# Australians at War Film Archive

## Frederick Dunn (Bill) - Transcript of interview

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## Tape 1

00:24 **Bill it is great to be with you this afternoon and what we would like to do as I just discussed is just get a feeling for the major events**

00:30 **in your life. Maybe we can start with where you were born.**

I was born in Adelaide on 6 April 1920. I should start by putting my father's story first, he joined up for the Boer War against his father's wishes and he also went to the 14/18 war also against his father's wishes. So much so that he discharged him from the will. Took him out of the will.

01:00 And they were very big landholders, but our family didn't benefit from that.

**Not a good start.**

When I was 2 my troubles really started, my mother died with septicemia when my sister was born. The grandparents came over to Adelaide and brought the baby back and left me in Adelaide where I stayed with some relatives. Three old maids they were

01:30 kind to me from what I can remember . When I was 4, my father remarried and that was the start of everything. My stepmother wouldn't accept me, my father was working on a property in Morgan on the Murray River in South Australia, I would stay there until I was 6. I had a pretty terrible 2 years, with the hatred of me from my stepmother.

02:00 My father thought then, well, the only way to do anything about this and he took me to Western Australia, he left me with his mother in Western Australia. I remember it was an old log cabin. It was an old, one room, log cabin and I was there until such time, I think about 7, as I found myself homeless living on the streets in Perth.

**Did you go to school at all during this time?**

No, I didn't start school until I was 10 years of age.

02:30 I have only had 4 years of education in my total life. I have always found that to be a handicap throughout life not being able to converse properly.

**Well you are conversing very properly.**

Anyway I found myself homeless on the streets in Perth. In those days there wasn't the stress of anything like today. Homelessness today would be a terrible situation, but it wasn't so bad.

03:00 I used go to the East Perth Church of England and found myself making that a home. There were soup kitchens in the streets then because there was the depression in 1927/28 and you could always go there and get a cup of soup. When I turned 8

03:30 the Salvation Army sent me down to a dairy farm at a place called Manjimup in Western Australia and I was very happy there. I had 2 or 3 meals a day and a roof over my head, worked like a nigger [meaning very hard], but I was very happy. The farmer was clearing his land and I was driving a bullock team for him.

**How old were you at this stage?**

I was 8 and I stayed there until I was 10. I recall the two names of the lead bullocks, Bluey and Dobbin,

04:00 the two leaders would go in and the others would come in and line up behind them, then the farmer would give me a hand to put their yokes on and away we would go with the drag chain pulling stumps out.

**How many bullocks in the team?**

**A little ‘tacker’ [child] with 8 bullocks?**

They were very obedient animals, they did what they were told. When I was 10, it was then arranged that I be brought to Melbourne to my grandparents. Life wasn’t happy there, I wasn’t accepted, but I

04:30 stayed there until I was 17 and then I went and lived with friends who were people who had befriended me. When I was 18 I went up to Red Cliffs, this side of Mildura and I stayed there. When the war started and everybody was joining up all the young lads, so I thought, ‘I must be in this too’. I came down to Melbourne and joined up at the Melbourne Town Hall. I was then just turned 21, at that stage. We went

05:00 from Royal Park up to Puckapunyal, that was 5 May 1941. From there I stayed in Puckapunyal for training until we left on 24 July for Malaya.

**Which unit did you join?**

I went over as reinforcements and then joined the 4th Anti-Tank in Malaya. In those days there wasn’t any

05:30 medium involved in where you were going you just were told and the parents here at home didn’t know where you were. We trained very hard in Malaya for months until 7 December when the Japanese came into the war. From there, Anti-Tank is different to infantry

06:00 battalion you are with the troops you are there to more or less to stop any tanks that come along. This did happen on two occasions, not with my own gun, but other guns on the other side of Malaya where they stopped two lots of tanks. Then it was a case of withdrawing all the way down just leap frogging from infantry to anti-tank all the way down until we came to the Causeway, where we were to go back onto Singapore Island.

06:30 I did think at the time not knowing the history of Sumatra and Java and the situation there that when we crossed the causeway, I thought to myself this is going to be another Tobruk. Of course I didn’t realise that it couldn’t be supplied by Tobruk was because of the geography of the place. I think with this story as far as yourselves are concerned

07:00 you should be looking into why Singapore fell. 52,000 get taken prisoner. It was another British military disaster.

**So you were in Singapore and how long were you there?**

07:30 We were there maybe 2 weeks, I think it was about the 9th they landed and Singapore surrendered on 15th. There was some very bitter fighting with the infantry battalions. It was a hopeless situation we didn’t have any air cover whatsoever and we just didn’t have a reply.

08:00 When you look what Churchill [Winston Churchill Prime Minister of the United Kingdom] sent out, the pride of the British Fleet the [His Majesty’s Ship] Prince of Wales and the [HMS] Repulse [battleships] and they just sent them out without air cover and they were sunk the first day. They were the blunders that were made. The Japs [Japanese] had an observation tower in Johor Baru, they could look all over our positions where we were. They said not to shoot it down because you would give your positions away.

08:30 The Japs were watching our positions, that was a…

**They can actually see you, but you were told not to shoot them down?**

Yes, not to shot them down because we would give our positions away. It was just a farce. I am afraid to say that Percival [General Edgar Percival, British commander in Singapore] was just not a leader in any shape of form. The 15th came and the final days were a mess in Singapore, the bombing was just continuous.

09:00 Fires everywhere and I went to Singapore recently, I went to a place called the ‘Battlebox’ where the British High Command was, and they have that set up now as what was taking place on the final day, with discussions with Gordon Bennett [Australian general] and Percival from England and their staff officers. Each staff officer was giving a reason as to why we couldn’t carry on. One that the final shells that had been issued,

09:30 the Japs had captured the final food depot that morning, water had been cut off to the civilians so it was decided at 4 o’clock on 15th that Percival would surrender and there would be a cease fire at 8 o’clock that night. It was the most eerie feeling, at 8 o’clock, prior to that there was rifle fire, ammunition going off everywhere, shelling and at 8 o’clock dead silence. I think everyone was just looking at their watches

10:00 It was the most eerie feeling just dead silence and we were sort of what happens now. We were ordered to assemble at the area called Tanglong Barracks. Over a period of the next 24 hours everybody gathered from all points of the island

10:30 I took the bolt out of my rifle and threw it into the lake and gave them the rifle without a bolt and it was thrown on a heap. This infantry chap came in this night just shortly after 8 o’clock and he had blood on

his rifle. He had dropped the population of Japan by another one, just quite recently, and he just picked up his rifle and threw it on the heap and said, “Bastard.” Just disgust.

11:00 The next day after that we were all told to go to Changi peninsula, we all had to march out there. You can imagine the 50,000 of us going through, it wasn’t a pretty sight for the natives to see. We marched all day, the streets were in a

11:30 shocking mess, with dead laying everywhere. If you can imagine dead laying for 3 days in the tropics, it’s not a pretty sight. The stench, and the whole civilian population were in shock. We arrived at Selarang Barracks after a full day marching, in the evening, we just sat down in a big padang. In Malay, padang was a huge park,

12:00 we stayed there all night. Our officers were quick on the draw, they realised discipline had to be maintained. Discipline was very good. It was a rather standing joke the next morning we went on parade and the CO [Commanding Officer] called for reports and a junior officer stood up and said all present and correct sir, one man unshaven. It was a standing joke for many weeks afterwards.

12:30 Finally it was sorted out and we moved to Selarang Barracks which was the Barracks which the Singapore Garrison stayed in prior to the war. We moved into those, we just laid on concrete floors.

13:00 I would like to stress here that in 1942, the problems with the POWs [prisoners of war], as I have spoken about, didn’t happen in 1942, it was later in 1943. 1942 was an excellent year really, under the conditions and the situation. We had a very good concert party formed, very professional. They made dresses out of old mosquito nets, they mixed up different coloured

13:30 chalks for makeup and they built a stage, it was really good, a morale builder.

**You had a good time.**

A good time. Also in those 50,000 odd we had many learned gents from Great Britain, QCs [Queen’s Council] and all that sort of thing they gave lectures every night and some very interesting stories came out of that. I always remember one which stuck in my mind, the simplicity

14:00 of a barrister being able to get a murderer off. This chap he used to tell them how he got murderers off. In this case it was a young lady and she had killed a child, and she said, “How could you kill a child?” The witness stood up, for the prosecution, on how you could kill a child. He put her in the box, he said, “You didn’t hear her say, ‘how did you kill a child’, he said, ‘how could you kill a child’.”

14:30 He said, “And I pounded the jury all day and convinced them she said, ‘how could you kill a child’.” That was just one of many examples of how simple it can be.

**It is a valuable lesson.**

The way they can twist things around. From the early days working parties were organised. My first working party was to clean up the streets

15:00 It was a terrible job, but we went on and cleaned up. I remember a Jap came up to me and said, “What are you doing?” I said, “I am cleaning this drain.” “You Australian”, he was referring to our slang. That was completed, I went back to Changi myself,

15:30 I was called into a working party and we went and stayed at the Great World Amusement Centre, but it was utilised as a camp. We were working on the wharf. We would fall in every morning and the party would go marching off down to the wharf. An example of how the Chinese were given an early lesson;

16:00 one morning we were walking down, there were 5 Chinese heads on bamboo poles. I might add that it was only 3 or 4 days and there were 5 Japanese heads on bamboo poles. They squared up. Whatever the Chinese did I don’t know, but tall picket fences and they strapped him out with his legs apart and tied him to the fence and left him there until he died. They were the sort of things that the

16:30 civilians had to put up with.

**This was very soon after the fall?**

Straight after it. They also shot many thousands of Chinese and military aides. Bodies were washed around the island and came up on the Changi beach. We had to bury those. I wasn’t in that party, it was a pretty terrible job. Many of them were still alive and they held them under water until they drowned.

17:00 As far as I concerned working on the wharves was a good job. We were able to scrounge all sorts of things. We found a case of Cadbury chocolates one day. We opened the case and everybody had a box and gave this little Japanese boy, the Japanese officer unfortunately caught him with them, he gave him a hiding and pushed him off the wharf into the harbour. They treated their own men exactly as they treated us.

17:30 I saw a Jap sentry, I saw him on the gate, a Jap truck drove past and didn’t salute. He stopped the truck and pulled him out and just belted the daylights out of him because he didn’t salute him. That’s the Japs. We went on, we didn’t have any problems at all there.

**What was good about the first year?**

18:00 This is all through ‘42 I am speaking of now.

**So you had a fairly reasonable year that first year. Then what happened?**

In ‘43 when we started to go up to the Railway Line [Thai/Burma Railway] that is when all the rot started.

**What was your experience then? How did you come to be, were you just sent in a working party?**

Yes, in 43 around about March I was in a force called D Force. We left for Burma. There were 30 of us to a steel truck, an enclosed truck, but they did leave the sliding doors open for air. With 30 of us we were unable to lie down. 15 or so would lie down and the other 15 would stand up and that went on for 5 days and 5 nights going up to Thailand.

19:00 We pulled up at a siding called Ban Pong and from there we were put on open trucks with sides on them and we were taken a fair distance up to a place called Kanchanaburi, but we didn’t quite make Kanchanaburi and we were off loaded and left in a paddock, and we were there for

19:30 quite a few days. The Nips [Japanese] hadn’t arrived to take care of us and the others went off and left us.

**So you are in northern Thailand?**

No, southern Thailand. Eventually this other group of Nips arrived and they took us up to a place called Kanchanaburi

20:00 and from there we went on to, the British had already built a big viaduct around the mountainside and there was a dirt embankment, which we were required to finish those off, which we did. It wasn’t an easy job. We had to cart all the dirt up

20:30 we had two rice bags with bamboo poles up the sides and we had three men to a team. I think they started off with 3 cubic metres of earth and it is a lot of earth for three men. We would load these up and carry them up and dump them and continuous stream going up and down all day. That went on until the bank was almost finished and to finish it they

21:00 made us work 38 hours straight.

**Day and night, without a break?**

We just went out and stayed out there for 38 hours and then came back. Afterwards we were just belted all the time. The Nips would just belt into you the whole time as you were going up. Eventually we got back to camp and we had a very short rest and then we had to pack up the tents and the cooking gear and we then marched

21:30 a long distance and we got up to an area known as… On the way we had to drop some heavy sick off at a base called Tarsau. From there we carried on and then they split the party into two and we went to a camp, and they named us K2, and another 400 of us carried on to K3, which turned out to be one huge cutting.

22:00 We cleared the land to put our tent, we built platforms around about 2 feet high and pitched the tents on the platforms to keep us out of the dirt and mud, which was fortunate because at a later stage the monsoon season came in. It was absolutely necessary to be that far off the ground. That was Anzac Day [April 25th], 1943. We got the camp

22:30 finished and then went out to see the problem. No tools really, we had what the Asians call ‘chunkels’, which is a very large hoe. We started working with that, moving dirt and shifting bits of rock until we got down to the face of the rock.

**Did you know what you were there for? Did they tell you what you were going to do?**

23:00 Yes, the Japanese engineer. In that camp we had the worst Jap I have ever known. His name was ‘Battledong’. He got his name because he lost 3 fingers in the fighting in China. He was so bad that the other Japs wouldn’t associate with him. He had a little one man tent’ he ate and slept on his own. When they had their meal he would sit 100 metres away from the others. He just ate on his own. They wouldn’t associate with him. He was the most dreadful man. He

23:30 would switch you with an 18 inch long steel belt, that is what he used to belt you with. He gave some unmerciful hidings with that. Another one we had we called him ‘the Silent Basher’. He was there 3 months and never spoke one word.

**To any of the other Japanese?**

No, to the prisoners, he never spoke one word. We used to have to file past him every morning and he would give a left

24:00 and right to the jaw of every man. It didn't matter where you were in the line. In the front, middle or end.

**He hit every man on the line every morning?**

Yes, every morning he would just go left and right. When you had finished, he was waiting for you and you had to walk back past him and he would give you a left and right to the jaw on your way back to the camp. Sometimes during the day he would come into the cutting and he would just go like that with his arm, which meant line up and then he would go right along the line, left and

24:30 right to the jaw again.

**Did he slap you?**

No. All closed [fist]. That is why he was nicknamed 'the Silent Basher' because he had never ever spoken. We had others, we had the mad ones, many others.

25:00 **We will get the picture of where you went next, and then where you went after that.**

The cutting took 3 months, we finished in the middle of August. The reason for that cutting I would make clear is that the Japanese were having trouble supplying their army in India and they couldn't get provisions through and it was necessary to build a railway line, and right at that time, this K3 cutting

25:30 was a stumbling block it had to go through, they introduced a 'speedo' period [when the engineers wanted to speed up the pace of construction] and it was a total scream, all day and all night. Their total scream, "Speedo, speedo!" So then, my own case, I was with one chap and I, we left that camp on our own, just the two of us and we had to walk down to a river camp, which was a staging camp where barges brought supplies and those sorts of things up.

26:00 We were very sick men, we got down to the river camp eventually. In groups we were shifted by barge down river to base camps. I went to a camp called Tarsau, I spent some time there. It was a camp full of very, very heavy sick and ulcers were breaking out and

26:30 it was a dreadful situation. From there I shifted down to a camp called Chung Kai. That was not a bad base came. The rice was of reasonable quantity. The doctors did the best they could with nothing. From there, I was starting to pick up by then, I moved to a camp called Tamawan where the

27:00 Japanese parties were being picked. They were picking out the fittest men. Their method of picking or one of their methods, they had a glass rod about 7 inches long and every man had to bend over while they put the glass rod in their rectum, and they did 5 men with one rod, and then put that in some type of fluid. They went through to the end of the day then they picked out those who had amoebic dysentery, which, I had to be one of them.

27:30 I didn't get on the Japanese party. I was then shifted on to another camp, a show camp that they thought that maybe if ever the Red Cross came, they could show how well they treated the prisoners. Instead of bamboo slats for a bed we had boards. It was there that Dunlop [Sir Edward 'Weary' Dunlop, Australian surgeon] operated on me and saved my life.

28:00 I wasn't expected to make it. What happened with amoebic dysentery, I was up to 90 motions a day, that seems incredible. Just blood and mucus that is all the content was. He thought he would put a bottle

28:30 a bag, we said 'bottles' because we only had water bottles and they strapped that to you. When he opened me up I made a funny comment to him. I said, "Sir, this must be how a rabbit feels when it is being gutted", I could feel him pulling.

**I gather from this you weren't anesthetised. You didn't have a general anesthetic?**

No. A sort of a rough sort of spinal that deadened, but

29:00 not fully by any means. He opened me up and he said, "I think I will have to put a bottle on you son." I said, "No way sir, just sew me up and let me die, I am not going to have that." So he said, "There is something else I will try." So he sewed the secum, that is where the appendix comes off the end of the bowel, they sewed the secum to the lining in my stomach and then put a tube in

29:30 and leaving some 6 inches of tube hanging out, and that allowed me to pour water through myself for days on end. The purpose being the amoebic dysentery is a pocket in the bowel and without medication there is no way of getting rid of it, we just lost so many men with amoebic dysentery and malaria that was the big killer. I poured this water through myself for 4 to 6 weeks

30:00 and eventually got down to 4 motions a day. It just shows what can be done without drugs.

**So you literally had a tube?**

I had this tube, which I filled with water, and that would flush right through my bowel and flush the germ out of the bowel.

**That is ingenious, isn't it?**

Isn't it? Everything they did, they didn't have any drugs of any description.

30:30 **You were lucky you didn't get a more serious infection?**

Yes.

**You walked round with that?**

Yes I walked round the whole time. I was in the camp when fortunately they dropped the bomb, which saved many millions of lives. The war ended and they surrendered. I was talking just standing alongside a fellow, we had been mates all the way through practically, he was from New Guinea, I was standing next to him and I just reached

31:00 for his hand and shook hands and said, "We made it mate." That was it. The feeling was unbelievable the weight was lifted off your shoulders, you couldn't credit the treatment that was dished out was that bad, 12 months after 3½ years.

**It must have been extraordinary?**

It was incredible moment. That day they had just buried 7 Indians. They had dug holes and buried them up to their waist

31:30 fortunately there wasn't enough pressure to stop them from breathing, they were still breathing and we dug the 7 of them out and we told them it was over.

**So they survived?**

Yes they survived.

**What did the Japanese do?**

They asked Weary Dunlop and Sir Albert Coates, they were in charge of the camp and they asked them to put a guard on them,

32:00 to protect them. They weren't interested in that sort of thing, they were more interested in getting some food. One Jap he did ride past on his push bike and he said, "You master now" he sang out. We had many Korean guards there. The Japs didn't want them and we didn't want them. The Japs took everything off them except the clothes they stood up in. I don't know if some of them are still walking home. I hope so, they were just left to their own fate.

32:30 From there on I stayed in that camp for quite some time because I was fairly weak and then I went down to Bangkok and I stayed there for a month. From Bangkok I went onto Singapore in an old DC3 [Douglas Dakota bombers] we went stumbling along and I was placed in a hospital

33:00 there and I was there for a month and I arrived home on 16 December 1945, exactly three months to the day after I was released. I arrived home and my wife and sister met me. We had a day in town that day and we went home that night and she said, "I am living here with somebody else, but you can stay the night if you want to."

33:30 Good homecoming. I persevered, we lasted 6 years and then parted.

**That certainly wasn't a homecoming.**

No, not what I expected.

**Tell me a bit about your life after the war and then we will go back to the beginning again.**

34:00 After the war I started working on billiard tables. I worked with Walter Lindrum on billiard tables. I put them up for his exhibition. Full sized tables not the little ones you see in homes today. I was there for 2 years and then I joined Australian National Airways, which later Ansett bought out.

34:30 I stayed there for 4 years, had a happy 4 years there. I had a happy experience there one day, a chap bought a parcel in one day, to send. I said, "You will have to put a name and address on it to send it." He said, "There is no need to, I have sent him a telegram and told him it is coming." After 4 years another POW by the name of Ken Dumbrill, he started to manufacture a

35:00 plastic ear tag, which you see in the ears of sheep and cattle today and he said, "Well you have the gift of the gab, so come on", I was there 7 years, travelling the station country or New Zealand right through Australia. In Wilcannia, dreadful town, on the Darling River. I hired an air taxi there for £10 an hour flying time

35:30 we flew an 1½ a day, he only charged me the time in the air. I used to do about 10 big stations a day. Introducing the tag and then I went on after I did Victoria, New South Wales, South Australia and then I went to New Zealand, I spent 12 months there. I went to every property in New

36:00 Zealand on the south island, introduced the tag. Came back and then we went over to Western Australia for 12 months and sold them again.

**You must have sold a few tags.**

Millions of them. In those days, I am going back to 52, when wool was a £1 a pound and the graziers had lots of money and it was no trouble introducing a new line to them, they didn't hesitate. I think there was

36:30 a need what it was designed for. Today you still see it and he is still making those tags under license all over the world.

**A good business to get into?**

He retired at 48. I kept working and now I am on the pension.

**How did you finish your working life?**

After that I left there and I joined a china/glass importing firm.

37:00 One of the things we sold was Noritake China. I found it hard to image me selling it, but I did. I stayed there for 24 years until I retired. I retired and then Zelma and I went on a 4 months trip. We saw quite a bit of the world then I settled down. I was in Melbourne and then my daughter she had

37:30 bronchiosis and was born without white blood cells, which was the problem. The doctor suggested we go to Queensland with her health, but it didn't help, we lost her when she was 23 years of age. I stayed in Queensland for 21 years and moved back here the last 4 years.

**Most people move the other way, don't they?**

Yes. That's right. We came back for family reasons. Our daughter

38:00 was with Channel 7 and we were back 3 months and she got transferred to Sydney.

# Tape 2

00:22 **Bill we have heard some of the major events in your life and now I am going to ask you to go**

00:30 **right back to the beginning again. I am very intrigue by the idea of an 8 year old being homeless on the streets of Perth. Tell me something about how you survived from day to day, how did you fill your days?**

I don't know how I filled the full day. As I mentioned the Church of England in East Perth. On a Sunday I would

01:00 go to a service in the morning and I would go to Sunday School in the afternoon and I would be back there at night. I pestered them so much that they finished up putting me in the choir. Whether that improved the choir I don't know.

**Where did you used to sleep?**

Anywhere at all. Anywhere where you can find a bit of cover.

**You would actually sleep out, sleep rough?**

Yes. Slept it rough, in the open.

01:30 **Did you have any blankets or anything with you?**

Not that I can recall, I may or may not have.

**Then you went to work on a property at that stage?**

I was in that situation for roughly 12 months.

**Out on the streets, homeless for a year by which time you were the ripe old age of 8?**

02:00 That was when the authorities or whoever it may have been stepped in, whether it was the church or the Salvation Army, I went down to this dairy farm and they were very kind people.

**When did you see your father again?**

I think it was when I joined up, I am not sure. I did go and

02:30 ride my push bike over to Mt Gambier where he was living to say goodbye.

**You rode from Melbourne, a push bike, all the way to South Australia?**

It was over 300 miles. I went over and I said I didn't want to stay long because my stepmother was there and I didn't want to be in that situation, so I peddled my bike back to Melbourne again. I then

went to Puckapunyal.

**Did you talk to your father on that**

03:00 **occasion about the war, about his experience in the First World War?**

No I hadn't. I can remember he was a proud as punch seeing me in uniform.

**He didn't give you any idea of what it was like?**

No. I don't think so. Not that he and I had spent much time together. When I came home I was still in uniform, so it wasn't hard to hitchhike a ride to

03:30 Mt Gambier. I went over and saw him again when I got back, but that was 4½ years later.

**You have mentioned that you found out quite late that you had a sister. What were the circumstances of that?**

When my grandparents brought this little baby back to Melbourne with them from the hospital where my mother passed away and left me in my father's care, who

04:00 of course was unable to look after me at that stage so he gave me this to these 3 elderly ladies. They were three 'young' ladies, very pleasant old maids and they looked after me until I was 4, that was when my father remarried, then the problems started with my stepmother.

**What sort of problems did you have with your stepmother?**

04:30 Well, she used to belt me with the head of the broom all day. She just wouldn't accept me, in any shape or form.

**So that is when your father decided to take you to Western Australia?**

I went over on the ship called the SS [Steam Ship] Nimburra.

**You went by ship?**

An old coastal freighter. That was the only way of getting there in those day.

**Do you remember much about that run around the coast?**

We were in steerage, right up the back of the boat and there

05:00 was a stewardess and she used to look after me. It was very rough going across the Bight [Great Australian Bight].

**Were you seasick?**

I don't recall, but I probably was I would imagine, although I am not a bad sailor.

**Were you sick when you were on the troop ships?**

No I wasn't.

**That was a bit of luck.**

Yes. The same as when I came back

05:30 when I was 10, and came back to Melbourne I was on the same ship again. An old coastal freighter.

**How long did the trip take?**

It would have been about a week. You use to call into Adelaide and up around the Bight.

**When you actually enlisted what was going through your mind? Why did you,**

06:00 **what made you join up?**

I think it was just what was happening, everybody was joining up. We all had in our minds that we would finish up in the Middle East or France as our fathers had done before us.

**Because that is where the war was at that stage?**

Yes that is right. There wasn't any indication at that time that the Japs were coming in. We didn't know until

06:30 we left Fremantle and when we got out to sea, and one ship lead the convoy and headed off north. Singapore here we come.

**Do you remember what ship you were on?**

Yomanik and Doran, they were two Dutch ships. They came to Singapore.

**When you sailed east, what was the feeling on the ship, what was morale like?**

07:00 Very high, full of adventure all these young chaps from 18 upwards.

**Were the conditions on the ship good?**

Typical army, we slept in hammocks, typical food, bread jam, tinned butter, tinned jam, and maybe some sort of a cooked meal.

**Were you well equipped?**

No. All we had in the early days was our .303 rifle [Lee Enfield rifle]. When I was in Puckapunyal we were training and we didn't have a gun, we used to train with sticks on the ground. We had two sticks we used as a gun, and you would train with, what you were supposed to be doing with a gun. Hard to imagine.

**When did you get your hands on a real gun?**

In Malaya.

08:00 **Then you started training in earnest in Malaya?**

Yes. There was a ship load of Australian reinforcements arrived in Singapore only about 3 days before the end. Why they put them ashore we will never know. They didn't have even rifles, they were told they could probably pick a rifle up off the dead men. That is how much a farce the whole thing was and then Waywood instructed the Orcades, which had 3,000 seasoned troops

08:30 coming from the Middle East and they had been in action all the time there and they were coming back to Australia and he diverted them into Java. The Japs took Java a couple of days later another 3,000 sacrificed.

**You have obviously have got a very strong view of what happened with the fall of Singapore and why that occurred and the politics around that situation?**

Well I am not fully equipped to answer that question, but I have read

09:00 that Churchill thought that the Japs were fully occupied in China and that they had no hope of putting divisions together to come down. Because he was mistaken once again. Singapore was designed as a fortress to be attacked from the sea and that also went wrong when they landed in Thailand and came down overland, all on push bikes.

09:30 When we were working on the wharves in Singapore they had all these streets leading down to the wharves, thousands of push bikes, taking them on board ships and we believe that was for Australia because push bikes wouldn't have been any good in New Guinea. I would say they were looking for the flat country to ride their push bikes. They convinced some people today that

10:00 they hadn't any intention of coming to Australia, but we saw evidence that they did. We had one character on the wharf and a ship came in and there is this cocky little Nip leaning over the rail and he said he had just come back from Australia, "Boom, boom all finish." He said, "Ah yes boom, boom all finish." Cracking jokes. He had a big hole in the side of the ship. A

10:30 torpedo. I said, "Torpedo?" He said, "No torpedo, collision, collision." He wouldn't admit they had been torpedoed. I was working on the wharves when a German raider came in. They had been sinking an allied ship in the Indian Ocean and he was picking the crews up. He was picking the crews up and couldn't handle it, so he had to drop them off in Singapore and hand them over to the Asian race.

11:00 Gave them a big meal. That would be the last big meal they had until the end of the war. The crew came down to the wharf, they were talking to us. I was also on the wharf when the Australia had sent the Jap envoys from here and they also had the ashes of the Japs from the midget subs [midget submarines] who were torpedoed in Sydney Harbour. They brought the ashes back as well. They were

11:30 rewarded with half a tin of pineapple juice per man in gratitude for what Australia had done.

**That time when you were still working on the wharves and you were in Changi, in the barracks, what was the general feeling about why Singapore had fallen so easily, was there a lot of shock about that?**

12:00 Well I think we were just out, we didn't have the equipment. We didn't have air cover and air cover is an incredible thing. I mean they were just there all the time it didn't matter where you moved, they were there.

12:30 I think the problem we had in Malaya was with the Malay 5th column, which they did everything they possibly could to do us harm and support the Japs coming through. For instance, you could put a gun position in and it would be only a matter of an hour and you would have a Malay walking around with a white shirt on and the next thing you would have a Jap plane over, it was just another headache.

13:00 **What about the civilians in Singapore?**

They were poor individuals. They weren't against us by any means. They were left in a dreadful situation. I am sure that they believed that it just couldn't happen to the British, what happened. The white man. When you think there, there was 30,000 odd British troops and

13:30 14,000 Australians, two battalions of Scottish troops and a battalion of Gurkha troops, who were very fine troops, some Indians, a whole mixture. Had we been equipped we could have held our own, there is no doubt about it. At that stage, it has been found out since that the Japanese communication lines were stretched and had Singapore on hold until such time as

14:00 reinforcements came in with some equipment, it might have been a different story, but it didn't work out that way. As I say I am not in a position to say just how bad the administration was, just pretty obvious things.

**It looked pretty bad by the look of it. Earlier you said people have the wrong view of Changi?**

Yes. It came about in May 43 they sent

14:30 9,000 Australian and British troops in the name of F Force and they were sent up just at the very critical time when the real 'speedo' season was on, to get the line finished, and they suffered dreadful casualties. Out of the 9,000, I think there were 4,300 returned to Changi when they had finished after about 6 months. They lost them all.

15:00 They arrived back just total wrecks, they were just skeletons. They had to be carried off the train. It was a shocking thing. They were there in Changi, not in goal, in the camps outside, when the after war journalist arrived in all these DC3, didn't go any further, saw these poor individuals in Changi and that got Changi a bad name. I have stressed that for 50 years.

15:30 When you talk to the journalists, they said that is what happened.

**They weren't paying attention?**

There was nothing wrong with Changi, it was a wonderful camp, had we stayed there we would have all been alive. In the gaol itself the white women and their children were there in the early days. When we were going past in our working parties they would be

16:00 out waving out through their cells. They would be waving to us from the goal. Changi gets a bad name for something that didn't happen.

**You had a lot of activities in Changi that were available to you. You mentioned there were concert parties.**

We could do anything We could make up anything in Changi there were just so many people there and there was

16:30 no worries at all there. You would be lucky if you saw a Jap once a week there. They just didn't come near us. They would ring 'Black Jack' Galleghan [Brigadier Sir Frederick Galleghan] up if they wanted a working party. If they wanted 200 or 300 men for a working party they would get in touch with him and he would organise the working party and away we would go. They weren't any trouble at all.

**Did you see the recent television series 'Changi'?**

I watched about 40 minutes and turned it off. The greatest farce of all times.

17:00 It didn't resemble anything like Changi was there were nothing at all like that.

**You said you could go for a week without seeing a Japanese?**

Yes.

**You were completely self-regulating were you?**

Yes we were under our own officers and they kept discipline. Discipline was very good. I could show you a photo where we used to have a wood party go out. The trucks had been stripped

17:30 down and just the chassis of the truck with the four wheels and the steering wheel and men pulling by ropes and gather up all the spare wood around the district and bring it back to our fires. To make sure our fires were right.

**Were you in Changi for about a year?**

Around about a year, off and on. We were working parties, after that period on the wharves I was telling you about.

18:00 Then caught dengue fever and I got sent back to Changi and when I was well enough there, I went back on a working party where we built a shrine to Japanese who were killed on the island. We took the tallest hill on the island. We took the top off and leveled it. We then went to the golf course and the race track, dug up all their beautiful turf and brought it all back

18:30 and turfed all around the outside of the mounting.

**Have you been back to Singapore?**

Yes I have been back twice now.

**Is it still there?**

Yes it is still there, but it is now a communications centre and we built the concrete steps all the way up the hill, but it is now cut off half way up. In the early days I know people who did go back and have a look at it. When Zelma and I were there we weren't allowed to go back up. That was a good job

19:00 we camped in private houses in Thomson Road, one of the main thoroughfares in Singapore, we were camped in there maybe 60 to a house. Just laying all around and they would pick us up in trucks at 8 o'clock and drive us over to Bukit Timah and then pick up the trucks at 5 o'clock and bring us home again. We had a shower in the house, we had rice, it was good,

19:30 we had a little parade ground there.

**Reasonable provisions?**

Yes. There we had boxing competitions, had some quite good boxers and we would put on boxing bouts of a night time. Everything was just lovely. We only had two Japs that weren't quite good. One was 'Bill the Basher', he had a golf stick club which he used to belt

20:00 you with, he wasn't that bad. We only got a belting once a day, we didn't worry, he wasn't as bad as what we struck on the line [Thai/Burma Railway] by any means. The other one, 'Snow White', he got his nickname because he used to turn up every morning with a snow white shirt. We had another time in Singapore we used to have to sit on these trucks with maybe 50 men on the truck with chaps hanging

20:30 and everybody held onto the person in front of you. We were travelling along in this truck this day, and we were swaying all over the place and saying, "Slow down you bastard." If we said stop, the truck would stop and the Jap would get out and say, "Not so much of this bastard business." He was a Yank, he got caught, he was holidaying, popped into the army in Singapore,

21:00 he was referee for a fight for us one night in the camp. He said, "In the white corner so-and-so at 8 stone 9 lbs [pounds] and in the red corner so-and-so at 8 stone 18 lbs." We said, "There is something wrong here there are too many pounds in the stone."

**He sounds like he had a bit of a sense of humour?**

Yes that is right. He was there for quite some time.

21:30 **Then it all changed for you when you were in Truknell?**

When we went north. Singapore itself was no problem at all.

**Tell me some more about that 5 day trip north, to Thailand?**

As you can imagine the conditions were pretty terrible with 32 in one of those trucks and we finished up, after about 3 days, we reached a place called Alor Star Town

22:00 and there we had the trucks and they were filling the engine from this water tank, a big hose coming down and when they finished they swung it out and we all got underneath and had a shower. They used to put a bucket of rice in each hut or truck and that was it for the day.

**That was all you had to eat?**

Yes.

**No other rations?**

No. When we arrived in Bangkok then

22:30 and all the Thais were selling boiled eggs of course we got stuck into the boiled eggs.

**Did you have any money at that stage?**

There was means of money. In Changi you could have just whatever you wanted, it was just such a massive place. Everything was available and there was quite a lot of trading went on. Traders went out and bought stuff off you and then sold it to the

23:00 natives and there was always money flowing around. At that stage we had the troops from Houston and the HMAS [His Majesty's Australian Ship] Perth, they were both sunk on the one night in the Sunda Strait, the survivors they finished up in Changi with us and they were brought across from Java. When we were on Singapore

23:30 at that stage, you must recall on 14 February when the nurses were told they had to leave and they didn't want to and they made them get on this ship called the Vyner Brooke and the second day out it was sunk and pretty terrible. One batch got ashore fairly early on Banka Island and the rest of them got

swept around the island by currents and eventually made it ashore. The 21

24:00 got ashore, first they lit a fire to attract the others to show them where to try and make for and the Japanese spotted the fire and marched them back into the water and machine gunned them. Bullwinkle [Vivian Bullwinkle, a volunteer with the Australian Army Nursing Service] was the only survivor. She was hit on the side, but played dead until they had gone and then crept ashore. A remarkable lady.

**I understand you knewBullwinkle. Did she tell you her story?**

Yes she more or less adopted

24:30 me [the anti tank regiment] as her unit. The Murray Goulburn Valley POW reunion, she would come with us every year. We finished up we gave her a little Siamese kitten which she called 'Tank Attack' and then the cat died some time later and we gave her another one and it was 'Tank Attack Two'. She was with us all the time. She was a wonderful woman. Her

25:00 and Weary went to every [POW] reunion in Australia whether it was big or small.

**So by the time you got to, you talked about building a cutting and constructing a road. Was that your first experience of the very harsh treatment?**

No the dirt embankment I mentioned first. That was the

25:30 start because we were half beaten because we weren't 100% by the time we finished the embankment. To start a job like that cutting, it was a killer.

**When you arrived in Thailand and you were working on that first embankment you mentioned that you had to move 3 cubic feet of earth?**

Cubic metres.

**Cubic metres of earth,**

26:00 **and so it was then that you first encountered the brutality of the Japanese. Were they a different group of guards from the guards who had been in Singapore?**

Yes, the front line troops who captured Singapore, they were there for about 3 months in the occupation and they

26:30 weren't the problem really they realised they were facing frontline troops and similar situations in a line of thought.

**Professional soldiers?**

I don't know if the Japs got that. Yes. In another mix up they left, I was in a working party in the suburbs and we woke up and no Nips. A day went past, then another day and another day. A week went past

27:00 not one Nip on the island. We couldn't do anything about it. What had happened they had left and the occupation troops were a week late getting there and they came in and they weren't nice people. A different bunch of Japs altogether. Japs and Koreans, different entirely.

**There were Koreans working with the Japanese at that time?**

Yes.

27:30 The Koreans were worse than the Japs in that they tried to impress the Japs on just how badly they could treat the prisoners.

**On that cutting that you worked on in Thailand how many men were you working with?**

There were near enough to 400 who started.

**Was it then that you started to lose men?**

Lost men after the first couple of weeks,

28:00 we were getting pretty desperate. Half way through the job the monsoon season came in and that made conditions dreadful. You were just in mud all the time. We didn't have any clothes only these loincloths with a piece of string around you.

**Is that all they gave you?**

That's all they had. Our boots had fallen apart by this stage,

28:30 we had bare feet, we had a hat and a water bottle and a spoon and a little dixie [container]. Then of course the cholera season struck and that was a dreadful thing, but fortunately our camp was saved to some degree, we didn't have any big losses of cholera in our camp. Some of them were very bad, there was an English camp not very far up the road about 100 metres

29:00 and it went through them very badly.

**There were a lot of prisoners of war working in this area?**

Yes. A lot of prisoners on different jobs. With the monsoon season even the latrines were bore holes with just a piece of bamboo across them and you just squatted on them. They filled up in the monsoon season and just flowed all over

29:30 the camp. A dreadful situation for hygiene. Australians were very strict as they could be with hygiene. We had a 44 gallon drum of water boiling all the time in camp in which we washed our dixie and spoon before we ate our rice. Things like that.

**How much rice did you have per day?**

At that stage we had what we called a

30:00 pap, where they put the twice the amount of water and less rice and kept boiling it until the grain burst. It went what was like a poor quality porridge. No flavour. It was revolting. Sometimes we were given some rice to take out with us in our dixies, but by the time lunch time came we

30:30 didn't have time to eat it, it was sour.

**That was your only meal?**

Yes that was our only meal. We would work until late at night and then we would get another cup of rice then.

**Two cups of rice a day. Were you working from sun up to sunset?**

In the cutting everybody had dysentery, we all had dysentery and we weren't allowed any toilet breaks or anything

31:00 and you were just working and it was running down your legs.

**So you have no toilet facilities at all, you weren't allowed to stop working?**

No you weren't allowed to stop, it was just running out of you all the time.

**And then the rain starts. You are knee deep in mud?**

The rain came and in that camp the doctor, Dr Parker, tried hard to keep some sick at home,

31:30 heavy sick and they might be 30 men he managed to keep back. Then they would form the working party count up and they would want another 10 men so they would call those 30 men out and line them out and they all had to do a squat down and do a stool on the ground. They went along and inspected each stool and if it wasn't 100% blood you were on the working party. Hard to imagine isn't it.

32:00 **You did this day in, day out?**

Day in, day out. We were working up to 18 hours a day.

**Seven days a week?**

Yes seven days a week.

**On two cups of rice, and what you weren't unable to continue, if you were too fatigued? Were there many guards?**

Yes. You couldn't stop, you were just belted the whole time.

**They would just belt you with sticks or**

32:30 **whatever?**

Whatever. I did mention Battledong with his spanner he was the worst. I was working one night with a chap, George Dickey from America and we were working and he came up to us and he was screaming at us, "Carbine, carbine." I said to George, "I think he wants a bucket of carbine for the lamps." We couldn't work out what he wanted. He was a dreadful man. George

33:00 came back with a bucket of carbine and he gave George the worst belting I have ever seen a man get at that time. George went down and he got into me and somehow I stayed on my feet, I don't know how, but it was all over and as it turned out he wanted a shovel. How would you know that when the man was screaming carbine at you? He would lose his temper and his legs would go apart

33:30 and he would be waiving this spanner and dancing and screaming. He sent me around the other end of the cutting to get something and I came back in the end, I was working and there, he was half way down and I said, "This is it", and I put down alongside the wall what he had sent me for and took off. He never found me fortunately because I knew what I was in for.

34:00 **So men who were beaten in this way, some of them must have not been able to survive those**

**beatings?**

Well there is all sorts of reports of men being beaten to death, but I didn't see it myself so whether they were true or not I wouldn't like to say but there were some pretty horrific bashings and it is quite possible men did die from them.

34:30 **What were you able to do for your comrades who did die at that time?**

I think the whole time was mateship. The Australian mateship was something that you could not imagine how strong it is under those conditions because you did whatever you could for each other. It was a terrific situation as far as the Australians were concerned.

35:00 Mateship.

**The people who didn't make it, were you able to bury themselves and give them a decent burial at that time?**

No, there was no such thing as a decent burial. We had a little area set aside in the camp to bury the dead and it was just the case if they had a rice sack, we would just put the rice sack around them in a shallow grave and bury them.

35:30 Nothing religious or anything like that.

**You weren't able to stop?**

No. We had a fire burning in the camp, with cholera cases they cremated them in the fire. You had to be very careful of cholera. The Japs themselves were scared, terrified of it.

**What sort of conditions did the Japanese guards live**

36:00 **in at that time?**

They weren't living too well themselves. They didn't have the rations that you think they did. They were poorly supplied themselves. Purely because you couldn't get rations or supplies through.

**That is why they were building the railway wasn't it?**

Yes. Their own troops were coming past our camp on their way to Burma and the conditions they marched through was something unbelievable. They were

36:30 bashed the whole time by their officers. They were only young lads too, 16, 17 and 18. They pulled these goat carts with their provisions on them, between them and there would be 5 Japs to one cart and officer to every 3 carts and he would be walking up just bashing them the

37:00 whole time. Day and night they would be pulling these carts with all their equipment. Just because of the Jap attitude to life. The last camp I was in we had a Jap officer kick a Jap to death. He fell asleep on his post he didn't even wake him up he just kicked him to death.

**Did you ever see any acts of kindness or concern**

37:30 **by the Japanese guards?**

No I wouldn't say what you would class as concern. To see them coming back from Burma they were pitiful. They were in a shocking state. One of the wounded, Dunlop actually took his leg off for him he was dragging his broken leg behind him. He had two pieces of bamboo as crutches and he was dragging his broken leg behind him.

38:00 **So our doctors and managed to treat the Japanese?**

If it was possible. That is one case that I know of. In the camp where we were, there was nothing for dysentery at all, we used to grind up charcoal and just eat some charcoal that was to try and help a little bit. But it wasn't successful to any degree.

38:30 Malaria was another thing. I had 43 attacks of malaria. After you had one major attack there are relapses. The doctors worked out that in every 10 days you had a relapse, similar to an attack, you felt pretty terrible. Of those 43, I only went delirious twice.

39:00 I remember once I told a friend of mine I told him to be careful of those elephants coming through the snow they are going to trample on you. Snow in the tropics.

# Tape 3

00:20 **Bill you are about to tell me a great story about rice?**

About our system adjusting to a rice diet when we first went out to Selarang Barracks.

00:30 During action we lived on bully beef and biscuits. When we got to Selarang Barracks and went on a rice diet it took anything from up to 3 weeks for our system to adjust, in as much as we didn't go to the toilet. We didn't have a motion 2 or 3 weeks.

**None at all?**

No. We would say something to the doctor and the doctor would say, "It is perfectly all right don't worry." Eventually out systems adjusted to rice. That is how long

01:00 it took. A rather interesting story when you stop and think about it.

**How long did you live on rice in total?**

Practically the whole period of 3½ years we lived on rice. In the early days in Singapore unfortunately they gave us rice that the British had condemned for pig feed and not fit for human consumption and they had sprinkled lime right through the rice.

01:30 They gave us this rice it was dreadful to eat, but we had to eat it. We survived, I think a week or more rations that it lasted. To try and give some sort of flavour to the rice we gather up a couple of thousand empty bottles around Changi and went down to the sea and filled them up and brought these empty bottles full of sea water

02:00 and cooked the rice in that which helped a little bit.

**How tall are you Bill roughly?**

175 [centimetres], 5 foot 9.

**And you lived on two cups of rice a day for about 3½ years?**

Some camps you might have got that extra meal, it wouldn't be 3 cups, but

02:30 they gave us three meals, a little more than two cups.

**So how much did you weigh at the end of the war, do you know?**

I was around about 7 stone I think. By the time I arrived home it was 3 months to the day.

**Were you still able to walk?**

Yes.

**Could you move around?**

Yes.

**Tell me about Weary Dunlop and your**

03:00 **association with Weary Dunlop. I know that he performed extraordinary surgery on you.**

Weary was a great man, his main ability was running the camp, that is where he performed as an administrator. He organised hygiene and food rations and everything else and did his surgery as well.

03:30 In his book he did mention that 'Bertie Coates was a better surgeon than I am'. Weary was a good surgeon, but he wasn't the top, as he mentioned himself, but that is where he performed very well, as an administrator. Weary took off 80 legs and Bertie Coates took off 140. Weary would come along to a hut and there would be a poor devil there in dreadful pain with an ulcer from his knee down to his ankle and he would just pick him up

04:00 and say, "I will whip that off for you" and take him up to the makeshift surgery.

**That was the reason for a lot of leg amputations, because of ulcers?**

That was because of ulcers. The ulcers just ate the leg away. In a ward there may be 200 men in the hut with these ulcers and the

04:30 stench from them was unbelievable. They used a teaspoon, the orderlies, and just scrape the teaspoon over the ulcer. The men were screaming in agony and it was a relief to get that leg off. There was no way of arresting them at all. Even today I know people who have had those type of ulcers, tropical ulcers and there is still no cure for them.

**And the men who had their legs amputated**

05:00 **did most of them survive that surgery?**

Yes most of them did, there were times when they didn't.

**What happened to them once they had their legs amputated, because they couldn't work?**

No.

**What did they do with them at that point?**

They were more or less in the base camps then, there were no working parties as far as they were required.

**If a man got**

05:30 **sick when he was working up on say, that cutting or on the embankment, would you be able to take him back to the base camp for treatment?**

No, you were in the camp to stay until the whole thing was completed.

**There was no medical facilities available up there at all?**

No none at all. It was a dreadful situation for the doctors.

06:00 There was so much that they could have done if they had the drugs.

**There were doctors working on the railway with you?**

Not on the railway, but in the camps. There was normally one doctor per camp.

**There was nothing they could do?**

No nothing they could do for the poor devils. They saved men with makeshift equiptment.

06:30 **Bill, I would like to ask you a question that might be quite difficult for you to answer. Why do you think you survived, what is it about you and others like you that enabled you to survive that experience, that killed so many others?**

Mateship of course that was the big thing. You had to say to yourself,

07:00 I used to say, “Well you can’t do anything about it”, you have to accept it.

**Do you think that your early childhood experiences had contributed to?**

Who knows. There were many men like me, thousands, accept the fact that nothing could be done, and just had to stick with it and stay as long as you can, and get home.

**What was, apart from the obvious physical**

07:30 **suffering that you had to endure, what was the worst aspect apart from that being working up there in those dreadful conditions and psychologically what was the most difficult thing for you to deal with while you were there?**

I think to see the suffering of fellow mankind was a dreadful situation, to see good men, good mates.

08:00 There were men that they just said, “I can’t take any more” and would make a ring and say, “Would you take this home to Mum.” They would be dead the next day. There wasn’t a lot of that, but it did happen.

**How did those men die?**

They just gave up. Their condition was so weak, they gave up fighting.

08:30 **They just laid down and died. Did that seem like an act of choice that they were making?**

Yes. It got to the stage that some just couldn’t take it any further, they accepted that they had taken as much as they could. There wasn’t a lot.

**Were there any men who actively took their own lives in those**

09:00 **circumstances?**

I never saw a case personally, but I have heard of cases, but I don’t know of one I can refer to myself.

**Did you have any thoughts that would give yourself comfort during this time, did you think about going home?**

Going home.

09:30 **What did you used to think about?**

You used to say, “I am going to stay alive and I am going to make it and I am going to get there.” I used to think of my wife and would think, ‘won’t it be lovely getting off the bus and taking her hand’. But that didn’t happen. In those days before you joined up you travelled on buses, you didn’t have cars. I used to think when I got old, I would be able to help my wife off the bus. That sort of thing.

10:00 Getting back to civilian life. I always said, “When I get out of here I am going to buy a loaf of bread and a tin of jam and I am going to sit down and have it”.

**Did you do that?**

No. I didn't. I always had a craze for 'bubble and squeak'. I always used to say, "When I get out of here I want an attack of malaria",

10:30 so I would have blankets and sheets and a pillow. Sure enough a week after I got an attack of malaria when I was finished, I finished up in the Bangkok hospital.

**Your wish was granted.**

My wish was granted.

**Did you talk amongst yourselves about those sorts of things to keep your spirits up?**

Yes. Even in the worst conditions sometimes we would start up trying to name the streets what was on each intersection

11:00 of the streets in Melbourne or wherever you came from. You would say well the south east corner is at and so on and you would try and keep your mind active to take off some of the stress of what you were doing.

**At that time did you have any idea what was going on with the rest of the war?**

No not really. There were very strong rumours all the time,

11:30 but I suppose rumours kept you alive. In Singapore in the early days there only had to be a bad thunderstorm and there was allied ships sailing to the island, coming to rescue us. Rumours were very rife there. There were the odd radio, which did give a sprinkling of news, but sometimes and Asian or Chinese would ride past and say the allies have landed in France,

12:00 but you didn't get anything definite. I think the end did come as a surprise. It was found afterwards they found the paperwork where we would all be executed in 9 days time, so we were just released in time. Thank goodness the bomb was dropped, it was a means to an end. We had already dug the big hole around the camp, where they were to bulldoze us in.

12:30 **You had already dug your own graves?**

Yes we had dug our own graves. We had 8 very fine chaps in our unit and they made a break for them in Burma, but the Burmese put them away and the Japs brought them back the next day and made them dig their own graves and just shot them.

**Did you have to witness that?**

No I wasn't in that camp. Eight Sergeants out of our unit.

13:00 Very fine men they were. Some of them I joined up with. I hate to think I could have been there. We got on that well together. We talked about making a break early in the peace.

**Did you ever try to escape?**

There was nowhere to go. You had 1,000 miles of the Indian Ocean of one side and you had the jungle on the other side, jungle to the north to Burma so there was nowhere to go.

13:30 There were the odd attempts made but most of them ended disastrous.

**Did you know anyone who tried to escape?**

Only these 8 sergeants I mentioned. We had one of our officers, he lived with the Chinese guerrillas right through, he didn't become a prisoner.

**So he got away early in the piece?**

No he

14:00 never got caught, he just disappeared on the night we surrendered and joined up with the Chinese guerrillas. They did a lot of damage behind the lines. Derailed trains and that sort of things.

**Did you see him again after the war?**

Yes. He came home and he joined us after the war when he came home. He is dead now.

**He had a very different war?**

Yes very different.

14:30 **During your entire army life did you ever get into a combat situation?**

Only at the war's end a couple nearly parted my hair for me. Spasmodic firing right at the end.

**So this is right at the end?**

As far as the Anti-Tank were concerned on that side of the island there weren't any tanks

15:00 with the infantry coming down.

**Your experience of the war, you obviously were a prisoner of war that the majority of time for you. Did you ever feel at any time that we might lose the war? Did you ever wake up?**

No.

**Why not?**

When we were first taken they gave us a form on

15:30 'our occupation and who would win the war and why'.

**The Japanese gave you a form to fill in did they?**

Yes. The occupation, I think 90% were rabbit trappers. Their skills couldn't be used for anything else. I put down that the allies would win the war because of America's mass production.

**Why did they ask you who you thought might win the war?**

It is strange isn't it?

16:00 That was one of the early forms they gave us 'who would win the war and why'?

**So even after the shock of Singapore, you never wavered in that the allies would win the war?**

No we knew that American mass production, they would replace lost equipment in hours.

**I have read this**

16:30 **previously that that was a big feature that won the war, that they could produce?**

That they could produce, the mass production.

**So you were aware of it even then, so you felt that in the long run that would overcome.**

That that would come out. Yes.

**Because it was the bomb that eventually**

The two bombs [Hiroshima and Nagasaki].

17:00 **Did you know at the time that the bombs had been dropped.**

No we didn't.

**When did you find out about those bombs?**

Well not until 15, until they surrendered, that I heard of it in our camp. The bomb was dropped on the 9th August and they surrendered on 15th. They did drop a pamphlet to the troops, 'owing to a barbaric nation using a bomb, we are unable to cope and are forced to withdraw from the war'.

17:30 **Really, withdraw? So the Japanese dropped pamphlets to their troops after which that was it, they just put down their weapons?**

No some of them in outgoing places still had to be rounded up I believe.

**Yes. That is right because there was quite a big campaign?**

Yes.

**Those mopping-up operations.**

18:00 When I was in the Bangkok hospital with malaria in the first week, the third or fourth night I got a bit sick of myself so I though 'I will go and find myself the way to the pictures'. There was a good picture on called 'The Sullivans'. The story of 5 American fellows. So I walked out of the main gate of the hospital and I saw this truck coming along and I held up my hand and he stopped

18:30 it seems that it was the first truck of a Convoy of Japs coming in. I stood on the running board and made them go where I wanted to go. How I found it I don't know' but I did. I got off the truck and then they all saluted. I had to stand as the full convoy went past and salute them.

**That must have been a great moment for you?**

Yes.

**How long after that, that you were able to**

19:00 **get back to Australia it was quite some time, three months?**

Three months all told.

**You had put on a bit of weight?**

Yes I put on quite a bit of weight.

**Did you have any long term affects?**

I think with the majority of them trying to adjust when we came home it was a big task to ask.

19:30 You see we had lived as 'Coolies' [labourers] for 3½ years and to come back to the western way of life things annoy you. "You don't do it that way", we had to adjust to that. I have heard people say, and I think also in my own case, it took up to 5 years before you could adjust back into western way of life.

**Tell me some examples of things you were adjusting to when you came back?**

20:00 Everything. We hadn't been associated with women at all. When a woman went about doing something, you would say, "No you don't do it that way." There were many ways that everything was back to front to you, you had to turn around.

**You had to do it in a certain way, that is what you had been used to doing?**

Yes that is what we had been doing.

20:30 We worked as Coolies, with Chinese baskets.

**Did you have any difficulties with adjusting to noise or did you have difficulties sleeping?**

Sleeping? The bed was very annoying, it was too soft. I know myself and I know many people who did, they got out and got on the floor and slept.

**Couldn't sleep in the bed?**

21:00 It just wasn't right, we had slept on concrete and bamboo slats for 3½ years.

**What about food. How did you…**

Food wasn't a problem really, we adjusted to that.

**I have heard stories about people who had difficulty because their children would be wasteful with food and they would find that difficult.**

Yes all that,

21:30 it was very annoying. You just didn't waste anything, just think what we could have done with that food that you saw being wasted.

**You say it took you about 5 years?**

In many cases I would say so. There is one crowd in our unit, the Murga mob, there were 12 of those and all but one came home. I was speaking to one of them a couple of years ago about this adjusting,

22:00 he said that they realise it went on, but not them because they had the 11 of them to support each other and they didn't find it a problem. They were all there in the one little town in Murga.

**Did you have anyone when you came back that you were close to? Any of your mates?**

Yes.

**Did you see the very often?**

Yes frequently. You made that point. I think that was one of our troubles when we came home and

22:30 we just couldn't adjust to the home life, we were mates.

**That didn't go down too well on the home front?**

No. That was it you had to do it. It was hard to brake away from what you had been surviving with all those years.

**The relationships that you developed then…**

Are still as strong today as they ever were.

**Tell me about some of your mates?**

23:00 I don't know. We honestly do look upon each other as stronger than a brother. With your brother at home here, he didn't go through what we went through. You form that bond between you, it is unbreakable.

**Tell me about some of the characters that were your close mates?**

Well there were many.

23:30 During the good days in one of the camps, it was in a base camp after the war and some mail came through and I was in this hut where all these chaps got these letters and of course they were reading the letters out so everybody knew the contents so I saw an opportunity when this friend of mine, a shearer in New South Wales

24:00 I said, “Charlie you have got to get a pack of cards, we are going to read the cards.” So I told Charlie all the contents of these letters and I spread a rumour about a chap reading the cards out. They would go down and tell them everything in their letter. We would charge them a cigarette at a time. We made a profit.

**Did you get much mail through?**

No very little. I had one card here when it was finished,

24:30 from home, but it was typed out. ‘I am well, I am working for pay, the food is good’ and then you just ticked those items and put the address on it and they posted it for you. There was no contact other than that.

**Who did you send that card to?**

My first wife.

**Did you receive any mail back from her in return?**

I didn’t myself, I didn’t know there were

25:00 mail got through, but not everybody was fortunate enough to receive a letter. It didn’t happen during the working days it happened when you got back to the base camp. They brought mail through.

**You faced a fairly difficult situation when you came home?**

Yes, very unexpected.

**That was obviously very difficult, on top of everything else**

25:30 **you went through?**

It was a set back, but I had overcome bigger problems in the past.

**How did you deal with it at the time? Did you feel that after what you had been through you could pretty well much deal with anything?**

I felt my whole attitude in life is, ‘I can’t do anything about it why worry!’ I am not a worrier. If I can’t do anything about it why worry about it, that’s my attitude.

**And that’s kept you in pretty good sted?**

26:00 I think so, but there were many many men just like myself. Just the same attitude. Not everybody got home.

**Did you lose many mates you were close to during that time?**

Yes I did. Quite a few. This chap wasn’t a mate he was a chap I got to know very well in

26:30 Cutting Camp 3, he was probably the finest young boy I have ever known. He was a rugby player, a strong man at 20, a big strapping boy, a good education and he was just coming back from work this day and he was dead 2 hours later. He was such a fine boy. It always hit me what a waste of life with a person like that of where he could

27:00 have gone, through life a very successful man. Within 2 hours, with cholera and he was dead.

**When you came home did you visit the families of many of the men who were lost?**

Some. They were more or less scattered. There were cases the inter city folk, yes.

**Did they ask you about the circumstances**

27:30 **of the deaths of their loved ones at that time?**

No I didn’t strike a family who asked me personally, but that did happen quite a lot.

**Did you talk to anybody about what had happened to you when you came back?**

No, I think

28:00 the feeling was that mateship we had to be together, we didn’t want to associate and discuss it with other people. There was a bond between us that we had to sort out ourselves.

**So you worked together to overcome those difficulties?**

Yes.

**You shared those experiences for a long time?**

No. Why tell people they wouldn't understand.

28:30 It is probably hard for you sitting here listening to it.

**Yes it is very difficult for me. They wouldn't appreciate what you have been through?**

Yes the same situation when we came home, how could you try to explain it to people, so we had to try and sort it out between ourselves.

**When you had sorted out your own lives and your own reactions to those things, then you started to talk and it became important that people knew what went on there?**

29:00 **Do you think it…**

I don't think to any great extent we tried to tell our story because, how could you?

**Did people come after you to tell this story?**

Well they are just starting. People over time have come forward.

**Quite a few?**

Only a few. When you look at the many books that have been written.

29:30 **Do you think we have got a lot to learn from those experiences, that is important that people understand?**

It is very important to understand. I think this present generation coming up now, I think there was a generation gap where that interest lapsed, but we find now the young people today are starting to ask a lot of questions and I feel this

30:00 job you are doing is going to help that situation. There are a lot of questions being asked now that have never been in years gone by. It is a bit late because a lot of chaps memories.

**You seem to have a pretty good memory. What I would like to ask you now is about the Japanese and**

30:30 **your feelings about the Japanese and in the years since the war. Have you had any relationships with Japanese people since the war?**

Only one, he was a soldier, in the Noritake China.

**How did you get on with him?**

Well I made myself get on with him. If I didn't get on with him, how was I going to sell his product?

**When was that what time?**

That would be back in

31:00 57/58. I had to…

**That was pretty soon then after the war.**

Yes. I told him what he was facing.

**What do you mean?**

Well I told him I had to accept him, what his countrymen had done.

**Did you tell him what they had done to you?**

31:30 Not to a great extent, isolated incidents only. I was in Manly hospital last year and there was a young Japanese sister working her way around the wards, she was maybe 22, and she knew nothing of the war at all. She sat down with me one day and we had a half hour conversation. I told her what they had done and she didn't dispute that,

32:00 they would do that. It could be done. I asked her, "Do you think your race has changed, become more and more westernised, and that last area will grow out." She said, "No it won't." It goes right back into history, they have always been the same. I met a very well educated Jap in Bangkok after the war and

32:30 he was referring to the bomb he said, "We will remember, maybe it will take 100 years, but we will remember." No you can't change. East and West will never meet. A man seems all smiles, but he doesn't see the other side of that face. It is too deep in them. I have seen a little dog, they just tie him up and

just cut him down the middle

33:00 for amusement. I have seen them tie a dog's all four legs together and throw him in the river just to laugh at him. Our mind doesn't think that way. We had two of our chaps, for punishment they tied them to stakes and built a big bamboo fire in the middle and cooked them. One chap died and one survived. Can you imagine a death with fluid in your body boiling, I suppose, I don't know…

33:30 Things like that you don't forget.

**What other sorts of?**

I will have to sit down and think about them. Different things, dreadful things that happened. When I was out in a working party in Singapore cleaning up

34:30 the streets and a truck load of Japs came along and there was a young teenager, a cross Chinese, and she was walking along the footpath and they ran up on the footpath and ran over her and while she was dying they all jumped out and formed a circle around her and pulled her panties down and urinated all over her while she was dying

35:00 and cheering. Nice people, aren't they?

**You had to stand by and watch this?**

You couldn't do anything about it, that was very early in the piece.

**This sort of behaviour continued?**

Yes, it's normal for them.

35:30 It is just their way, their mind or their history. I suppose you can go right back, as this Japanese sister told me, it will never be out.

**You saw examples of brutality between the Japanese?**

Just as much. When they do it to their own people. When you look at the 'Rape of Nanking', it is a book everybody should read

36:00 the things they did there to the Chinese women. Pregnant women bayoneted, which we saw in Singapore.

**Did these sorts of events, which are extraordinarily traumatic, how did you manage to live with those memories?**

Once again, what can you do

36:30 about it? You have to accept these things. I would never go to Japan, I just couldn't go to Japan. I see Japanese as tourists now, but some of them I let them pass by and then all of a sudden I see one and I think, 'Oh you bad people'. You can see it in them, it stands out in them. You just have to accept these things and adjust

37:00 accordingly. You can't do anything about it.

# Tape 4

00:23 **I want to take you back to your father and in fact to your grandfather.**

00:30 **You mentioned that when your father enlisted his father disowned him. Was this in the Boer War or the Great War [World War I]?**

The Boer and when he joined the Great War that was the end.

**Why was that?**

He expected him to stay home and look after the farm, but he enlisted and his brother stayed home and looked after the farm and he came into the whole lot.

01:00 They were big land holders in South Australia, the Dunn family and we didn't benefit in any way through my father joining up. We were on the outer.

**Did your father have any relationship with his brother after that?**

Not that I am aware of I don't remember them coming together at all.

**You said at one stage you lived with your grandparents, was that your mother's?**

No

01:30 my father's mother. Now where are we talking, Perth or in Melbourne. I was bought across to my mother's parents.

**Your father enlisting in the Boer War, how old would he have been. He must have only been about…**

He couldn't have been too old, 18, 19 or 20 or something I don't know but he would have been young because he was still young enough to enlist in the Great War.

02:00 **He probably would have known Morant [Harry 'Breaker' Morant] I imagine, being from South Australia. 'Breaker' Morant. He was from South Australia wasn't he?**

Yes, no I don't know.

**In the Great War, do you know where he fought?**

In Belgium. I have letters he sent home to my mother

02:30 they are as good as if they were written yesterday. Incredible. It was a nightmare.

**You said he tried to enlist in the Second World War as well?**

Yes he tried to. I only found that out recently from a distant relative.

**He must have been in his 50's by then?**

Yes he was.

**Did he get anywhere or did they just turn him back?**

No they turned him back. He put his age down again,

03:00 but of course he didn't get in.

**39er. Probably lucky for him. That could have been a record if he had been in all three shows.**

All three yes. There had been a great number had been in the 14/18 [First World War] and 39/45 [Second World War].

**For you then, enlisting wasn't an issue, that is something you were going to do?**

03:30 I just went along and did it. It was a different world in those days.

**You weren't at all concerned that your father might disown you or anything?**

No not at all, I didn't have anything to lose.

**When you rode over, your bike to see him, you said he was very proud to see you in uniform?**

Yes in uniform.

**After the war,**

04:00 **you saw him then too?**

I went back, I don't think we discussed it in any depth what happened to me at all. Probably like everywhere else there were more important things to think of. I mean they were deep scars,

04:30 unless you were there you just can't visualise how deep those scars are.

**You had obviously your links with your own company the blokes you had been in Singapore and Thailand with and Burma, were you able to talk to other servicemen who hadn't been prisoners of war?**

Yes

05:00 For some reason they were quite understanding and sympathetic to us. People in New Guinea who had seen POWs coming back through their ranks and were understanding as to what had happened, they accepted us 100%. That was quite common. I struck a chap in hospital one

05:30 day he said, "I made up for what you suffered I got a few of them one night" and things like that.

**There wasn't any sense of someone who had seen action in New Guinea and had a different sort of value of war experience?**

No. As a mater of fact I remember one group coming back and they said to a friend of mine, a sergeant,

06:00 they said, "Oh you poor bastards, you know mate, we are the lucky ones".

**How did they go, Veterans Affairs in the years following the war, I know there has been lots of**

**attempts to acknowledge that people who were prisoners of war had special needs**

06:30 **in a special way. As I understand it, Veterans Affairs for a long time didn't want to acknowledge that. Do you feel you were getting a fair go [fair treatment]?**

My own experience I personally feel DVA [Department of Veterans' Affairs] have been very good to us. You will always get the person to complain about something, but I think they have been good. I think it took a long while for their doctors to understand

07:00 and maybe try and work out our story, what we have been talking about, that probably happened. I don't put that against the DVA, that was something that everybody had to try and work out.

**Another thing, I wanted to get some more detail on was the battle at Singapore**

07:30 **in late January or early February 42.**

When we came back from the mainland.

**The first time.**

From here, August 41.

**Then you were fighting up the west coast of Malaya?**

Down the west and then we were on the east,

08:00 the main action was on the west coming down.

**Fighting basically the rear guard?**

Yes, it was all.

**When you retreated across the causeway whereabouts were you?**

We were more or less, I think it might have taken a day or two for command to sort of get

08:30 areas for different units to defend. Myself I was on the right hand side coming across the causeway on that part of the island the western sector. Then we gradually…

09:00 **Most of the units were in that sector I think?**

Yes it was. Then we got down to the airport that had to be defended and then they swung around. The Japs were very clever, they went around the outskirts, our flanks were always weak because we didn't have the men. The Australian 19th and 29th Battalions had suffered very heavy casualties in a battle called Muar, they were half strength

09:30 when they got to the island. They had a lot of fighting to do, making up one man doing what two men should have.

**Then there was a bunch of Australians landed just the week before?**

Yes. Only 3 or 4 days What a tragedy that was. Something like about 4,000 landed and just completely sacrificed. They hadn't been in the army

10:00 in Australia very long, only a matter of two or three weeks.

**They hadn't had very much training. What was their discipline like?**

Well I can't comment on that because they sort of didn't intermingled. I think we didn't come across the bulk of them until we were in Changi.

**Why do you think there were so many strategic bungles**

10:30 **in the defence of Singapore?**

When you look back over time the British military have made an enormous amount of bungles. Gallipoli was just one big mistake. There are battles in France where the British made dreadful mistakes. Seems to be in their history right through. Some very bad examples.

**Have you any ideas of how it might have been done better, I mean in hindsight?**

11:00 Well I mean air cover was the most essential. I mean you don't realise just how important air cover is until you have been without it. They were constantly there the whole time, the Japs. Tree top heights just blazing away the whole time, we just had nothing to defend ourselves with.

11:30 **Another thing I would be interested for you to comment on. It has been noted that the various troops who became prisoners the Australians, the British the Dutch the native population had quite different survival rates.**

Yes.

**The Australians did very well.**

12:00 **Did you realise that at the time?**

What, in the very early days?

**During the war.**

It became evident to us as time went on, as to how bad it was in Thailand. It was very effluent then, that Australians were just so far in front, the discipline, hygiene were the two big factors. The camp case I am talking about, they brought in some Dutch reinforcements for us,

12:30 about 100 or so, and they brought them in and their hygiene was dreadful.

**Give me some detail about hygiene. What do you mean by hygiene?**

Cleanliness, discipline in the camp. In this particular case the platform was so high

13:00 that the tents were pitched on it and the Dutch in their huts, in the monsoon season they used their huts instead of going to the toilet. In the middle of the floor.

**Just down onto the earth?**

Yes. It was just one example, of lack of hygiene very badly. We slid and slipped and slided and got to the toilets regardless.

13:30 **Because you've got people with dysentery and all the disease?**

The English weren't as strict in discipline, in those camps. The Australian, he is a larrikin and he is, I don't know whether they can be led as well. The Poms [British] they just jump to attention straight away.

14:00 The Australian takes his time, but overall as far as discipline is concerned, and hygiene, we were a long way out in front. Even the Americans, they were dreadful prisoners. Not from hygiene point of view, but hopeless at anything. One camp we were in, where we had the floor boards instead of the bamboo, even the bamboo we used to take them up and put them through fires to burn the bugs,

14:30 the bugs were dreadful, and in this camp with floor boards, the Australians took up their floor and first of all we got some charcoal and drew a line right across the floor and marked the boards 1, 2, 3 and so on and they were all different lengths and we put them all back in line. The Yanks [Americans] were, some of them were there for 3 days trying to get them back. They just ripped them up and had trouble putting them back again.

15:00 That is just examples.

**Was that training, did officers tell you or…**

No it is just the Australian way of life, they adjust to what ever, I don't know.

**Was there any attempt to point this out to the other people at the time, that they could smarten up their act?**

No. It was just something, the way we did it and the way they didn't do it.

15:30 **What about authority and class division and that sort of thing? Was there much difference between the Australians sorted themselves out and for instance say the British might have?**

No not so much with the men but it was in the officers. The British as always considered themselves superior and I think that did exist.

16:00 I can't bring them to mind.

**Did you have a lot of respect for your officers or were they just another bloke?**

Yes and No. There were officers you had respect for and there were others you had no respect at all. We had one Major Quick he was just

16:30 absolutely hopeless. He was in charge of us in this K3 cutting, and he never came out of his tent. How the Japs tolerated him I don't know. He had a tin trunk full of food, cigarettes and he made the men carry it from camp to camp and he used to sit in his tent all day. I don't know whether people were going to put him in as a war criminal, but it didn't eventuate. He was a hopeless man.

17:00 He didn't have the respect of any man in the camp, regardless of nationality or anything else. There were others maybe who we thought could have tried harder and there were others who were remarkable men, they took bashings for the men. Weary Dunlop had some dreadful bashings in his time, over the period.

17:30 Yes and No.

**The various places you worked on the railway can you name them all for us? A lot of them had names. You were talking about Hellfire Pass [Halfaya]?**

And the other one would have been Cutting. That was the two main areas our particular party was on. Wampo Cutting

18:00 **And Hellfire?**

And Hellfire Pass.

**You were saying how many blokes are still around from Hellfire Pass.**

Well, out of 126 Anti-Tank, there were 400 artillery men went in. They, 2/10th and 2/15th Field Regiments and the 4th Anti-Tank and of the 126 Anti-Tank that went in, there are several of us left. There is a

18:30 one chap still alive he was the orderly with K3 with Dr Parker he was his assistant but there wasn't much he could do. He went around the sick all the time and gave them words of encouragement. There was no medication they couldn't do much, but they could comfort people. He was very highly thought of that young chap, old chap now he is my age, even so that the

19:00 doctor came to his wedding after the war. He went down well. It is very sad for the doctors what they had to put up with. It must have been a hopeless situation and they must have felt that themselves,

**To know that there was so much that they could have done.**

Yes that they could have done.

**And yet at the same time the remarkable achievement.**

19:30 Yes the remarkable achievement.

**It is interesting that already the people we have talked to, some people can say that the war was the best experience of their life even for all the, they look back on it as something, a remarkable experience.**

I can agree with that, I have felt that way. Many of us said it talking,

20:00 never anywhere else. It stands up for something, never anywhere else.

**Strange isn't it?**

Yes.

**You said before there seems to be a bit more interest…**

Now?

**I know there was a number of accounts published shortly after the war things like 'Behind Bamboo' and 'Naked Island'. Did you read these books when they came out?**

Yes I did.

20:30 **How did you respond to those?**

I don't know whether we tried to be critical or not or whether we read them and we felt that they were an accurate description of what happen.

**Did you feel they may help people understand, or not?**

If they could absorb or imagine it happening, how many people could visualise it, that's what happened,

21:00 I mean absorb it sufficiently to understand the depth of the whole story. One, 'White Coolies' was published about that time Betty Jefferies wrote that book about the sisters. I was in Singapore hospital after the war, on my way home, when they brought those sisters back from Java and Sumatra it was a sight I have never forgotten, it was terrible.

21:30 They were just skeletons. The sisters came over and gave them their uniforms to put on and they hung on them. That was a sight that has stood with me, women shouldn't have had that happen to them. There were apart from those nurses on the Vyne Brooke that was sunk

22:00 there were another batch that got home and Matron Sage met them on the wharf in Perth and said, "Where are your patients?" That was like a knife, what a terrible thing to say. A heartless woman. One of those sisters told us, "We felt dreadful"

22:30 because they didn't want to land, they didn't want to leave the patients behind, but there was no alternative they had to go.

**What about you probably would have been to the film 'Bridge over the River Kwai'?**

I got up in the middle of the State Theatre and said, "What a load of so-and-so" to a gentleman who had never spoken to me before. Absolutely disgusted with it, what a lot of rubbish.

23:00 Nothing about it at all that resembled the truth in any way. It was a story, put together.

**Did you feel that happened a lot, that people appropriated your experience for their own purposes?**

Yes I would say so. The tragedy, and also I read an article in the paper from one of the people in the war museum

23:30 in Canberra, when they watched that Changi episode, the whole tragedy of it is a million people see this and believe it. It is just a load of rubbish, nothing like it ever happened.

**If you were going to make a film or a series like that what do you think would be the important things to put in there?**

24:00 Well we have often discussed this and thought, 'how could you make a movie to portray what happened'. Where could you get the people, skeletons, from, and there are things that you couldn't put in a film, I mean there are one or two films, there was one shortly after the war, it endeavoured to get down to,

24:30 it was brushing down on the edge of the truth, still a long way from it. It was one of the best efforts. Then was another one made not so long ago 'The Sisters'.

**'Paradise Road'?**

'Paradise Road' that's it. They had ablution blocks, they had electric light in the camp. There was no such thing. The girl, the sister that was taken,

25:00 reported to her friend who was being punished in the parade ground. All the Nip did was knock the water out of her hand. It was associated with it, but well. You will never get the truth on the celluloid.

**No, and perhaps there is no reason to try.**

When I say 'the truth' I mean portray in pictures.

25:30 **One of the other things about the debate that is often discussed, but never resolved, is Bennett's behaviour. Did you have an opinion?**

I did, I think we all did. What good would Bennett do in staying in Singapore, for an Australian general to come in contact with the Japanese in jungle warfare, his actions had been appreciated by Blamey [Thomas Blamey, Australian general],

26:00 to come home and tell them what they were facing. What was the good of his wasting his time for 3½ years in a POW camp? He didn't get away right until the finish. He was there at 4 o'clock when the decision was made to surrender. I think we appreciated him going. He and Blamey [Percival] were at loggerheads from day one so he was kicking against the wind from the start.

26:30 But he thought he may be accepted, he thought his experiences would be accepted.

**So the troops didn't feel let down by this at all?**

No I am sure they didn't. I have never heard any adverse reports.

# Tape 5

00:47 **To begin with what did you pack when you were about to leave home what sort of things, your personal things to begin with?**

01:00 You mean when we were leaving?

**Yes.**

I put what belongings I had and left them at a friends place down at Albert Park and I have never seen them from that day to this. When I came back the people I left them with had move, I never found them. Not that I had a great deal in the case. A new suit and a spare pair of paints, a few shirts and a couple of pairs of socks and such, but not a great loss.

01:30 **And so did you take any personal items with you when you left.**

I don't know you might take one or two little keepsakes you like to have, but when I was leaving my father gave me a huge Rolex wristwatch, it had been given to him when, he had it at World War I. I had

great trouble keeping throughout the whole POW days, but I did.

**You did.**

What I did was

02:00 I made a pair of wooden clogs with a little strap over them and I hollowed out a little hole in the wooden clog and sealed it up. I got it right through.

**Have you still got the watch?**

No I have lost it somewhere.

**Does that mean then when you got back from the war literally you didn't have any**

02:30 **possessions?**

To start off with no. We were given a clothing allowance, a Fletcher Jones voucher and I went in bought a pair of trousers. In those day they were on the corner of Market and Collins Street. There was a queue from Market Street down to King Street. I bought a sports coat and some other clothes. They gave us a allowance of £40 for tradesmen's tools, which I went a bought a

03:00 whole lot of them. Being a handyman they came in handy.

**What was your kit when you were leaving Australia?**

More or less a change of clothing shirts and underwear and we were left in winter uniforms and on our way to Singapore we were issued with the

03:30 tropical uniforms, shirt and trousers. In those days we didn't look very neat in them we had long pants that rolled up so you wore them as shorts during the day and let them down during the night to be mosquito proof and then we packed when we went into action we packed all our kit bag with all our gear in

04:00 and we never saw those again. They were taken to a bulk store in Singapore and of course never recovered so we lost everything there.

**How did it feel when you returned to Australia then to know that you literally only had what you were standing up in?**

Well I was so pleased to be back that anything did. It was March 46 before I was discharged

04:30 I spent quite a bit of time in Heildelberg hospital. Things just gradually fell into place. The coupons were still in place and you could only do what the coupons would allow you to do as far as replacing personal belongings.

**Did you have many mates at Heildelberg?**

05:00 What at the same time. There would have been quite a few. I went into a ward, 15, which was the nerves ward and it was a terrible experience for 7 weeks. I couldn't see a reason for me being there but they gave me shock treatment where they would put me out at 5 o'clock in the morning and brought me to at about 8.30

05:30 Bring me to with a slice of toast and a cup of tea. Put us out with insulin treatment, not an electric shock. That went on for about 7 weeks.

**Were you told why?**

Not really I honestly didn't think I needed it but the psychiatrist thought otherwise. That's what happened.

06:00 **Apart from that treatment what else did you do in the hospital in those weeks and months after you had returned?**

Just a case of rebuilding the system up is all you needed. Apart from some unknown reason they pulled all my teeth out. I don't know why, they were

06:30 good teeth. When I joined the army I had a partial plate I had been in a push bike accident and broke three teeth, so I had to have three teeth put on a partial plate. I wore that and every time I looked like getting a bashing on the line I took the teeth out, so I wouldn't break them. This big Nip one day lined me up and I was in for a big hiding and I spat the plate out of my mouth and he looked at me and he said, "Pig" and walked away. It didn't always work, but it did that time.

07:00 **One of the things which has come up a lot is the notion of religion and how that, different people had a different attitude to this. Were you at all religious during the war?**

I wouldn't say I was religious, but I certainly wasn't against religion.

07:30 At that stage I hadn't been involved in church at all. There were men who were and there were other

men sort of like myself sort of on the weekend sort of thing [not very serious about it]. I always remember one night in part of the worst time, pitch dark black as the ace of spades, and this voice in the hut calling out, “God, come to earth and fight me like a man.”

08:00 In desperation. That was his cry.

**Did they have regular church services in the camps?**

In Changi they did, but in work camps there was no such thing. In Changi they had everything, they formed a Masonic Club. Anything you wanted was at Changi, Selarang Barracks, as it should be called.

08:30 **During the war did your attitude to religion change or remain sort of take it or leave it?**

Just on sort of a level keel I suppose.

**What about the notion of your country and Empire, Australia and Britain were obviously very close in many ways how did you regard what you were going to do, who were you going to fight for?**

09:00 Well we felt that it was an Empire effort, everybody should be involved. I did mention yesterday that I think that when we all enlisted in those early days, before Japan, we all thought we would finish up in the Middle East or France or somewhere of that nature. The feeling in those days was very strong as far as Empire goes

09:30 I mean the concert parties at Puckapunyal, before we sailed was British Empire and all the old songs.

**What songs?**

I am just trying to recall the songs we sang. ‘There will Always be an England’ is one that comes to mind. We had many concert parties on those lines. In those days it was a different line of thought as to what there is today.

**You joined up before the Pacific War began?**

Yes.

10:00 **After the war how did you think had those feelings changed that sort of attitude.**

There was a certain amount of feeling I think that we had been let down. Churchill did make the statement he couldn’t defend east of the Suez [Canal]. I think that feeling was there that

10:30 Britain hadn’t done enough. Then you also have to look at the position that they didn’t have the means of coming this far, to defend Australia. They put too much emphasis on Singapore that was their downfall, as far as the far east was concerned. They thought it would always be there. They thought it would save everything, but it didn’t happen.

11:00 Everything went wrong.

**There was obviously for you there was no question about the rightness of this war and it was the right thing to do?**

In this present.

**In 1941 when you were joining up? In the past 50 years Australia has been involved in a couple of other wars. What has been your feelings**

11:30 **about the justness or the rightness of those?**

Well I always give an answer to that, ‘who am I’ or ‘how am I able to give an opinion on that’. With Iraq, I have never been to Iraq, what they had and what they didn’t have [referring to the weapons of mass destruction Saddam Hussein allegedly possessed]. How could I give a personal opinion and say well that should happen and this shouldn’t happen, I am not qualified.

12:00 I do agree what we know should have happened. I said to Zelma today, “Australia will not lose one troop.” I just felt the American firepower was just so enormous and the SAS [Special Air Service] boys are trained to look after themselves. I knew there wouldn’t have been any loss in the navy and it would have been bad luck if a fighter had been shot down in the air force.

12:30 I felt all our service boys would come home, which they look like doing. I did hear Cosgrove [Peter Cosgrove, Australia’s Chief of Defence Force] make a statement the other day which was very straight to the point. ‘25 million people have suffered for 20 years under Saddam and they had to be released’. The emphasis he put on it, he spoke very well. But other than that,

13:00 that is my personal opinion.

**With the war in Vietnam, there was a fairly complicated response from the Australian public.**

Yes, very sad what those boys came home to, they didn’t deserve it. Why? I don’t really understand what the public

13:30 opinion was there. They were throwing blood over them and for years they didn't seem to have any recognition at all. They had a very difficult war. As far as we were concerned the Japs wore uniforms, the VC [Viet Cong] didn't wear uniforms. They could be in the paddy field pick up a rifle and shoot you in the back. They had a pretty tough situation over there as far as I am concerned the Vietnam boys.

**It wasn't just the public, some of the**

14:00 **official organisations didn't give them the warmest welcome home either.**

It was a terrible situation. I mean looking back over the whole war, it was bad situation, where war was never declared and that is why they lost the war.

14:30 **I think the Americans learnt a thing or two from it.**

Yes. I knew a chap he won the MM [Military Medal] at the battle of Long Tan, the Queensland chap Bob Hewitt. Huge man. I said to him, "Bob, how was it?"

15:00 and Bob said, "It wasn't all that bad. They always brought us a hot breakfast in the morning."

**I want to ask you a little bit about when you came back and adjustment. You talked a bit about this yesterday. You met your wife before the war and you got married…**

15:30 The day before I sailed.

**The day before you sailed.**

Why did I get married? Some of us did get married. Why, we ask ourselves. The only answer I can put to that we felt that we would have someone to come home to. In my case I didn't have anybody really.

**With no other family?**

I had my sister but I had known this lass for 12 months and to be quite frank with you, she was pregnant and not to me

16:00 and I thought…

**You knew that at the time?**

I said, "Ah well I'll be the father." As it turned out I wished I hadn't in the finish. I carried that burden for 60 years until the lad died last year and I decided that I would go and explain to his wife and his children why I wasn't a grandfather or father

16:30 that they probably expected me to be.

**You never told him?**

No he never knew. I thought it was better for him not to know. I left a letter for him if ever things went wrong, but I didn't give him the letter I preferred for him not to know. When he was gone I thought I should tell his family because they probably blame me for many things that wasn't my fault.

17:00 That was one stupid thing in my life, probably one of many. That was the reception I got, but it set me back a bit. I always get very annoyed with people in court, the lawyers saying, "My client had a dreadful time during the war" and, "My client had dreadful childhood", I thought, 'I could tell you a story or two'.

17:30 They are sympathetic to people. I am a bit callous as to why people can let themselves go. I can't see any reason. Here I was, a person down in the dumps, my marriage broke up, I can't see… I think you can pull yourself back up again. I have been to the bottom

18:00 at times.

**You can say that again. The first few years when you did come back for better or worse you and your wife decided to stay together.**

When I arrived home that night she said, "You can stay the night and I'll make a decision in the morning." I had to go back to hospital, back to Heildelberg that morning for the checks and when I came back

18:30 all his clothes and everything had gone so we patched up and stayed together for 6 years. There wasn't one cross word in those 6 years, she was happy as larry. She just stood up at breakfast one morning and said, "Bill I am leaving you today" and that was it.

**Did you see her again?**

Yes a number of times. There was no hope of any reconciliation.

19:00 I finished up, I met Zelma then and so I went to the solicitors to get a divorce. Zelma had thought she had married a person, but he was a bigamist and she had to have an annulment, so she went and saw a solicitor and we went to court and our cases came up 1, 2. We were in front of old Judge Barry.

19:30 You couldn't do that again. Zelma got her annulment and I got my divorce, so we went out and had lunch.

**The son, did he stay with his mother at this stage?**

No she more or less neglected him. He went

20:00 with her until I think he was about 18 and then he came down to Melbourne from Robinvale where they were. She more or less neglected him from then on. Zelma and I gave him his 21st birthday and then when she passed away she left everything to her de facto, with whom she was living

20:30 and the son missed out there as well. It wasn't a good situation for the poor kid.

**Zelma knew the situation?**

Yes, right through.

**This sort of situation was that common, maybe not the particulars, your other mates who came back,**

21:00 **have the same sorts of things happened to them?**

There were cases that we heard of over a period of time. I couldn't relate to them. I do recall one chap his wife was so lonely she adopted a little girl to keep her company and things like that. It was a bit of a shock to him.

**Because he felt that had enough?**

The story was I don't think that she adopted the kid at all.

21:30 There was a lot of that, things had to be settled down again. It is understandable in some respects we were away for 4½ years. It is a long while to be apart. I had a job in the '42s with Jap, don't know why,

22:00 he decided the war was near enough over and he wanted all the camouflage taken off his motor bike and somehow I got the job. I went up to this Jap camp and lived like a lord for two days and he had the radio tuned into Tokyo Rose [Radio Tokyo propaganda radio host] all the time and they were playing western music. It was the first time I heard 'South of the Border' and

22:30 I finished up taking the bike to pieces. Tokyo Rose was saying, "Boys you really should be packing up and going home, the Americans are giving your wives and girlfriends a wonderful time." She played on that. It wasn't the prisoners, it was the troops mainly. She was explaining how the Americans were giving the women a wonderful time.

23:00 I didn't really think they would stop and go back home. I cleaned the bike up and had it in a million pieces and couldn't put it back together again so I got another belting.

**The work that you did when you came back, you said you bought a whole lot of carpentry tools?**

That was more or less just a handyman tools

23:30 I worked putting billiard tables repairing and maintaining billiard tables with Walter Lindrum.

**In Flinders Street.**

Flinders Lane the billiard room was. The tools came in handy there. I think it was about 2 years I was on that before I went and joined ANA.

**You said it took you 5 years to adjust.**

24:00 **How did you know that you had readjusted, was there anything triggered?**

Life became easier and more acceptable, that is the only way I can put it. We had difficulty accepting things when we came home. Anything and everything. It was all in our minds. We were in bad shape.

24:30 When you think all we had was a Chinese hoe and a Chinese basket and we did work. Whether it was roadwork or working on the railway lines we were working as Coolies. It had to be extracted from the mind.

25:00 **Talking about the war, you obviously saw your mates in the war, did you go to regular reunions, Anzac Day?**

Yes we did.

**And other times as well?**

We used to have our unit reunion every Anzac, and of course it was very well attended. In those days we made the most of it. I was driving home one night after a reunion from Carlton back to Moonee Ponds with an 18 gallon keg in the car with the boot up and the lid up, the police pulled us over in Puckle

Street, “How are you going boys”, and they had a couple of beers with us. “Best of luck boys” and away we went.

26:00 Different story today. We had our reunions yearly and the most successful reunion we feel that ever happened was the Goulburn Valley reunion which was started in Numerkah, by an Numerkah mob. The Numerkah mob were very fine boys from the bush and they were in the light horse prior to the war and then war broke out and they decided to join up

26:30 they came to Melbourne Town Hall with their spurs and slash hats and created a storm. The press came from everywhere to get their photograph and story and they just joined up as one body, the same as we had in our regiment, the same as the Mildura Pipe Band, joined up as a whole. It was very enjoyable marching behind the pipes.

**Did they take**

27:00 **their pipes with them to Singapore?**

Yes.

**Did they keep them in Changi?**

No. I wouldn’t like to say what happened to them, probably lost like everything else. While we are on the pipes. The Gordon Highlanders, on their way back, marched across the causeway behind their pipes. Stirring

27:30 to think they were getting close to the end, they were very fine troops those garrison troops. In Singapore before the war, the Gordon HIghlanders. Same as the British permanent army you can see a difference when you see them. Very well trained tough boys. I can tell you a story whilst I am on those perhaps

28:00 I did hear that the day after the Japanese surrender I was in the camp called the Compton and 3 British commandos came in and they told us they had been outside the camp for 3 months just prepared for what might happen. They could have been a help to us if they had that massacre, if that had happened where we were all to be shot.

28:30 Whether they could have helped because they were tough. They told us they were involved in another British military disaster when their whole division was dropped in the wrong place over Holland. Dropped right into the heart of the German line instead of being dropped behind. It didn’t happen, they lost a big number, enormous casualties.

29:00 These three boys were three of the survivors. They came in they had Sten guns [light machine guns], which is similar to the Owen gun of Australia, and they dropped it on the ground and covered it in dirt and then picked it up and fired it. We thought, ‘you don’t do that’. We had our eyes open. They dropped a jeep in full parachute and down came this jeep. We couldn’t get over the size of the damn thing. We had seen fighter aircraft for

29:30 the first time, we had seen one, the whole world had changed during our captivity.

**We were talking about reunion. The Numurkah reunion you said was the best?**

It was very well organised there, their ladies prepared lovely

30:00 suppers for us and there was always a guest speaker, Weary Dunlop and Bev [Vivian] Bullwinkle never missed one trip they came every year up to there. The whole thing was properly organised. It wasn’t a beerup it was

**Was this each year?**

Each year and then we would stay, farmers had beds we would stay on farms and the next morning we all marched up the main street

30:30 of Numurkah to their cenotaph and laid a wreath and had a little service.

**Is this on Anzac Day or…**

No. It was the last Saturday in July.

**Is this for all prisoners of war?**

Yes all prisoners of war. We even had European prisoners. There were quite a few of the 2/7th Battalion, which had fought in Crete and quite a few of those chaps around. They came from Mildura, they came from far and wide

31:00 from everywhere to that reunion. Anti-Tanks, I would say we were one of the strongest there was usually about 45 of us. It is a very moving thing there is a little town called Tallygaroopna, just this side of Numurkah, just a little pub on a little side road off the main road, and we never ever got past there we always spent an hour there before we got into Numurkah

31:30 and Bev was just standing there and these old cockies from around the area they went out and they formed a guard of honour for her. That was very moving to see them do that.

**It was obviously a comfort to have your mates to talk to after the war?**

Most essential.

32:00 I think it would have been very difficult to come back had it not been for mateship. We all relied on it.

**Were there circumstances where one of you might be having a bad time and try and catch up, how did that network work?**

I expect it sort of followed on from our mateship

32:30 in prison life.

**You have a remarkable ability to get up and keep going it is quite phenomenal. Not everyone would have had that resilience that you had. When you saw perhaps some of your other mates struggling to keep going what might you do should you or did you think it was up to you to try and**

33:00 **do something?**

I think we all tried to give support where it was needed and any little thing at all you could do to support the chaps. There weren't a lot of them, but there were some good people.

**Without naming any names can you tell us what**

33:30 **happened to other people? It is remarkable how you managed to keep yourself going.**

Although I don't look upon it that way, it just seemed natural. I think I would have to go back to the work camps, when we went back to the base camps. The support there was unbelievable. We had one chap

34:00 who was in our unit, Harrison was his name, but he went by 'Blythe', so he got 'Gov', after Governor Blythe, he was a hard case he was, an elder man, he said, "I have been in every goal in Australia." Only for vagrancy during the Depression, for jumping the rapiers and he would be locked up for vagrancy. He said, "Have you ever been to Wagga [Wagga Wagga] Bill?" I said, "I have been to Wagga", he said, "Do you remember

34:30 the rockery around the police station?" He said, "I built that." That man had the kindest heart. I remember in this camp called Tarsau, he was always all day going around with a bucket of water sponging people down in the sick wards. He did it day in day out. That was his little contribution of being able to help.

35:00 He was a very fine man. He also had a road job where we were using a wood burn steamroller. He would go to the Jap Q Store [Quartermaster Store] every morning to get 4 gallons of petrol and going out the gate the Japs would question him he would point to the steamroller and the Japs would say, "OK, OK." Full of tricks he was.

35:30 He was a very kind man and that sort of thing happened with lots of people but he comes to mind because it was the natural thing to do. He would get buckets of water going down to the river. Because buckets were scarce they were hard to come by. There are stories, but is hard to put them together now

36:00 To answer that question as it should be answered it is hard to try and put it into words what was happening.

**Did you feel when you were married to Zelma and your children growing up, there were times that you wanted to talk to them about it, were they interested or was it in the past and you didn't want to dwell on it?**

36:30 No. I didn't they were too young. When they were growing up I didn't think I should be telling them those stories.

**Have you talked to them now they are grown up?**

Tanya now the one in Sydney is becoming interested. She got that book and read it through and she said, "Tell me more."

37:00 She was quite interested so I sent her up another book. She is very interested. This is what is happening now in this current generation.

**Any idea why that is.**

No I don't think I can. The first indication I had was on the 50th Anniversary of the Pacific War, VJ Day [Victory over Japan], the 50th Anniversary,

37:30 I was in Brisbane and they had a victory march all the troops together, 8th Division and whatever, they

did this march through Brisbane and the schools all gave their children the day off and they lined the streets. It wasn't a march it was a stroll they just

38:00 wanted to know everything they asked us so many questions.

**Do you think it is a story that hasn't been told well enough, in the years following the war?**

Probably, all though there were many books written. Maybe the older people read the books and not the young ones.

**Story telling is an important**

38:30 **part of this and it is understandable that you would not have wanted to tell stories but …**

Well, as you probably notice, the lack of education and without education I would have liked to have gone out and told young people, but I am just not qualified to do it, I am very limited in the use of words.

**I wouldn't say that at all, you seem to be doing a pretty good job.**

39:00 They are basic though. I am always reading words and reaching for the dictionary to find out what they mean.

# Tape 6

00:18 **Bill you were talking about your mates, is it Gov Blythe who was**

00:30 **stealing the petrol to sell to the Chinese and pretending it was for the steam roller, which of course ran on wood. How did the Japanese, did they know that they were having the petrol stolen?**

No. Provided he just pointed to the steamroller the guard on the gate was perfectly happy.

**What about their Quartermaster, he must have noticed that they were going through a bit more petrol than they seemed to be using?**

He just pointed to the steamroller and he drew his 4 gallons every morning. The Japanese are a very fixed

01:00 mind. The searches we had, they were told to look for pencils and paper because you weren't allowed to have them, you could 45 in the bottom of your bag and it didn't matter. They would look for pencil and paper and their mind went along those lines.

**You mentioned that a Japanese officer coming to complain about the theft of the petrol. Tell us about that.**

He came out to give a great story that there was too much petrol being stolen

01:30 at the end of his talk he got out back into his car at Selarang and he only got down the road a little bit and the car ran out of petrol. They milked it while he was giving his talk. Milking just went on the whole time. A car didn't dare stop. The Chinese wanted petrol and they paid good money for it.

**What were some of the other things people tried to steal?**

Anything they could get their hands on,

02:00 you could get your hands on and trade.

**If you sold something what would you buy with that money?**

In Selarang you could buy practically anything you wanted. It was such a huge camp.

**Did you have Chinese coming in and out selling things.**

No. Around the boundaries. Even when we went to Thailand the Thais would

02:30 pull up boats beside the base camps and sell you bananas. I had a friend, when I was operated on by Weary, a chap from New Guinea and he had book called 'The Seven Pillars of Wisdom' and he went over the wire [and sold it] that night and bought eggs for me with the money.

**You managed on two cups a day, on rice, so that**

03:00 **every now and then you would supplement it?**

Yes you would supplement it, yes.

**Is that something that might happen daily or might it be once a week?**

No not that frequent. It happened spasmodically.

**Did you dream about other types of food.**

Very much so. I mentioned yesterday Bubble and Squeak. I craved for it.

03:30 We did find other things to substitute. One working party was called a transport working party, which the Japs formed with most Anti-Tank chaps. 'Ali Baba and the 40 Thieves', they had that many secret compartments on the trucks. They were carting food and all sorts of things from the wharves. I have even heard

04:00 A spare tyre was full of food and they used to come back to the camp of a night and toss up what they would have for dinner. A wide choice. They had so much food that when we went back to Changi in 1942 we had a real Christmas lunch with scrounged food. Fully non-rice meal.

**What is your attitude to rice now?**

04:30 I love it because the quality is much better than what we had.

**What about after the war when you came back to Australia could you eat rice then?**

I think I could. I don't think I just turned against it. Because it was a different situation we were eating it under. Now I love a meal of rice. I always say to Zelma

05:00 every time we go through the supermarket and there is these bags of rice, 10 kg, I say, "Please let me buy a bag of rice." Just to go back when I didn't have any. I think what a price would have I got for 10 kg of rice.

**Just to clarify one thing, you were part of D Force, how many men were in**

05:30 **D Force?**

D Force I couldn't give you the exact number.

**F Force had…**

7,000. 3,904 I think was the figure that arrive back in Changi and they were just total wrecks.

**You have written down some stories we need to get you to talk about, tell us about**

06:00 **the fighters?**

The fighters was a wonderful morale boost. In 44 in the base camp at Chungkai, there was all this filling in our day and all of a sudden came over the fence these 6 fighters [aircraft] and they flew down between the huts and up again and they were waiving to us and we were waiving back. At the end this little Nip dived into a trench and

06:30 he had his feet sticking up in the air. They gave us a wonderful flying exhibition for a good 10 minutes.

**These were British or American?**

British fighters they were. We thought if there is fighters they are in close range because we heard the heavy stuff coming. That lifted our morale terrifically.

07:00 They were off carriers it was false. It was a wonderful 10 minutes just to see them. When they were finished this little Nip got out of his trench I said, "Nippon [Japanese] plane", he said, "No Nippon plane" and went bang with his rifle. I remember those lucky buggars, they are having a good meal now.

07:30 **Was that the only time you saw any evidence of your own troops.**

Yes it would be.

**You said you heard.**

You could hear the heavy bombers. In the early days during the night, but as the war grew on and the Jap positions got less there they came in the day time. I always remember one camp there, there was

08:00 one little Tiger Moth on a soup can. He had a little tiny moth the bombers would come over and he would take off. He would start to wind up but he wouldn't get very far. It was humorous to see him going up after these big liberators. I remember one day we heard a burst of machine gun fire just for the fun of it, but he came back.

08:30 **Tell us about its in the bag.**

Its in the bag is another very funny story. The Japanese didn't understand slang. They spoke perfect English, but if you spoke slang they were lost. Hence the pamphlet, the dropped pamphlets to us shortly before the war ended, maybe 3 or 4 months, 'cheer up boys, it's in the bag'. They wanted to know what bag and what was in it. They searched the camp looking for this bag. A couple of days later a chap out

of the 2/19th

09:00 from New South Wales, where he got it from I do not know, but he had a sugar bag he climbed the tallest tree in the camp and tied the bag up on top of the tree. The next day the Nips found the bag. Up the tree they went. It was incredible to think such a little pamphlet with such few words would cause so much trouble.

**Were there many pamphlets dropped?**

Quite a few towards the end, yes.

09:30 Unless they were to us, most of them were in Thai the wording on them. They focused on MacArthur [Douglas MacArthur, American general] and different people. More or less for the benefit of the Thais, but they would spray them over us as well.

**Do you think that they knew you were there then?**

Yes they knew where we were, but our camps weren't marked, which was one of the atrocities by the Japs.

10:00 There was one camp very near to a big railway siding they got that siding, but they took quite a few Dutch prisoners with them. The Dutch started to run and they had scatter bombs, and they took them. We weren't allowed to have a Red Cross or anything over our camps. In most cases it appeared that they did know

10:30 our camps. They did machine gun a train full of prisoners by mistake. I was not sure what the casualties were.

**One thing which can fascinate people just one of the minutia of daily life,**

11:00 **is about what do you do when you go to the toilet. You said you were talking to some school girls?**

We were giving a talk and he had some cartoons and one of the cartoons showed a POW walking along with a bunch of leaves and there was a branch in his hand. The little children asked what the leaves were for

11:30 and we had to delicately explain that we didn't have toilet paper. We had to use the leaves. That used to create a problem when you moved into a camp you had plenty of leaves, after you had been there for three months you ran out of leaves and then it developed down to sticks. Terrible situation.

**Especially I suppose with a lot of people having dysentery?**

Shocking situation. I mean you just don't think about it. We had gone 3½ years without toilet paper.

12:00 **What was toilet paper like in Australia before the war?**

Was it coarse or fine, 3 ply or 5 ply?

**I don't know, was it what we have today, a roll of toilet paper?**

Yes.

**I just remember in a public toilet, even 20, 30 years ago, it would just be sheets of newspaper.**

I think most had the old phone book

12:30 hanging behind the door. That was quite common. Where I was working in the China and Glass there was a little Italian man and he spent all his spare time cutting the phone books up into little squares for that purpose.

**Better than a bunch of leaves.**

My word.

**Tell us about the colonial boys?**

13:00 Yes. This is before the war and I went on leave down in Singapore and I went into a Red Cross hut for a cup of tea and a biscuit. This English lady said to me, "What are you colonials doing here? We can manage quite well on our own." I would love to bump into her now and say, "How did you get on?" What are you colonials doing here? The English attitude.

13:30 **How did you adjust to the climate? Obviously it is very different from Australia, monsoonal rains.**

It is incredible when you think of it. We were young, but we didn't seem to suffer with dehydration like we should have done. I went to Singapore last year and was caught without water

14:00 and I was in a bit of trouble. We only had our one water bottle we took to work with us because you

couldn’t drink anything, it had to be boiled water and how we managed on one bottle of water working in that heat, working hard and sweating and not dehydrating, I have never ever found out. Perhaps the doctors can answer that, but I certainly can’t.

14:30 **What about in your tent in the rain?**

In the tent in the monsoon season. We were given tents but not flies which is 15 inch above the tent and of course the monsoon rain just came straight through. We never right through the monsoon season did we ever sleep on a dry rice bag. We only had rice bags to sleep on on bamboo slats and we were roughly

15:00 20 or so to a tent. We were crammed into the tents, so you slept close together. We just slept on those rice bags, completely exhausted so it didn’t mean a thing. We were never dry because the tents leaked, it just came through. That was another problem we had with the monsoon season. It was a dreadful time, the conditions

15:30 were unbelievable.

**What were the Japanese living in?**

They were living in tents, but they did have flies.

**Tell us about the duck.**

The duck story is in that book there. I went down to the toilet these days, ‘the bog holes’ as we used to call it,

16:00 they were just a mass of maggots. I got a handful of maggots and I walked passed the Japanese duck pond and just dropped this bit of maggots as I went, and this old duck came waddling out and I kept walking until I got down near a bush, he came troddling along, I put both hands around his neck and held tight so he couldn’t squawk. The difficulty with that situation was getting rid of the feathers, we plucked him in a bucket with some clothes on top.

16:30 The feathers was our problem, anyway we had duck. There were a few ducks went off out of that pond, but the Japs they had a roll call every now and then they couldn’t work out where they were going.

**Could have made a feather pillo?**

Survival was the root of all evil as far as

17:00 we were concerned. There could be many stories like that.

**You had a mate, Rory.**

Rory was a chap from Numurkah, he wasn’t one of the Numurkah mob, but he did come from Numurkah, he was a very good artist and we had this British colonel, he detested Australians, he hated Australians, so it came

17:30 around about Christmas time and Rory had a nice piece of cardboard, I don’t know where he got it. He drew a beautiful bronzed Anzac standing up with a slouch hat a perfect specimen and he wrote on it, “Yes sir you too could be a man like that if you tried.” I had the job of crawling up to his tent at midnight and pinning it on his bed. It caused a lot of heated coverage at that.

18:00 Four of us got him and threw him in the lake in the duck pond. Two on his legs and two on his arms and in he went. A dreadful man, he detested Australians.

**You didn’t fear any reprisal for throwing a British officer in a pond.**

There was no action about it. He might have caught up with us after the war and he could have his say then. To make matters worse he had a bucket, so I knocked that off while we were there so we had a bucket each.

18:30 You had a bucket, a kerosene tin and we had plumbers with us could cut them in half without proper tools and tap a little bottom on them and make two buckets out of one.

**What did you use the bucket for.**

Water. In the base camps. It didn’t work, because there was no time for anything out on the work camps it was work, work, work. In the base camps you needed water to have a wash

19:00 or something like that. We had a wash but no towels of course.

**What I would like to ask you about the civilian population in Thailand. I know that you said you had quite a lot to do with the Chinese when you were in Singapore,**

19:30 **once you got up into Thailand did you have anything to do with the civilians?**

In the base camps again, the work camps were a different story we didn’t come into contact whatsoever. In the base camps the Thai people were very good to us they used to try and sneak things into us and

they were also prepared to trade anything

20:00 you would want to sell or had to sell in desperation. People would hand onto a ring or something like that for as long as they possibly could, they had to sell it to buy some food. A lot of trading went on but the Thais were quite descent people, we got on fairly well with them.

**Where was the base camp located near a village or...**

Yes often it was near a village. The

20:30 Compton the main base camp at the end it was quite a big town and Camp Burie was another one, a base camp near a town. Failing that the camp Tamarkan, Chungkai and Tarsau were on the river and the traders came along in their boats as they still do today loaded up with bananas and that sort of thing. Mainly bananas.

**When you were with the working party how long did it take you to get up**

21:00 **to where you were working?**

We sort of went, when we left Singapore we were more or less directed straight to work camps and then the base camps later on. There had been a base camp at Kanchanaburi and also at Tarsau which had been established by parties before us and they were all English but that was in 42.

21:30 In 43 that work had been done. They had also built the line [railway line] in the flat country from Ban Pong up to Kanchanaburi . That was the easy part of the line that was established by the time the Australians got there.

**So when you went back from the working party from the base camp, you would be marching back?**

Marching back, sometimes we went by boat

22:00 if it was a fair distance. I recall one camp I was in I think it was Chungkai, every time there was a boat loads of the sick coming back from down the river you would always go down the river bank and see if you could recognise somebody or knew somebody and I remember they just used to throw them off the boat onto the riverbank, quite often in the mud. I was stepping over these chaps trying to see if I knew anybody and I heard,

22:30 “Don’t you know me Bill?” I said, “My God, Pat Barrington, I recognised your voice.” I didn’t recognise him he was a skeleton, but as soon as he spoke I knew his voice.

**Did you stop and were you able to talk to him?**

Yes. I probably managed to scrounge some rice or something for him, I don’t know.

**Was he there for very long?**

They were there for quite some time. He eventually

23:00 built himself up he came home and he was playing golf some 10 years ago and dropped dead on the golf course. He gave me a photo of the bank [embankment] we built at Wampo and he said, “Bill anybody who survived Wampo and K3 deserved to have a game of golf.” It is ironic that he died on the golf course.

**The K3 you mentioned you actually returned to K3.**

In 91 and 93 we went back up.

**Tell me about that experience how did that happen?**

You never hear a K3 man say ‘Hellfire Pass’, You will often hear people say Hellfire Pass, you know straight away they weren’t there, it was K3, it always was and always will be. To others

24:00 that is all, they would never know that. Zelma and I were doing a trip through Asia we went to Hong Kong, Beijing, Singapore, Bangkok, and when I was in Bangkok I took the opportunity of getting up to K3 and having a look at it.

**How did you get up there?**

Had trouble. We found a car driver in Bangkok who,

24:30 ‘oh yes’ he knew where it was. He took us as far as Kanchanaburi and he put us on a boat I didn’t know where we were going to finish but we did finish at an old camp called Chungkai one of the base camps. It was no longer there, but the cemetery was there, beautifully kept, because they were all English in that cemetery and I said no, he showed me this cutting, so he went and got back into his car and we headed off towards K3

25:00 and we got up there near a village and he called in and he got directions and we finished up at K3. It was traumatic going back for the first time. I just didn’t realise the size and the fact of how we did 12

weeks without proper tools very difficult. I took a lot of photos that trip and when I got back to Singapore

25:30 I took them to the pharmacy in the hotel to have them developed and I got a black film back. We went back in 93 and we had two couples. We had three cameras and a video and we made sure of it.

**What is there now?**

It is a main tourist for Thailand. Thailand are doing very well out of it.

**When you say tourist attraction?**

Bus loads of people go up

26:00 there all the time.

**Because of the Railway, because of the prisoners of war?**

K3 or Hellfire, they have emphasised it as a tourist centre. They have built a museum there with bits and pieces of the POW life.

**Was there anything that you recognised?**

The museum wasn't there, it has just been completed. I think John Howard [Australian Prime Minister] opened it on one of his trips.

26:30 They did have a little museum in a hut similar to the huts we lived in on the base camps. That was full of sketches by different artists and they were very true to life. I enjoyed going through there in 91.

**Why did they call it Hellfire Pass?**

I don't know where the media got that name from. Somebody named it.

27:00 I must find out, I will ask questions.

**It is pretty dramatic I suppose, compared with K3?**

Yes. It had to be the toughest job on the line it was an enormous job.

**Was that where you worked 38 hours straight.**

No. It was the Wampo viaduct to finish that. We were tired by the time we finished that.

27:30 We were fit when we started and to go there, straight from there, to K3 made matters a lot worse.

**Tell me about that time working 38 hours straight. When did you start? You started one morning, did you realise you were going to have to keep working for 38 hours?**

No we just went out on a normal days work knowing that we were getting close to the finish

28:00 but they kept us working they didn't stop us. We had to keep going. Then night time came and they lit bamboo lights and we just kept going all night and part of the next day until we got to that period of time. I cannot remember whether they did bring out rice for us, they probably did I would think. I would imagine it was organised for our

28:30 group to bring rice out to the site.

**How did you manage to stay awake?**

Beltings. They stood in line to you carting the dirt up to the embankment in bags and all the way up with a bamboo pole and would just smash you across the back as you kept going. You couldn't fall asleep.

**That kept you awake I am sure. On that topic about the Japanese**

29:00 **obviously as jailers, they behaved very cruelly. What was your view of the Japanese as a soldier?**

I don't think you could deny they were fanatics. I mean to die for the Emperor was a great honour. They didn't show fear.

**The Japanese soldier was a brave soldier in your estimation?**

I would say that, I would say that would be a general opinion.

29:30 **What about their professional standards in terms of their gear and their tactics.**

Their gear was very basic. Before the war we were told they all had thick horn rimmed glasses, couldn't see and their aircraft were obsolete, their bullets were so small if you got hit you just dropped the main baker tablet in

30:00 and that stopped infection. The propaganda was incredible.

**Who told you all those things?**

Our officers, the command.

**When you realised this wasn't true?**

Too late. They wore their shoes made of rubber and canvas and they had a slit in the toe so that they could get hold of the tree branches. They would

30:30 be great in the trees. They used to climb trees. The fellow who wrote that book, I think it was the same day I almost got hit, he got hit by the Japanese by firing from a tree and it was only about a couple of hours before the finish we had been, myself and another party we had been sent to an area where the Japs had already been through it, but there was a burnt out Bren gun [anti aircraft gun] carrier there and I was standing there looking at it

31:00 and ping, he had a shot and missed my head by no more than 6 inches, the bullet just hit the metal and fell to the ground. I looked up in the tree and I picked the thickest part of the foliage and I put 5 shots in there, but he didn't fall. I didn't have a look just the same. I nearly met my end 3 times in that one

31:30 night,

**Tell me about the other two times?**

The other time we were out in the open on the big road and this plane came from nowhere and he just came over the tree tops and I looked up and I actually saw him looking down the sights at us, the rear gunner and he opened up and he did a big .5,

32:00 big ones for the aircraft and he cut the road in half about 2 feet from us and she was a mess.

**Did anyone get hit?**

No, we were all missed. He missed us all I had a quick shot at him, a reaction. Actually we could see him looking down the sights. There was another one, I can't think

32:30 of it, I know there were 3.

**It might come back to you.**

I know on the last day, I was begging for a smoke, I wanted to have a smoke badly. But you couldn't have a smoke because they would have spotted the smoke and you would have you head blown off. We couldn't have one at night time either. When the surrender came the first thing I did was light a cigarette.

**When you came back from Singapore did you follow**

33:00 **the war crimes trials at all, the trials of the Japanese?**

I don't believe, looking back, there was a lot published about them although we were keen to read anything we could. There was some of the really bad ones we knew did. There was one case when we went down to Bangkok

33:30 at Competon there was a bad Nip he was nicknamed 'Dillinger', he shot 3 of our chaps after the war had finished, he shot them in the head. They brought him down to Bangkok with them and they had, in the camp at that stage, the Chinese Chamber of Commerce and we were camped there and they locked him in a room there and they got the Gurkhas to come in

34:00 and pick him up. The little Gurkhas they were just so good. There was 12 of them came on an open truck with 6 on each side, they got out of the truck as one person and disappeared into the gardens out of sight they were just so professional. Two of them went in and got him and brought him back and they took him away so I don't think he had much life after that. That was the end of him.

**How did you find out about him**

34:30 **shooting these 3 Australians?**

The people who brought him down told the story.

**They were in a camp?**

Yes in a camp.

**Just shot them after the surrender.**

Three days after I think it was. They nicknamed him Dillinger.

**A lot of them had nicknames didn't they?**

Yes.

**What kind of nicknames?**

I would love to, but I just can't remember all of them now.

35:00 'The Silver Bullet'. He was hit in China and he had it taken out and silver plated and he had it hanging around his neck.

**The war crimes trials after they were over, did you go back and look at any of the material, did you read anything in the paper**

35:30 **did you try and keep up with whether the guards you knew had actually been punished and what happened to them after the war?**

No I don't think I did actually notice any particular person. There was one person we would have loved to have was Battledong, I mentioned at K3 the most dreadful man of all time.

**Was he the one with the 9 inch wrench.**

15 inch

36:00 and I would love to know what happened to him. We left K3 and he went on somewhere else I certainly hope he was hung if somebody caught up with him.

**I notice you have got a couple of photos of Japanese guards and I wonder where you got them from?**

The 'Storm Trooper' and the 'Mad Mongrel'.

**The Mad Mongrel was one of your guards,**

36:30 **they were both guards at your camp?**

Yes they were on the line. Somebody gave me those photos. I think a lady found them in her husband's things a year after he passed away.

**There was just a story that you told me earlier this morning, back to your childhood in Perth when you were homeless where you remembered…**

Yes I remembered,

37:00 that one of the lady there gave me a camp stretcher and held it on the verandah for me. I stayed there for quite a few nights. I remember in the front of the house was a big railway cutting and I used to fill in my day playing on the side of the railway tracks and watch the trains go by.

37:30 **Did people feed you from time to time?**

I suppose, I mean there must have been kind ones I would think. At that age probably did draw attention.

**You have been hungry often in your life Bill?**

Haven't I. I don't intend to be any more.

# Tape 7

00:18 **You just mentioned there was an issue with blasting, tell me about that?**

It was a big operation the hammer and tap men would

00:30 have to drill holes about 1 metre long and then the charges would be put in, the Nips would give somebody a cigarette and you would have to go along and light each fuse, and count the fuse as you lit it and run like billy to get out of the cutting. Everybody got out of the cutting because before you started lighting the fuses. There were pieces of rock did fly, quite a distance in some cases.

01:00 **Those sticks of dynamite, just light.**

They were dropped into the hole that has been tapped and you light the fuse and you count the fuses, you light and then count the explosions.

**How many fuses were set?**

I suppose you could say 25 or 30.

**By the time you get to the end of the line**

01:30 **how much time did you have?**

Not a lot of time you had to act very quickly. I only got that job once unfortunately, I didn't want to do it again. I just happened to get detailed one day. I nearly came to grief there, ran along the cutting, and down I went and Beri Beri hit me and I just laid on the ground and put my arms over my head, not that would have done much good

02:00 and just hoped and not one piece hit me. I eventually got up and got away and I did lose count of the explosions. You had to be very careful of that because if a fuse was late going off you could go back and start working and it would be a disaster. The Nips were very strict on that to make sure every charge had gone off. One

02:30 day another fellow was a fair way from the cutting, from the blast, at the finish and he just fell over, we were sitting talking and he just collapsed. What had happened a piece of rock had come up and went past his head and hit him on the elbow and he passed out. Just the shock of it.

03:00 He came to again, just the sort of things that could happen.

**Very hazardous.**

Yes. When all that rock was blasted then I was in the parties that had to clean it out and depending on the size of the rocks. There were some small pieces, some big pieces and some very big pieces and the guards, Japs would say one man one, or two man one

03:30 and if it was a very big rock three man one. It took one man a big enough size, but then if one man couldn't shift it the Nip would always have to show us how big the Japanese were and he would get a crow bar and start pushing it and we would eventually get it over the edge. It was big job clearing up the rock and making the floor clean again for the

04:00 next lot and so it went on day in day out. I still don't remember I have often asked whether we started from the top and came down or whether we came in from each end, I can't recall. We got there in 12 weeks.

**A supreme effort required.**

It certainly was.

**Bill before**

04:30 **we come to the end of this I would like to give you the opportunity to put anything else any of your experiences on record anything you would like to say about your experiences, which are obviously unique, is there anything that you would like to put on the tape today?**

I think I have just exhausted my memory,

05:00 it is strange, over time little things come to you, you wish that it could happen at this time.

**INTERVIEW ENDS**