened the Crane family into the wars.

**So how many children in your family?**

We had 9 altogether. Yeah, still 3 is alive.

## **Where did you**

06:30 **come in the family?**

I'm number 1, yeah I'm number 1.

**So you must have had a lot of responsibility being the first son?**

Oh, yes, yes, a lot of responsibility. I mean I had to milk cows before

07:00 I went to school in the morning, all hand milking now with a machine like nowadays. I had a lot of work to do, I mean it wasn't easy, and then of course we had our girl guides and scout movements and Church of England Boys, which I am still in.

07:30 I still wear a uniform, I am a Melbourne Diocese Executive now, Mission Committee and that been Camp Officer for years. Anyway, so when war broke out,

08:00 where would you like me to go from there?

**I would like to hear more about your life growing up on a farm in the country. What it was like for you at a country school?**

08:30 **Do you remember stories of things that happened to you from that time with your brothers and sisters?**

We just lived an ordinary family life on the farm, and during the Depression years things got tough, we never went short of food anything like that, we grew all our own vegies.

09:00 Vegies like that, and there was plenty of rabbits, I can tell you 100 ways to cook a rabbit. All different ways and we would do our fishin' and we had a boat, lived on Murray River of course we had Nyah, and swimming clubs down there,

09:30 I belonged to a swimming club and a bike riding club, I was a bike rider as well, pretty active on the bike. Of course when I grew up old enough, I started to go out to dances and things like that. I was just starting to enjoy my life when war broke out. I had it all taken off me. So the best part of my fine

10:00 life was spent in a Japanese prison camp. That's the way it went. Not much for us to talk about really, just a normal daily life. Of course then we would go

10:30 once a year, once we joined the army, once a year we'd get a fortnight camp and go away, to the Mildura Regiment and get a fortnight camp. That was the only holiday we get. We never knew what a holiday was. I never seen the sea 'til the war broke out.

11:00 So, I don't know where to go from here.

**Ok, so you were the eldest of 9 children, how many brothers did you have?**

3. I had 4, but we lost one early, he never came home from the hospital and I had a sister that never came home from the hospital.

11:30 And, so there has been a double grave up in Nyah up there for nearly 70 odd years. And just last August I put a mead grave on it, me brother and sister's grave. You go and see Dad's, I knew where Dad's was, I knew where the little grave was, the 2 children's grave so I put a

12:00 head stone on it. That was a 50 year dream I had. Different ones say to me, don't ask me, like brothers and sisters and family they say, "Don't ask me for money". And that was a 50 year dream I had and I carried it out. And, you walk past and now when you are at the cemetery and you see the

12:30 children's grave I look at it and I feel proud I done it. I mean, pretty hard to see a grave with no name on it. As far as children go,

13:00 the person it affects, it didn't affect us, your parents are the ones who had to clothe and feed and look after you and have that job to do. I mean me father had a couple of trucks and they had no work for him. So, were you going to say something to me?

13:30 **What would the trucks be used for?**

Carting wheat, and mallee stumps and fire wood. Carting cattle to the sale yards and something like that. On the land you always had to have a truck to have something to do and we would cut a lot of wood and send it,

14:00 cut it into blocks and send Melbourne for fire wood for household use. Anything you could get to make a few shillings. If you were lucky you got a fairly good job and you earn 10 shillings a week. 10 shillings a week had a

14:30 lot of value in it in those days. So it's equivalent to our \$5 now and you know how far \$5 would go.

**So you would have been involved in all those chores those tasks on the farm?**

Oh, yes I had to milk about 8 cows

15:00 every morning by hand before going to school as a kid. That was my share and we had about 30 cows and being the elder one I had to milk cows morning and night. And, we always got a little cheque back from the butter factory, hand separated with cream and

15:30 I mean then you had to cut fire wood for all fuel stoves, open fire place and things like that. You had to cut wood, everybody have a job to do.

**Did you actually have to separate the milk from the cream for the butter factory?**

Oh, yeah, hand separators.

**So you had a little dairy on the farm?**

Yeah, that's right and you kept a few pigs

16:00 for the skim milk you feed the milk to the pigs and cooked up barley and stuff like that.

**So whose job was it to separate the milk?**

We all took turns at it, turn the handle. I mean we finished with a crown separator in the finish and that was a bigger one. I mean, you gotta keep windin' all the time to wind them up to get them spinning

16:30 until the bell stops, but see they don't separate on a dairy farm now more now that all goes to the factory. You buy full cream milk it's not full cream milk the cream been taken out.

**So can you describe for me the dairy that you had on the farm and the equipment you had there?**

We just had a

17:00 little 6 x 6 shed where the separator room was, you had Coolgardie safes, that's wooden frame made with hessian on it then a little tank on top, and you have towelling hanging in the water and drops down the side and the water comes down and keeps the sides safe, there's no refrigeration those days,

17:30 not in the Mallee. Probably in Melbourne no refrigeration either, all Coolgardie safe, meat safe was a wire safe hanging up under the tree somewhere or under the veranda. You find in the village you see all these things.

**So, did you keep the cream and the milk in the Coolgardie safe?**

18:00 Yes, in the Coolgardie safe and about every third day the cream truck would come from Swan Hill and pick it up and take it to Swan Hill. So you keep it for about 3 days. I don't know it's not much to say

18:30 about it.

**Did you enjoy doing that? What farm work did you like?**

I liked wheat and I still like wheat. I think it's a good job. But then when I got the job on the travelling chaff cutter, I did that 'til up to the war. And I got good money for that, I was getting 3 pound a week and I was able to buy myself

19:00 an old car, but I was doing pretty well when the war broke out really.

**So tell me about those times on the chaff cutter, what would you do? You'd go from farm to farm?**

Farm to farm yes. Everybody had horses, you've seen hay stacks have you? The sheaths of hay,

19:30 they had to grow their own hay and stack it and then if they didn't have a chaff cutter themselves they, well I was on a travelling chaff cutter, the chap had an old one when I got the job and he brought me a new one, first rubber tyred tractor in the Mallee. He bought the tractor, Tripp and Bunning chaff cutter. I had a brand new outfit to look after. He was very good to me,

20:00 that's his son up there next to the clock, my best man at the weddin'. He just died a while back. So, I was a long way travelling, because we would camp, sleep on the hay stacks or sheds or on the farms or something like that.

20:30 Most of the farmers cooked the tucker for us, so we didn't have to worry about cookin'.

**So it was a horse drawn chaff cutter?**

No. Tractor.

**Oh, tractor.**

Tractor had the belt drive to drive the chaff cutter, belt drive, I got photos up there of it.

**Can you describe it? Describe the machinery you worked with.**

- 21:00 Yes, I mean, you got a bag of chaff and the bags, I always did bagging job the sewing, because I always did a bag a minute. From here to my front fence you sat by the hay stack and would cart the bag from here to my front fence and by the time you finish it that big stack of chaff would be up
- 21:30 where you started from. I mean you would get 1000 tonne hay stacks and put it in bags, it takes up a lot of room. I got photos up there, boxes I could show you for hours, hay being carted behind the wagon and things like that.

**It would be great to hear what**

- 22:00 **was actually involved in chaff cutting, so when you arrived at the farm, what would you do?**

You gotta set up.

**What was involved in setting up?**

You gotta put the tractor front, you put the belts on, you put stays on, the four wheels so the chaff cutter doesn't move. And then up in the Mallee you might only get a dozen bags of hay

- 22:30 cut and you gotta resharpen the knives because the sand used to blow in on the side of the stacks. So you are always sharpening knives. All hand sharpened, no machine. All files. So there's quite a lot of work in it.

**The sand would blow in?**

Yeah, the Mallee dust storms. All your houses would be full of dust.

- 23:00 You've never seen a Mallee dust storm?

**I have but for someone who hasn't seen it, can you describe it?**

When it rolls in you need all the lights on and everything it's as black as the ace of spades you can't see 2 in front of ya'. Choking dust and everything like that. The wind just picks all the dust up off the ground

- 23:30 and just whirls it round and round the place. Some of the storm would lift machinery on the farm, shift it, shift ploughs and things like that. We don't get them nowadays. I don't know why. You only ever hear of a bit of a wind storm goes through, but you don't get nothing like you used to.

- 24:00 **So, did you experience many of these storms - did you see tractors being picked up by the wind?**

Oh yeah, I seen plenty yeah, plenty of them. We've been going along the road with the trucks and you would have to stop because you couldn't see where you were going. You could see them rolling in from the West for hours and hours before it hits you

- 24:30 and in half to 3 quarters of an hour it would be gone. Just go straight past you. Took all the top soil out to the Pacific Ocean somewhere. So, then we had mice plagues and grasshopper plagues. I had 50 acres of oats standing about 4 or 5 feet high.

- 25:00 Me father said to me one day, "When are you going to cut the straw?" I said, "Probably Wednesday", but Sunday night the grasshoppers chopped it all up and left it laying on the ground. That's what a farmer has to put up with. So a year's work gone in over night. The grasshoppers

- 25:30 moved Sunday night and gone Monday, they kept on going, just chewed everything up. And mice plagues, in those days there were no silos at the railway stations, they all bagged wheat, they used to stack it all in bags. And the mice used to get in there and play up, flatten the stack down. Yeah, so.

**How much did you lose from the**

- 26:00 **oats being eaten by the grasshoppers?**

We lost the lot. We had 50 acres of it.

**How much money would you have lost?**

Oh, in value I wouldn't know.

**Would that have been an annual income?**

Yes, that was our supply for the year, hay for the year, one 50 acre paddock it was. We had more, but it wasn't ready,

- 26:30 but that was our year's feed for the horses for the year. You lose it. So it's not easy.

**What did you feed horses with?**

If you haven't got it you have to buy it for yourself. Probably a bag of chaff would cost about 2 shillings a bag. That's what

27:00 represents 20 cents at the moment. Then we had a few grape vines as well. We had lucerne growing, we grew lucerne and we had that irrigated, pumped water out of the river. And

27:30 now and again things got quiet I would go and get a job on a paddle steamer, I would go away on a paddle steamer for a while. That's where I should be now, it's the 150 year anniversary of the paddle steamer arriving at Swan Hill, last Wednesday. I should have been up there. But I got commitments down here and I couldn't go. I was a bit disappointed about it.

28:00 **So what sort of job did you have on the paddle steamer what did you do?**

We'd cart wood, we'd go down the river and lay wood on and bring it back. We had a big pumping station at Nyah and used to pump water out of the river and send the water out to irrigate the areas and used to go out and fill up dams and farms and all out back to Sea Lake and all those places. But it's nearly all piped

28:30 now.

**So you were loading up tanks to take to the farms, loading up water? How were you getting the water to the farms?**

Channels, it was all channelled dams, but each house had its own rainwater tank and that was a year's supply of drinking water, you had to conserve water, I mean you would only have a bath once a week.

29:00 You would have a wash or something like that. There always used to be bath night somewhere. There would be a tub in front of the fire place for the kids and all the kids have a bath. No bath rooms.

**All in together?**

Yeah, one lot of water would do, if you had 10 kids all the water would do 10 kids. You didn't have the water, you had a copper you had to heat it by

29:30 copper, wood copper. Your mother did all the washing, boil all the clothes in the copper. I have got an old copper down the yard now, still got one.

**So getting the water to dams on the farms it was all through channels from the river was it?**

Yes, channels. And of course every year, in the winter time on the farm you channel, you had scoop all the sand out

30:00 because the sand would get into the channels. But they run the channel from the Grampians or it goes from the Golden Weir to Waranga Basin, what's called the Waranga Channel goes through to Kerang and fills all the lakes up there, so once a year they do that. We've got enough water this year we're going go

30:30 run them again this year. But Northern Mallee is already piped, now, but a big job with the horse scooping out the channel before you can run the water. Like the damn I saw the other day up a Marla where they found the body, it's nearly empty. Lot of empty damns this year.

**Did you see**

31:00 **severe drought during those times when you were living up there?**

Oh yes, I have seen a lot of drought, until after the war and then they seemed to disappear. But we've had 6 years now again. But it's different type of farming now, nowadays you have got all different types of crops, you've got beans and peas

31:30 and Canola Oil and all that stuff, I mean it's different farming and it's done on a big scale. But back in the old days you only had a square mile which was 640 acres each, that's what each block was, now you wouldn't even get a week's living off a

32:00 square mile now. You gotta get 8 or 10,000 acres to make a living now.

**So what would happen in a bad drought, how would that affect the crops, the farms, the families?**

Well, no income, and you didn't have no unemployment benefits, I mean the life

32:30 just existed, that's all it did. To my mind now, the young or anybody who doesn't want to work just go up to Centerlink and get yourself \$190 a week given to ya. So anybody that starves in this country now is a fool. But they can still get the dole and run a motor car, it amazes me how they

33:00 do it. I know how much money it costs when I got married, and I brought up 4 children and I built this house meself brick by brick. I didn't have a builder and I had to work hard to earn money. In fact in the

old days you couldn't earn the money it wasn't there. So,

33:30 you gotta think, your mother made all her own bread, made her own yeast and her own bread and we were lucky we always had water, so we had plenty of vegies, we sold vegies too, as well. But it wasn't easy.

34:00 It's pretty hard to try and describe everything. I don't know what you want to know really.

**Why did you have plenty of water?**

We lived on the river. We had the Murray River. We had a pump on the river and everything. We were a bit lucky there,

34:30 but when we was on the dry farm on Tomwell or Cannie or Lake Lookout we had a big lake there, there was always plenty of water there, off the lake or river. Cannie was only damns and channels and you generally had a couple of rainwater tanks on the house of 1,000 gallons each. Only had about 2,000 gallons of water on a tank and

35:00 that's for cooking and drinking and that, and you had to conserve it of course. Life wasn't easy. Even as a kid I know it wasn't easy.

**So in a drought, in a bad period of drought what would happen to the river, would it lose very much water ?**

I can show you photos,

35:30 us walking across the river, the river stopped running. It would do the same now but the only thing that keeps it running now is dams and weirs, been dammed. I can show you photos of us walking around the river stepping over puddles of water, the water even stopped. Before my time in 1914,

36:00 practically the whole Murray River dried up before I was born, which I never seen.

**So when the river was dry like that, what did you do for water for the farm?**

If there was no water in the river there was no water for the farm. See, what we call the channel and dams is

36:30 stock and domestic supply and you have dams, run the water, you fill the dams up but half the water in the dams you would never use anyway because of the evaporation of it, evaporates away. But that's what the cattle and the sheep drink and everything and sometimes you water the garden, have a windmill and a tank and water around the house.

37:00 So it's called the stock and domestics supply. But now they are slowly putting pipes out, it's cheaper to just have tanks, you fill the tanks up through a meter. So, it's a costly

37:30 job.

**I am still very curious about the river and the water supply and how the farms got their water and life on the river, I think it's really interesting that you worked on the paddle steamers and**

38:00 **what the river meant to the communities up there and the river trade, when the clock stops can you?**

You could only run river boats when like winter time or when the river was in flood.

38:30 The river's high at the moment that's why we got the boats going again now. But I mean some of the boats would go up the Darling River up to the Mendie [Sp?] and Wilcannia and it might take them 10 years before they get them back down again. They might be landlocked up there for 10 years. I seen photos of them landlocked.

39:00 During the good years follow across country sometimes, and not even follow the river and the river is flooded they could travel across overland, paddle steamers. But pretty hard work doin' those, travelling round like that with boats. We had no railways

39:30 those days. We had railways in my time but the early days they had no railways, the river trade was the only trade they had. That's what the anniversary is on for now, the first boat to ride in Swan Hill 150 years ago, last Wednesday.

**So where were the paddle steamers made, do you know? Were they built in Australia or did they come from overseas?**

40:00 Well, some were brought out from England. They sailed them through the mouth of the river down at Gawler down at South Australia and then went up the river. But most river boats are made on the River, at Echuca and Narrallen all over the place. I got a few photos in there, I got a box of photos of all the paddle boats and things.

40:30 The Marion and all that, the Gem, big passenger boats and that. I was looking at the photo last night of

the Gem, you been to Swan Hill? Seen the paddle boat there at the museum? Well I got a photo while she was a passenger boat on the river. I love the boats.

## Tape 2

00:30 **Ok, so you were going to tell us some more about your experiences of living on the Murray River and working on the paddle steamers. So what ships did you work on?**

I worked on the Peppersea, she's at Echuca now and we used to travel up, down to from Nyah to down to the Wakool Junction and we go up the

01:00 Walker River and go to the Roodleman, you can't get to the old wharf, you can't get there now, we'd pick up fire wood, cart wood. We tow a barge and pick up wool and bring it back down to Roa Head and mainly fire wood, unload the fire wood at Nyah pumping station,

01:30 there was a big pumping station in those days and anyway they tied her up there, our pump and she caught on fire one night and they cut a hole in her and sunk her, and eventually they raised her and reflanked her and got her going again. Years later my wife and I went up to Echuca and the Peppersea, she's up there

02:00 and we went on board and we was going for a trip in the afternoon so we'd buy a couple of tickets and go for a ride on the Peppersea. Anyway I got talking to the engineers and I said to them, "I could always remember the night the Peppersea got burnt". They said, "What do you mean got burnt?" I said, "They cut a hole in her and sunk her near our farm. You look at

02:30 all the woodwork over the boiler house inside, it's all charred". They said, "We know that, we often look at that and often wonder what's happened", I said, "That was caused by the fire". I told them what happened to the boat and how they sunk it and everything like this. Anyway that afternoon we were going on the trip so I went back over to the office to pick up the tickets and they gave us the 2 tickets for nothing. Complimentary tickets because they found out something of history about the boat that they didn't

03:00 know. They often wondered why some of the woodwork was charred above the boiler house, it was caused by the fire.

**So just tell me about that fire, where you were?**

I was home at the house. I wasn't on the boat then, I was home that night. She was tied up there for the night

03:30 and they were going down to Natya somewhere next day to Woodhill Junction to pick up some more fire wood. They ordered 5 foot blocks, logs like posts and had to be a certain size, I mean you threw them in the boilers at the pumping station and of course

04:00 you'd have a swing winch crane on and swing the crane over the bank and put a rope around it and swing it back and stack it on the boat and that's how you'd unload it too that way, load it on the bank. They they'd get trucks to cart it down to the wood stacks. Used to be wood stacks half a mile long at Nyah pumping station, it was a very big pumping station in those days.

04:30 I thought my ducted heating was coming on.

**So the boat was tied up near the pumping station did you say?**

Yeah. Near our pump, just round the bend a bit we had a little pumping station. That picture up there

05:00 where the big pump is, that's looking down stream. That's the river, just round the right side of the picture is where our pump was. The big pump is just to the right of that picture and our pump is just upstream the bend in the river. I got a photo of it.

05:30 Marie Matson, one of the girls I grew up, went down and painted the scene for me. I got the photo I took before the war, it's over there on the table, the shadows and that. Yeah, Marie Matson did that one.

**So how did the fire start on the boat, what caused it?**

Wouldn't have a clue, something around the engine,

06:00 round the boiler or something like that. Wouldn't have a clue. Burnt all the superstructure and all that. But she was apparently out of the water for a long time. They towed her away when the river dropped or something, they repaired the plank in the bottom, they put an axe in the wooden plank. A paddle steamer is a flat bottomed boat.

06:30 And they are all made of gum planks. Any rate they repaired the plank and towed her back, probably took her back to Echuca, or somewhere like that, and repaired her.

**So there was no one on the boat at the time the fire broke out?**

I can't remember, I think there was, it was a long time ago, long time ago. I was only about

07:00 16 or 17 I suppose, it was a long time ago. I wouldn't have a clue if there was anybody on the boat that night or not, there would be. I mean Alston was the skipper of the boat, and he lived at Nyah too so he probably be home with his family. Probably would be somebody

07:30 on the boat must had to be somebody there because they cut a hole in the floor to let the water in, to sink her. You would run a paddle boat by itself with about 6 blokes. Night shift and day shift, and you would be towing a barge, you would have a couple of blokes on the barge.

08:00 I got books here, "Bend of the River" books, I show you, I could keep you for a fortnight and show you stuff. I don't know what's going to happen to it all when I go.

**With this boat being out of action, like sunk and at the bottom of the river,**

08:30 **what did it mean for the industry? Was it a big problem having 1 boat out of action?**

The point is the crew never had a job when the boat was out of action. So I mean the minute you lost your job. I never had a job, on the boat, so

09:00 you lost, and you had to look for something else. 1937 I think it was, yes, a drought year. Then I had to cross over to Coralie Station across the river and I was cutting wood for their pump, cutting timber. I think I was getting 4 shillings a

09:30 tonne to cut wood, anything to make a living.

**So you must have been disappointed when you heard that the boat wasn't working?**

Oh yes.

**When did you hear the news, do you remember?**

Oh, next morning or something,

10:00 probably next morning. But you see any mishap you had in those days, I mean you lose your job straight away.

**So,**

10:30 **when did you join the local militia group?**

When I was about 18 I think, 17, 18. I got a

11:00 I got some photos over there I pulled out last night.

**So that was the local Nyah group?**

7th Battalion, that was Mildura, the north west district, it's called 7th Battalion Headquarters Mildura and we had a company in Swan Hill and we all had a company of 17 Light Horse Swan Hill, which my brother was in. They didn't like horses, they rode

11:30 motor bikes. Now, the north west district has been extended now and includes Shepparton and it's called 7th and 8th now. So one of our old army banners are going up to Shepparton, going to be stored in drill hall Shepparton. They were good days in the

12:00 army. So, I had been to camp when I turned 21, May 39. I came home, I was home from camp and

12:30 one of the girls on the neighbouring farm, she was only 17 and I was a bit sweet on her. And I got photos there taken of her with her because when I came back from the war she was married later in life. I seen her 3 times this year. At 2 funerals, I been up her place and she been down

13:00 here. She's widowed now. She's havin' trouble with her eyesight of course. When war broke out I was enjoying meself as a young bloke. I was starting to go out with the girls and keep an eye on the father and everything.

**So where would you**

13:30 **go, where would you meet the girls? What sort of social life did you have?**

Well, around our area you had 4 balls a year, you'd have a RSL [Returned and Services League] Ball, a Church of England Ball and a Catholic Ball and a New Year's Ball, that's 4 balls a year you go to. Of course that's when we was old enough to go, allowed to go and it used to cost us

14:00 7 shillings and sixpence. You had to save up 7 shillings and sixpence, that'd buy a double ticket, to take a girl to a ball, that included your supper.



- 14:30 You do that 4 times a year, that takes a lot of saving, those days. And of course we'd go out to Kyalite and over to Manangatang, Dad'd take a truck and a mob of us would all pile on the back of the truck. We'd go to the ball or dance, country dances. My mother and father played tennis, a lot of tennis, and we'd go out to
- 15:00 Chinkapook, Chillingollah come home from a dance and go straight to work, you wouldn't bother going to bed. The dance would finish at 3 or 4 o'clock in the morning. But now if you go to a dance you gotta sit around a round table and if you have a dance you only dance with the ones sittin' round the round table. Our day you
- 15:30 danced with every girl around the hall. And of course there was no grog or nothing' at the halls in those days, not like today. I mean it's all bring your own when you go to a dance, I don't know what a country dance look like. I haven't seen one for years, but you come home, first on a truck in winter time
- 16:00 it'd be freezing, you'd have rugs and everything. I never done, I been to Bendigo once, before the war, I went down to me grandmother once on the back of a truck,
- 16:30 but I never been Melbourne. I never seen Melbourne or nothin', I never even seen the sea until war broke out.

**So did you enjoy that time you were with the militia, can you tell me a bit about that, how long were you involved with the militia before you went to the war?**

- 17:00 I was in the militia before the war. See you did 1 night a fortnight, then you got a fortnight camp. Well, that was my holiday and anyway you go and they'd meet round Mildura or somewhere and have a fortnight's camp, army training.
- 17:30 Well I stopped in the militia from right through 'til the war broke out, when the war broke out the whole of the 7th Battalion come down to Melbourne, anyway they wouldn't let me go away because I had been on the land and I had to stop on the land they couldn't take everybody
- 18:00 away, I wasn't allowed away. I kept work, going to camps and things like that up 'til '41. They brought in compulsory training and they reformed the 7th Battalion which is my 7th Battalion gone over to the Middle East and most of them had gone over there as a unit and they got called the 2/ 7th.
- 18:30 So May, June, July August, 1941 they reformed some of the old militia units 7th, 8th and 38th Battalions. So, I come in 1941, I come a permanent forces, I was still V number then, we did compulsory training, they brought all those boys in and
- 19:00 then I went up to Seymour and up to Bacchus Marsh to the 39th Battalion and help train the 39th Battalion militia training. I went over to New Guinea and while I was there, they said to me, would I like to go away with them when they go over to New Guinea, seeing I had been denied going overseas. I said, "Yeah I go with em". So I get leave, go home November,
- 19:30 '41 and I come back and the chap at the guard house said, "You are wanted up at the Orderly Room", I said, "What for? I am not late back", and I get up there and they say, "You are not going with us to the 39th Battalion to New Guinea, you are headin' north, you gotta go down to Royal Park and they'll give you a VX number, you are going up to Darwin,
- 20:00 6 blokes go with you, that's including me, you are going up to Darwin to work with the navy". Anyway so.

**So tell us about your flying thing?**

Well, as you know, young people all do some silly things at times. 6 of us decided

- 20:30 we bought an aeroplane, and we were down at Kerang and it had been condemned by the aviation mob. It was a Bonwood plane anyway 6 of us, we got the plane, we got it for nothin', we took up the Mallee, back home to the Mallee.
- 21:00 6 of us young blokes involved with it. Anyway we patched it up, put the wings on it. We taught ourselves to fly this plane. Hop skip and a jump like that. My father was goin' stone mad, "Bloody kill yourselves".

**How much did it cost you this plane?**

It didn't cost us nuthin'.

- 21:30 It was condemned, it was too old. Anyway we got a hold of it and patched it up put some more fabrics on the wings and a few sheeting and things like that and fixed it up a bit and had the motor, we taught ourselves to hop, skip and jump and eventually we flying the planes. Eventually the aviation heard about it and come up and they set fire to it and burnt it on us. It's a wonder we didn't
- 22:00 kill ourselves. Then I decided to go and learn commercially. Learn at the Swan Hill aerodrome and that's why I went learning then. Great fun.

**What sort did you learn in what sort of planes?**

Tiger Moths and Gipsy Moths. Later years of course I have worked on Caribous and Hercules, the big stuff.

22:30 I been on a 707 too, I still fly a plane, I still got licence to fly a plane.

**So what was your first solo flight like?**

A bit scary, very scary and when I come to land I seen a kid run out and the bottom of the wing hit him on the head, I nearly killed him. That was my first solo flight.

23:00 Very scary the first time you go up. All planes are scary, really, they're not a toy, a lot of people think they are. But it was good to look down and see the cattle and the sheep on the farms and they're only little

23:30 dots and things like that, you are only up about 1000 feet. A bit scary, but a bit thrilling to fly around. I am going up in November, I am going up hot air ballooning. I got rocks in my head, I know

**You are brave.**

Hmm.

24:00 **Very brave.**

Oh, well, yeah. We had a lot of fun with the old plane I'll tell you now. See Dad's cousin, Roby Manuel, was a First [World] War pilot. He always owned a plane down at Kerang, Roby always flew planes.

24:30 **So was he one of the partners in the plane?**

No, nothing to do with us. He would have reported us straight away.

**So what did you use to take off from, just a bush track?**

Dirt paddock on the farm, no air strips.

25:00 No air strips. One of the boys Keith Murdoch, he finished up being a war time, Battle of Britain, went to Canada training, he finished up Battle of Britain, he did. Ern Lewis went to the air force too, he was another one of the louts playing with me.

25:30 **So you take off in a paddock, how high would you get it?**

How high?

**Yeah?**

Just skippin' and jumpin' all the time. Eventually we got her up in the air, took us a long time to get her up in the air. Mad.

26:00 **You would have to get over the fences though? High enough to get over the fences?**

Oh, no we had a big open farm, paddocks, yeah. Once you learn to fly it's easy to get over fences and all that. I mean you take off straight away, but we was drivin' round paddocks

26:30 like you drive a motor car around the paddocks. And try and get up in the air all the time, hop, skip, and a jump we used to call it.

**What sort of engine did it have?**

An old Moth Engine in it, a Gypsy Moth. Air cooled motor, 4 cylinder, wooden prop on them. But the lousy coots come up from Melbourne

27:00 and burnt it on us. I was condemned anyway.

**Did you know they were going to come up and burn the plane? Did they tell you?**

We knew eventually we'd get caught. I think the people at Kerang might have reported that we had

27:30 the plane anyway, it hadn't been destroyed. They were all made from bond wood and fabric in those days. They've still got plenty of them around, the old planes, Moths and that, Point Cook still got a few. I don't know what to talk

28:00 about.

**Let's talk about your enlistment, you were called up?**

Mmmm.

**Let's talk about your enlistment in the army.**

Yeah, well as I said I went right through. I wasn't allowed overseas because I was essential service. But then I come full time, it's all on that table over there and then

28:30 I got there, November, 39th Battalion, they went to New Guinea and they all got wiped out, militia unit. Then 6 of us got loaned to the navy and went to Darwin and worked for the navy. I thought we were loading ships and things like that and then I got loaned to the navy ship and I served on HMAS Swan.

**So why did you get loaned to the navy?**

Well the navy

29:00 was short of men, because every time they got a new ship, they would rob experienced men from another ship to help make crew for that. So if anybody had experience they'd get transferred and they would be short. Anyway so the Army decided to lend some of us army blokes to it and I was on the Swan when the Japanese got us.

29:30 So, we finished up at Darwin and we loaded a Dutch ship called the Bantam. We did a trip to Ambon, unloaded the ship there and come back and we loaded the ship up again. We used to load the cargo ship

30:00 up as well. And then we went to Thursday Island and Port Moresby, because the 39th Battalion was already up there then and some air force blokes, New Guinea. And we come back loaded the ship, went back to Ambon again because the Gull Force 21st Battalion was on the island with the

30:30 Dutch, it was a Dutch Island. And while we was unloading, the Japanese landed there. And left handed Commander Travis, the Captain of the Swan, got out of the harbour, we got bombed in the harbour, we had torpedoes thrown at us, missed us. And we had bombs dropped at us, missed us. I was down in the

31:00 magazine. I worked on the magazine, or No. 2 gun, she had 3, 4 inch guns on her. And while we were there the Japanese landed and we were still on land and we got left behind and Travis got the ship out and back up to Darwin but she got hit in Darwin. Then I joined up with the 2/ 21st

31:30 Battalion and I finished up becoming a POW [prisoner of war] with them. Spent the years 3½ years in a prison camp with the Japanese, or North Koreans mainly. Nearly all the guards we had on the camp were Koreans. So there is still in the news today.

32:00 So that's how I come to be overseas with the HMAS Swan. You want to keep going with the war business or what.

**Yeah, be good to get some more detail about your experiences not just in the POW camp, but your training experience.**

32:30 **You said you went on to train men in the 39th Battalion, is that correct? You were actually involved in training them?**

Well, not that much work, let's face it, during the war all the training and all that experience

33:00 was all pretty short lived, pretty quick. I mean if you did 3 months in a training camp you'd be on the way overseas. I have been a

33:30 butcher in an army camp, I have done a lot of transport driving. I served in 39th Battalion, I was a transport driver with them, Bren gun carriers.

**Where were you doing the transport driving for the 39th Battalion?**

Bacchus Marsh. So

34:00 you did a lot of root marching. I mean we marched on trial well Seymour to Bungil, 1940.

**That was a long march?**

Oh yea. Then when we was Bacchus Marsh, every week we marched from Bacchus Marsh to

34:30 Gisborn, camp there somewhere in the scrub and come back. Or we go over to Rokewood out north, out Geelong or Lismore, we walk out there. I mean all day marches. Army consisting of marching all the time, drill work and

35:00 how to look after rifles, how to look after machine guns, how to look after trucks. And kitchen, you had kitchens, you had hand pump fed boilers for steam cooking in kitchens for hot water and all that. Then you had work during the day time and then you had picket duty at night time.

35:30 You had people on duty at night time. All the camp tents and all that had to be kept in order. It involves a lot of work to keep an army going, especially when you got 1000 men in one group. So the organisation side of it was a lot of work which I got involved in, the organising of it.

36:00 When we used to do the compulsory training camps and things like that you did a lot of work, you get young blokes of 14 wanting to do compulsory training, some did it easy and others didn't want to do it at all and they make it hard for you.

**What would happen, how would they make it hard for you?**

Well just make up

36:30 their mind they didn't want to do it, they didn't want to be in it. They'd rebel against compulsory training. Same as when the Vietnam War was on, they had all compulsory training, sent there, that's why all the trouble over that, not the regulars. My eldest son was a regular, he went to Vietnam, the regulars don't cause no trouble, it's the ones with compulsory trainees who have the beef.

37:00 **Would they get charged for not being obedient?**

Yeah. Get into trouble, get charged, get extra duties. Carry the pack, put 6 or 7 bricks in a pack and make them run. They get punished, oh yeah. But some of them did compulsory training and

37:30 they did 3 months and they went back home and they never went near it again the whole of the war. Never got called up again. That's what I can't never understand. The people I help train in '41 compulsory training in my own district, never went to the war, or never went to camp again. Never understand that.

38:00 All they did was stop and knock off all the good girls. All the good ones are gone when we get home.

**So how did you come to be a trainer, what skills did you have when you went into full time service that meant that you could train other men?**

When I went full time

38:30 I was looking after the transport for the 39th Battalion, so I was looking after all the trucks and the drivers and everything like that. I didn't get no rank for it, just because I was keen and stupid I suppose. But you work for a boss or you work for anybody. A man

39:00 that does the right thing and does his duty and does what he is expected to do always gets along better than the bloke who don't want to. He will always have a job too. I like army life, it's a good life, all you gotta do is accept discipline. If you can't accept discipline

39:30 you do it hard. In the army you don't have to think for yourself, someone higher up does all the thinking for you. Correct?

**Yep, from what I can tell.**

You don't have to think for yourself, it's all done for ya. And to go home on leave you get a

40:00 4 or 5 day leave, trouble is my leave down south here, I always go back home, takes all day in a train and things like that. Pretty hard to talk about things like this. I have been asked over the years and it's something

40:30 I haven't been able to do. I have never been interviewed by people. I come blank when I come to think about things. I am not too sure what you really want either.

## **Tape 3**

00:31 Engineers work in factories like that, people in essential service, when the war broke out it was Melbourne Gas Companies start making Bren gun carriers, you know what Bren gun carriers look like?

01:00 Then the Victorian Railways workshop at Newport, they was makin' tanks and guns and the ordinance factory started up at Bendigo makin' big guns, which I helped take through Darwin, 3, 9 inch guns, to East Point.

01:30 People have worked on farms, dairy farms, shops, things like that, a lot of people couldn't, my wife wasn't allowed to join up for a long, long time, because she was a farmer's daughter. So they all come under essential service. You walk around and you find blokes that never been in the army,

02:00 but they're my age. But there is a reason why they haven't been in the army, because they belong to the essential service. The Fisherman's Bend, back General Motors, that become an aircraft factory and they made the Wirraways and the Beaufort bombers, they were all done there. So there was a lot of people who couldn't go to the war,

02:30 but they took part in the war, workin' on the essential service, then you had all the men that worked on cargo ships which they called Merchant Navy during the war. And although the Merchant Navy cargo ships and all the work involved carting war supplies and all things like that, but they weren't treated the same way as

03:00 the enlisted man. I think they should have been. They were a long way behind in a lot of things. So a

farmer stopping on the land, anybody who worked the aircraft factories, the old gas companies, all these factories, because they had all these big factories, had lathes, machinery, fitters and turners, so they involved

03:30 a lot of essential work. So you don't send them overseas to have them lost, because somebody got to stop home. That's what happened to me, they didn't want me to go away because I was on the land. It took me a long time, it took me a long fight to get away eventually. Then when I did get away it didn't do me any good.

04:00 I been out, one potty to another one.

**So when war was declared, you had been involved with that local militia unit, so which Battalion?**

The 7th Battalion. North west Mallee. It goes right down to St Arnaud, Bendigo, Mildura Head Office. Now it has been extended down to include Shepparton, and now, it's called the 7th

04:30 and 8th together. So it still operates.

**Do you remember where you were and what you were thinking when war was finally declared?**

Well, war broke out on a Sunday night, come over the radio, "We are at war". You see,

05:00 we all knew Hitler well. Because you come to realise, even '20, '21, you don't realise what Hitler's doing, I mean, I knew that Germany had a dictator and you don't have to talk about dictators, ever since the war there's been dictators around. Now war

05:30 broke out on a Sunday night, but people don't stop to think, because then Japan joined them '41. Then Japan had been in China for 25 years before that. They'd been fightin' the Chinese, they had occupied Manchuria, North and South Korea and

06:00 nearly half their army was Koreans too. Because the Korean didn't do what he supposed to do, he get bashed up. Now, the Japanese come this war and just only said lately, that they weren't invaders, they were only liberators, they reckoned they liberated us, Australia

06:30 from England. East Indies from the Dutch and so on, they called themselves liberators. But that's only a couple of them. I've got a book over there, 100 years of Australia and Japan, there. I haven't read it yet, it just come out. We had a Japanese family up home,

07:00 Tagasukis, now one of their daughters was one of our school teachers.

**Is this before the war?**

Yeah, and he grew rice up there. First rice grown in Australia was grown up at Benifra [Sp?]. If you go there you will see a can there called "Jappy Bank", they put a big bank across a creek,

07:30 hold water and things like that. Now the old man Sho, was born in Japan, and Murray and Ika were both born here. Murray served in the Australian Army, went overseas, he only just died a couple of years ago. He went to South Australia. Ika's dead and Sho's dead, but Ika's son Murray,

08:00 named after the Murray River. Anyway, he's in the Lodge, he's a nice fella, he's got an Australian father, but they grew rice up there and Mrs Tagasaki and the old man went home to Japan to die in the finish, I don't know what year

08:30 now, but I believe he had been on every railway in Australia. So what we call spies I think he was a spy too, probably.

**That's confirmation he was?**

Yeah. He was a spy too, but they reckoned he'd been on every railway in Australia. Why would he go on every railway? He might like trains, I don't

09:00 know, nobody knows.

**You said one of his son's served in the army?**

Yeah, Murray, did yes. He lived down at Frankston for a long time, and he got too old and he went over to Adelaide to one of his sons and he died about 2 years ago.

**Where did he serve do you know?**

Crete and Greece and all the Middle East, Palestine, my brother Ern was over there with him too,

09:30 and most of the town I belonged was over there too, because we named them the 2/ 7th, that's how they formed the 2/ 7th up. Most of them.

**How were those Japanese kids treated in those days? Were they treated any differently from the other kids?**

Up there with us?

**Yes.**

No, no.

10:00 You knew they were Japanese, I mean I like their family very much. See she didn't teach me, she taught my sister, the daughter Ika, she taught school. No it's like the kids today, half the kids that go around, I mean we got the league of nations in this country

10:30 now, mixed culture go to school. I think all the kids get on pretty well together, all kids get on well together. That's what I like about Olympic Games, you bring all the young athletics together, and all mix together, I think it's a great thing. You shouldn't be fightin' wars and carrying on like they do.

11:00 Only because you get dictators. See what happens as far as I am concerned, even before the war, you blame the big industrial countries. They supply arms and ammunitions to all these small countries and they can't handle it. They can't handle themselves until they get a dictator

11:30 and the dictator takes over, runs their country and cause a lot of trouble, that's where all the trouble is. See, when September 11, the twin towers were blown up in America, I heard a while after that happened, America is partly to blame for themselves, I partly agree.

12:00 Because America a big industrial, supplies stuff, Russia supplies stuff, Australia supplies stuff, we all supply stuff to underprivileged countries, and that's where all the trouble starts. I don't know whether you ever thought about this.

**There's money in it isn't there?**

It's all money. Then you finish up with dictators, take over. Mean you take a

12:30 place like Tassie, or New Guinea for arguments sake, now, New Guinea, we sell enough stuff to New Guinea, supply war, enough arms, they could invade Australia, if they had the equipment. If we supply it to them in the first place, it's all money and oil. Oil is the

13:00 root of all evil.

**You think this was behind Japan as well, entering the Second World War?**

Japan is a big population, it lives on a massive earth quake area, I mean you never know when it's going to be flattened and it has been flattened

13:30 before and it will be get flattened again and they have got such a big population and they had to import. They are great copiers, they can copy anything, doesn't matter what, that camera, if they got hold of that camera, it's probably made in Japan.

It'd be a copy of a Japanese camera.

They copy or something else, they are great copiers. Now, Japan

14:00 up to the war, had to import all their natural resources, they had no natural resources, coal, oh they had coal there but coal, but steel and all that stuff, they had to import everything. They had such a big population the only way Japan could go, I got the book there, 100

14:30 years of Japan on Australia, now the only way Japan is this is to expand, move out, take over the Pacific, they wanted to take over everything between Asia to America, they wanted to take over New Zealand and all that.

15:00 We short of water in Australia, but if Japan had got to Australia they wouldn't be short of water. All that water that goes to waste up in north would be channelled inland, and they would grow rice fields and each one would have holding things and this. As they said a while ago, "We weren't invaders, we were liberators". But

15:30 my second son said to me one day, "You know you had the best part of the world", I said, "What do you mean Ian?" He said, "You had all the natural resources, from now on we have to manufacture our resources", which is true. I mean we have had excess of water, we've had timber, whatever you like. Now if you want timber you have gotta grow your own plantation of timber, you gotta

16:00 manufacture stuff, there's a lot of stuff that nature supplied that you can't get no more. All your animal and bird life, nearly half of them are nearly extinct. They were just saying this morning the lions are about finished. Because man thing, and from now all our resources we gotta manufacture for

16:30 ourselves. We were fortunate we were making natural gas now, that saves makin' gas. You see you don't need oil, from sugar cane and grain and all that you can make ethanol. You can run a car motor on pure ethanol. Ventura Buses are doin' it now, they got buses runnin' on pure ethanol, Volvos.

- 17:00 So but Japan had to expand, she had to go somewhere, and Germany was a stepping for her, she became an ally of Germany, Italy did the same, in the First War they became allies of Germany, and halfway through the war they switched
- 17:30 over, they thought, "Well we are going to lose war", so they switched over in the last war. Italy was with Germany and they saw the light again so they switched over to us, the allies side.
- Talking about that period, war was declared and you wanted to get involved, you were working the land and that was deemed important for the country's**
- 18:00 **efforts, so it was a good 2 years before you got the call up, you said that was a frustrating time.**
- Oh, I wanted to go away the first day. See the world for a bob a day, a shilling a day, the motto was. And, I had never been nowhere, we never had no money, I had never seen the sea.
- 18:30 I never saw the sea 'til December 1941 in Darwin, all that while I was stationed at Bacchus Marsh I never even seen the Bay. I was only at Bacchus Marsh for about 6 months. Seymour, I never seen the sea 'til I got to Darwin, 'til I was on board on a ship.
- 19:00 See, in our days you never went nowhere, but now, a young bloke can go anywhere, he don't have to work he can go and get \$190 a week and he runs a motor car. I don't know how the hell they do it, it's got me beat.
- So your desire to**
- 19:30 **join up, it sounds like it was a sense of adventure as much anything, was it?**
- Oh, yes the adventure, but when I originally joined we was getting 2 shillings a night every fortnight. I had to ride a bike 17 miles,
- 20:00 didn't have transport, and the reason I joined is part of my social life and finances. But see as I was saying a while ago, I was earning good money when war broke out, but I still wanted to give up 3 pound
- 20:30 a week and go and work for the army for 5 shillings a day.
- So were you still involved with the 7th Battalion after the war started?**
- Oh, yes, when war broke out in '39 until I got called up, full time duty, I was involved all the time.
- And**
- 21:00 **what was the involvement?**
- We had a night practice, you go and do 3 hours every fortnight, and you always got a fortnight camp out of it, and I then I come down Seymour and then
- 21:30 I got full time duty, under the militia. I was at Seymour, Bacchus Marsh and I changed then to overseas service. They let me go see, but they wouldn't let me go before that. I would've gone right in the beginning if I could've if they let me go.
- So why do you think it was they called you up in '41? Why was that at that point?**
- 22:00 I pushed the issue. I kept pushin' it.
- How would you push it?**
- Well, they were trying to bring in proper training, they wanted to send militia units overseas, which was against the principles of Australian Government, no militia units went over, although '39ers went over New Guinea, but
- 22:30 New Guinea was under our control anyway, so New Guinea wasn't overseas, for us, it was our front line defence. And I kept pushin' the issue, then I knew they been in compulsory training, May, June, July '41, anyway I just done a fortnight camp at Seymour.
- 23:00 Anyway so I got permission. I got stopped there for the next 3 months so they could do this intake of compulsory trainings, I just kept snowballing there, I kept pushin' the issue. I wanted to get away. I wasn't worried about essential jobs at home, there was plenty of blokes back home to do what I was doing. Older blokes and our fathers. See my father
- 23:30 he joined, he was doin' home defence the whole time I was away too, in uniform. It's all an adventure, I mean you are probably the adventurous type too, you like campin' and fishin', and travelling around or holidaying, or boating or power skiing you name it.
- 24:00 **All of the above.**
- Yeah. I mean life would be awful dull if we didn't have some plan. Anyway, so, I was starting to enjoy life when war broke out, I was old enough to start knocking 'round with girls and go to dances, I was

allowed to go

24:30 out, in the finish I didn't have to say to Mum and Dad I wanted to go out, I didn't have to ask permission to go out, if I wanted to go I would go. I was going to a ball one night and I said to Mum, "Can I have the horse and jig tonight?" 'Stead of riding the bike, she said, "You takin' a girl?" And I said, "Yes". No, I didn't get the horse and gig, because she reckoned you get

25:00 in the gig and you put a rug over you, you don't know what you might get up to.

**Fred we hear lots of stories about how innocent men and women were at the age of like 19, 20, 21, but what's the truth really?**

Oh, we were innocent. The morals we had those days and the morals we have today are entirely different, they lost their morals, they got no morals at all now. I mean,

25:30 look, well it did happen in our days, there was children born out of wedlock, you can't deny it, that's history. It's always and always will, but more so now, there's a lot more of it now. But we had children up there that was born out of wedlock.

26:00 We never thought, well didn't know nothing about it. I was very innocent, I was, yeah. But nowadays you meet a girl today and you got her in bed the same night.

**I wish Fred, I don't think so?**

26:30 You wish.

Not in this town are you?

Are you both married are you?

(Him) Yes I am married. (Her) No I am not married.

Are you still hunting are you?

I am not divulging anything.

Are you too smart? I don't blame them. I had 4 daughter in laws and I still only got

27:00 1. I mean, I had 4 boys and they all say to me, "Don't worry about it you got 4 nice daughter in laws". Doesn't work out that way no more.

**So how did boys and girls, teenagers, young men and women interact**

27:30 **socially?**

Well our days, we respected both sexes. You respect both sides. I mean, you always friendly and like that. Life was good, I mean, you belong to a Church group, or scouts or guides groups or something like that. You see, 17 I was a scout master when I was 17, which was

28:00 young. And by the time I was 20, Mrs Campbell, the girl guide mistress died. I even got the job looking after the girl guides temporary until they got another mistress. Because we were pretty close, we used to go camping together, scouts and girls and all that. I can imagine now putting a

28:30 mob of boys and a mob of girls in the same camp together now, you'd have a headache looking after them. But I was enjoying my social life until the war broke out. When the war broke out, half the people never come back home again, they found interest somewhere else, which

29:00 I did, I never went back home again, because my wife came from Kyabram, Swan Hill. So it was a big change in our life the war.

**Still on the issue of boy-girl relationships, you were telling us about**

29:30 **a date you had with a girl called Daisy. Can you tell us that story again?**

Well, she was one of our neighbours girls. There was 5 girls and a boy in that family and there's still 4 girls, I just went last week to a funeral, now the 4 girls are still alive and they are all widows, one is 91, she lives in Sydney, 91.

30:00 Daisy was the one I was keen on, she's 81. Anyway, I don't know, you probably lucky if we saw them 4 or 5 times a year, when you lived close you saw more.

30:30 But see, my 2 brothers and I went to the war and Mr and Mrs Jeans' 3 boys next door went to the war and none of them come home. But us 3 come home. I don't know why I come home, but I got home, why me? But I was enjoying social life, I managed to

31:00 buy meself a car, I got meself independent, I got photos of it a Chevy [Chevrolet] car, a ute [utility], things like that, so, then that one over there, I bought that one 1939 model Bedford ute. Murray Goodman and I bought one each. They were 300 pounds in those days that



31:30 was, 10 horse ute, half a tonne. And Murray only had his 6 months when it caught on fire and burnt it. I had that until after the war that one. I used it for carting all the building materials. Then we had 2

32:00 children and when the Holden come out in '51, I bought a '51 Holden. They came out in 1948 the year I got married, then I bought a '51 Holden because we had 4 children and utility wasn't big enough for Mum and I and 4 kids. But

32:30 every New Years day we had Nyah sports, I belonged to the Nyah Football Club. I belonged to the Cricket Club. I belonged to the Methodist Young People's Club. I belong to the Scouts. So, technically we had plenty to do and I took up bike riding, country bike riding and I did that.

33:00 I had the bike here not long ago, one of my sons took away and never brought it back. Don't know what happened to it. I am not happy about that.

**What did having a car mean to you, obviously independence?**

Oh, you didn't have to rely on anybody else, you want to take somebody with you, things like that, oh having a car, it's beaut to have

33:30 a car, what you call your first possession really. Like the kids today, as soon as they are 18 they gotta get 4 wheels under 'em. We no were different they are now, we still wanted the same thing. You were probably no different.

**How common**

34:00 **was that though in 1939 1940?**

To get a car. Oh, not everybody had a car, took a long time to get a car. Well it cost me 120 pound to get one. Takes a long time, 10 bob a week to say up to 120 pound to buy a second hand car. See a big

34:30 Chev car, when war broke out, was 380 pounds. A big Chev, but they were 6 seater. Takes a lot of money. I bought a Titan tractor for 25 pounds, had that around home to work around the farm, it's on loan now to the Swan Hill Museum

35:00 and still goes, 1915 tractor, a Titan. It's on loan to the Museum. I would have loved to kept it. I didn't want to do with it, would have liked to go around country shows, exhibitions with it, because you need a low loader truck, cost a lot of money, anyway they had the Museum going so I went in

35:30 there, I know where it is, it's on loan, it'll never leave there. When I'm dead and gone it'll still be there.

**Fred can we just fast forward a bit to when you at last were called up, how did that feel for you?**

I never got called up actually. I just kept pushin' the issue. I was a volunteer,

36:00 I was never called up. I helped with the compulsory training because I volunteered to do that. See I been to Seymour for fortnight camp, by stopping at Seymour I got 3 months out and that was 3 months pay I got and that was a job and your keep. So it had its merits.

36:30 I was usin' it as a job. And the longer I got stopped there the better chance I had of goin' to full time army.

**What happened at Seymour? What were you doing there?**

37:00 I first went there as a butcher, in the kitchen that fortnight. I learnt the butcher trade when I was down there, you had lot of duties, they wanted so many cooks and so many for the medical, the first aid posts and

37:30 hygiene, they needed so many people for hygiene, so many cooks things like that, they wanted a butcher, so the fortnight I did at Seymour, I was a butcher, in the kitchen. I used to get all their meat there and cut it all up and everything for the troops. The cook would cook it all. So then I did compulsory

38:00 training. I was a truck driver for that, to help the compulsory trainees, they formed the 7th and 38th Battalion. I enjoyed those 3 good months. Never saw the sun for those 3 months, rained every day. Cold, it was a cold year that year. Then they wanted

38:30 a truck driver, somebody to look after the trucks at Darley, at Bacchus Marsh, at the 39th Battalion. They called them up. They called for volunteers amongst all the militia units to form the 39th Battalion.

39:00 Anyway, so I found out, they called for volunteers amongst all the militia units and if they didn't get enough volunteers they were going around all these units and say, "Right, you, you and you to make up the 1000 men".

39:30 Anyway so I said to 'em, "You want a Transport Officer?" They said, "Yes", I said, "I will volunteer to go to Darley, I will be the Transport Officer and do the training. While I was there, that's when they said to

me, "Seein' you hadn't been accepted to go overseas because of essential services and all that, would you like to go to New Guinea with the 39?" And I said, "Yes I would go with them". And then I got final leave.

40:00 In October '41 I went home and I came back and I got told I wasn't goin' away, they wanted 6 men to go up to Darwin to work with the navy, which I thought I would just work on the wharf, I didn't realise I would get allotted to a navy ship.

## Tape 4

00:31 **Now Fred we just want to get a clear picture of what your role was in Seymour for starters, you said you started off as a butcher, then how did you get involved with the transport?**

When they brought in compulsory training, I stopped there and went to Nagambie Road, we built the camp site, that's when I got full time, we built the camp site

01:00 for the intakes of the compulsory training and we had the trucks and I was driving a truck. Anyway I was stopped as a truck driver and then they wanted me at Bacchus Marsh.

**So it sounds like jobs came up and whoever put up their hand kind of thing?**

Oh, yeah. So I was lucky, I did very well out of the army. Not only that,

01:30 I love army and I still do 6 weeks a year now, I am on the retiree reservists. That's why I look after an aircraft at Point Cook, a Hercules.

**Right. Just now Fred you said you helped build the camp?**

We had to build toilet blocks, shower blocks, 2 pumps on the river for

02:00 water, a septic system for the toilet blocks, camp kitchen, put all the tents up. Mess huts, where you have your meals, for the ordinary ranks and a mess hut for the officers. We did a lot of construction work to build this camp, Bunny Hills was the same.

02:30 , a lot of work.

**So sorry that was Nagambie Road?**

Nagambie Road yes. You know it at all?

**Well, I've heard a lot about it.**

Well, where you turn off the freeway now, to go to Shep [Shepparton], if you turn off the freeway, all that land on the left hand side was the Nagambie Road Camp Site. It was a farmers place on the Goulburn.

03:00 And old Seymour Camp is on the Trawool Road, going out to Trawool, on the left hand side and the right hand side.

**How long did that construction job take?**

Oh, 3 weeks I suppose. You got a big mob of men, it don't take long to knock up a job. We built a railway platform at

03:30 Terowie in 3 days. It's nearly a mile long and still there, that's in South Australia.

**When did you do that?**

'41, in between Seymour and Darley, where we went up to Terowie and built up there, took the trucks something over there and the railway platform is still there.

04:00 And not for years I went back there. I picked up a lump of coal, it's somewhere in the house, it lay there for 40 years and was black and shiny as though it had just come out of the mine, out in all weather. Must be very hard coal. That's about

04:30 all I can tell you leading up to the war, before we went overseas.

**Yes. So Seymour then Darley, which was the 39th Battalion?**

There's a couple of bits of paper over there, typed up couple of sheets of paper written out about me coming home and things like that too.

**Oh, when you were on leave?**

05:00 See when I come home first.

**We can have a look maybe after lunch.**

Yeah.

**How long were you involved as a transport officer with the 39th, that was with Darley right?**

3 months, October, November, December. I left

05:30 Christmas Day to go to Darwin. Every input at camp or everybody that walked in the basic training is 3 months. If you join now you finish up at either Puckapunyal or Kapooka near Wagga and you do 3 months basic training. It's all 3 months basic training. Had marching and

06:00 discipline. Say "Yes sir, no sir". You gotta learn all that.

**How did you deal with the discipline side of things?**

Me? I accept discipline anywhere. I had to when I was a kid with Mum and Dad for a start. I knew what discipline was. That's half the trouble with young blokes today, the kids going to school they got no discipline. The school

06:30 teacher not allowed to hit 'em or smack or nothin'. They got no discipline at all today. So discipline doesn't worry me, 'cause I remember after the war, we had to put in compulsory training after the war and one bloke at work didn't want to go. I got hold of him one day, I had a talk to him and I said,

07:00 "Now, you rebel against this, you go in make up your mind, you're goin' to do this easy, do it properly accept what goes, you rebel all the time the 3 months is going to be the hardest 3 months of your life". You have gotta accept it, no good rebelling against it. If you make up your mind to do something, you do it easy and time will go quick.

07:30 You probably realise that yourself.

**Definitely. When you were pushing for that time to get involved and you kept hassling them and other guys were getting called up, against their will. Did you see examples of that?**

Oh, yes. I mean I can remember the first time they brought in compulsory training in Australia, was May, June, July, June '41 at Seymour,

08:00 half those blokes went back home and never saw a uniform again. Waste of energy. They should have been made to keep on goin' to camps and keep them occupied, they went back home and as far as I would say, knocked off all the good girls. All the good girls gone when we got back.

**Did you have a**

08:30 **steady girl at that point?**

No, not really. I think I got a leave home, I got intentions, put a ring on her finger. Anyway she got married about end of '43, she married one of my best mates. But he was good to you and I finished up with a good one.

09:00 And we've all stopped and friends. I had plenty of picks up home, plenty of picks. I had me favourite. I think everybody has their favourite and I think your favourite stops with you all

09:30 through your life.

**So that last home leave you had, did you catch up with the girl of the day?**

Oh, yeah.

**You probably knew you were going to be going away for a long time, what was that like?**

Her father asked me what me intentions were, but I reckon if I could have got home again

10:00 I reckoned I would have had enough money to put a ring on her finger. But she said to me early this year, "You were too damned slow". I just thought I had plenty of time. A lot of blokes got married. They went to the war, they probably knew a girl, they got married, went to the

10:30 war. As far as the ones in the prison camp, most of them didn't come back home again and they also left a child behind. They never saw their wife or their first child, never seen 'em. I had no intention of getting married before I went away. But I would have got engaged, I'm almost sure that I would have got engaged if I could've got another leave, but I didn't.

11:00 Then of course I got posted. I was posted missing for 3½ years, then I turned up out of the blue.

**We'll come to that shortly thanks Fred. Can I just ask, obviously we all know the story of the 39th Battalion and what happened in Kakoda and all that and stories of how they were under equipped and just not prepared, I mean really?**

I don't know what happened in New Guinea,

- 11:30 I didn't go to New Guinea I don't know nothing what happened there. Let's face it we didn't have the equipment, even the Gull Force I finished up with in the prisoner of war camp, they just had some old Vickers and old 303s, they had old equipment, they had no modern stuff. Not an island, it's subject to invasion, you can't defend an island.
- 12:00 Pretty hard. Oh, no I worked hard to get away. All adventurous. And not only that, being brought up in the Depression years and hard times and things like that I never seen another
- 12:30 country. If war hadn't broke out I guess I would have married a local girl and still be living in the same area. But the war spread us out, a lot of people never went back home.

**Were you training on learning how to use guns as well at this point, had you used a gun before?**

No, I never owned a gun or anything.

- 13:00 No, I learnt to use big, big guns like the Lewis guns and the Vickers guns and 303s. You did bayonet training and all that. The main thing in the army with a gun is keep it cleaned and serviced and everything like that, and in good working order. You can't afford to
- 13:30 have it in workin' order, your life depends on it.

**We were talking earlier about some of the guys who just didn't want to be there, were there any cases of AWL [absent without leave] or anything like that?**

A lot, a lot, very lot. We had one bloke joined the regular army, George Wright from Nyah,

- 14:00 he was knocking around with a girl and knew her good. And every time there was a draft going overseas he'd go away and miss it. Anyway, he eventually come home, Mrs Goode come home one day, Mary's missin'. Gone to Melbourne with George. Anyway, the police picked them up on the train at Kyneton, they found
- 14:30 Mary, they said, "You Mary Goode?" She said, "I was". They'd gone into the Catholic Church at Swan Hill and got married, shot through, they still together. "You Mary Goode?" She said, "I was". He went AWL about 7 times while they got him overseas.

**So he finally went?**

- 15:00 Oh yeah, they put him on the boat in the finish, manhandled him on board.

**How did he fair overseas?**

Alright I suppose, he come back. I don't know where he went to, Crete or Greece, somewhere he went, might have been Poland I don't know where he went.

**So what did being a transport**

- 15:30 **officer involve?**

Training new truck drivers, training people to drive trucks. I also helped to train people in the Bren gun carriers too.

**Can you tell us a bit more about that?**

Oh, not much really.

**As much as you can.**

- 16:00 Just like a young bloke going to driving school, you are taught how to drive a vehicle. It's the same principle. Then, they also gotta learn the maintenance of the vehicle to keep it maintained, greased, and oil and tyres and everything that goes with a motor vehicle today is the same.
- 16:30 Virtually the same sort of work. And of course you use trucks for troop carrier as well, you carry troops on the back. So it's quite simple really.

**What sorts of vehicles are we talking about here Fred?**

Most army vehicles during the war are confiscated vehicles. People who had

- 17:00 say a Chev or Dodge ute, about 12 months old, the government confiscated off you, the farmers, they took trucks off farmers. Anything, seeing as say 12 months old they confiscate. Then we gotta replace after the war or paid for it. Gross, he
- 17:30 had a brand new Chev ute, he lost it. Then they paint it khaki, spray em all khaki. That's how we got all our vehicles, mostly confiscated off private enterprise.

**Did you have any involvement in confiscating vehicles?**

No, I didn't do that. We got all khaki painted and a

18:00 lot of camp area, so many trucks each Battalion.

**And how successful do you think you were as a trainer, was it something you were good at?**

Yeah. I liked it. That's why I wanted to do the job. I like to be a leader. I started off as I said as a

18:30 scout master at 17. All my life I have been a leader. I love doin' somethin', I like leadership. I don't know why, I like to be, I just feel though I am

19:00 a point ahead of somebody else, that's how you explain it being a leader. I still do a boys group, since I was 8 year old I joined, I gone 85 and I still wear a uniform, boys club uniform. I always been a

19:30 leadership type. You see, any chance of promotion I had during the war, I lost all that. I would have went further, but it wasn't to be.

**If they had training guys at such an early stage, it sounds like that would have been**

20:00 **the way.**

Oh yes, I am a great volunteer, anything wanted I volunteer for it. I mean if it is something that I like I would be in it. Always have done.

**So what happened next, you were training guys, you were instructing guys how to use the vehicles, maintenance, what was next after that? This was with the 39th Battalion, you were training guys with the 39th, what were the plans for you**

20:30 **beyond that?**

If I would've gone to New Guinea I probably wouldn't have come back. You didn't know what your future was, it's a day to day job. So, you don't know what's mapped out for you.

21:00 **So when it was decided the 39th was going to New Guinea, what was your part in that, were you going to be with them?**

I intended, I was offered the job I like with them, and so said, "Yes", and that's when I got final leave and when I come back my plans changed for me and they said there's 5 blokes up there yourself, go down to Royal Park and get your VX

21:30 number because you are goin' to work for the navy up in Darwin. So Christmas Day 1941 I got aboard the train and went to Darwin.

**Who were the 5 other blokes? Were they from the same Battalion or from elsewhere?**

In the training section. They all training like I was, training to be 39.

**Why do you think they hand picked**

22:00 **you 6 in particular?**

Well don't know, they lookin' for people, they seemed to pick 6 out of that training camp area, Darley Camp, it wasn't only the 39th in Darley there was others there too, other Battalions, 4th training Brigade.

22:30 I was on the 4th training Brigade there, although I was still listed as 7th Battalion. And I don't know how they come to pick us. I think the other 6 bit like me, we'd been from '39 to

23:00 '41, we'd been stuck in Australia like in training camps and things like that and workin' around and I suppose they gave us an opportunity to go to Darwin. When I left to go to Darwin as far as I was concerned, it wasn't an overseas posting. I was only going to navy, probably on the wharf loading ships and looking after things like that. But I finished up getting put on a ship.

23:30 So I don't know why we were picked out, I wouldn't have a clue.

**Who were the 5 other guys, can you tell me about the 5 other men, did you guys become good buddies?**

Yeah, well Dave Barr came below Norton just out of Horsham, and Jimmy Elmore come from Kongwak near Wonthaggi,

24:00 Tommy Sergeant come from Wangaratta. Teddy Peterson I am not too sure where he come from and also another bloke named Peter Vaughan, come from Seymour, and that's right, that's the 6. But Peter Vaughan wasn't his name, he put his age up and changed his name.

24:30 I was overseas since the war, and anyway, one of my colonels said to me, "There's a chap up here wants to see you. I believe you and his brother served together". Anyway I saw his name, I said, "No I never had that name".

25:00 He had his name down as Peter Vaughan, I said, "Yeah, I remember Peter". He changed his name. I still know them, they were all good buddies.

**So he was Peter Vaughan all through, you never knew that?**

When the Japs got us he got caught as 300 over the air strip and the Japanese

25:30 had his cut off head, the Japanese executed 300 in one day. Peter was in that crowd. I got a list of names there, now that some of them come from my area, the Swan Hill area. You want to talk about that later.

**Yeah, I guess we are now talking about getting up to Darwin,**

26:00 **how did you get up to Darwin?**

Went by train to Alice Springs and went by trucks. While we was there we towed 3, 9 inch guns from Darwin to Larrimah, the train line started at Larrimah and went to Darwin, but they got 10 kms to go now and it should be completed, they joined up the lower

26:30 line at Alice Springs yesterday, just to go Darwin, they joined up the two lines yesterday. I would like to go on that first trip. That was an experience and a half goin' up through there, they live on bore water and all that sort of stuff. We camped at Winellie camp, so

27:00 I just interested if the railway line is going to follow the old railway line from the Adelaide River or not. I was thinking just last night. I know the land is still there, the railway bridge still at Adelaide Creek, River. Yes so we left Bacchus Marsh Christmas Day '41, so I never got home for Christmas

27:30 which I thought I would.

**So had there been a chance to say farewell to family and loved ones?**

I was home in October, that was the last time they'd seen me, they didn't see me until end of '45 before they saw me again.

28:00 So I had no contact or nothing' with 'em. I got a letter there from Mum, after the war they found some mail bags in Japan, Red Cross mail bags, and they found a letter for me I had returned to me, I got two letters, one me sister wrote to me and returned back to her. She wrote to me and wanted to find out what sort of Christmas I had in

28:30 '41. I spent my Christmas Day on a train. I think we had lunch at Ballarat, they had nice tea rooms there and Taylor Bend was another place, not Taylor Bend, up stream, Murray Bridge I met a nice girl there too, they were serving

29:00 lunch and everything like that and she gave me her name and address and everything. She was out hunting all the time I think.

**What else do you remember of the train trip up to Darwin, the girl in Murray Bridge?**

It's not the train trip we know it.

29:30 The old Ghan that. I know we spent nearly 67 hours with a louvre van off the line north of Oodnadatta and we got brakes on the side of, she jumped the rails, and all was in was one bag of mail, locked up, a louvre van, that's a van with louvre 'round.

30:00 Then the railway workers had to climb the telephone poll and hook wires and telephone back to Adelaide, I don't know where they telephoned see if they could cut the lock on the van and take the bag of mail off, had to get permission to do that. And then we put ropes on the thing, tipped the truck over on its side off the line

30:30 but then the wheels all sticking over and we had to jacks from the railway and we had to jack to clear the railways to join the train up again. It was all experience, you never know what you come into. But she's a lonely old track that from Petersborough to Alice Springs, the old Ghan track.

31:00 So that's why I want to go on the new Ghan, go to Alice Springs on the new track. I have been up a few times by car. I like to go again go back up there again but it's very lonely travelling by yourself.

31:30 **With the 5 guys, what was the camaraderie like between the men? Did you get to know the men very well?**

The ones I went with. Oh, yes, we lost Peter like, but I saw the others off, they all died of course, I was the only one of the 6 to come home. Not only that 6 left behind, there were 2 sailors as well.

32:00 There was 8 of us left behind, when the Japanese landed on the island. So I enjoyed the life on the navy ship, it was a very good life. If you want to know how to be sea sick I'll tell ya.

**Well let's hear about that, what happened**

32:30 **as soon as you got to Darwin? Are you working? What did they have you do?**

We used to go down to the wharf and the navy ships there and you load the supplies on or a cargo ship, you help load the cargo ship. We went down one day and we loaded a cargo ship, a Dutch Ship called the Bantam, but anyway the next thing I know

33:00 I am with these other boarders, HMAS Cootamundra, the Swan, I went overseas with her, we unloaded the ship at Ambon and come back to Darwin, loaded the ship again and escorted back up to Thursday Island, Port Moresby, did the same thing again, went back to Ambon. We had 3 torpedoes thrown at us, we missed those, oh a matter of fact

33:30 I was givin' a hand to the helmsman, steering the boat when that happened then we pulled into Ambon Harbour and I was sitting on Number 2 gun watching, looking through the telescope watching them dock the cargo ship when the alarm went off on the ship, the siren went off. Anyway, so left handed Trabbador [?] said to

34:00 me, I had 2 jobs, I work on the gun or down at Number 2 magazine, and he said to me, "You down with Number 2 magazine and the ship go up you go up with it". Another sailor and I down at the magazine pushing the shells up and you couldn't hear the noise, there was guns goin' off, we

34:30 below water line, but the echo of the 3 guns echo right through the whole ship. And when we come up after the air raid over we found out the Japanese dropped 2 lots of bombs each side of us, never even scratched the paint off her. We didn't know, they said, "Didn't you feel? She rolled over, she nearly rolled over, a big bomb flew a crater, a big water crater". The ship would roll over into it.

35:00 They said, "She half rolled over into one of the craters". We didn't feel that. So that was my first experience of war, Japanese bombin' us.

**What about the other ships in the harbour? What sort of devastation had there been around you?**

Oh, there was Dutch ships there too, I don't know what

35:30 happened the first day really, but the day I left Darwin, my first trip left Darwin, HMAS Perth was in the Harbour, went over and was sunk. The American ship, the great big battle ship, the Houston was there. It had aeroplanes on her, fake planes on her, that was sunk with the Perth and plus the 2 English war ships all sunk.

36:00 I saw 90,000 Americans land in Darwin one day. Nearly all negroes, wearing dungarees with black blokes everywhere, nearly all negroes. The negroes made up nearly all the American Army, must have a hell of a lot over there. They were slaves originally.

36:30 **Did you meet any of the Americans, any of the black soldiers?**

Yeah, I met some there, I met some since the war too at the Officers' Mess in Darwin, back on '99 I met about 20 of them, they'd come for R & R [rest and recreation] from Japan down there. And most of them were

37:00 wearing the square and compass of the Masonic Lodge. I snatched the administrator up there, he was a Mason, he said to me, "We up at an old lodge meetin'".

**So you said you had 2 jobs on the boats? You were manning a magazine?'**

I learnt to be a helmsman and I learnt to work the

37:30 Number 2 gun and I also learnt to work on the magazine, I learnt all that in 25 minute lessons. Yeah, so, see they had 4 sleuths, there was the Parramatta, the Yarra and the Warrego and the Swan. The Parramatta was sunk in the Middle East with 147

38:00 lost lives. The Yarra was pulped to pieces with 147 something lost in Java. Warrego went right through got a scratch, but the Swan got back to Darwin and we lost 3 men I think and 13 injured or something, the bulkhead was blown out between the engine room and the Number 3 magazine.

38:30 Now the sleuths only did 23 miles per hour, they used to lay mines and all that. They come down and cut low on the water at the back and no air conditioning, so I spent all my time

39:00 up in the islands, I slept up on deck, I couldn't sleep down, too hot down below. Now the later ships I been on since the war, I been away on 'em, use 4 and 5 blankets now, all air conditioned, a big difference. But very hot, I couldn't sleep, I was sea sick for 3 days. Gee I was crook, thought I was gonna die.

39:30 **So there were some pretty rough seas out there?**

No, weren't rough seas, don't have to have rough seas to be sea sick, it's just the motion and close to water, low atmosphere and the pressure on the ears and cause the sea sickness. You've seen children car sick in cars? My 4 boys

40:00 everyone of them been car sick, they were good at it.

**So who was in command of the Swan?**

Lieutenant Commander Travis. He went right through the war, he finished on the Warrnambool. They were mine sweeping after the war off the Great Barrier Reef and they hit a mine and flew up, he didn't get killed.

40:30 I still remember Travis.

**What was he like?**

A good bloke. He was like our new Governor General, he was a good bloke too. He went to Vietnam and everything, I know him very well. If you went to WA [Western Australia] and you didn't go 'round to his

41:00 place and have a beer he'd tell you off. Good bloke the new Governor General.

## Tape 5

00:31 **I just need to work out where you were, so you were in Darwin?**

Yeah.

**So you were in Darwin working on the Swan and doing the trips to Ambon. So how many trips to Ambon did you do Fred?**

2. I got caught there the second time.

**And the first time was when the bombing in the Harbour at Ambon?**

No the last time. That's a photo of her,

01:00 I belong to the Association, that's the only photo I got. I got another big one blown up, it's in the there, it don't look very nice. So that's what they look like. And that's when they dedicated the window down at HMAS Cerberus and all that and all the sleuth boys. So I am in the Swan Association too.

01:30 **Can we go back to that time and you are working on the Swan and you did 1 trip to Ambon. How were things on that first trip, because the Australians were there and the Dutch were there defending the island?**

The 2/ 21st Battalion. To start the story off right the 23rd Brigade consist of the 21st Battalion, 22nd Battalion and the 2/

02:00 40. 21st was sent to Ambon, the 2/ 22nd sent to Rabaul and the 2/ 40 was Timor, that was our front line defence. I lost 2 cousins in the Rabaul mob too, most of them were sunk at sea, war ship.

**This was the Gull Force on**

02:30 **Ambon?**

The 2/ 21st Battalion, the reason it's called Gull Force now, they give them all names and all that, there's Sparrow Force and all that, there's not only the 2/ 21st Battalion, you got the 8 div sigs [8th Division Signals], you got Field Ambulance and all attached troops, which made up about 1300 men. So they called it the Gull Force

03:00 then. We also had 13 Lockheed Squadron on the air strip, all the Lockheed Squadrons. The Dutch had a Catalina base, all the young blokes dressed in green uniform, the day the Japs arrived they just took their green coat and green pants off and they just had blue shorts and white singlets and they were civilians. We couldn't do

03:30 that. So I mean. A lot of things happened on Ambon.

**So these trips to Ambon were pretty dangerous missions? When you were doing the trip, you knew it was a dangerous mission?**

Oh, yes, because we knew, I still say I heard Japanese talking,

04:00 the sinking of the Sydney before the Japanese come into the war, I still say Japanese submarines were involved with that, as well the Italian ship, nothing ever convinced me any different. They had submarines all along before they declared war. See when they raided Pearl Harbour and all that. See they been operating for 2 years before they come into the war.

04:30 And I heard Japanese talking, I knew their language, a bit of foreign language and all that. And I heard some Japanese talking one day about the Sydney and I still from that day to this convinced that the Japanese had submarines around the Sydney, off Western Australia. They been all around Australian



coast. Shipping right around the subs. I don't know how many ships been sunk by a Japanese submarine around the coast, they come into Sydney Harbour and everything.

05:00 It don't matter what world war theatre area you go, you know its dangerous. It's like this Iraq business. The war is supposed to be over and people still getting killed. As long as you are there you got danger zone. And I know when we went away as soon as we left shore we got danger. You had to be on lookout for subs and

05:30 watch out for aeroplanes. I mean you had to be alerted all the time. You don't go to sleep. You are defeated straight away. It's a survival of the fittest, who gets in first.

**So on that first trip, how long did you spend**

06:00 **in the harbour at Ambon unloading?**

About 3 days the time we get there. Sailors and that go over, plus some Dutch people or wharf labourers or whatever they like to call them. It takes about 3 days to unload a ship because it's old days, not container ships, it's all sling

06:30 work, down the hold, load up on slings and everything. So about 3 days and it used to take us about 3 or 4 days to load them too. Once you started loading, you wouldn't leave to Darwin, you wouldn't leave the same day you loaded it, you probably go the next morning. So, of course the idea of the navy ship being with the

07:00 cargo is to escort it, to protect the ship from enemy fire. So I mean you couldn't send a cargo ship on its own, it's doomed. So you have gotta have some military defence to escort them. And not only that you gotta keep yourself out of trouble see. The third trip going over and someone yelled out, "Torpedoes", and we saw 2 torpedoes coming down towards

07:30 us. The chap on the helm went starboard and the 2 torpedoes went passed and one missed the cargo ship. Now he never come back, the sub there he only had 3 torpedoes left, he never come back again. Of course we depth charged on the back, but we couldn't leave that ship unescorted, we couldn't go searching for him to put depth charges

08:00 over. On your own you can't do it, you got a convoy you can do it, but not singly. There is a lot of tricks of the trade goes on.

**That's what we want to hear about some of those tricks of the trade.**

See when you got ships on convoy you might have a dozen war ships escorting those cargo ships and one can break off you know there's a sub around

08:30 there's been attack on. They can go depth charge him echo sound him and find him and depth charge him but when you on your own, you couldn't do that, we had to protect the ship. We zig zag and go round him all the time like that.

**So did you only ever escort one ship?**

Unfortunately yes. Only the Dutch ship, the Bantam we

09:00 went to Ambon and Thursday Island and back to Port Moresby and went back down to Ambon and I got caught there, so unfortunately there's only one ship I escorted. But there was a lot of other ships in the harbour at Darwin. Darwin was a gold mine for the enemy, which they proved later

09:30 on.

**So when you did that second trip to Ambon with the Bantam, can you describe to me what happened there? How were things when you arrived? Was there much activity by the enemy?**

When we arrived there, we were sitting out in the middle of the harbour, you couldn't drop anchor because

10:00 Ambon is only 13 miles long and 10 miles wide. It's an old volcano. There's 2 big craters, the main harbour you go into, there's no chain for ships to drop anchor because there's no bottom until you come in close to shore. Inner harbour it's quite deep and the Dutch had a Catalina

10:30 air force base there, so we were sitting out in the middle of the harbour while they were berthing the ship and we were going to berth along side of it. Anyway, then we had air raids on, they dropped bombs each side of us and around the harbour, and cleaned up a Dutch harbour boat I think it was.

11:00 They cleaned that up. I am not sure really what it is, they cleaned up. We too busy trying to save our ship. Then eventually we anchored near the wharf, not far from the main wharf, we anchored there, then we went by

11:30 trucks, the 2/ 21st had all shared trucks there, the Dutch gave 'em the transport, the Gull Force. So 8 of us used to go at a time on the ship and while I was there the Japanese landed over the back of the island

and come over the back of the island

12:00 and Lieutenant Commander Travis took off with the Swan, he got out through the harbour, I don't know how he got out through the harbour because we had to be escorted by the Dutch in through the mine fields, but he got out, back to Darwin because then anyway they sunk the Bantam, the Japs did, the air force, and we joined up with the Gull

12:30 Force. They were up in the foot of Mount Nona, and I joined up with a Sergeant Martin from Box Hill and we had a Corpers shield on a Vickers machine gun and different ones. Terry Kilmartin was there with me, I got hold of a rifle

13:00 grenade and I was firing grenades across the gully. Next we know about 20 Japanese come 'round the bend on the road all ridin' push bikes, Vickers machine gun sittin' up on the big cliff overlooking them, that was the biggest scatter you ever seen when the machine gun open up on 'em. Then they kept pushin' us back down,

13:30 this want you want to know is it?

**Yeah, yeah these little details are good.**

They kept pushin' us back down, so we finished up takin' mortar bombs up there, there used to be 6 mortar bombs to a box and we had these native carriers, one would carry 3 bombs and another would carry 3 bombs and the other would carry the box. And you walk up through banana plantations and coconut trees

14:00 up on top of Mount Nona. Anyway, so we got told to come down and withdraw and to be down by 7 o'clock they goin' to blow the bridge up, the big bridge on the ravine. So on the way down a Lieutenant Anderson, his father was a eye specialist in Collins Street,

14:30 and Sam, they got shot in the leg, so we stopped back with him for a while and there were some Dutch stretcher bearers come along and they said they'd take him, so we helped haul, so there was a tropical rainstorm like a real cyclone storm on, so there is a narrow bitumen road near the foot Mount Nona only a short strip of bitumen near the bridge. So we're going down towards the bridge,

15:00 and we knew the bridge had blown, we heard it blow. But as we walkin' down the hill, another group of men walked up this way, goin' this way. Somebody said somethin', "We're goin' that way, why are they goin' that way?". They never spoke to us. The next we heard them talk and they were Japanese and we crossed like that.

15:30 Side by side in the rain and didn't recognise each other. 'Cause we took off, run like mad down the bridge. We ploughed in the river, got across the river. I knew one bloke, corporal, his name was Russell Torbett, I said "Russell Torbett can't swim", the next thing a voice says, "I'm here", in a squeaky voice, "I'm here". They said

16:00 "How'd you get across?" And he said, "I do not know". Fear put him across, that's how he got across, fear. It wasn't a very wide river but it was very fast running. When the rain's on, they push us down and we finished up down at Eri, then we had to surrender. Now I put my gun in a fork of a tree and bent

16:30 it. I lost my gun I was lost, I felt helpless, without a gun. You couldn't surrender to the Japanese with guns, they'd shoot you on site. So they marched us back to where the blown up bridge was and they put a temporary army bridge across

17:00 or somethin' and that night we camped among the coconut trees in a group like this and there was a group of Japanese and Korean coolies all around us. I felt a bit of a dingo, I thought if they gonna shoot us I am not goin' to be first, so I got in the middle, I wouldn't sit on out side, because I thought they would shoot the ones on the outside first. Because we got told they wouldn't take any prisoner of wars. We was told that.

17:30 **Can we just go back a little way? You were in a gully at the time when you were told you would have to surrender?**

We'd been up the mountain too?

**So how many of you were there?**

The group I was with about a dozen. We were pretty isolated

18:00 some of us. Because I joined up with a force, I did not know nobody in that force, the officers, the colonel, I knew nobody. I mean different thing, I hadn't been training with a couple in Rookwood for 2 or 3 years like they were. I was a total stranger, I was lost and scared, anybody tell you they were never scared of the war you were never

18:30 there. So, they had a rifle grenade, I don't know where it come from, I got hold of that, I never used one before, but in 5 minutes I knew how to use it, launching 7 second grenades, only 7 seconds before they go off.

**So you were hiding out in this gully for quite a while, how long for?**

19:00 They had a regimental aid post, a first aid there, they had some cooks there, there was only about a dozen when I joined up with them. I still not sure how I come to get there in the first place from where the wharf was, because it was quite a way to get there but I got there

19:30 somehow. And, I know all me kit bag and everything still there. I lost a lot of stuff in me kit bag, 'cause when we got pushed back I didn't get me bag. But I am very vague how I come to get from the wharf area to where I went. They moving back and the Dutch was too,

20:00 we were moving with the Dutch as well. Hopeless the Dutch, hopeless people the Dutch, they are an arrogant mob. I hope you are not Dutch.

**I am not telling.**

I should say that, don't know who you are talking to. French, Dutch and Germans, they are all arrogant.

**My middle name is**

20:30 **Gretel.**

**But um. It would be good to just go back over some of that. The other thing I was curious about was the point, I don't know I might have missed something when you said it, the point at which the Swan got out of the harbour?**

Oh, she took off.

**Yeah, and you were still on the dock?**

We were still on the dock, yeah.

21:00 But the skipper's job, his first place is to save his ship. Men don't mean a thing. You save your ship, that's your first priority, you don't go wait to pick up men to come back to shore. He gotta leave short staffed, you gotta leave short staffed. His idea is to save his ship, that's what he's trained for.

**And 6 of you were left at the dock.**

21:30 8, 6 Army and 2 sailors, so 8 was left behind.

**So what happened when you realised the skipper was going to go off with ship and you were going to be left there?**

Well, when they started dropping bombs around the wharf area, we got away up, towards to some of the foothills, headin' down towards the about the bottom of Mount Nona,

22:00 because they bombed the ship, they blew the wharf, all the oil tanks, they bombed all the oil tanks up. They practically wrecked all the town of Ambon. Like, the island is called Amboina and the main town is called Ambon and all the different villages, Latuhalat and Batu Merah and Tunj and all

22:30 Laha air strip there, different names villages. But the main town is Ambon but the island is called Amboina but it's not called Amboina no more it's all called Ambon now. Since the Indonesian over run it. In the Moluccan group there is 99 islands, 199 islands in the Moluccan group from there up north to Mindanao, that includes

23:00 199 islands, but Timor is not in that Moluccan group. Seram is 7 mile from the island. Seram is 200 mile long and 100 miles of water between Eastern Seram and the western tip of New Guinea there's a 100 mile of water. Then you got a series of islands coming down through the bend of the sea through the Tanimbar Islands

23:30 like a circle and work back to Darwin, that's how the other blokes escaped they hopped these islands, when they escaped.

**So do you remember what date it was when you went over to Ambon, it would have been in January sometime I guess?**

24:00 In the January it was.

**So it was only a matter of a few days from the attack on the harbour to when you were taken prisoner?**

I was taken prisoner of war on the 3rd February.

24:30 **I had all the dates, I think it was 30th January Fred.**

I had it all written down, I sort of had it all written, exact dates I arrived there, date I arrived home and everything.

**It's ok Fred don't worry, it's not really that important.**

25:00 Well I was taken prisoner on 2nd February 1942 by the Japanese.

**So how did it actually happen Fred, you were locked into this gully area?**

The Japanese, let's face it,

25:30 the Japanese had 36,000 troops landed on the island. Where we consist of, I don't know how many Dutch troops there was, but the Australian troops 'mounted to 1,300 altogether. So we had no hope to keep goin' back, then we finished up on the edge of the water and then

26:00 where we were taken prisoner of war, there was 600 miles of water between us and Darwin, Northern Australia, so we couldn't swim it. We had to come to a stop somewhere. So they just kept pushin' us back, and we never had the equipment for the start. I mean they had aircraft all the time flying over shellin' and machine gunnin' yas. They had navy ships shelling

26:30 the island as well, plus their troops. Nobody can defend an island because the invading troops has got the upper hand. Dutch had 1 coastal gun down and that was only to fire at the entrance of the, they couldn't elevate it 'round that way and fire the other way. So, we just got pushed back

27:00 pushed back all the time. And of course heavy tropical rain too at that time of the year, it's wet season. It's rainin' all the time, sometimes you can't see 6 foot in front of ya. That's about all I can tell you up to the surrender.

**So how did they treat you when they first took you prisoner?**

27:30 Well the interpreter said to us, "You are now guests of the Japanese". And 2 days after they start slave labour work on us, made us go to work. We had to work on Japanese ships, dig tank traps, rebuild oil tanks they blew up

28:00 everything like that. They just let us die 1 by 1 of starvation. They were fools, if they looked after us and fed us they would have got a lot more work out of us. But they just wanted us all to die. They executed 300 in 1 day at the air strip. So we found a mass grave after the war.

28:30 So we were badly treated, I mean, alright we did get some huts for a while, but we spent most of our time night and day outside. They take you away from the prison camp site, you might not get back for 3 or 4 or 5 days before you get back again, they work you all the time, day and night.

29:00 On loading ships, we worked on all the Japanese ships that come in we worked. They brought a 3 funnel cruiser in there one day, it had been damaged, the 3 propellers out the back, there must have been 20 feet or more missing, just as though somebody dropped a big guillotine like that and hopped that part of it. So they pushed the

29:30 tail out, propellers up the beach and then they got us in the truck and we go down the beach we cart rocks back up on the ship and put them on the bow 'til the bow sank low enough so the bow would come out of the water. Then they welded another bulkhead on it and put a rubber on it. That took about 7 months doin' this. They finished it and they made us cart the rocks, they wouldn't let us throw them overboard, they made us cart back off again

30:00 1 by 1, damned heavy rocks some of em', we losing a lot of weight, suffering from malnutrition, berri berri and malaria. The malaria killed a lot in the war. I can always remember a Saturday morning they took the ship for a run, while they were taking the ship down the bay for a run, American Air Force come over and put one down the funnel and blew it up after we worked on it for 6 months.

30:30 And of course they hit you all the time, with sticks. Then people were sick they still belt you and make you go to work. I been belt up a few times, your main thing was trying to stop on your feet. Never lay down, once you lay down they'll kill you, once you lay down, they call you a coward. They're

31:00 barbarian and cruel and there's only one good one now and that's a dead one, as far as I am concerned. I got no time for the Japanese.

**So what was the food that they gave, what did you survive on each day?**

Mainly grass. Or, you happen to be in the hills somewhere and you see a banana palm with some bananas on it, we ate a lot of

31:30 coconuts, a lot of goodness in coconuts. I think I always had plenty of coconuts. I was a good scrounger, a good thief. I pinched a lot of stuff off the Japanese, off ships and that. The only thing when I got home, I would still continue to practice. But something you learn over 4 years.

32:00 I was very good. Another thing that helped me get home was soap, whenever I saw a cake of soap on a ship or in Japanese quarters somewhere workin' I'd pinch the soap. Personal cleanliness was one good thing. I think that might have helped me get home.

**It helped to keep you healthy?**

Well if you can keep yourself clean you don't get a lot of skin

32:30 diseases and things like that. See some blokes just didn't care and they didn't last long, once you give up. But I had one motto, I didn't want to die on foreign soil. I fought it all the way. Yeah, that's the hard part of it.

**So what sort of food**

33:00 **were you able to get from the ships?**

Well, I used to find tin food. We unload ships, you stick some in your pockets and hide it from the Japanese. If they caught you get a hidin'. Sugar and things like that. Sometimes you might eat somethin' down the hold of the ship and come down with a tin, you always had

33:30 a knife and open a tin. And you had to scrounge all the time. You know what a 4 gallon bucket looks like? We made our own buckets, kitchen utensils, 4 gallon bucket. And you'd put

34:00 sweet potato leaves in it, grass or green bananas. We got some, they are awful things to eat, green bananas, you used to eat the skin and all, oh terrible. And make soup, only made soup out of it. That's all we had. And probably out of a 4 gallon bucket of soup you'd be lucky to get 2

34:30 cups of rice in it. So you always hang back to the bottom, and hope that you get the thick part of it. But I was a good scrounger, that's what saved me I think.

**Did you ever get caught with any food on you?**

Yeah.

35:00 I had a few hidings. One day we were down at Galala digging tank tracks. They dig tank tracks so you dig a great big scoop like that and about an 8 foot bank like that and they line it with logs so that a tank can't get in and he can't climb out of it. We had Japanese guard there one day, he reckoned Australians were thieves,

35:30 which we were. He was doin' a demonstration. They had a little oval dixie with a tray in it, they have some white rice and they boil their rice up and roll it in a ball double hand, and have a little tray in it with some bits of raw fish and some soya bean sauce, made from soya bean.

36:00 Anyway he said, "You Australians, you hang your dixie up on a tree, you turn around", he's turning around doin' a demo, so he hung his dixie up on a tree and when he turned back round it was gone, I don't know who took it, I was the nearest. And then he grabbed a pick and I saw him knock the head off the handle of the pick, and I knew someone was goin' to get a hidin' and I thought, "It's not goin' to be me", so I get

36:30 up, I was the closest to him, I am goin' to sneak away from him. He looked at me and he said, "Maisini gorshu", that means come here Australia, maisini means come here, gorshu means Australia, that's Japanese words. So he looked at me, the boys reckoned he hit me about 25 times. I was still on me feet the whole time.

37:00 But the point was he fractured me hip in 2 places and he fractured me pelvis in 2 places, I was on wooden sticks for weeks and weeks. 'Cause we had no doctor, our doctor been killed in a bombing raid. We had no doctor. Only medical bloke we had 'round the camp was a Dutch orderly, a nursing orderly he didn't have no medical qualifications. It took

37:30 52 years to accept this as war related, back in 1999, I had this operated on, 99. I had bone decay in the joints and everything. I am afraid our Australian government hasn't been very helpful. Mr Howard has been promising Iraq do this do that, they be treated same way we been treated. No different.

38:00 **So you had no treatment for those injuries at all?**

We had no treatment at all. We lost our doctor, our padre and things like that. When we were first taken POWs, our padre was a very old bloke, and this is an army church service book.

38:30 So he gave all one of us, he signed for us. He gave us all one and I kept mine. I found some cardboard to cover it, only had a soft cover, soft pack. I found some cardboard somewhere and I covered that and I carried that right through the war. I kept all that. Our padre gave us one each. So I don't know how many of them around.

**This was**

39:00 **inside the camp, when you were inside the camp?**

Yeah. That army pay book's over there too.

39:30 You can see what 4 years, it's been in my pocket, it's been wet and I carried it all the time because my best mate Tommy went down on the ship. I got that in Darwin, this is the HMAS Sydney, it's very delicate, handle it with care. I have lost some of it, it's been worn, been wet and everything all the time.

40:00 My pay book's up there, you'll see 3 pay books up there, you'll see one up there, real dark too. But

that's the sort of thing that I treasure. And it's got all the battle honours on the back. Tommy was engaged to one of our farm girls up there, this Daisy I talk about at Hawthorn, neighbour of hers, Marion Forest, Tommy was engaged to Marion. Of course he was lost at sea. And Marion never married. She was nursing. She was a nurse and she died in South Africa after the war.

40:30 So I don't know what's goin' to happen to all this stuff when I'm gone. The war museum in Canberra don't want this stuff much more, they got that much now. I had a watch what was given to me for me 21st birthday. Some Japanese got that, he took that of me, I lost that.

## Tape 6

00:32 During the war, they brought 3,000 English, Tommies, English soldiers they picked up in Malaya and 'round there. They took them right around the other side of the island to build an air strip at Leang, out of that 3,000 only 300 got back home to England after the war. As they dropped dead on the air strip they just put the next load

01:00 of dirt on top of them and left them on the air strip. They had no known graves, they had to dig up the air strip to find the bodies.

**So when you were first captured you said you had to form a circle and you went into the centre?**

Yeah, I was in the centre because I was a coward, because I thought if they goin' to shoot us we were warned that they wouldn't take prisoner of wars, they didn't on Laha the air strip, they executed all them, they didn't take them prisoners.

01:30 We found 4 mass graves and I don't know whether you saw a picture called "Blood Oath" or not? It was about the war trials and it was based on 2 air men, because the Japanese didn't like the air men, and I can still see them now, back of the truck being driven into the jungle to get executed.

02:00 **Which air men were these?**

Australians, yeah.

**Do you know the circumstances of them, being Ambon?**

Japanese didn't like air men because they used to bomb 'em, so number 1 priority. So if you were air men you got very rough treatment of the Japanese.

**So their planes had been shot down?**

Yes, oh yes.

02:30 Before Japs landed there was an air raid on, the Dutch had 2 fighter planes up here, I think, and they both got shot down, they both went up to tackle the Japanese, but they had no hope at all. Catalinas, we used to go out and they come back all shot up.

03:00 They been around the different islands meeting events and forces. Then we dug tank traps, we carted sand, the Japs brought oil tankers from different islands, some other islands, fallen to pieces, cut the rivets out, put em back and we'd build a stone wall right around the stone footings and cart sand

03:30 from the beaches around Paso on the trucks. You had a wicker basket, 2 of us had poles and you cart all the stuff up hills and everything like that. We fill up the things and the oil tanks and we dig trenches for pipe lines for the war. You grew a lot of sweet potatoes, they took over a lot of the gardens belong to the neighbours and we'd have to go down and

04:00 keep the weeds out and like weed 'em. And when you do a bit of bandicooting and you dig a hole and fine a sweet potato about that long, we stick it in our mouth and eat 'em, just little buttons, so long as you didn't get caught.

**When did you learn to bandicoot?**

When you are hungry you do anything.

**But that's something that you did when you were a kid?**

No,

04:30 I was never a thief, wouldn't know how to thief. I am not like the blokes today, they go rob a bank and can't get caught. I wouldn't get 5 minutes down the road, I get caught. I am too slow, or not cunnin' enough. Then we have to do a 2 day trip.

05:00 A bag of cement used to weight about 94 pounds for blokes like us only weighing about 6 or 7 stone, down to 4 stone I was, damned heavy. I was only 4½ stone when I was rescued. We used to march from Paso right around the bottom of the island. They made gun emplacement, you carry a bag of spent on

your shoulder, it's like this all the way,

- 05:30 all the hills and gullies, they had reinforcement wire, rolls of reinforcement wire, probably about 4 to carry a roll of that. We marched all day carrying that. But we used to milk the bags, what we called milk 'em. We'd tear a little hole in the cement bag and as we walked along a little bit would dribble out, and by the time we got there we'd only have about half the bag of cement. But then the Japanese woke up to that and they
- 06:00 sewed them in jute bags. So we couldn't spill the cement, terrible. For fit men it was easy work, but for us it wasn't not easy. Like the boys building the railway line through railway line, building bridges, cutting, not easy work and
- 06:30 when you are not fed, terrible. So we built all those gun emplacements, those big guns there I've never gone on. And, 1942, May 1942, the first
- 07:00 Australian air raid was done on the island, Lockheed adjunct come over. They got a couple of ships and all that. I can always remember our major running down through the camp and waving a towel like that, "Give it to 'em, give it to 'em, give it to 'em". A wonder the Japanese didn't shoot him, he was game as Ned Kelly, he only died a while back up at Toowoomba, McCrae. He was 90 odd.
- 07:30 Yeah on the 13th May it was, then on the 22nd they come over again, and they managed to shoot one down in the bay down at Paso. We knew where that plane was, so we were able to tell 'em after the war where the plane was, they went and looked for it and it was only in shallow water so they found the 4 bodies. Remains of the bodies still in the plane. So they were
- 08:00 identified, they got a known grave. We lost a Catalina on Nebo [?] Island, that was found 50 years later, was able to identify the bodies so they got known graves. But if I had my slides I could show you the cemetery, rows and rows of cemetery, I mean I walk along the cemetery now and it just looks like
- 08:30 yesterday since you seen 'em. But, look at their ages, all young people, terrific waste of life. Then they used to take us on boats to nearby islands too. Work there. And, we got bombed on the way home one day and we finished up we were in a life boat. I was in a life boat like that, I finished up 3 days
- 09:00 and 3 nights sittin' in a life boat with the water level, the side of the boat was all damaged and the water come in and we just sittin'. All I had was a pair of shorts on and I sun burnt all down legs everywhere, then we saw a ship and I thought we were saved and it was another Japanese ship, got picked up again. But they used to cart us all over the place, over to Seram, 7 miles away.
- 09:30 **What was the work you were doing on the other island, what did they get you to do?**
- Building gun emplacements, and everything where they could put gun pits and things like that and we dug a lot of tunnels, we did a lot of tunnelling. We started in one gully and you drive a tunnel right through. The Japanese or ladies didn't like waking over hills, so they get you to dig a tunnel so they could walk right through the tunnel.
- 10:00 One gully to the other. So we did that, you want to know anything about tunnelling I can tell you all about it. It's all volcano rock stuff and a lot of sand with it too. Then every time a Japanese was killed
- 10:30 they'd take us and we'd have to cremate 'em, burn 'em put them on a sheet of iron and burn them all up and then the Japanese would pick up the bones and put them in a little white box and take them back to Japan. So they made us do a lot of cremation work for them.
- Was there a special place you would do that work?**
- No just light a fire anywhere. They have a sheet of iron to put the body on.
- 11:00 I can always remember before the war, Dad acquired a truck load of mallee stumps we cremated an Indian hawker up home. 'Cause being Hindu, the cow is their religion, and 'cause butter used to come in 56 pound boxes once, 56 pounds of butter in a box and I think there was 10 boxes butter used,
- 11:30 placed around his body and the stumps and cremated and his ashes sent back to India. So Indians, all cremation. And they are not properly cremated, they just throw the rest of it in the river.
- Did you say butter was placed around the body?**
- Yeah, that catches on fire and helps it burn. They use
- 12:00 butter because the cow being religion of the Hindus.
- So how did your father come to be cremating his body?**
- Dad owns a lot of mallee stumps 'cause he carted the stumps there, Dad didn't do it, the police or somebody like that done it. I am not too sure who done it, 'cause the butter factory at Swan Hill supplied the butter. Butter melts,
- 12:30 it burns. Something to do with the Hindu religion, they use butter.

**I understand there were a couple of other raids on the camp?**

We had raids all the way through. I am jumpin' a few years ahead now, but we spent

- 13:00 about 3 weeks loading about 4 army ships with ammunition, bombs and shells like that. All around the island, before the Dutch had those islands, the Portuguese had 'em. And the Portuguese had a fort on that island, I can show it to you later on, it's been done up. When I saw it first
- 13:30 big fig trees were growing through it and wrecked all the building and it's all been done up and made into a museum now. We worked about 3 weeks unloading shells and nearly all the stuff was stacked in Ambonese cemeteries and Portuguese cemeteries, some of the cemeteries are 3 and 400 years old. I can show you a church there
- 14:00 in the book. Now this was Guy Fawkes Day 1944, when we finished, loaded, that night allies come over, now they must have had spies or something, they bombed all these cemeteries, they blew it all up everywhere all over Mount Loca [?], Laha, didn't matter where you look, it was the best Guy Fawkes night I ever seen,
- 14:30 didn't matter where you looked everything was on fire. And these old cemeteries, probably 3 and 400 years old, all blown up and disturbed. Japanese had no regard for nothin' like that, nothin' sacred about them. To think they bomb, they put the stuff in and then they bomb. Then where we were camped, a bomb dumped in the middle of our camp. That's how our
- 15:00 doctor and padre got killed. The Americans come over and blew it to pieces. I was lucky I was not killed. I cut my finger there and cut my leg, all I got out of it.

**When did that happen? Was that a night or day raid?**

Day raid, 1943, those 2 months.

**How big a bomb was it?**

1000 pounders, armour piercing

- 15:30 most of them were, they had 500 pounders, we had to unload them off the ships and cart them and they stacked them in the middle of our camp site. And when she blew we were in a coconut area, a coconut tree area, an old Chinese bloke owned it originally Tan Tui. That's why the camp was called Tan Tui. Well, there wasn't a hut,
- 16:00 we built some huts, there wasn't a hut or coconut tree for about 50 acres I would say of land, as big as this park over here. They cleaned the lot up, killed a lot our blokes of course.

**You were unloading bombs did you say, and having to store them in the camp?**

Yes. You see the

- 16:30 Japanese didn't recognise what do you call it? The Red Cross Convention or somethin',

**Geneva.**

Geneva Convention. Switch and control it. Geneva Convention. The Japanese didn't recognise the Red Cross or nothing' like that. According to the Convention,

- 17:00 you are not supposed to be doing any war work, they had us do work to fight our own people. Now under the Convention, you are not supposed to. You are a prisoner of war that's it. They blockaded the island off, I mean, I forget
- 17:30 how many did they take. They split us up. They took some to Hainan. This is my records. So,
- 18:00 there was 500 or something left on Ambon. I forget.

**Was it about 300 Fred? Saved, went to Hainan. I think it was about 300.**

263.

- 18:30 263 went to Hainan. 67 died at Hainan.

You been through some of the records have you.

**Yep.**

Where did you get them from.

**From the archive people.**

You probably know a lot about this before you come here.

**Little bit.**



We had 9 killed at Hainan

19:00 Then we had 10 missing, but there's been 2 bodies found since then.

**So were you sent to Hainan?**

No. They did pick me to go to Hainan but I swapped with somebody else. I wanted to stop as close to Australia as I could. I didn't want to go to Hainan, I might have been better if I don't know. So

19:30 I thought I had the list of how many stopped at Ambon. 500 stopped at Ambon. Not counting the attached troops, out of 2/ 21st Battalion which consisted of about 1,000 men, 770 or something never come home. So it was pretty sort of grim.

20:00 It was classed as one of the worst prison camps in the world, Ambon.

**So before you got to Ambon you said that you found your father's cousin was there as well?**

Yes, I knew Malcolm had joined the

20:30 army, but I didn't know where he went. When I finished up in the prison camp I found Malcolm.

**So what was it like finding him there?**

The worst part was to see him die of starvation. He was pretty young, because he was only at the end of the First War and it was

21:00 pretty hard to see him die, I had a

21:30 list a while ago.

Here it is.

Oh. Ollie Carr, he went to Hainan. There's some of the chaps, the 2 Barnes boys they come from Bolton. Eric Hutchison, his 3 brothers Fred, Dave and Eric, Eric was executed last,

22:00 Sam Anderson, Ken Hudson was NSW [New South Wales]. Roy Barber, he was a mate of mine and Harry Lawrence, I haven't got there, I went to school with Harry, everything. So out of the 17 altogether in that camp that come from

22:30 the Shire of Swan included Swan Hill and Older Manangatang, Robinvale, Nyah and all the surrounding districts and I was the only one to come home. In the finish, out of the lot of them. And I always say, "Why me?" I still say it, "Why me?".

23:00 Somebody said, "Someone had to come home and tell the story", but I am not a very good story teller. I haven't been able to talk about it much, I have suffered emotional problems all those years, everytime I think about it I break down. And, it's not easy.

**So all those fellas from the Swan Hill District? 17. Those 17. In the camp.**

23:30 **In the camp. They got split up somewhere in Hainan but I was the only survivor out of the Swan Hill District boys.**

**But you discovered they were there once you were in the camp?**

I found them all in the camp, yes. Yeah, I found them all in the camp.

**How long did it take to find them?**

Not long. I mean you walk into a group of men, it's like you go for a holiday, you never know who you will

24:00 meet in the street. Never know. I can remember Harry Lawrence, he was very, very sick, he was dying, he still had an army greatcoat for a blanket, I had one, still had one for a blanket, I gave it to him. I used to try and scrounge a bit for

24:30 Roy Barber and Harry. I ran out of food sometime to give them some food. And, Harry said to me, "You take my greatcoat", I said, "No I don't want your greatcoat", and he said, "I won't be here tonight when you come home from the work party". He wasn't there when I come home. He'd gone. Terrible. I can still see the poor

25:00 buggers lyin' there like that. Yeah.

**So,**

They have got stuff in archives about us, have they?

**Oh, no just from what you told the researcher on the phone.**

On the phone. Oh things like that.

25:30 **So when you were told that you would be going to Hainan, you didn't want to go?**

No, I made up my mind I wasn't goin'. Anyway I had a captain with me, DA Wilfey, I said, "No, I am almost 600 miles, I am not goin' north further, so if I can get somebody to swap with me".

26:00 Anyway somebody did swap with me, they had mates and they wanted to stick together, so 1 pair of mates must have been split up anyway so I swapped. The Japanese didn't know I swapped, they just bundled us off and I stopped on the island with hope that I might have got rescued early, which I didn't. Boys at home got home a lot earlier than we did.

**So who were the**

26:30 **Australian officers in the camp managing these instructions from the Japanese? What officers were there with you?**

We had Colonel Scott for a start, he went to Hainan, Major McCrae went to Hainan, Major Wesley, who was a dingo, he hid in a burrow all the time. He was no help.

27:00 And when we come home from the war we disowned him, nobody had nothing to do with him. He didn't help us or nothin'.

**What do you mean he stayed in a burrow?**

Well he never tried to talk to the Japanese interpreter, never tried to help us or nothin' like that. The Japanese respected the officers more than they did us. Didn't work

27:30 the officers like us, they left them in the camp. Officers weren't allowed out, but Major Wesley was more or less in charge of us, what was left there, but the point is he never helped us. We never used to see him. He had a hut, he stopped in the hut all the time. So I of course when we come back home

28:00 he only come to 1 reunion, we disowned him. So, I don't know, can't think properly.

**So 263**

28:30 **went off to Hainan?**

Yes, according to the book.

**According to the book, yes and that left how many back on Ambon?**

Seen 500 or 600 and when the war finished we had 121 left. And 119 got home, because we lost

29:00 2 on the way home. I got taken to Moratai then I went to Borneo after that. I was one of the fit ones. About 15 of us fit. I was fit and I volunteered to go to Japan from Moratai, so went over to Borneo and started training again. I had rocks in me head.

29:30 I had.

**You were 4½ stone.**

Hmm.

**4½ stone.**

Yeah, but I soon put it on weight. Soon put on weight. I'll show you the photos in a minute when you finished with the camera you can have a look at the photos. I don't think you can take photos too?.

**Yes.**

I don't know whether there's a photo of me,

30:00 there's one up on there of me with the hat on the corner of the buffet.

**Yeah, we'll take that one.**

The phone guy asked me if I had a photo, I have got quite a few photos there from the early days.

30:30 Between 500 and 600 was left there.

**You were talking before, Fred can I just ask you about this, you talked before about there being a raid on the camp when you just got a**

31:00 **scratch, but the Padre was killed, was that when there was a pile of bombs stored there in the camp?**

Yeah, yeah. I don't know how many there was. They had thousands, the armour piercing bombs they got a solid nose on them, they go through ship walls and everything. The Americans come over and they blew the dump up. They

- 31:30 must've knew it was there. They always kept sayin' they didn't know there was POWs on the island. But every time they did somethin' on the island like I tellin' you about, they blew the cemeteries up all the bombs and everything, they wait until we unload the ships and then they come over bomb it. So they knew what was goin' on, on the island but they didn't know we were there they reckoned. It's amaze me. So Japanese said,
- 32:00 and they were the war offences, the Japanese told them there was nobody on the islands. Because off the islands there were 4 Corvettes and they said they were looking for POWs and the Japanese said, "No prisoners on the island", and the Corvettes said, "We are coming in", and the Japs said to 'em, this was the day the war finished and the Japs said, "If you come in we'll blow you out of the water". So they went away.
- 32:30 We lost 99 men in that month.
- Which month sorry?**
- Last month of the war. But they could've rescued us earlier, when they wanted to, come in lookin' for us, could've got us. When the war finished to when we were rescued it was nearly 8 weeks.
- 33:00 Before we got rescued.
- They came in to rescue you in August didn't they?**
- The day the war finished. They see off the island. They blockaded the island north. We didn't know this of course. But the navy, the 4 Corvettes of the navy ships said they were coming in and the Japanese said the war wasn't over. They
- 33:30 said, "If you come in we'll blow you out of the water". So they went back to Moratai. Can I start talking about the end of the war?
- Yes, yes you can.**
- Well it was about 1500, when the war finished, all the Ambonese native fools
- 34:00 runnin' around with V for victory and all that, anyway we were down at Paso about midday, they saw us on the trucks and brought us back to camp in a big rush. Anyway then the interpreter said peace talk was going on, but they had already signed the peace on the ship at Japan. We didn't even know about the
- 34:30 atomic bomb. Now people condemn the atomic bomb. As far as I am concerned I got nothing against the atomic bomb because that saved my life. If they hadn't have dropped that bomb none of us would have survived, war went longer. We had 10 Americans in the camp. Anyway, so there was some of us there, we reckoned we could knock of enough of us there to do knock the guards
- 35:00 off, which we did. We knocked of the guards. At the back of the camp there was a radio station, which the Japanese had left. And somebody had been out and said all the wireless equipment was still in the station. Now one American, we lost our radio bloke Roy Barber, they did his thing.
- 35:30 And a bloke I can't think his name, Mike, he was a little American bloke, he was a radio operator and we said to Mike, "We're going to commandeer this radio station", he said "I'm not goin' out of the camp", we said, "Well if you don't go out of the camp you'll go up on the end of a bayonet". We got some Japanese rifles and that. Anyway, so
- 36:00 we got up there and we spent about a week tryin' to send messages, morse coding all the time because in the 4 years we had been there the code had been changed. We were using the '41, '42 code. And what was happening, there was something called jamming, something jamming the radio at Moratai.
- 36:30 And they thought there was something wrong with their set, so they got an engineer to come in to check the set up. "Nothing wrong with your radio, there's someone using an old code". "Who'd be using an old code in 1945?". He said, "That's an old code being used", and they couldn't decipher it. But he said, "I know", the engineer said, "I know a bloke that knows all the codes", so he got him back. He said, "That's a 1941, '42
- 37:00 code", and he made contact with us he did. So this is on the Friday, he said, "Ring us back Monday morning. Can you get the radio station?" "Yeah". So we rang back on the Monday morning and he said, "There's 4 ships on the way down to get yas". We got ourselves out that way.
- Goodness me, so the**
- 37:30 **Japanese had left the camp?**
- No they still on the island. We went back afterwards Moratai, so I never got out of the army until December 1946. I stopped off in the islands for nearly 12 months afterwards. I was goin' to go to Japan, but no I didn't. We went back to the island and rounded up all the Japanese, we took the island back off the Japanese and we sorted the equipment and put all the Japanese on

- 38:00    Seram, and every time you wanted a work party you go over by boat and bring back so many each day and do work on the island.
- But the camp, when the Japanese surrendered around the middle of August in '45,**
- Nearly 7 weeks after the war before they give up.
- So you said you knocked off the guards?**
- After about the 7th or 8th week we knocked of the guards.
- 38:30    Yes.
- So the Japanese were still there? You were still being guarded in the camp?**
- We went up and got the interpreter and brought him down and put him in the guard house in the cell, they had a cell there and told him if there's any other Japanese come near the camp we shoot him first. We had guns at the finish.
- Which you had got from the guards?**
- Yeah. We knocked the guards off,
- 39:00    there were about 15 of us left and I said to the Lieutenant Hook, there was enough of us to take the camp over from the Japanese, and we started to get better food then, so we got some clothing and that. We told the Japs what we wanted food and we got more rice and some of it wasn't doin' us any good anyway, our stomachs couldn't take the extra food, wrong type of food.
- 39:30    **So, tell me how you knocked off the guards, how did you do it?**
- We just grabbed them, about 7 sentries.
- And did you shoot them?**
- Oh, no. We not barbarians, Australians. We don't shoot anybody. I'm getting' cramps.
- 40:00    Anyway, so I was at Moratai.
- Just before Moratai though Fred, you radioed back to Moratai?**
- Yeah, and the ships come down and got us and I went back on the HMAS Cootamundra and the Latrobe took all the stretcher cases and we had 4 ships, June, June,
- 40:30    Latrobe, Cootamundra and Glenelg.
- So that must have been a pretty amazing sight?**
- I seen people layin' on stretchers that never sat up for months and months, and started waving seein' the ships come down the harbour. They had a Japanese pilot boat guiding them through the mine fields. They got a Japanese pilot boat out.
- 41:00    But it was a lovely sight. They wanted to carry me, put me on a stretcher and carry me aboard and I said, "No, I walked on a ship I am goin' to walk back on a ship". I didn't want to be carried on the ship and went to Moratai.

## Tape 7

- 00:31    **How are you doin'? Have you got the energy to do another 1 or 2 tapes?**
- Yes. You want to ask me some questions.
- Yes, certainly. I am just curious to know, I am going back to the beginning when you just before the surrender and you were in that 4 days in the gully, and you were working with the Battalion there. How did**
- 01:00    **you know that the surrender was taking place? Was there still a chain of command or was it just a matter of being overrun and having no choice?**
- You talkin' about the end of the war?
- No I am going right back to when you were taken prisoner.**
- What do you want to know there?
- I was curious to know, was the surrender something that came from the higher ups or was it the men just**

01:30 **understanding that it was not a winnable situation?**

We just kept going back and back until we finished up in the water. They pushed us right back in the water, so I mean we either surrender or we was shot there on the spot. You had 2 choices, they either shoot you or you surrender. You gotta surrender

02:00 and just hope for the best. The POWs in Germany, they were treated as POWs, they weren't worked or nothing, they were in good hotel conditions, they lived like the Germans lived. See we weren't classed as POWs, we were classed as concentration camps. There's a difference. See, the Geneva Convention,

02:30 so we come under concentration camps not POW camps, although we were POWs or we were supposed to be, but we were not treated like POWs.

**You mentioned, was it Wesley?**

Yeah.

**Major Wesley. Did he ever defend the men in terms of dealing with the Japanese?**

No never, never.

03:00 **Was there anyone who could speak on behalf of the men or who took it upon themselves?**

I often thought after the war, he should have been court martialled, classed as a deserter to us, that's how I feel. That on tape now? You gotta be careful what you say. You could get into trouble, It's 60 years ago!

03:30 we all have an opinion. We can't always say what we think. I mean, different people that we were with, I mean there's other blokes we didn't like either, but they didn't come home so you don't say nothin' about em. You just gotta be careful what you say, you don't know who you are talkin'. Who hears

04:00 those lines. But as far as prison camp go, he was never liked anyway, he was never welcome to our reunions or nothing like that, he was outcast. But the less said about the better.

**You mentioned a lot of the guards were Koreans?**

Most of the guards were Koreans. See

04:30 you gotta think before the war they spent 25 years in China, Manchuria, and north and south Korea, they had all those, and so they had Korean coolies, and the Japanese were cruel too 'em to. They had them as army. That's why the Japanese at the moment are dead scared of North Korea,

05:00 because North Korea would like to repay the debt, what Japan did to them. You understand it?

**I understand that.**

**What I would like to understand is how they displayed that cruelty, how they physically treated the Koreans, what did you see?**

Well, they used to bash 'em up too. But not only that, they had Japanese kids there in the army and

05:30 they're barbarians, you see the officers bashing the young kids up. Kids, 14, 15, 16 or 17 years old in the army, and they'd be bashed up. They're cruel to themselves, they were not only cruel to us, they cruel to them too. Yeah.

06:00 **So, what were you saying of the Japanese treatment of their own soldiers?**

They were cruel to their own people too, especially the young kids. Well see, they were sending their pilots out with enough fuel for a no return trip. Diving into war ships and all that. So that's how

06:30 they didn't value life, not even their own.

**And these boys, that they would also beat up, are these boys supposed to be guarding you are they?**

Yeah. But see, Hitler did the same too, Hitler brought in the Hitler Youth Group, they had them on planes and ships and everything. And kids

07:00 today in these Arab countries walking around and Burma and that walkin' around with guns, in the defence forces, kids. And now we are tryin' to get a law here that you go home to Grandma and Grandad and you are not allowed to give 'em a hand unless you are registered or something. You've heard that haven't ya?

**So what language was being used?**

07:30 We had Japanese language, we had a mixture of Japanese and Malay and Korean language and we also had the Ambonese, the native population on the island and the language was most Malay anyway.

**So but with the guards in terms of their communication with you, was it mainly Japanese?**

Mainly

08:00 hand signals most of it, because you didn't know what they were talkin' about half the time. Oh, we learned a few words, we learned what ships were called and what water was called, and sugar is called and what they called us and everything.

**So what did they call you?**

Gorshu. Gorshu stands for Australia, that's a Japanese word.

08:30 And I learnt to count in Japanese because they used to count us off all the time. You go ichi, ni, san, shi .... And in Malayan it's [Malayan counting], it didn't take long to learn to count because you hear the Japs say it all the time. We were short of men, you have us all lined up, we were short of men

09:00 and they start here by the time they got there, some of them jumped of into a ditch and we had a ditch and they run up the front to make up our number. We had blokes there. We spent a lot of time at night out at camp too and scrounging for food and get amongst the native villagers. The native villagers were very good to us, very sympathetic to us.

**How were you able to get out of the camp?**

09:30 Drains under the fence and things like that, you got caught out you were executed. Oh yeah. We had a few executed that had been out of the camp.

**Did you ever get out?**

I been out and done my share of scrounging. We all had to.

**What were the chances**

10:00 **of being caught?**

You went by yourself. You don't go 2 or 3 or half a dozen together, because that's how you get caught. So you are better off by yourself, go alone. So we had 2 escape just before the war finished, Jimmy Elmore and Fred Schaeffer. Well Elmore

10:30 died of malaria in the jungle and a Jap caught Schaeffer and brought him back to camp and executed him for escaping. One of the war trials were over that. Yeah. What else have you picked out?

**I am just curious, I am hardly looking at this, it's just where the conversation takes us.**

11:00 **So when you say escape, you mean people actually attempted to escape the island as well?**

Oh yeah, we had people escape the island, from our prison camp. Yeah, we had escapees.

**So would there be? Because you hear of**

11:30 **escape committees and that sort of thing.**

Anybody escaped you never knew, didn't know they do it until a few days after and then they would tell the Japanese. Well see there's a lot that escaped from the camp, that lot. All escaped. So after capture, there's about 4 or 5 guys.

12:00 So there are a lot of the escapees. I didn't know as much, see I didn't know there was an island named Ambon or nothin' like that in my life, I didn't know as much then as I know now, I would never have been a prisoner either, I would have escaped even if I died, getting' home I would have escaped.

12:30 They would never have held me there. But I didn't know, but some of them got together, they clubbed together and they escaped. But you wouldn't know nothing about it, they'd be counting us and all of a sudden they'd say, "We are 7 men short or 5 men short this morning", or somethin' like that. Then you see Japs on trucks goin' out in the jungle and with guns lookin' for you, but they'd get off the island.

13:00 The Raja sons were very good, bloke named Bill Gastra, come to Australia, they been in my house here actually the Raja has. John Gastra is living out here at Eltham, now. He is out here now. He was one of the sons. But it was his father

13:30 that helped us. So they were all Christian people, very nice island it was, lovely people.

**Sorry you said the Raja's sons?**

Mmmm.

**You said the Raja.**

Yeah, John Barber Gastra. John Gastra was only a young bloke like us, but his son is here in Australia at the moment. He come over here, they had all this trouble the

14:00 last couple of years in Ambon. John come over to get his boy, he was looking after the war cemetery, he

come over her to get his son into university and he got caught here, he's been back but he's been given citizenship here. I don't know how long it is for, but anyway they are doin' alright here. I see him a lot. But it's his father

14:30 ands his uncles that helped us. And Gastra, John, Barbara is a lovely person, she come here too, we brought 'em out here actually. Yeah, we brought 'em out here to

15:00 Australia for a trip. And they stopped with different people's places, I had 'em for a couple of days over at Kew for a couple of days over at Oakleigh for a couple of days, and John's dead now but Barbara's livin' in Jakarta at the moment, lovely person.

**Can you please tell me how the Ambonese people helped you**

15:30 **in your time there?**

You are going to work and walk past and drop food on the ground. They wouldn't hand it to you because if the Japanese caught them they get bashed up for it too. But they drop food on the ground along side of you and when the Jap wasn't watching you'd pick it up and eat it. I mean we get bananas or pineapples and things like that and pawpaw.

16:00 And of course all that stuff like pineapples is pretty big to hide. But they weren't doin' it easy either, the Japanese plundered their land. I mean they had, they had orchards where they grew, beans and they grew sweet potatoes and things like that and the Japanese just pilfered all that. So

16:30 it wasn't easy. And the longer they stopped there the whiter they looked to us. Yeah.

17:00 **What have you got there Fred?**

Mmmm?

**What have you got there?**

I just thought I had a photo of Bill and Barbie.

**We'll have a look at that later.**

I put them on slides.

**Well that's smart, I mean they'll last.**

But now and again I want something, I'll take a slide out and get it made into a photo for somebody.

17:30 **So what else can you remember about the local people, the Ambonese ways, they may have helped you or shown support?**

Well, ever since we been goin' back they hate the Javanese. See Indonesia taken over all the islands, but all the islands were run by their own groups, they are all different. But now it's the whole of the East Indies is called Indonesia now

18:00 and the Javanese that took over the islands, not Sumatra or Bali or that, it's the Javanese, they are all Muslims and they went through all the islands. That's what caused all the trouble now. And this bombing business and all that's going on, it's not finished yet. I mean there's millions of them now. And when you go to Ambon all the Ambonese people

18:30 used to live in the town they all been pushed out into the hills and the Javanese have taken over all their houses and all that. Got all business there and everything like that. They got thousands of all army people there, I never seen them, all I seen 'em do is runnin' up and down the road doin' exercise. And because they got stuck into the

19:00 Christians, they burnt all their churches and everything. They ripped the war memorial arch and everything. Anything to do with Christians the Muslim, that's what all the trouble is now these terrorists they all the Muslim religion.

**Just going back to what we were talking about Fred, you were talking about getting under the fence and scrounging around, what sort of things were you able to,**

19:30 **to bring back?**

Well, we knew a banana palm had bananas on it. Knocked a bunch of bananas off, bring it back into the camp and things like that, and you meet up with some of the Ambonese people and they give you sugar, sugar which is called goolit, it's not white sugar like we got it's in a block it's brown,

20:00 pure sugar not refined. You seen dark brown sugar, but it's in a block form. Sago, they have sago palms there, they pulp, it's all pulp, and it goes in a block and they cook it like sago. Sago's been machined and like pebbles and all that. They have paw paw trees and

20:30 sweet potatoes, they lived on their sweet potatoes. Well our main diet is potatoes too, really. I like sweet potatoes they are nice. Of course they did a lot of fishing too. Sometimes you get a fish thrown at you.

So,

21:00 it's the way it goes.

**Obviously you take a great risk if you do that and men who were caught escaping would be?**

You knew the danger. You went out and got caught, you knew what the answer was. They'd just chop your head off. They loved their swords. Yeah.

21:30 **And the executions were they held for all to see?**

Mmm.

**When executions did happen.**

They just tie your hands behind your back and make you kneel in front of the hole and your head just dropped in the hole and then they'd push your body in then, they make you dig the hole first. Dig your own grave, oh yeah.

22:00 But I never saw any executions, I was lucky. I missed a lot of that stuff. And I never worked on any of the burial parties, burying any of our dead up the back of the camp. I was always on a workin' trip and you come home, so and so died today, dead and buried you see. I never worked on a burial party. I was one of the fitter ones, I

22:30 was out on a work the parties. But they weren't dug very deep I don't think.

**So you were one of the fitter guys?**

I had to be otherwise I wouldn't be here.

**Sure.**

**Is that possibly why you picked to go to Hainan?**

23:00 No, I don't think so. They just wanted so many people to go to Hainan. How's that for Berri Berri. That's what us eyes used to look like at times.

**Can we talk a bit about that about**

23:30 **just the medical situation in the camp?**

I was very fortunate because I never got malaria. Mosquitoes didn't like me, and I didn't get malaria and I think that was one of the things, even now, I can go anywhere now and a mosquito never touches me. I am in that group there somewhere I'm in there

24:00 somewhere waiting on the wharf for the ship to pick us up. I am in that. That's how many there was able to walk around, all the rest were stretcher cases, out of the 121 there's only about 20 or 30 or somethin' there, so it just shows how many fit ones there was.

24:30 There's our cemetery we had at the back of the camp.

**So what were the main sort of medical health problems, you mentioned malaria?**

Malaria, starvation and berri berri, we had berri berri, wet berri berri, where it swelled up like I showed you, well I had berri berri too, but

25:00 not the wet one. Although I swelled up and my legs swelled up like that, and me face and if you laid down you got a few hours to lay down it would disappear again because you must remember, our blood had nearly 70% water in it, not pure blood, it was nearly all water. Because that's what

25:30 berri berri is, it's malnutrition. Because it's berri berri of malnutrition. And your body's got too much fluid in it and your blood is thinned down, well my blood test showed I think when I got to Moratai was about 74% water and how you survive on that I don't know.

26:00 Someone up top is lookin' after ya. It's not easy.

**Was there anyone there who was able to give medical assistance?**

Over there, no we had none. We lost our doctor, we had 1 doctor go to Hainan and the other doctor who stopped at the camp and was killed in the bombing raid was Padre

26:30 Pat Moore, from Addison. Johnnie Hook, but we had a Dutch nursing orderly, like a nurse and he took legs off, people had gangrene and he cut legs off and everything. See, you've heard a lot probably about Weary Dunlop. But Weary Dunlop wasn't the army doctor in prison camps. Weary Dunlop got a lot a

27:00 praise but there's a lotta other doctors did just as much as he did. And army nurses and things like that, and we had all our army nurses knocked off on Banka. And Sister Bullwinkle survived. But we had one Dutch orderly,



27:30 he had no equipment. We had a dentist and he pulled a lot of teeth out, people had a lot of teeth trouble and he pulled a lot of teeth out. I lost a lot of teeth, we had teeth trouble, but no anaesthetic or nothing. Poor coots get their legs cut off with no anaesthetic. And

28:00 stitched up with a bit of cotton or something.

**Obviously he couldn't do that all by himself, he was getting assistance from the other men?**

Most cases when you took a bloke was getting' his leg of he was unconscious anyway, he didn't know. When he did gain conscious he realised he had no leg and the shock would kill him.

28:30 Most cases. It's like today with the old people, they break their hip. A lot of people die now as a result of a broken hip, just the shock. Don't know why. My wife she broke her hip out there one day. She walked over the park there and tripped over the gutter. So she had to get a

29:00 plate put in her leg. But I suppose you been in drought area, I suppose you seen sheep and all that cattle drought condition a bag of skin and bones. That's what we went through, we went through what you call a drought. . Same thing. You see cattle dying, sheep dying,

29:30 from starvation that's the way it goes. We worked on a lot of coal boats, they'd been coal boats unloading the cargo ships with coal. Then they'd bring their war ships and we'd have to refuel the ships with coal again and pass the coal fill their hoppers with coal, dirty damn job it is too. And you

30:00 might work on a ship 2 or 3 days and not have a wash, you come home black as a nigger. We were lucky we had water runnin' through our camp in a stream. You wouldn't reckon now, but as far as we were concerned it was good water, we always had good water. That kept

30:30 a lot of diseases down. We had no cholera at all, no cholera at the camp. In Malaya and on the railway line, they had thousands that had cholera. That's because of dirty water. We had none. Ambon was never known for cholera. There was a lot of good volcano springs in the hills there they run water all the year

31:00 round. So we were fortunate to have good water runin' through the middle of our camp. Just up the hill there was a bit of spring.

**How long would you be working at any given time, can you perhaps give us an idea of what the day was like? When you would get up, start work, how many breaks you would have if any?**

Well for a start a ship come in,

31:30 probably I don't know 30 or 40,000 tonne ship, probably have 4 cargo holds in it. Now, they used to bring a cement ship in there, what, in bags just pour the cement in and we used to work on

32:00 that about 4 or 5 days, day and night. Don't stop, and we'd have to go down and bag it up into bags, jute bags and put it on a sling and up like that. Then a few days after you start coughin and you cough up lumps of spent out of your lungs the dust has gone down into your lungs and got wet. You'd cough up these lumps of spent out of your lungs. And it would be just a

32:30 cloud dust you couldn't see. It didn't matter what, ammunition or coal on it, you worked from the time you started work you worked until that ship finished. You didn't do shift work like the wharfies down here. No way. So you out in the jungle you might be carting stuff out in the jungle. Sometimes it would be 4 or 5

33:00 days before you come back to the camp. And half the time you get nothin' to eat, the Japanese always had somethin' to eat. They just wanted to kill us off. They didn't want us. Simple as that. So the only way to get us to work us to death and starve us.

**If they wanted you dead it seemed like a very complicated**

33:30 **way of doing it, I mean using you as labour?**

They could have shot us the first few days they had us, got rid of us straight away. So I can't understand why they didn't. But their young people back home don't even know they had a war. They had not been told.

34:00 They are barbarians and they got the chance they'd do it again. I'm sure. I don't think they learnt their lesson. They don't like the atomic bomb of course. But the atomic bomb not only saved allies lives, it also saved a lot of Japanese lives too, it brought an end to the

34:30 war. So I mean, you gotta save people on both sides. Yeah, so I don't know.

**How about just basic things like getting sleep, were you ever able to rest, where there ever times you called rest?**

Well, every now and again you get a spell, wherever you laid on the ground you

35:00 fall asleep straight away, and you stay that way until they come around and poke you in the bones to get up again, you just automatically fell asleep. No trouble at all. So I don't know.

**Was there every any,... Sorry Fred you were gong to say something .**

35:30 **I forget now. I was going to say something or not. Were you going to say something?**

**I just wanted to ask, when there were idle hours, I am sure there weren't many but when they came along how would that time, other than sleep be occupied?**

36:00 Mmm?

**When there was time when you were not working you weren't sleeping, I'm sure there wasn't much of it but when there was, how would that time be occupied?**

Well, you weren't fit enough, you couldn't play sport or anything like that. But we always had a

36:30 church parade, church service. I was one of the blokes who would help run it and another chap named Clarrie Hines down at Portland, we always had a church service without the Japanese knowing about it.

**If you need to look at the book that's fine.**

And um.

37:00 **But if you can just tell us what you remember, what comes to mind.**

Anytime back at camp like that you be layin' down, resting.

**Yeah.**

That's early in the war, we still had a padre, that's one of our church parades there.

**Can I ask, you were heavily involved in that, how were they conducted, Fred?**

Mmm?

37:30 **How were those church parades conducted? You said they had to be done very secretly?**

Oh yes, they knew, but early in the peace. But then they banned it, but we would meet secretly. It's like the Germans, Hitler banned Masonic Lodges, Masonic Lodges, but they still met in groups, they still had lodges down on the river banks or in the forests somewhere.

38:00 They still met in secret. Held their lodges. And in Malaya they ran a lodge for about 2 years too as well. In the camp, have a lodge meeting.

**So how did you manage to hold your parades in camp without them knowing?**

38:30 There wasn't many that used to get together. But most of the time back in camp you'd have a good wash and I had an army greatcoat and go down to the stream, wash that and get the dirt out of it because I used it as a blanket. But when I was

39:00 rescued I still had a full uniform that I reserved. When I marched on the ship I went back on the ship in a full uniform. Bit raggedly lookin' but I still had a uniform, I kept it in reserve, me felt hat I wore all the way through.

**What would you wear when working on the ship?**

A pair of shorts.

39:30 You'd have a pair of shorts on all the time, very seldom we had a shirt on or anything like that, I mean you were livin' in the tropics, and me boots, I used to

40:00 patch me boots up. You know what a wheelbarrow tyre is? Wheel, the bomb carriers we used to knock off some tyres of that and cut the rubber up and we'd wire a sole under your boot to keep the boots going. I had 1 pair of boots for 4 years, with a bit of a rubber tyre on them for a sole.

40:30 I never went bare foot not once. Most people did. I never. So its pretty hard to survive, I tell ya.

**You said**

41:00 **Fred that it wasn't necessarily the country guys, the fittest ones weren't necessarily the ones who got through?**

That's what they used to say lyin' there dyin', you country blokes will survive better than the city blokes. But that wasn't true. There was probably more city blokes come home than was country boys, because people got the idea that if you were a Aussie country bloke you were a big

41:30 strong healthy bloke, but that was not always. It's the will power you got that you survive. I could go to jail, I could get a 20 year jail sentence I could to it on me head I reckon. You know you are not goin' to

get executed or starved.

**So will power was the thing was it?**

Mmm?

**You just said**

42:00 **willpower was the thing, was that what got you through?**

## Tape 8

00:32 **You did mention there were Dutch POWs and there were Americans as well, was there much going on between you guys?**

Well the 10 Americans didn't like us and the day we were rescued they wouldn't let us put them on the ships, they stopped there. They said, "Nuh, Australians are not going to rescue us. We'll be rescued by the Americans".

01:00 They said they could stop there. We sailed and left them on the island. So I don't know what happened to them. But one of our blokes had been in contact with a couple of them over the years and some of our blokes have been in contact with some of our guards over the years, too. One day I was at a shrine service.

01:30 Isabel and I walkin' out, over at Government House gate and normally there were about 5 or 6 buses of Japanese arrive there nearly every day. One night they go to the shrine and they go down to the Penguin Parade at Phillip Island. Now we don't make no money out of them, or the bus companies do I suppose, but it's all paid for when ya leave

02:00 Japan. And I am sure that they shrine in Japan one day and it will be a copy of ours. I reckon. Now I saw a bloke there one day and I said to Isabel, an old bloke there I reckon he's one of our guards. And he looked and when I walked past he still lookin' at me and I reckon we both recognised each other, I am sure he was one of my guards.

02:30 Old bloke. Features, there was something about him, I reckon he was one of ours and I reckon he recognised me. Because after I got past he kept still staring at me, so I am sure it was a guard. See between us the road and the beach we had Dutch women

03:00 and children. There was about 300 Dutch women and children and when they blew the bomb dump up over half of them was killed. All the big bomb crater was in their camp and we went down to fill the craters in and I remember I was workin' on one crater and somebody filled a crater and I found a mattress, they had a hut or something, a hut there and I found a

03:30 mattress buried underneath the earth from the crater and there was a woman and 3 children layin' on it dead on the mattress, when we took the dirt off and found the mattress with all those sort of things, still eat into my mind. To see, they must have been layin' on the mattress or somethin' I don't know whether, sleep, what was left of them got taken,

04:00 we never saw them. We had one hut with Dutch in it, now you are talkin' about tryin' to scrounge food. The Dutch arrived there with Timor ponies, tiny little Timor ponies the Japs did, one day one of the ponies come the gateway through inside of the camp and never went out.

04:30 They never found the hair or nothin', I reckon it finished up in the Dutch hut. I don't know what they did with the hide and the skin, I don't think they ate that. The Japanese lookin' for their pony couldn't find it. We always reckoned the Dutch had it and ate it. Probably ate it raw, because Dutch and Germans like 'orse meat anyway.

05:00 We had a lot of funny times as well as sad times too. I mean you have a laugh, see something happening. Even amongst yourselves during a bombing raid you see people heading off into slit trenches or gutters or something like that and have a laugh. Well it's a sad world if you can't laugh. I remember we were down digging tank traps one day,

05:30 anyway an Australian plane come over. They go about 50 feet and they leave a bulkhead of dirt so the tank got ahead of it so you couldn't run along bulkhead unless he could back himself up the slope. This plane got a hold of us and probably thought it was Japanese or digensrep (?) anyway he flew in against the sun, he starts strafing and so we all went up the hill and hid behind this bank, we were all pretty fit and

06:00 he turned around and started strafing us again, we'd run up and hide behind the bank. I can always remember a bloke, he was a Corporal Wally Banks come from Preston. Old Wally said, "I have had this bloke and all of a sudden the bullet went under his arm and burnt the skin on his self". Well John Landy or Herb Elliott or nobody would catch him after that. Well that's somethin' we had a laugh about.

- 06:30 **When there were bombing raids and there were guys running into slit trenches why was that funny? What was it about that?**
- Oh, no, we just had a laugh about it. And one time I was in a slit trench, I still got an army shovel I brought home from the prison camp and it's in my car. It should be in a museum in Canberra, it should be.
- 07:00 They wanted to take it off me when I got to Moratai and I said, "No, that saved my life a few times, I'm keepin' that". I brought a shovel from overseas.
- What would you use that for?**
- I used to dig trenches, slit trenches and things like that a hole to get into. I can always remember one day after the big bombing raid down on the beach, there was a coral reef, no sand all coral reef.
- 07:30 The next day the Americans come over again with a plane. Flew right over, I thought they come and bomb us again. After the raid was over they flew over, I got up, mother earth's a good place to be I reckon, I could see the imprint of my body in the coral reef, how hard I pressed into it. Another time I heard a bomb whistle
- 08:00 and I had to share a hole with another bloke and I said, "We're gone, I heard the bomb whistlin". I found out after that if you hear a bomb whistle going over head you miss it. Oh, no we had a few laughs too. You see every time they bomb the Japanese we would cheer and carry on, a wonder we didn't get shot for it.
- 08:30 But we'd have a laugh about it. And when they dropped incendiary bombs all over the mountains and things like that and see the fire works at night time, it's pretty lookin' the best Guy Fawkes Night, '44.
- Obviously when you went in as a POW the war was pretty much with the Japanese.**
- 09:00 **By '44 things had changed. Was there any way of knowing what was going on?**
- We knew that our island had been blockaded because the Japanese were getting' no ships in, they were getting' planes in, but no ships come in the last 18 months because they been blockaded. You see they were all short of food and everything too. But the planes
- 09:30 across the bay they land there, they had Liang, but see I don't know what they do at Liang, there were 3,000 English diggers went there, Tommies, they built that and 300 survived out of the 3,000. Now, I have been around there since the war and no way I would walk on that air strip, there's craters
- 10:00 everywhere. We went there one day, and an army bloke there picked up a piece of metal off the side of the air strip. Don't pick up nothin' you are mad, you don't know what's alive what's not. You pick up a grenade it could still be alive. I mean a scrub gun going over Liang air strip and no way I would ever walk on that air strip you don't know what's under there. They dug up the air strip lookin' for the bodies,
- 10:30 the English bodies to bring back and made the cemetery. The cemetery is built on our old camp site.
- But you said you noticed the Japanese were low, obviously there was a naval blockade, planes were coming in and Japanese food supply was ...?**
- We knew the island, apparently the allies reckon the island wasn't worth
- 11:00 retakin' so they just around it, go north and get close to Japan. So they bypassed all the islands, although Moratai was always a workable island. But Philippines too, they bypassed all that and Corregidor see where the American Base was. They didn't worry about a lot of the
- 11:30 islands because they weren't worth takin', I mean it's better for them to go closer to Japan and belt 'em from there. Ambon wouldn't be any good for a base, not when we was pushin' Japanese back. They probably recovered a couple of old miserable lookin' old POWs ready for the hospital or 6 foot box.
- 12:00 But after I come home, do you want to hear about that?
- Well yeah, I'll get there in a minute. I think you probably mentioned before, but when do you remember when you realised that the war was won, that the Japanese had lost?**
- When. We were down at
- 12:30 Paso, they took us down there, we were workin' down there, weeding sweet potato patches plus eat a raw one now and again. About midday there was a big hurry up and they put us on the trucks and they drove like lunatics back to the camp site and they were lunatic drivers, when there was an air raid on they wouldn't stop
- 13:00 and let you off the truck, they would still keep drivin' they drive like mad and you would be sittin' on the back of the truck, belting the hell out of us, they drove us back to the camp, and then the interpreter told us that war was partly over, they were havin' talks. Then they started to give us food, extra food, which wasn't doin' any good.

- 13:30 They bring some dry fish in which I didn't like anyway. And dry fish is like a board and you gotta grate it up into a powder and they tried to give us some footwear, like canvas boots, like the Japanese wore, they give us
- 14:00 footwear, half of us had no footwear most of the time, I walked around bare feet. They tried to give us some clothes and everything like that. I think they wanted to fatten us up a bit before they hand us over, because that's why they said we weren't there. They kept us for 9 weeks after the war.
- 14:30 Then they got a bit lax, got very lax and that's why we decided to have a go at the radio station, we'd knock off the sentries and get the rifles and then we got the interpreters and said, "Anybody interferes with us we'd shoot you", which we meant.
- 15:00 **So you and a couple of the Americans formed a little team and decided you were going to speed things up?**
- We got the American radio operator to go and work on the
- 15:30 radio station, we got ourselves out.
- It sounds like that was very crucial because you had men on a daily, weekly basis, dying if you hadn't done that?**
- For the month after the war we lost 90 men. Now if the ships gotta come in the first time, they would have saved most of them, but that was the hard part,
- 16:00 we lost 90 men. Then when we got rescued we only lost 2, on the way home.
- Can you just describe to us, you said you knocked off a couple of the guards, because to me this seems like a really important event in your time there, not just for you but for history?**
- 16:30 We knew the war was over. They had a big hole dug in our camp with a machine gun sittin' on it. I think at the finish if war hadn't finished what was left of us I think they were gonna knock us off. And it was important and when the war finished that idea must have disappeared. Because what's the good of hangin' on to 160 blokes not able to work. They gotta get rid of you in the finish.
- 17:00 And then there would have been nobody to come home, nobody to know what happened to us. We were known as the lost Battalion anyway. When I disappeared off the navy ship my parents got a telegram and said I was missin' and then they got another telegram to say that the navy took me overseas and left me overseas
- 17:30 and there is a possibility I could be a POW. The third telegram said I was missing for the remainder of the rest of the war, like that, 'til I was found. So my parents didn't do it easy either, same as anybody else, they didn't know if they see ya again or not.
- 18:00 So it must have been pretty distressful for wives and mothers, fathers back home to know you are missin' and if they ever see you again, and half of them never come home. One trip we went back with the girls and I knew her father pretty well he was executed in a mass grave and got rows of graves and on 'em, "Known to God Only"
- 18:30 on 'em, there's a skeleton in there. Anyway I said to Doreen, "Did you pick one grave out and say it was Dad", she said, "I did". Anyway she's in a home now, she's suffering alzheimer's disease, that trip didn't do her any good I am sure, goin' over to see her father, the cemetery where her father is buried.
- 19:00 **So Fred are you able to take us back to that time? I just want to get a picture, I am seeing these men who are just skin and bone and you somehow managed to overpower the Japanese guards who are armed?**
- They got slack and lazy, 'cause they knew the war was over. So it wasn't a hard thing to do. And we were
- 19:30 desperate and we wanted to try and get help. We knew somethin' had happened because the Japanese, already the radio station that was at the back of the camp, they left that. Some unknown reason I don't know why, and somebody sneaked out one day and had a look and said the radio equipment still in it and that's why we decide to commandeer the American bloke to send messages out to see if we could get rescued. There
- 20:00 had to be somethin' goin' on for them to desert the station. Cos you would think they would kill, using the radio, because they had a big one in town an underground one, we dug a big hole built concrete over the top and they had a big one in the town, the little ones out in the country areas wasn't even important to them.
- 20:30 That was one of the big help for us. Trouble was we were usin' an old '41 '42 code, because the code had been changed every year. The engineer saw somethin' wrong with the radio up there and he discovered it was an old radio signal call. So they got down pretty smartly down to us to get us out.
- 21:00 **So during that time you had a little more range, you could get away with a bit more?**

They weren't takin' out a work party, we finished work. They deserted the station, the guards are lax they weren't very strict on us or nothin' like that and they bringin' food into us tryin' to fatten us up and they bringin' in footwear for us and some Japanese shorts and shirts and things like that.

21:30 They was tryin' to dress us up to be rescued I think. I am sure of it.

**You said earlier there obviously was a lot of brutality from guards and soldiers, a lot of brutality from Japanese/Korean soldiers?**

Oh yes.

**I mean you told us how you were beaten severely.**

Oh, yes. I still pay for it.

**Did you see any what I guess you call**

22:00 **humanity from any of the guards?**

Hmm?

**Did you see any signs of humanity amongst the guards?**

Yes, yes there was. Any old Japanese, I can always remember one we used to call him "Handlebars", he had a moustache out here, he used to roll it and it would go out this wide. We used to work under him in work parties and things. And he was a

22:30 family man and he said to me one day, "I might not ever see my family again". Some was very friendly. I can always remember 'ol Handlebars sayin', "I might never see my family again". I often wonder if he ever got home. So, their mothers and wives in Japan must have gone through the same thing as our mothers and wives

23:00 went through, wouldn't they? Know their men are away at the war. There were thousands of Japanese never got back home. We weren't the only ones that never got back home. There were thousands of Japanese never got back home neither. So it works both sides. How old are you now?

**Sorry?**

How old are you now?

**33.**

23:30 **You wasn't young enough, you were too young for the Vietnam War.**

**Oh yeah. I was born toward the end of that, yeah. So, finally the ships arrive and you told us of the men getting off their stretchers, getting up, never been up?**

Yes, seein' the ships come down the bay, marvellous. Blokes been

24:00 layin', never walked for weeks and weeks and when we left the camp we had 3 miles to go back to the wharf and the navy commandeered Japanese trucks and from the camp back to the island the Japanese stood each side of the road with their back to us. Like a guard of honour. I don't know what they

24:30 did that for, they had no guns or nothin'. Because with the navy they just pushed every Japanese aside. Then we got out of the wharf and the cooks are busy tryin' to give us some sandwiches, tryin' to give us a feed. I showed you the photo there of the group I was standin' with on the wharf. I mean

25:00 the rest of it was all stretcher cases. So it's a pretty hard life. I didn't know, I thought I might have broken down this afternoon but I haven't, couple of times close to it. But

25:30 I have always been very emotional about it. And we used to have to go into the Japanese hospital and everything like that and you see the Japanese nurses, and I always reckoned the Japanese women and Japanese men didn't belong to the same race of

26:00 people. They seemed different.

**How's that?**

Don't know why. They just seemed different people altogether. You go around the hospital cuttin' the grass and everythin' like that and any earthwork done around the hospital, they had the Japanese hospital there. And

26:30 they lost a lot of men from malaria too, Japanese did. They had a crematorium built down, didn't matter where you'd go, it was always working. Lot of Japanese never got home.

**The Japanese nurses you were talking about?**

Nurses, yeah, they seemed quite nice, because they were always nice to us, they never growled at ya or nothin' like that when they were doin' their work.

27:00 You gotta remember the men were made up of Japanese, Koreans and Cambodians. All those mobs see. But I don't think Vietnam was ever controlled by the Japanese, they probably were during the war I think. They went right through into Burma and everything, they covered a big area,

27:30 didn't they?

**I guess those women were the first women you had seen for 4 years, a long time to?**

I listened to the TV [television] about 3 weeks ago and there was a Japanese talking, they said, "We weren't invaders we were only liberators, we liberated the Australians from England, the Dutch, the island we seen

28:00 from the Dutch and Portuguese all this business". I mean that's a cover up. Did you see that story?

**No I have heard that story, apparently during the war that was the cover story.**

We're liberators.

**Yeah.**

No Australia had a lot of stuff goin' for it, a lot of good country, I mean they'd got

28:30 this they would have brought all that water that goes to waste up in the Northern Territory they would have turned all that inland, you would have found that Central Australia would be an oasis now. The Japs had had it. We are behind. When we started the Snowy Mountain Scheme, that team should have kept goin' right up the whole of range turned all of the rivers inland and run across the top. The Ord River Dam, they did that,

29:00 that not been used for what it should be. Australia's not short of water, we think we are but we're not there's plenty of water up north, you ever been up to Darwin areas?

**No, Queensland yes.**

See I get up to Darwin every April because I used to do retired reserve army, because I got recalled when the Vietnam War was

29:30 on. I finished up looking after the major Monash University Regiment from Monash University. And most of them were all compulsory trainees, some did it easy and some did it hard, didn't want to do it. Then of course a lot got sent overseas. My son went to Vietnam too. But he was in the regular army, he did 9 years. When he went to school down here he was in the part time army, the medical corps and he went

30:00 there when he finished school, he wanted to learn a trade, and was learnin' in the army and he went to Watsonia and he was in the radio station out there. It's a secret radio station out there. Communication, then he went up to Queensland. He did 9 years in the regular army and then he came out ,he went right through 'til he was 49 in the part time army and he's got a good job with Telstra. He's one of the big

30:30 boys, a good job in Telstra, but he learnt it all through the army. If I had my life over again I would go again.

**We've only got about 10 minutes or so left on the tape so you were on the Cootamundra coming back?**

I was on the Cootamundra back to Moratai.

**Yes, so what happened there? How long were you on Moratai?**

31:00 Oh, I was on Moratai about 3 weeks. I went into hospital for a while and they discharged me out of hospital, and I put on weight, and they were calling for volunteers for Japan, occupation forces for Japan so I volunteered to go to Japan. Virtually I had a vendetta, I might have got into trouble if I reached Japan

31:30 anyway, I went over to Borneo and then we come back down to Ambon. Anyway I didn't get home until June 1946 before I got home. I didn't get discharged out of the regular army until December, 18 months after the war.

**What were you doing in Borneo and back in**

32:00 **Ambon?**

Well we were rounding up Japanese and everything like that on Ambon, occupation force see, cleanin' up.

**So it was still a military role, I mean you were actually were armed? Were you coming across resistance from pockets of Japanese?**

No, the Japanese were glad the war was over. They were like us, they just wanted to go home.

32:30 A lot of people don't realise, but the turning up of the war went right through to nearly to 1974, did you know that?

**Fred we've only got a few minutes left so I don't know if you really want to make the best of it?**

Yes. A lot of people don't realise

33:00 they went right through to '74. That's the last medal I got that's from '45 to '74.

**Oh ok, right.**

That's me in front there, that's me brother there, that's me in front of the first car I bought. We'll have a look at that in a few minutes. I look pretty fit there.

**You do,**

33:30 **you do, how much later was that?**

That was '47 I think.

**So what were the actual tasks you had to perform in Borneo and back in Ambon?**

More or less just rounding, also we were doin' retraining. And rounding up any Japanese, you see

34:00 you couldn't just leave the Japanese on the island you had to round 'em all up and put 'em on another island like Ambon. We dumped 'em on Seram and just let 'em go loose, I mean they had no food or nothin' like that but you had to get 'em out of the good islands and put them on deserted islands and let 'em defend for themselves. You had to clean up. And all the mine fields in the

34:30 harbours had to be cleared up, a lot of work, especially the navy, their mine sweepers, they had a lot of work, a lot of work cleaning up after the war. It's like this Iraq business, I hate to think what cleanin' up's gotta be done there. 'Round the Japanese and you got Japanese boats

35:00 around, you put 'em on the boats and send them home. We put them on another island on a compound somewhere they gotta be looked after. There's a lotta cleanin' up to do.

**So there was repatriation to be done, but you also said some were dropped off, Seram?**

We didn't occupy Seram, not us. But we put all the Japs from Timor, Rabaul,

35:30 anybody we get, they all put on Seram.

**What would happen to them from there?**

I don't know what happened to them, don't care. They eventually go home. But see, while I was on Borneo I come back and I went back to Borneo anyway then I got a vibration in me body,

36:00 I got the shakes. The doctor tested me once, checked me over one day and said, "How do you feel?" I said, "I feel alright", and he said, "Are you sure?" I said, "Yes". I thought to myself, "He's looking for something", I said, "Well I am lyin' down but I got a vibration in me body". What it was, I put on weight too quick and I always had an enlarged heart, which I still got, and it was causing the vibrations, so they sent me back to Moratai and the next thing I know

36:30 I got put on a hospital ship and sent home to Australia. So that's how I finished up in Heidelberg Hospital. Another home from home that was, all the good nurses we had to look after us and everything.

**Can you tell us about that, coming back home back to Australia?**

So I finished up at Bonegilla Hospital for a

37:00 while and Heidelberg. Then after I got married I worked at the hospital, my wife and I both worked there, then come here and built a house.

**Where did you meet your wife?**

Heidelberg Hospital. Oh, I knew her cousin anyway, I was lookin' after the fire station at Heidelberg Hospital

37:30 I was on the staff, I was lookin' after the fire station. Matron, me wife assistant come down, anyway Alf had always told me about her, anyway so eventually I got to know her pretty well so I married her, '48. We have had a good 52 years together, so there all the

38:00 weddin' photos there. Bit sad to live there on your own and look at the photos.

**Do you recall when you came back seeing your family after all those years do you remember that time?**



Mmm?

**Do you remember coming back to Australia and seeing your family for the first time after the best part of 4 years?**

Well,

- 38:30 I arrived back to the Heidelberg Hospital, I arrived on a Friday, I come down by train from Sydney. Anyway, the doctors checked it over and said, "You can have weekend leave. I'll see you on Monday". I thought to meself, "You won't be seein' me Monday, I am goin' to head for Swan Hill". But I didn't know about transport,
- 39:00 I didn't know there wasn't many trains runnin' in those days, a lot of things hadn't got back to full service. So I go back up near the entrance and somebody said, "You got a kit bag layin' there, a big sausage bag", and I said "I am not takin' that to bloody Swan Hill". So I walked back to Ward 12 and I go to throw me kit bag under me bed. And sister met me at the door and she said to me,
- 39:30 "Mr Crane", and I said, "Yeah". She said, "You know you got visitors", and I said, "No". It was me sister and me mother. The army had brought 'em all the way down to welcome me home. Only for that kit bag Mum wouldn't have seen me, I would have gone home. I was going AWL. I was shootin' through,
- 40:00 so lucky she seen me. When me sister come down later on that's her up there, she come down and seen me. I don't know whether.

**Fred we've got one minute left on the tape so I am not going to let you look at this.**

Yes. So,

- 40:30 with respect to POW life and like that I still like military service. I loved it. And if I had me way again, I would be a navy boy next time. Because you take your bed, wherever you go, your bed's there. In the army you haven't got a bed. Since the war, doin' this part time I went through and did courses
- 41:00 on satellite navigation and that's a great thing. We maintained an aeroplane down at Point Cook. We take it for a run now and again. So, semi retired the Hercules Air but still got 800 hours on it. They are over 30 years old the old ones, the new ones are a bit bigger, and they have less crew on it now instead of having
- 41:30 5 they got 2. So the co-pilot gotta do their own navigation. I found coconut very good food. I learnt,
- 42:00 I was never a climber, but I learnt to climb a coconut tree and when you hungry you get out and you

**INTERVIEW ENDS**