Australians at War Film Archive

Saul Spielman - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:40 **OK, Saul. Yeah, if we can just start off hearing about your childhood days the twenties and thirties that'd be great if we could.**

Yes, well, I lived in Middle Park on Beaconsfield Parade, which was seaside lovely seaside resort

01:00 and went to Middle Park Central School. The Depression years did hit pretty heavily. My father went out of business and the family struggled for a while but his main bent in life was racehorses. He

01:30 operated as an SP [Starting Price] Bookmaker, if you know what that terminology is. And I guess that's mainly where the income was derived, well, there was nothing else. It was very hard for my mother. Life in those days was pretty dramatic but with the

02:00 number of young people about I had a pretty happy life really. I remember my father - excuse me -

02:30 I remember him catching walking to the city to save a thrupenny [three pence] here tram fare. And everything was save along the line but again my life as far as schooling and

03:00 the seaside was a very happy one. Being so close to the beach I was very involved with the McGregor Street Life Saving Club. I participated a lot at school in sport. I was most keen in sport. I wasn't an academic really

03:30 and whenever somebody bounced a ball, I was to be found helping. I played in the school football team and the cricket team. I swam with the school in the Central School Sports. I participated in the athletics. I

04:00 in the in the athletics I was the long jump champion of the Central Schools, I think I was 14. Life at home wasn't easy. My father had left England as a very young person and had a big chip on his shoulder,

04:30 and he didn't take any particular interest in my schoolwork. He had a phenomenal brain but any arithmetical problems that I had from school, he'd give me the answer but couldn't tell me how, how I could work it out, so I was virtually on my own. Life at Middle Park Central School was wonderful.

05:00 The community, as I've said before the community was a tremendous young group of young people around that area. And we enjoyed everything at the school. I finished at Merit Certificate. I didn't go on. I was just about 15 when I left school.

Can you tell us a little bit about your mother?

Yes.

05:30 She was a very soft person, sorry…

06:00 **We can stop the tape if you like?**

Yes if you would. So wonderful and did every for me. Made all my clothes. Was a wonderful knitter and knitted jumpers for me and other kids at the school.

06:30 Without her I think, or I don't think life would've been very difficult. She was admired by everybody. She was far too soft a person for my father,

07:00 but that was the life she had to put up with I guess. Being an only child she just doted on me. But we enjoyed life together that's the main thing.

So you sort of immersed yourself in your sports and your schooling

07:30 **and you said you finished school at 15?**

At 15, yes.

And where did you go from there?

Well I went to work at a company called Welch Margetson who were in at the corner of Latrobe and Swanson Street. They were an old English company manufacturing men's shirts and ties and in particular, white dress

08:00 shirts and waist coats and ties. And I had a very good life. They were wonderful people. I was the office boy and was really spoilt by the staff there. It was during my work there that I decided I, I'd be better of spending a lot more time away from home.

08:30 Particularly evenings when I could please myself with what I did and how I did things. And decided because one of my schoolmates was already a cadet at in Signals that I'd do something about that. And in February '37 I decided to take myself off, and the Signals Depot was

09:00 at Albert Park just outside the old South Melbourne Football Ground. Caught the tram down there and sat for an hour and a half trying to decide whether I'd wait any longer or whether I'd go. But I waited and was given the treatment. Joined the cadets. They found because of my height and

09:30 thin stature that they were battling to find clothes to fit me. If the trousers were long enough in the leg they were far too wide in the waist. But finally we got a uniform together and I stayed with the cadets until '39. I moved up the military scale. I was a lance corporal then a corporal then a sergeant in the cadets. But you couldn't carry that,

10:00 those stripes into the into the Militia. The Militia was a voluntary group formed met two nights a week at the at the depot. And joining the Militia I lost my stripes. Became a signalman again. The depots, the meetings on a Tuesday and a Thursday night were

10:30 wonderful because I learnt Morse Code and I learnt about laying line and wireless sets. It was another education for me. Apart from the friendships that I formed down there. There were no camps at those stage at that stage, but

11:00 later in, oh there was really. There was a camp in '37 at Fort Franklin, which is Portsea. That was the first camp that I ever attended. It was a lot of fun and again it was rifle drill and marching and learning the intricacies of the army and how to be obedient.

11:30 But very enjoyable. From '37 onto '39, I remained as part of 3rd Division Signals which was under command of Colonel Simpson as he was then. He later became the commanding officer in chief of the South Pacific area of signals as a general.

12:00 **Other than the fact that you had a friend that was doing signals when as a, as a cadet were there other reason why you took an interest in that in that area?**

Yes. I thought the fellas that I'd seen about in uniform were quite interesting and that the uniform attracted me. And I felt that I could further my

12:30 education by being part of a military group. Apart from that I don't know that anything else fired my imagination. But the uniform definitely was an attraction. The uniform in those days was breeches, leggings, stirrups, not stirrups, spurs. And a navy blue jacket with brass buttons.

13:00 Slouch hat. We wore a piece called a bandolier which ran from the left shoulder down to the right side and the bandolier had pockets in it that carried the ammunition. Slouch hat and a cap for other occasions. And for dress wear was the same tunic top with navy blue long navy blue pants with a red stripe down the side. So it was quite

13:30 an attraction to a young bloke.

What knowledge did you have of the Great War? Had your anyone in your family people close to you had any involvement there?

No. The only contact I'd had regarding the Great War is my grandfather had a property down at Caromine [Karomin?] and the people next door, he was a prisoner of war in the Great War

14:00 and the few occasions that we holidayed down there I used to enjoy listening to this Mr Mossop tell his stories about when he was a prisoner of war. But apart from that, I didn't take a great interest. Backtracking a little bit. When I worked at Welch Margetson's, the man in the in the dispatch area was a First World War veteran and he took a great interest in me

14:30 and used to tell me stories of the Great War and his participation. And he hammered into me the fact that if ever the war ever took place and I was a participant, that when it was all over I didn't just come home and say, "Well that's it." Forget about it, as the Diggers did in the First [World] War. And then of course when they started to get illnesses it was all too late. The repatriation people didn't

15:00 want to know them. So George Vestros said to me, “You make sure you take yourself off when you are discharged and get assistance from the Repatriation Department.”

Saul are you able to tell us what Melbourne was like at that time we’re talking, about the mid-30s?

Yeah, Melbourne was a very, for me it was a

15:30 very interesting spot because as a clerk, a junior clerk with the company, I moved about the city a lot. I was sent on lots of errands and I knew the city eventually like the back of my hand. All the little shortcuts and particular spots. The shot tower that was just across the way that’s

16:00 part of Daimaru now or as it was a very interesting spot. I remember when the bad fires in the, it was January or February, I had to go out with notices to the retailers around the town and the bitumen on that day was sticking to my

16:30 my shoes. It was so hot. I used to take the monthly statements around and in those days, Henry Buck’s was situated on the corner of Swanson and Collins Streets. And having been there and delivered their statement I then proceeded to the corner of Collins Street and

17:00 Swanson and there was a large grate there to take the excess water away and standing with all these statements I dropped them and half of them fell down the grate. And I just wondered how the company would accept this but I was forgiven. Not a lot of people about, there were. We right to continue?

Yeah, yeah…

Lots of interesting menswear stores in

17:30 which I took particular interest. Thelwool’s and Kemp’s and are two that I remember particularly. Thelwool’s were in Collins Street and Kemp’s were just near the corner of Collins and Swanson. But the big Damon’s, I think were the big cigarette company on that corner there. But I used to

18:00 be entrusted with the bank every now so often which was a trip down Latrobe Street to Elizabeth Street. The, I think it was the ANZ [Australia and New Zealand] Bank or one a those on the corner that I used to go to, but I distinctly remember going taking one day and I had to go down to the Swanson Flinders Street Railway Station to deliver something and I had the bank

18:30 in a wallet under my arm and as I left the station a gentleman stopped me and wanted to talk to me and I took off like a rabbit because I had all this bank under my arm. And made it back to the ANZ Bank and back to the company. But no, it was an interesting time moving about the city and seeing the population.

It sounds a bit like the worst of the Depression had

19:00 **had passed by that time?**

Yes, it didn’t have a great affect on me really because I was well fed at home, and except for the fact that I knew my father had lost his business, I was able, I was young enough to be able to play sport and enjoy the company of young people, so in effect it

19:30 it didn’t have a lot to worry me really. I didn’t think about it as much as I guess the people in Collingwood and Richmond that were very badly affected by that aspect. No, I can’t think of anything.

20:00 **How important was religion to you growing up at that time?**

My father came from a very religious family and I think that’s why he got away from home. He was not religious at all and my mother took up the religion and she was the one that taught me what I knew in the early days. On top of that,

20:30 one of the families in the immediate area in Middle Park by the name of Smith. I became very friendly with them and she virtually became a second mother to me. And they were always there to take me to religious instruction on a Sunday. At that stage we lived in Clarendon Street, South

21:00 Melbourne. And Sam Smith was, this great Austin vehicle used to pick up lots a kids on the way and me in particular at the corner of Clarendon and I’ve forgotten the name of. Just near the South Melbourne Football Ground anyway. He used to pick me up and take me up to the synagogue for religious instruction. I

21:30 wasn’t very enamoured with it all because again sport featured prominently in my mind. And particularly at school they used to have a religious instruction, a Jewish woman would come after school was over and that was not good as far as I was concerned. So I was very disinterested. I could think of better things to do than sit down and listen to Jewish instruction.

22:00 But I followed Judaism right through, and whilst I’m not religious really, I think religion’s in your heart anyway. But no, I am Jewish and my family is.

How much prejudice was there in those days?

Not a lot. Every now and so often the kids'd come out with something. But it

22:30 sort of didn't rub off. It didn't mean much at all. No there was there was nothing really that was nasty at all at that stage.

You talked about your love of sports. What was your favourite sport?

Bit hard to define. Well, I liked

23:00 I liked cricket very much. I was the wicket keeper for the school and I followed that on in later life. But I enjoyed football very much. Swimming was outstanding as far as I was concerned. Being at Middle Park we went down once a week to swim at Stubbs's Baths on the foreshore and being part of the Lifesaving Club, I

23:30 spent all the hours I could and I lived on the beach whenever the opportunity was there. So swimming was predominant. I managed to get Surf Lifesaving Medallion and (interruption)

OK, we can continue

Also another Surf Medallion and I received an award from the school for

24:00 swimming so that played a predominant part. I participated in all the sports. The Central School sports.

As someone whose sort of a bit of a cricket and footy fan can how has the game how have those games changed do you think? How have they

Oh tremendously. In particular football. We used to play our games in Albert Park. Walk down from

24:30 the school to the park and play out matches down there. And I remember a player coming across from Western Australia by the name of John Leonard and he finished up coaching South Melbourne to their only premiership. But what stuck out in my mind was that when he first came down to the school

25:00 to talk to us, we found out that he could kick with either foot and that was something that we'd never heard of before. You were either a left footer or a right footer. So that that impressed me greatly. And the game was more individual. I don't suppose the name Bob Pratt would ring a bell with you but he was the leading goal kicker. He was the first one to kick 150 goals in a season. And

25:30 it was more an individual a pass from man to man. Beautiful kicking styles and overhead skills. Today's game is getting closer to Rugby as far as I'm concerned. Still a lot of skills. Much faster but I don't think I can improve on that.

What about

26:00 **your recreation in those days, your social life? How did you what did you do for fun?**

Well, we I guess we had more recreation than a lot of the kids today. We because you to create your own interest: a) We didn't have leather footballs so the packets of cigarettes or the outside area of the packet of the cigarette we used to stuff with

26:30 paper and kick around when we came home from school. We also used to sharpen a piece of wood. A short piece about six inches long. Sharp at both ends and with another stick you'd tip the end of that and it flew in the air and you'd hit it as far as you could and the further you hit it the more you scored. All these things were created by

27:00 yourself. Nighttimes we used to get down to the boat the Lifesaving Club and play lots of games. Form a chain with your head down between the fellas, legs in the front, and about six people back and then a person'd run and see how jump and see how far he could arrive up at the front.

27:30 Or you could jump as high as you could and make the team underneath collapse and this was all part of the fun that we had. Sundays was always a special day at the club. Was championships run by the club and we had some famous swimmers down there.

28:00 Trying to think of a name. Vockler, Gough Vockler was outstanding swimmer. Freestyle swimmer. He when I first went there was a very large diving board quite a distance out from the shore. But half way out there were two little platforms that were

28:30 25 metres apart and I could make it out to there. But Vockler took me out one day and said, "Well now, you can swim back in," and that was a big first in my as far as my swimming was concerned. I never looked back from then on. But the Sunday days were quite interesting because it was a competition

29:00 to see who was top of the club. We also had another interesting person whose name I can't remember but he used to swim every morning. I'd go over to the beach and run of a morning and he'd come over with his dog 'Boss'. Black and white bitzer. And he'd go out to the diving board and

29:30 the dog'd follow him and he'd dive off and the dog'd jump off and they'd swim across it which was about 200-meters to the baths and back again. And just after the war started after the Sixth Division had, had gone his dog went missing. And it was a, oh, some months later that he was

30:00 viewing a newsreel in one a the theatres and here was his dog with one of the units. They'd picked him up and take him taken him as a mascot. I can't remember his name. But that was an outstanding feature as far as my memory's concerned.

When did when did girls come into the equation?

Oh, very early in the piece.

30:30 Yeah, I had girlfriends at school. We used to go to the pictures. At that stage there in Albert Park there was the Kinema and at St Kilda was the Palais and we used to meet the girls. You'd never meet them outside because that was costly. You'd meet them inside to save a thrupenny bit or

31:00 whatever the fare was. But yes, I had a number of girlfriends and we used to there were dances, not regular ones at the school but they did have dances there. There were regular dances in the Catholic - I'm trying to think of the name of it - Catholic Church on the corner of Richardson

31:30 Street and Right Street. We, I attended there and had lots of fun there. The, that was a mixture of people from Albert Park and everywhere. Most of the ones at the school were school friends. But yes, a few, three, four, five or six girls that I was quite interested

32:00 in. Had a lot of fun at the dances and apart from that, didn't follow up after I left the school. It wasn't until I got home, oh I think I was married at the time when we first had a shop at East Preston, and one morning this lass came into the shop and said to me, "You're

32:30 Saul Spielman. I'm Jean McLeod." I don't think there were any others that. But there were several lived close by that within walking distance. We used to have a lot of a lot of fun.

What did courting involve in those days?

Oh, I don't remember because it didn't mean it didn't mean much.

33:00 I was I was too young, I think, and too silly I guess. But I wasn't mature enough to know what courting was. One of my big disasters was when I was - I'm jumping ahead a little bit here but - when I was commissioned when I was 19,

33:30 my uniform was made by Buckley and Nunn, who were in Bourke Street, and I collected the uniform on a Friday night. Went home to my parents on Beaconsfield Parade. There was a little bus used to run between Port Melbourne and St Kilda and I was stationed at that stage at the Caulfield Racecourse, but as I've said I've jumped ahead a little bit here.

34:00 But after I left my parents I got in bus and there were two young girls sitting up the front of the bus and I heard one of them say to the other, "There's a good sort down there." And the other one turned round and said, 'Yes, but he's only a kid." So that was a dampening feature for me. I thought, "You know, I'm lost. I haven't go much hope with girls."

Did you have any

34:30 **sense of what was happening in Europe at the time when obviously you were with the cadets – '30, sorry, it was '37 to '39 is that correct? 'Cause obviously there were rumblings in Europe?**

Yes, yes did and in the latter part nearer to '39 when I was in the Militia I was friendly with a family by the name of Trewavis. The son was at school with me. Used to go round

35:00 to his place evenings because his father then was an operator of a theatre in Flinders Street and he had a photographic set up in at the back a the house, and Trewavis and I used to go down there and develop print and develop films. And the father was adamant. He took me aside at one stage and said to me, "You've got to forget

35:30 about this army business. Britain are in heaps of trouble. They haven't got enough guns and if you're going to persist you're going to finish up just another…" What's the word I want? 'Dead person', that's not what I'm…

Casualty?

36:00 Another casualty. Yes that's right. So he tired very hard to get me to get out of the army and I was determined at that stage having proceeded to the Militia and enjoying every bit of it.

Can you tell us more about those days with the cadets? You said you learnt Morse and other things can you tell us a little bit more

Pardon?

Can you tell us a bit more about what you learnt

36:30 **when you were with the cadets?**

Yes. Well I did mention Morse Code. When I first when there I didn't know anything about Morse Code and I learnt Morse Code. I learnt how to connect cables together to give a line so that that you could operate a telephone and all about the innards of a telephone and

37:00 how they worked. I was introduced to the early wireless sets. Which are, I wasn't very keen on, it didn't fire my imagination operating wireless sets, although I lectured later on that. I think that the main thing was that you learnt to be part of an

37:30 organization and that you had to be part of the scene and, I'm lacking for words here, you had to submit to the wiles of the senior NCOs [Non-Commissioned Offers] and

38:00 and officers and by virtue of that you were learnt to be…I'm sorry, there's a particular word but I can't think of it. No, it's gone. The parades down there were,

38:30 you were had to be they were very strict with the parades and you had to learn your rifle drill and make sure that you conformed to the standards of that were set by the senior officers. There was a lot of marching and learning how to operate a 303 rifle,

39:00 which was the only armoury that was available at that stage. Particularly to signallers. I learnt to shoot down there. I had done some rabbit shooting as a as a boy with local people but they had a 20-metre rifle range with the 303 rifles which had a 22-inch bore and

39:30 I was very successful. Although when I first shot, the sergeant came up to me and said, "Why have you got that eye closed?" I said, "I thought that was the right one." He said, "Well, it is the wrong one but you've hit the target." Anyway, so…that I enjoyed very much. There was particular information required for office procedures

40:00 that became very pertinent later on because everything that came through from other units came through the Signal Office. So there had to be a particular procedure in handling messages and that was the one of the prime things.

Can you tell us what that procedure was?

Yes the Divisional Sections Office

40:30 or D-Section as you would know it. We called it Don-Section there were 78 personnel under two officers in that section and you had a number of telegraphic operators and the officer in charge was responsible for all the messages coming in from the divisional headquarters and also from the battalions

41:00 that were and brigades that were forward. So that your operators would receive messages per medium of a unit called the 'Fuller' phone. This piece of equipment was possibly the best piece of equipment the Australian government ever produced. The rest of it was really rubbish because they hadn't realised that we were going to have to work in

41:30 in areas like New Guinea with humidity so high, and whatever they developed in Australia was too heavy anyway and old fashioned and out of date. The first telephone unit was a Don-3, which had a Morse key on the top and voice piece to it. But coming back to the Signals Office the messages would come in

42:00 from Div [Division] Headquarters.

Tape 2

00:30 **Go ahead. OK we're back. We're rolling again Saul.**

Yes, well the Signals Office, it was quite a large organization with these Fuller phones and telephones. And one end was set aside for the dispatch riders and the other end the Signals Office was the A-Section or Wireless Section. So the officer

01:00 or sigo [signaller] in charge of the Office and his 2IC [Second In Command] of which I was the second in command, his responsibility to make sure all messages coming into the Signals office were dispatched. Handled immediately and dispatched as promptly as can be. So the messages would arrive at the Signals Office and the duty clerk would take control of them and it was my duty to see that they were handed on to

01:30 the operators and make sure that the operators dealt with those very promptly and. Also, of course during the course of the day you, you'd have a line fault and there were a group of linies [linemen] that were available to you straight away. So you'd have to dispatch the linies out to one of the units where the line had been broken and they

02:00 had to repair it. All information that would affect the divisional commander the Signals Office was responsible for. And during the course of the five and a half month campaign in New Guinea there was

no problem at all.

02:30 We had a group of operators. Again, I'm getting ahead, because we trained a lot of the operators at Seymour in 1930, 1940/41, but the group of operators that we eventually finished with were top notch operators. Several of them were from the PMG which it was known as in those days.

03:00 Post Mater General's Department. Two of whom were 35-word-a-minute operators. And to put that, or explain that to you it means that they could talk to you as I'm talking to you now and write the message at the same time. So they were brilliant. In the main top operators were around the 25 words a minute mark. The higher they got the

03:30 more pay, or we got increases in pay, but I'll deal with that later.

So can you tell us about the Fuller machine?

The Fuller phone.

Yeah the Fuller phone?

Yes the Fuller phone was designed in England by a gentleman obviously by the name of Fuller and it must have come to Australia. And I don't know who built it here but it hashed the signals. In other words when you sent

04:00 a Morse signal it hashed that signal so that nobody could break in and interpret the plain word message. The only person who could read it who had a Fuller phone at the other end would unravel the hashed message. The, on the message form there were groups of

04:30 of five letters when the message had been ciphered. So these were sent out in groups of five letters and, but in plain language the message was written just across the page and the operator would complete message. Fill in the time of he'd received it. Fill in the time of dispatch and receipt the other end. It

05:00 was the message ended with the signals 'ackar-ay-r-di-da-di-da-dit'. What else can I tell you?

What sorry, technically not that I'll probably understand, but 'hashing'. What does that involve technically?

Instead of speaking as we're speaking now, the message is cut up into pieces and you'd have letters floating all over the place. So

05:30 you couldn't interpret what that message was. So the Japanese couldn't understand what the message was if it was written in plain language.

So only the Fuller phone would do?

Only the phone operator would at the other end. So you're sending a message from Division to or particularly from brigade to the battalion, which was most important because they were the forward troops. And the

06:00 possibility of interception by the Japanese. This unit was paramount because it would break that signal up so that the Japanese operators couldn't understand what it was all about, and we felt that it was the best piece of equipment that was ever built for the for our cause anyway.

And what other technology you mentioned just telephone

06:30 **I mean. What other technology was there available to you during the war?**

Well, we obviously we had switchboards in the in the Signals Office. Telephones, Don-5s as they were called. Although the Don-3 was what we first had when we were about to be shipped overseas and then we were given these Don-5s that were built in a metal aluminium case that was as heavy as could be. And

07:00 they were pretty hopeless units. They had a Morse key on them and also a telephone connection, but they were about five or more of these in the signals office. One to the sig [signals] clerk. One to the sergeant in charge. One to the officer in charge. One to the dispatch riders and a further one on to the wireless section.

07:30 It wasn't until we got to Torokina that we were able to divest the Americans of some of their equipment that we got decent telephones. But again, I'm jumping way ahead.

That's OK. How skilled were you with Morse?

Not very. I was a 10-word a minute person, but I had so many other things to pick up.

08:00 Not many of the officers were, unless they were efficient early on, were good operators. I didn't have a need to and I'd a been to slow anyway.

Now just getting back to your days with the cadets pre-war. You were talking about the strict discipline involved there. Can you tell us a bit about how you personally responded to that?

Yes, I

08:30 accepted this very much because it gave me the possibility of moving ahead and I enjoyed the militarism of this strictness and realised straight away that the discipline was something that had to be foremost in your mind. It didn't matter how nasty the

09:00 Sergeants or the sar [sergeant] majors were there was a reason behind it. And without discipline you got nowhere. The army fell apart if you had no discipline. Although according to the, in the First War the Australian soldier was the most undisciplined person in the world. No discipline was very evident and I accepted it very much.

09:30 And it affected me later on when I was selected to go to officer training course in Casula in NSW. Because there I hit discipline head on. But as I said, I think I'm getting a little bit…

That's OK. I guess later the shoe was on the other foot. You were actually the one dishing out the discipline weren't you?

Yes, when

10:00 when I still went through the ranks. After I lost my ranking with the cadets I then became a lance corporal and a corporal and a sergeant in the Militia and yes then I had the opportunity to offer some discipline to fellows that that came in. Because we apart from the

10:30 the militia fellows that we that I associated with once the war had started and we moved to Seymour camp then we had an intake of 18 year olds, and that was when discipline really hit the forefront. Because they were fellows that a lot of them were not willing to accept discipline

11:00 at all. I remember particularly a fellow by the name of Francis Timothy Joseph Kirby that was at camp site 17 Seymour and he came in with this group of 18 year olds and he was going to beat the army. No matter what happened he was going to beat the beat the army. And there was we had a bugler operating at that stage obviously

11:30 for rising and finishing of the day and the bugler also learnt to play defaulters. Now, once the bugler played defaulters which could happen at any time of the day. If you were a defaulter, whatever you were doing you dropped and you had to be on parade within seconds. And Kirby thought he was going to beat this. But he found himself so many times on defaulters parade that finally

12:00 he realised that discipline was far better to accept than becoming a defaulter.

What sort of punishment would be metered out on those instances?

Parade for half an hour at the double, if you know what that means. It's just not marching. It's running up and down. And peeling potatoes. Washing out the

12:30 the showers and the toilets which wasn't a very savoury job. Yes, Kirby. He became a very good friend of mine, Frank Kirby, later on. No longer with us.

Do you remember where you were when war was declared?

Yes. I mentioned,

13:00 yes. I mentioned the Smith family they lived a couple of streets away from me in Middle Park. Sunday nights or Sundays was a regular family affair. We used to or the whole family assembled and I was considered part of the family, and we used to sit and listen to the radio. I can't remember the program but

13:30 it was some mad thing that we listened to avidly. And it was I don't know what time. My parents had gone out to friends in another direction. I knew where they were but when the news came over the radio that war had been declared, I decided to take off and

14:00 join my parents. I'm trying to think. Yeah. That wasn't far from my home. That was with a family by the name of Hyman and I don't think they realised what it was all about. You know the war had started so be it. It was a long way from home and it wasn't going to

14:30 affect us anyway and. But one thing that I must back track a little bit. With the cadets, Colonel Simpson used to address the parades before we started our training and he took us or presented himself this night and said, "I've got something to say to you fellas. You put your heads down and your bums

15:00 up and make sure you learn all you can about signals because those little yellow bastards up north are going to come here one day." I'm sorry I've jumped the…

You were talking that night war was declared and…

Oh yes. So yes my family we all went home

15:30 pardon me after that. But no the penny didn't drop really what was involved. I guess being part of the army, I thought, 'Oh, here's something. I might get a trip around the world." I don't know what came

into my mind. But Shirl [Shirley],

16:00 really nothing was further from my thoughts that that I was going to be sent overseas or anything at that stage. Or I'd volunteer to go overseas.

So what was the next step? You were with the Cadets.

Well, I joined in '39 when I was old enough, I joined the Militia which was a volunteer group of fellows and it was meeting at Albert Park at that stage was the 3rd

16:30 Division the 4th Division and the two Cavalry, 2nd Cavalry Divisions met on different nights. I joined and was accepted there. And then did a couple of camps to Seymour. Weekend camps and then 10-day camps and it progressed from there. They became monthly camps and then

17:00 full-time duty which was spent training at Seymour camp. Teaching the new individuals that had joined as different parts of what was expected of them and running exercises. Laying cables and have operators joining up phones and

17:30 operating phones and etcetera etcetera. But there was nothing realistic about war as far as we were concerned at that stage. It wasn't until later in the piece in '42 when there were big exercises carried out. Mainly because they'd suddenly realised that fighting a war in the islands would be vastly different to fighting in the Middle

18:00 East.

How did you balance that with your work?

I got I had no problem with that. In actual fact, I was selected to attend a course at Nagambie when I was working at Buckley and Nunn's and a gentleman who was in charge of the menswear department by name of Charlie Whitelaw,

18:30 he was a First War veteran, and I went to Charlie with this note and said to him, "I've been selected to go to this training course at Nagambie." And he just said to me, "Well go. You'll get, I'll give you leave." So there was no problem getting leave. That was only a short fortnight course, so it wasn't too bad.

19:00 **So what was the mood at that time? Once war had started and you so war was declared then you joined the Militia not long after. Is that correct?**

Yes. No, no, no, I'm sorry. I joined the Militia in '39, in February '39, as soon as I was over. Soon as I turned 18. The mood was

19:30 there was an urgency for people to join the AIF [Australian Imperial Force] but of course at that stage my parents wouldn't give permission and I was too young anyway. It wasn't until later on that I was most anxious to get overseas. Quite a

20:00 number of my friends that were with me in '39, much older people, they'd been part of the 3rd Division Signals they joined the 8th Division when it was formed. Myself and a fellow by the name of Luxton, we decided we'd

20:30 try and join the 8th Division, but Luxton's father was brigadier and he was in charge of one of the recruiting depots and he told us to run away. We were just boys. Can I just blow my nose?

Yeah sure. We'll stop tape for a second. OK, so sorry, you're talking about you and your friend Luxton.

Yes, well, he told us to run away, we were we weren't required, and that was good fortune for us because

21:00 8th Division Signals, as you may recall, were taken prisoners of war in Burma [actually Malaya]. So it was a good move by Brigadier Luxton. But Jim Luxton and I became firm friends. During 1940, I think I was selected to

21:30 attend an officer training course at Casula in NSW and Luxton and a fella by the name of Wheelan. Bill Wheelan, the three of us were selected to go to this course. It was a three-month training course and I mentioned before to you how I ran head on into discipline. Well this was

22:00 discipline at its utmost. The instructors there were permanent army sar majors and they really made life difficult. But it was all for a purpose to train you to make sure that the troops under you were eventually would respond to the treatment that you were giving them. But it was a most interesting course. I qualified.

22:30 I learnt to ride a motorcycle there. The road into Casula was about a mile long and dead flat and training this day was riding motorcycles and the RSM [Regimental Sergeant Major] said to me, "Spielman, it's your turn. You ride a motorcycle." And I said, "Sir, I've never ridden a motorcycle before." And he said, "Well you'll bloody well soon find out won't you."

23:00 So I rode to the end of the road and fell off. I couldn't turn it around. I don't know whether it's part of the I should tell you, but these fellows were so tough. Bailey was the warrant officer that was looking after us and we nicknamed him 'Basher' Bailey. The huts that we were living in

23:30 were like dormitory arrangement but they had doorways and you were three people to a room. Lights out were at 10 o'clock at night and the duty officer would come round and make certain that the lights were out. This particular night the lights were still on and Bailey was the duty officer and he knocked at the door and then came in and sung out, "Lights out!" And nothing happened.

24:00 So he marched down the passageway with his swagger stick [a short metal-tipped cane] under his arm and opened the door where the light was on and said, "Lights out!" And he still go no response. So he moved in and turned the light out and as he got back to the doorway at the front a voice very quietly said, "Thank you." Well, all hell let loose as you can imagine. But that was one of the funny

24:30 parts of the, that course. That was the start of my training real training. I went from there to a D and M course, Driving and Maintenance at Nagambie. I qualified there and then from there I went down to Caulfield Racecourse, which was a P and RT,

25:00 Physical and Recreational Training, course. That was interesting from the point of view that the instructors down there were Bonny Muir, who was the heavyweight wrestling champion. I tell you that for a reason. And also there was another fellow by the name of Gough. Billy Gough or 'Snowy' Gough as we got to know him.

25:30 The reason I tell you this is because the padre organised a dance for us in Latrobe Street and we attended the dance. And there was a lot of ill feeling between the AIF and the Militia and course we were still Militia. And when we got to the dance there were a lot of AIF fellas there who were going to bounce us off the walls.

26:00 And the padre spent time mentioning to these fellas that Muir was the heavyweight wrestling champion and Gough was the welter weight amateur boxing champion. Now we didn't have any problem after that. From that course I went back to Camp Site 17 at Seymour and was posted to

26:30 Four Brigade Signal Section. They were situated at Bonegilla and I was 2IC to a Captain Ross. No, I wasn't…yes, I was. But I was a sergeant. No I wasn't. Let me think. No, it was while I was at Caulfield that the posting to my becoming a lieutenant was made known

27:00 and I went back to Seymour as a lieutenant and was then posted to Four Brigade Sig Section as 2IC to Ross. And we went left from Bonegilla to on St Patrick's Day in '42 to Warwick in

27:30 Queensland and we there had to set up the services to the Brigade in the countryside at Warwick, which was pretty horrific. Nothing offering there other than millions of flies and the water supply ran above the ground level and you could have a hot shower in the afternoon and cold shower

28:00 in the morning. But we weren't very long there and we were really realising at this time that things were, had become very acute as far as the Japanese were concerned. And we knew that we were moving from Warwick it was only a training area on the way up. And went from Warwick to

28:30 Chermside. Had a fall of a motorbike before I left Warwick and burnt right down the inside of my cause we were wearing shorts up there and burnt the inside of my leg on the exhaust pipe of this BMW motor bike. But survived. And at Chermside was a training area. We were due to move on from there. Another interesting

29:00 aside is, I had a sergeant by the name of Corr, Des Corr. Good operator. Good wireless operator and a particular friend. Excuse me.

29:30 He decided…

Do you want us to stop tape?

Yeah for a minute.

Sure.

30:00 **He decided that he wanted to become a ship's wireless operator. And asked me if it was OK if he left and I said, "I can't stop you, Des." And he became a ship's operator on the Centaur, which was sunk. The other interesting feature was the chief instructor at the course that I did at Casula**

30:30 **whose name was Humphries, he was also an operator on the Centaur. That was just an aside I wanted to tell you. And we went from Chermside to Beenleigh. By this time the Japanese were well on the way**

31:00 **south and it was apparent that they were island hopping to make Australia their destination. And we were then moved up to Maryborough.**

31:30 **Before I leave Beenleigh we had an interesting I had an interesting association with a man in the local exchange there who was in charge of the exchange and took me home and let me shower. The water was very short in Queensland and he took me home and let me shower, and I had a problem**

32:00 **there because the allocation of wire to supply three battalions in the brigade was so short that I didn't know how I was going to manage this. And I was talking to him over a beer and he said, "Saul, don't have any worries." He said, "I'll hook you up straight away. Tomorrow morning, I'll, you've got enough for two**

32:30 **battalions, I'll hook the other battalion up," and I said, "Oh, that's great." Which he did. And I'd forgotten all about it and a major appeared in my tent and said to me, "This major was from core." You've got division, and then you've got core, and then you've got army. So core were quite high-up personnel. And he said to me, "What are you on about Spielman?" And I said to him, "I don't understand, Major." He said,**

33:00 **"What right have you got to hook up to the local telephone wires?" And I said to him, "You surprise me." He said, "Why?" I said, "Don't you give any credit for initiative at all?" "Oh." Well, I never heard anymore about it, but you had to be careful you didn't tread on toes. I was supposed to have rung core and asked them for permission. But it was more pertinent that I do it on the spot.**

33:30 **Maryborough was further training. We went down to the beach, ran an exercise down to the beach there a wireless exercise. Because unbeknown to us, this was when the Japanese were well on their way into the Coral Sea and the coast was pretty open there and that's why the brigade had been moved up**

34:00 **there as a defence if necessary. Maryborough was, we didn't stay there long. Another interesting interlude there. The First World War man that was part of the Brigade Headquarters I became friendly with and we hopped off into Maryborough this night to have a steak and eggs, which was the meal of the day at**

34:30 **in those days and he was driving his own vehicle and he said to me, "Looks as though the redcaps [military police] are in town tonight." I said, "Well that's interesting." He said, "Yes." He said, "We'll give them a bit of a run for their money." And I said to him, "What do you mean?" And he said, "I've got my pet with me." And he had a pet carpet snake. So we took off. I didn't realise that he left this carpet**

35:00 **snake on the front seat of his car. And the military police arrived, duly arrived and they saw this vehicle unattended and unlocked and one of the fellows decided he'd open the front door and get in. Well you've never seen a man take off and cover a hundred meters in 30-seconds in all your life. Because there was the python with it's head raised just ready to say "hello."**

35:30 **And we left Maryborough then and went to Nambour. And I left the brigade at Nambour. I was selected to become an instructor with the Army School of Signals at Maroochydore. I didn't particularly fancy**

36:00 **the job. I didn't believe I was an instructor, anyway, but I guess I knew enough about what was required.**

Was there other technology that you'd had to pick up along the way in your from the officers training camp through into Queensland, was there new technology on the way?

No, not really. No we were still saddled with the old 101 wireless set, 109 wireless set, and a 108 [wireless set], which was a backpack wireless set.

36:30 It was pretty useless. Maroochydore was fairly short but was interesting because we were right on the right on right on the coast at a place called Alexandria Headlands and used to swim every morning and every night or surf. One further interesting anecdote was, Brigadier Cremor, who was in charge of the

37:00 artillery and visited the school, and we'd had an intake of artillery signals personnel. And there was an admission. That's not the right word. They had to fill in a what's…?

Application?

Application, not application but that that'll do. A questionnaire, a

37:30 questionnaire. And one of the questions on the paper was "how many officers in an artillery regiment." I might add that Cremor was an absolute stickler for discipline. Immaculately dressed and a tyrant really. After he was discharged he was part of the University of Melbourne. But this particular day he

38:00 said, "Well now we'll deal with those forms that you fellas have filled in," and he said, "I'm interested in one in particular. That question how many officers in an artillery regiment." He said, "One bright spark's put too many. Would the man stand up?" And this fellow stood up and you could hear his knees knocking from the time he got to his feet. And Cremor said, "Sar Major, give that man three stripes.

38:30 He's the only one with any bloody sense." We left Nambour, I don't know when, but it was '42 and went to Townsville. By this time we realised that we had a,

39:00 we were going to move overseas. Being a an instructional course we had no activity in the fight. But by this time of course, Kokoda was in full flight. I can't think of the time we left for we left Townsville. But anyhow we left Townsville on the Duntroon for Port Moresby and

39:30 arrived in Port Moresby in December '42. It was our first introduction to the Americans really. Oh no, that's wrong. There was a big fight in Brisbane, but that doesn't matter.

Oh no, we'd like to hear about that.

Well the it was while we were at Chermside really. There was a lot of leave and of course the

40:00 Americans were in full force in Brisbane and they were well dressed. They were overdressed, over-paid and over-sexed. And the publicans decided they were going to give them first class treatment and the Aussies could go jump. And that didn't go down too well. So the Australians assembled in the main street of Brisbane and decided they were going to force the issue.

40:30 I'm tyring to think of the colonel's name who finally realised what was involved and managed to quite the things down. But you couldn't get a drink in a pub if there were Americans there. It was a disaster. But that that fight was just stopped at the last moment. It would a been a real battle.

41:00 Anyway, we left Townsville on the Duntroon for Port Moresby. Arrived in December late December and the trip from, oh, Murray Barracks was the, was where we stayed for a couple of days and then we had to move up to the school which was at a place called Sogeri. It was

41:30 40-mile, I would think, out of Port Moresby over a terrible road. The road ran parallel with Rona Falls. There was why I mention this because there was a drop on one side of the road of about 800-feet down to Rona Falls or more even, and it was a one way track. Very muddy…

Tape 3

00:31 **So just going back to when you were 19 and you were commissioned as an officer. Can you talk about that and how that experience changed your experience of being in the army?**

Yes, well, I was ambitious of course and I guess that's why I moved on. But the,

01:00 as I look back on it now I just wonder how anybody at that age can have the maturity be able to command the respect of men. I must have achieved that because I've still got a lot of friends that…the move from sergeant to officer was quite a move because you

01:30 even though the sergeant's mess was very operative and we had a lot of fun there, but to move from there to the officer's mess or to the officer's ranks and officer mess was quite something. Also you were able to have a stretcher to sleep on rather than a palliasse. I don't know

02:00 if you know what a palliasse is? It's a hessian bag with straw in it. And there were other perks of course. Some of the officers, particularly at Seymour, had had cars and they were able to drive you to dances if you didn't have a car. And you'd leave was much easier to obtain I guess.

02:30 I enjoyed moving the troops around. I enjoyed very much participating with them and directing them. I don't know if I can embellish that any way.

How many men were you responsible for?

Seventy-eight, 78 in the section that I was. Just to go back a little bit. I started

03:00 with Fourth Brigade Signal Section as a cadet and then with the Militia and then when I left them went back to the division. Why I say this is because the wheel turns a full circle. Because when I finished up as adjutant of 11th Div Sigs in Rabaul, to be able to get home they posted me as

03:30 OC [Officer Commanding] of 4th Brigade Sig Section. So I brought home the section that I started with and wound it up. I've digressed a little bit.

That's OK, that's fine. Digression is fine. So what were some of the perks? You had a car you had a driver and a car and

And a batman [soldier assigned as an officer's servant] of course. That was the biggest perk of all I guess. Someone to polish your shoes and make your bed and…But

04:00 generally the position that others respected you weren't an 'also' rank.

And what were the disadvantages of being an officer?

The pressure, I mean, and the job of signals is absolute, and when I say

04:30 absolute I mean that it doesn't matter whether your troops aren't performing well or your equipment isn't good, you're given a job to do and it's got to be done. The responsibility comes back to the officer or officers. That was upper most in the New Guinea Campaign when it was realised that our equipment was so poor but we still had to

05:00 maintain communications with the brigades and the battalions it was our responsibility. And responsibility to see that the men were on time for the shifts. Obviously, with the 78 men, the, they were broken up into a number of shifts and they came on duty at x, y, z time and spent so many hours

05:30 in the signal office and then were relieved by another shift, so it was the officer's responsibility to make sure that those shifts were maintained. And also the fact that the troops were fed properly and that their any sickness was looked after. That was your own responsibility.

06:00 **So you'd be responsible for calling in a doctor or medical?**

That, that's if they didn't report. Yeah, we had a nasty one in Bougainville. Had a fella by the name of George Healy, he was what we call a runner. Outside the signals office we had a seat with four or five runners.

06:30 and the responsibility of these runners were that once the signal office gave them a message they were to hand deliver it within the Signal the Division Headquarters. That was the sole responsibility they had. Healy was a very quiet type of fellow. Very introverted and on the

07:00 mainland he'd had a test for tuberculosis and he was told he was a malingerer. Unbeknown to me at the time. At Bougainville one of my line fellows, Macarthy, came to me and said to me, "Boss, George Healy's very ill." I said, "What do you mean he's very ill?" He's said, I said, "Has he got the flu?" He said, "No," he said, "I'm sure it's worse than that."

07:30 So then as we discussed earlier it was my responsibility to make sure that he was shipped off to hospital straight away. And he died of tuberculosis.

So you arrived in Port Moresby on the Duntroon?

On the Duntroon yes.

Yeah. So will we pick up from there and you travelled up to Sogeri along a very treacherous road?

Yes it was

08:00 very treacherous. I stated earlier that we went up in an open 3-ton truck and it rained all the way from Port Moresby to Sogeri. And it had rained well before this because the road was just mud all the way. It was a quarter of the way up that the driver decided to put chains on and then we realised why, because you couldn't afford the rear wheels to slip or you'd

08:30 a finished up in Rona Falls. There was a check point at each end of this section of the road. They allowed vehicles through one way and then stopped them and allowed them come back the other way. Just prior to leaving while we were still in Moresby we were introduced to what's the tablet

09:00 for malaria? Oh dear…no…

Quinine?

Quinine. Thank you thank you. I should've remembered it. We were having a drink at the bar with an old rubber planter up there and he said, "Fellas, you taking quinine?" And we said, "Yes." He said, "There's only one way

09:30 really for the body to absorb quinine properly." We said, "What's that?" He said, "You've got to chew it." Now I don't know if you've ever tasted quinine, but I couldn't taste a cigarette for 3 months after that. We were really taken in. Anyway we finally got to Sogeri and that was situated on the Loloki River. A beautiful spot.

10:00 The major in charge of the school was RTW [?] Payne. Was a bit of a pain at times too. Very capable man. Very religious. But we lived in tents there for a while and I mentioned palliasses before obviously so far out of Port Moresby there was no straw. There were palliasses, yes, but

10:30 no straw to put in them. So what did we do? We went out and cut kunai grass. Pardon me. Kunai grass is, has tremendous growth in the areas of New Guinea and other places with the humidity there like that. But it was good stuff to put inside a palliasse. We didn't realise at that stage

11:00 that living on kunai grass was a mite that lived on rats and wallabies and it, I've lost the name of the disease now, Scrub Typhus, Scrub Typhus was…the early features of scrub typhus was as though

11:30 you had malaria. So if the doctor or the person concerned didn't pick up the fact that you had scrub

typhus and he treated you for malaria, you automatically died - it was so pronounced. And a course we found this out later and we realised how stupid we'd been filling our palliasses with kunai grass and we could've had great problems because there were

12:00 lots of rats. And when I say rats, they were bigger than rabbits. Enormous things. You dare not leave chocolate or peanuts or anything about. They'd take the tin and all if you had peanuts. But Sogeri was a delightful spot. The Loloki River was possibly 30, 30 metres wide and to get from one side from the camp site to the opposite side of the river there was a punt

12:30 that you pulled hand over hand to move across. The CI [Chief Instructor] of the school decided that he was going to move the officers over to the other side of the river and he arranged to build rather nice huts there. But when I mentioned rats before, the rats got in. They were two story

13:00 places and the rats got in between the lining and created an enormous amount of mess and noise at night. But we used to swim daily in the in the Loloki River. Except after extreme flooding, because then you were subject to small crocodiles coming down and it didn't matter how small they were they had teeth like needles and gave you quite a bite.

13:30 At the school I mentioned this RTW Payne he had a lot of initiative and he decided that he was going to do away with the punt and put a swing bridge across. He didn't have any engineering skills but he managed to get all the necessary bits and pieces together. And it meant that there were there were four

14:00 horses had to be run across. Two over enormous logs strung across the logs and two to hold the carriageway. Well, they got the logs, these enormous logs, they dragged them into the camp and sat them down on the bank of the river and dug the necessary holes and found that there were no fellas and they had no equipment to raise these logs up they were so heavy. At that stage we had a group of

14:30 Papuans that were allocated to us. The head boy, boss boy's name was Pawa, and these fellows watched us struggle with these logs and try and get them into the holes and Pawa came over and said, "Boss, this fella help." And we said, "Yes, what do you mean Pawa?" He said, "This fella help, we know how." And

15:00 they assembled there and they got sticks or heavy trees underneath these things and these boys had come from a village called Kikori which was northwest of Papua. And they assembled themselves and got a number on each of these trunks

15:30 and they started to sing. And they chanted "Kikori Kikori Kikori" and these damn logs went up like toothpicks. And they sat them in the holes and enabled us later on after cement and everything had been put in to put the horses over and run the decking. And

16:00 we moved across to the new quarters. But there was a Papuan camp out bush from there on the far side and daily we used to have this rather gorgeous Papuan girl come in just with a grass skirt and a pig following her and a piglet and she'd pick it up and carry it across the swing bridge. But she used to come across on the pontoon

16:30 or the punt earlier on. And I mentioned the pig with her because whilst on foot, the pig would follow her all wherever she went because they suckle the pigs. And we didn't realise this until later on. But part-way through the camp there were too many troops on this bridge at one time

17:00 and the thing collapsed. Threw a number into the river. The number that couldn't swim and these Papuans dived in and pulled all the boys out. Also, whilst at Sogeri it was, I realised it was during the period of the Herald Learn to Swim Campaign in Melbourne and I wrote down to

17:30 to the Herald and said if they were interested, I'd teach a number to swim if they promised to send the certificates up and it did happen. So I taught a number to swim and they were duly given the parchment copies.

You said earlier that the girl would come across to the camp, the local girl.

18:00 **She came, she came into, the into your camp?**

She passed through the camp.

Oh, she passed through?

She wasn't coming to the camp specifically.

So you had apart from the local people that were assisting you, did you have other informal contact with the local people?

Not really, no, no. Only those that were allocated to us for movement of stores and things and development of the camp or work in and around the camp area. I don't know how many

18:30 we had at Sogeri, but no they weren't moving through the camp regularly. She was going somewhere else from her own home. I had contact while I was instructing there I was instructing in wireless and also in permanent line. That's right. And whilst

19:00 I was, I was instructing there the first or second intake we had of troops came in and they were Signals, Infantry Signals from the 39th Battalion. That was the

19:30 the first indication that I'd had of how tough these fellas had had it.

Cause you were there after the Kokoda campaign?

No, the, we were in Port Moresby before

20:00 Buna and Gona had fallen and Buna and Gona, this was where the Japanese decided they were going to move ahead across the Kokoda Track. Those troops were Japanese troops were permanent army fellows. None of them under six feet. I mean we always thought the Japanese were just tiny people but these

20:30 were very well-trained and big fellows and that's why I think the 39th Battalion boys found it so tough: a) they had no equipment, b) they had no food. They had very little ammunition. They were forced into areas that they, against enormous odds, and did a fantastic job.

21:00 It wasn't until I think it was Ioribaiwa that the 25-pounders were taken apart and taken up the 1500 odd steps that the engineers had built over the ridge or up the ridge and once they got them up onto the top of

21:30 Ioribaiwa they were they were able then to give the Japanese a pounding and so give some relief to the infanteers. But they were very badly knocked about. They were very ill. Malaria had taken a tremendous toll. That was my first introduction to the fellows. No, I didn't see any fighting at all on Kokoda. But the CI of the school at one of our breaks

22:00 decided he wanted a survey of the line that ran across Kokoda and he called for volunteered and I was one of those that volunteered and took a team a team of 10 fellows across the Kokoda Track.

So you were back you were at the Sogeri base and the 39th were coming back?

Some of them were coming back, yes. And they got reinforcements

22:30 some of those, I guess those that were malaria sufferers and those that were not well enough to continue on or coming back to [Port] Moresby really.

So when did you commence your journey up the Kokoda Track to survey the line?

It must have been April or so in

23:00 '43. Ten fellas and a padre and we took off very early. The track or you start the journey from a place called Ower's Corner. Ower's Corner was sign-posted by a stick in the ground with a tin hat on it with 'Ower's Corner' written on it, so

23:30 that you knew where you were. And from then on, it was sliding on your backside and dragging feet out of mud and making sure you didn't break legs tripping over tree roots and we stopped for lunch and foolishly didn't take particular note of

24:00 where the track continued on. After we had lunch the chaplain or the padre said to me, "I know the way Spielman. Follow me." And we followed the padre and we crossed a stream about 36 times I would think. And finally came to a very desolate area with about half a dozen Papuans black as black as black

24:30 could be. Two or three women. A few men and a few youngsters. And I didn't have a great command of Pidgin English. They obviously spoke very little English if any. And tried to convince them that we were lost and that we wanted to get back to the Kokoda Track and "me no understand" was all they said. "Me no understand." So I said to

25:00 my batman who was with me quickly dig out a can of bully beef and some biscuits. Whatever you've got. And we pulled these out and I presented them to this fellow and I said to him, "Kokoda Track?" Oh, suddenly he remembered. And an hour and a half later we got back to the Kokoda Track. I kept saying to him, "How far is it to the Kokoda Track?" "Just next corner boss.

25:30 Just next corner." But that was an hour and a half's journey to get back to the Kokoda Track. By this time we'd lost all faith in any padre's having taken us on the wrong journey and he subsequently injured a foot and returned back. But because we'd taken the wrong route, we were running late and once we got down on the other side of the ridge it was late

26:00 afternoon and of course rain set in and it just dropped out of the sky. To get to our campsite was across a small stream with a log across held between two trees either side. And this became a raging torrent. So we decided the only safe way was to stay where we were. But of course we had no tents or anything so I directed the fellows to get

26:30 banana leaves and construct some form of a tent or cover. And that was fine, but most of them were under six foot. They were round the 5 foot 5 mark and course me being over six feet I had my head out

one end and my feet out the other. On top of which the only way to survive, really and stay warm was to get out of your wet clothes. So we got rid of our

27:00 clothes and huddled together to keep warm. Then to dress in wet clothes was rather terrible. But we had we opened a can of peaches with a bayonet for breakfast. And the method of serving the peaches was to dip your hand in and pull out a couple of strips of peaches and eat them. Then

27:30 my batman came to me and said to me, “I’ve got a tin of plum pudding here.” And I said, “Where did you get that?” He said, “I’ve opened and it’s fine. Taste it.” We all thought it was good and then I had a look at the can. And perhaps I shouldn’t mention this. Might need to be cut out. The can was riddled with holes and that was one of the methods we decided, or the troops decided that was one good method of stopping the

28:00 Japanese, because one the tin is holed and the air gets into it, they get dysentery very quickly. However, we didn’t suffer, but perhaps you might like to chop that out. Well we surveyed the line and got across as far as we could and I kept saying to these fellas to drive them on, “It’s just round the next corner.” I took a cue from the native. And we made it to the camps and were well looked after with

28:30 fires and food. And got rid of our wet clothes. Got back to camp at the end of back to ready to get back to the main camp at Sogeri because the trucks were only going to be there at a certain time and we did make it back. It was a tremendous experience.

Can you tell me exactly what the purpose

29:00 **of the trip was? What actually were you doing when you say surveying the line?**

Well, the line at that stage consisted of a piece of galvanised wire if you can picture it and it was strung through porcelain insulators. And the line you had to pick your route to so that the line wasn’t touching any trees. And along that line were linemen spread out

29:30 at different spots so that they could maintain one area of that line. It was too far for one, a group of people to try and pick up a fault in the line. Because to pick up a fault they had to move out along the line keep putting their telephone across the line. They’d get through one way and they’d realise that they were getting back to headquarters, but they couldn’t get

30:00 forward. So they’d then move on till they found the break in the line and that was the reason for the survey was to see how suitable the area was and whether further line was necessary to be to be laid. I’m presuming that’s why. I never queried why the survey was done or what it was for but it was a tremendous experience.

What condition did you find the line in?

It was,

30:30 it was operable. But it could, five seconds later a branch fall off a tree and it would snap the line. Later on, LFC [Land Force Command] Signals had manned parties and they laid down the special cable, D-8, Don-8 cable to run though to the to Kokoda and onto Buna

31:00 and Gona.

So that so the line went from Sogeri or from Port Moresby?

No, the line ran from Port Moresby or from the start of Ower’s Corner virtually right across to Kokoda.

And that line would’ve when was that line actually laid?

Well it would a been put down I guess at the time that the 39th Battalion

31:30 boys or be somebody some lineman behind the 39th Battalion that were laying that line to give them communication back to brigade headquarters.

So that means in that situation that that linesman or linesmen would have had to have gone behind enemy lines in order to?

On many occasions they it would possibly be, because it wasn’t until that

32:00 operation that the headquarter group realised that the Japanese method of attack was not direct. It was an encircling movement and so they’d encircle the group and cut them off. And by virtue of that encircling movement, yes the linesmen on many

32:30 occasions would be within Japanese territory virtually. And we had that further on in New Guinea.

So you said it was a fantastic experience doing that that survey. Can you tell me a bit more about why you enjoyed it? What you got out of it?

Well, it was a, it was a test I think, that the CI was putting on fellas to see

33:00 if they had the guts to do this sort of thing. And I felt I really didn't know what the track across Kokoda was like at the at the time. I suggested I'd be interested. Or I didn't think it was as bad as it was. But I wanted to have the experience of seeing what the

33:30 track was like and the problems that the infanteers had suffered in their effort to hold off the Japanese.

Can you remember the names of villages that you went to?

Eroro was one. Templeton's Crossing was quite a way over.

34:00 No, I can't remember. I've listed them somewhere but I can't remember them off the top of my head.

So you would've also seen the impact of that battle?

Oh, very much so because the smell of Japanese, of dead Japanese troops was still very, very prevalent and,

34:30 rice that they'd managed to get across part way was rotting and the stench was terrible. Once that gets into the mud, it's there for as long as you can think of. It never dissipates.

What about dead Australian soldiers?

Well, I guess there must have been many. Although I think the

35:00 Australians carried or moved a lot of their soldiers. They buried them. They didn't leave them and push on. The Australian soldiers that were injured were carried out by the Fuzzy Wuzzy Angels [New Guineans who aided Australian troops on the Kokoda Track]. That could be for an injured person, it could've

35:30 been a six-day trip to get them back to safety virtually. And if you can imagine them being carried shoulder-high and a lot of the time on by natives and those natives were wonderful.

Did you have any close friendships with any of the natives?

This

36:00 Pawa fellow, yes, I had a close association. He was the boss boy of the group a natives at Sogeri. I had a close association with him. Would do anything that that you wanted. Was very amenable to helping Australians. Not only me any of the troops. The other association I had

36:30 was I we were allowed leave every now and so often and I used to go down to the officer's camp at Moresby. It was a building that was built out over the sea and wide verandas and there were bunks along the verandas that you slept and we stayed there for perhaps four or five days. During that time one of the boys that

37:00 used to bring me breakfast I got to know very well. And I was sorry I didn't keep a letter he wrote to me in the best English he could command. He badly wanted to be my boss boy when I left there to go back to Sogeri. But of course I was not allowed to take him and I wouldn't have thought of taking him from his the safety of his job as it was. That's the only other association I had

37:30 with the natives.

So would that include meeting their families?

No. Only time you'd see their families if you went to their village. We used to go out to the villages sometimes to get pawpaws from Sogeri or bananas. But apart from that no. No there were no association at all. Wouldn't see them.

38:00 **So what would happen when you turned up at a village to get fruit?**

You were very welcome and the children would run and hold hands with you and. Very friendly. They knew Australians as distinct from Japanese and we were, I'm tyring to think of the word they used. No it's gone. But we were very popular with the Papuans.

38:30 They weren't known as New Guineans then, of course, until after well after the war.

Did you get up to Menari on that trip?

Yes, that rings a bell.

The big there was a big Australian base there or relatively big? That's where…

Across the track?

That's where Blamey addressed the troops.

Oh yes I went past. Yes. Blamey didn't go very far down the track. Finish.

39:00 **What do you think about his reaction to the Australians over the Kokoda campaign?**

Your tape wouldn't record what I would like to say.

You're free to say.

No. I think he was just terrible. I think he was a disaster waiting to be, waiting to happen. If he'd of carried on

39:30 any longer in that frame of mind. It was a terrible thing to do to these young guys. They were so enthusiastic and they were fighting a losing battle and the worst thing he could do was to call them 'rabbits'. So as far as I'm concerned he was terrible. He might've been a good commander but his visit to the

40:00 concert party in Port Moresby showed the feelings of the fellows when they hooted him from the time he walked in until the time he left. And he sent a message through his aide de camp to tell the announcer that that all leave would be cancelled from there on. No further comment.

So you said before that the Australians weren't terribly well supplied with equipment

40:30 **that there were problems with equipment. There wasn't it was insufficient or not very developed. Can you talk a bit more about that in regards to your area?**

In regards to signals? Well the equipment was old. It was not designed to be used in tropical areas. Because of the innards of

41:00 of wireless sets and telephones was so intricate the humidity played havoc particularly with wireless sets. Wireless wasn't as used usable as they thought it would be because of the mountainous area and the porter, the portership [carrying] of wireless sets.

41:30 On top of which the atmospherics played havoc with wirelesses. There were only certain times of the day that the operators could work their sets. This is where line communication became absolutely paramount. Without line communication it would've been a great problem. The old switchboards that we were issued with were ...

42:00 End of tape

Tape 4

00:30 From a signals point of view, particularly from a Division, you've got your line forward to brigades. The brigades then have signals, a signals section and that section then they're responsible for the line forward to battalions. And the battalions have signalmen who aren't trained as highly as the divisional signals because it's not required of them,

01:00 but they are responsible with small wireless sets to move forward also to lay lines and keep the brigade in contact with the battalions. It's the battalion's responsibility to maintain contact with the enemy. They feed back all the information to the brigade. The brigade back to division an the divisional commander then

01:30 decides on what his activities or his movements will be next. The phones that the battalion people would've had, would've been Don-5s as far as I know. I was never that far forward. I do know that they had 108 sets which were the little wireless sets. But because of the tropical jungle very difficult

02:00 to get any distance at all. No Fuller phones further forward than brigade. That explains the...

Yep. So once you'd finished doing your survey of the line at Kokoda what did you do next?

Went back to the school at Sogeri and there was a change of

02:30 officers, senior officers there and I became for a short time adjutant to a colonel junior. Very short time. I think at that stage I must have had a 21st birthday or some such thing, because I know he arranged for me to go across to one of the hospitals for a concert party. But I

03:00 I was then recalled from the school back to the 3rd Division. Just before I leave there beyond Sogeri, a short way beyond Sogeri was a place called Koitaki. Koitaki was a large rubber plantation and some Japanese scouts had actually got as far as Koitaki before the whole

03:30 show collapsed for them. I became very friendly with one of the planter's sons there and that's how I knew what had happened at Koitaki. We went out to see the production of rubber there for a short time.

So what was your next assignment?

Oh, I was recalled to the unit which meant I had to make my way back to Port Moresby

04:00 then fly by Biscuit Bomber [aircraft that dropped supplies for inaccessible areas]. Biscuit bombers I

don’t know if you’ve heard the terminology, but they were DC-3’s that carried the troops and everything over the Owen Stanley’s. Across to place called Popondetta and then Dobodura. That was a flight across late afternoon and

04:30 stayed overnight at Dobodura and we were then moved by 3-tonne truck to Buna. That was an interesting journey because it’s through swamp area and the engineers had done a tremendous job of splitting coconut palms into four quarters and laying them down and creating a track for the vehicles

05:00 so that they could manoeuvre over the swamp areas. Buna looked as though it had been ravaged or it was ravaged by bombing and shelling and the palms there were no heads to the palm trees they were just sticks. One interesting feature at Buna was when the tide when out

05:30 there was a supply of crystal clear water about 20-feet out from the edge and the engineers had built a rock can so that you could find it. As the tide went out you could fill your pannikins with clear crystal clear water. And we left Buna, Gona and went on to

06:00 Sanananda and Morobe. This was by light craft carrying about 40 people. It was a small ship with a machine gun stuck up forward. I don’t know what he hoped to shoot, but I don’t remember what time we left but we travelled up the north

06:30 coast as far as Nassau Bay. Nassau Bay at this stage was the rear headquarters of Third Division. The headquarters were at Mubo. I was only at Nassau Bay a short time when the CO [Commanding Officer] had decided he needed me up forward for some reason or another. I guess

07:00 somebody was leaving or somebody was ill and I was told by Major Barber that I get myself ready and I was to leave early the following morning. Which I did and got aboard a jeep with the driver and another person on board and went out through a beautiful track that was a complete canopy

07:30 and it was a wonderful sight. But then that that stopped completely and there was no further road for the, for the jeep. And it was then that the staff sergeant driving the car said to me, who knew me personally, he said to me, “Saul, this is it.” And I said, “What do you mean this is it?” He said, “You’re on your own.” I said, “You’re joking.” He said, “No, you’re on your own.”

08:00 So I looked into the distance and I thought, “My God, what, what’s facing me.” And I said to him, I said, “I’ve never been on this track before. How do I find my way?” And he said, “You follow the track,” he said. “You follow the cable. But whatever you do don’t follow the yellow cable or the light green cable because that’s Japanese and it virtually in many places runs parallel with ours.” So with the necessary equipment. I

08:30 had an Owen Gun, a couple of grenades and a pistol and I took off. And I walked for half a day and came to a place called Napier [?] which was a staging spot. And they fed me lunch there and I said to the Salvo [Salvation Army representative] there, I said, “Well, I’m on my way.” He said, “Where’re you headed for?” I said, “I’ve got to be in Mubo.” He said, “Well you’ll never make it until it’s absolutely

09:00 dark. Stay overnight and leave early the following morning.” Which I did. And this was quite a frightening experience. The countryside looked as though it was completely

09:30 impenetrable. One minute you were in tropical jungle and then the next minute you were on a razor sharp ridge with thousands of feet fall away on either side. The track was no more than a two-man width to move along. And of course when you’re on the crest, you’re silhouetted against the skyline from anybody that wants to take a pot shot at you. And

10:00 I travelled on but I’d stop for breath and perhaps a branch would fall off a tree or something would rustle and I’d be off like a rabbit to make sure I wasn’t caught up with. But I came to a spot in the track that blocked the track completely. It was an enormous boulder. When I say enormous, it was extremely large. And the only way over it was a

10:30 a grass kunai grass rope that they native’s have left there. So you pulled yourself up this hand over fist. And I was just about at the top when a faced peered over the top and I thought, “Oh my god!” and it was a Papuan infantryman. A sergeant threw out his hand and pulled me up the rest of the way. And we sat down and he said to me, “Where all fella belong you?”

11:00 Which means where’s the rest of you? And I said, “This fellow only.” And he said, “Oh, deecar area.” Very bad that means. I said, “I must leave you I’m bound for Mubo.” He said, “Good.” So we parted company and late afternoon I found the going very tough. I was very tired at this stage and I turned a

11:30 corner and there low and behold was a tent with a Salvo. He look at me and said, “You look as though you could do with a coffee.” And I said, “Yes, I really could.” So he said, “Well put your bum down soldier.” And not, no I shouldn’t say that because a Salvo wouldn’t talk like that. But he gave me coffee and biscuits and I said to him, “Where’s the

12:00 Mubo Headquarters, where’s Divisional Headquarters?” And he said, “Oh, it’s about 700 yards away. And late afternoon I reported into the CO’s tent and said, “Sir, Spielman reporting.” He said to me, “Welcome. You took your time.” And I thought, “Well, that’s a great introduction to the CO.” But he was a

12:30 tremendous soldier, this man. He said, “Report to Don Section, you’re with Bert Richards and you’re in the Sig Office.” And he said, “You won’t be here long because the whole division’s moving ahead shortly.” So two days later I had to saddle up again and another day’s walk to

13:00 to Nassau to Tambu Bay. The walk incidentally took two days. Took two full days, virtually. The walk to Tambu Bay was quite arduous, but nothing as difficult as the previous day.

Why do you think you were sent by yourself into on such a dangerous walk?

I

13:30 worried over this over the years and I’ve never been able to come up with an answer and nobody’s given me an answer. The only thing I can think of is that Major Barber must have felt that there were other troops also going forward and that I would join them as a party. But it struck me as being quite ridiculous to have one person, an officer, taking off on his own where he didn’t know where he was going and if he was knocked

14:00 off you’ve lost a man for no reason at all. It didn’t get to that stage fortunately. But the trip down from Mubo was quite a tough one but nothing like the to Tambu Bay, nothing like into Mubo. Tambu Bay was a re-entrant, in other words, it was tucked between two ridges and it was well

14:30 chosen because it was within gun artillery range of the Japanese that were in Salamaua. They fired regularly every day but they were hitting the beach area and the re-entrant was very protective. We had a small sig office there. Just prior to

15:00 leaving Mubo we lost all communications one night. The first time only we lost everything. The Japanese came in and cut all our lines. And a Lieutenant Hodson was sent out to with two troops, two signalmen to repair the line. This was at night. And they did confront Japanese but they were able to

15:30 circumvent them and they were well armed. They repaired the lines and returned back to Headquarters. Hodson won an MC [Military Cross].

So it was a dangerous task for them to do?

Extremely. Extremely dangerous. I mean,

16:00 night time, you’ve virtually got the cable in your hand, walking with the cable running through your hand tyring to establish where the where the faults were and knowing all the time that the enemy’s on your doorstep. Very treacherous and that’s why he got the MC. There were only three MCs won

16:30 by signals in the Second World War. But it was at Tambu Bay that I had an interesting session with Catholic chaplain. Father…his name’s gone. I decided I’d have a break from the signal office and was only about 50 feet

17:00 away, sitting on a log over a stream and I felt an arm around my shoulder at it was the Catholic padre. And he said to me, ‘How are you soldier?” And I said, “I’m alright, sir.” He said, “I don’t seem to have remember seeing your face at any of my church parades.” I said to him, “Father, I’m Jewish,

17:30 that’s why you wouldn’t have seen me.” And he said to me he said, “Yes lad, I know that there are very few Jewish chaplains in the forces and without any prejudices at all, if there’s ever a time you want to talk to somebody, I’m your friend.” When I said the Japanese shelled us,

18:00 it was a regular visit and we used to swim at Tambu Bay but you’d select your time or you thought you could. But on the beach at Tambu Bay was a Salvation Army tent. He never moved from the time he set up his tent until the time we drove the Japanese out of Salamaua. He remained in that tent and served coffee and tea. The was our first real

18:30 introduction to the Americans and they were the first troops I think that the Americans had sort of got together to go to New Guinea. It was called Roosevelt Division. I think it was the 132 Division from memory. It was called Roosevelt Division because most of them we seemed to recognise the fact that most of the people concerned where either brothers, sisters, aunties, uncles. They were all Roosevelts.

19:00 They weren’t used to jungle warfare at all. At night time you kept your lights down low, but once it got very dark the you could hear the Americans shouting out, “Put that goddamn light out soldier or I’ll shoot it out!” and they were fair dinkum here. But it was of great use to us because we were at

19:30 close quarters to their store area and course once it got dark and these fellas didn’t want to know anybody else, we all managed to get into their stores and it was the first time we’d had anything that resembled decent food. I haven’t mentioned the food before. But the food was atrocious. We had bully beef. We had goldfish. Goldfish, which were herrings.

20:00 Dehydrated eggs. Dehydrated mutton. No fresh fruit at all or fresh food really other than pawpaws or bananas that the natives brought in. The biscuits that the army served us with were, they were square biscuit with ‘HB’ on it which meant hard bastards, because that’s what they were. You needed a hammer to break them.

20:30 The cooks did a fabulous job really. The used to pound these things up at night and put them into water and serve them as a porridge. But the food was atrocious. I haven't mentioned Atebrin at this stage, but we were on Atebrin very early in the peace. From the time I was at Sogeri we were on Atebrin. The Quinine had gone out of out of focus.

21:00 The yes, the American troops, yes we pillaged their stores. No, we didn't pillage, we just borrowed them to supplement our meagre rations. They sent a fighting force in to take a ridge prior to Salamaua, which they did. They were successful and then they returned back to camp that night, failing that,

21:30 tomorrow they could go back and re-establish themselves. And when they went back the following day they were cut to ribbons. And it was another three or four weeks before we were able to take that ridge again. And one of the Japanese prisoners wanted to know what was the terrible piece of artillery that we had that we pounded Roosevelt Ridge with. This ridge became known as

22:00 Roosevelt Ridge. And it was Bofors guns [anti-aircraft guns]. Bofors guns are those that are used on ships, mainly anti-aircraft, and they fire at a great repetitive speed with a quite a large shell. And our troops had used these through open sites and the whole of Roosevelt Ridge was totally denuded of any vegetation. And this is what

22:30 sat in this Japanese guy's mind. They were so horrified of this weapon that was being used. Salamaua subsequently wasn't to fall. The general commander decided to push on Salamaua but not to take it in an endeavour to drag as many

23:00 troops, Japanese troops from Lae to Salamaua so that it would weaken Lae for the 7th and 9th Division, which was later to move in. However, somewhere along the line there was a misunderstanding between General Savage and headquarters and he moved into Salamaua. Subsequently he was asked to go back to Australia which was a disaster because he was a fantastic

23:30 man.

What was the misunderstanding, Saul?

I don't know. Somebody got their wires crossed and gave him an incorrect interpretation of a message. He was reinstated. Herring was the man that sacked him, Ned Herring and he was reinstated and subsequently took over 2 Corps campaign

24:06 that he ran in Bougainville. But he was the type of soldier who would walk the track and no badges of rank up but everybody knew him. And I remember he came across a

24:30 couple of our linesmen repairing a line and he stopped and said, "What are you doing up soldier?" And the reply was, "What the bloody hell do you think we're doing?" And then they suddenly realised it was Stan Savage. "Oh, apologies Sir." "Forget about it soldier." He was just such a wonderful guy. Marvellous tactician. It was he who has written a manual that's out at the museum and how to circumvent the

25:00 Japanese encirclement operation and he decided that was the way to move. To send patrols out rather than advance head on. I must mention also once Salamaua fell it was just an isthmus and the bombs that had been dropped there were practically cut the

25:30 isthmus into pieces. But once it feel the troops used to go over there once they were off duty and pick up bits and pieces that souvenirs and so on. And one of our characters had been across there and was coming back. He'd found an umbrella and a top hat and he was coming back and he was stark naked carrying this umbrella and the top hat and he was confronted by

26:00 the CO and without batting an eyelid he just said, "Excuse me, Sir, which way to Melbourne?" These are the sort a things that Australians can throw up at the drop of a hat. His name was Murrels.

Can I ask you with in regards to General Savage

Yes?

I mean he was very sort of top brass. Did you have personal contact with him? How did you know him so

26:30 **well? Was it through personal contact or…?**

Not really. Just through seeing him and we didn't have much. Being close to his headquarters, of course everything was to be passed on to the general. And we knew him as 'Savage'. We got our little anecdotes back from the fellas that had met him on the en route. He never came into the signal office at all. His Number Two [Second In Command], a

27:00 man that we didn't respect very much, his name was Griffin, Colonel Griffin, but he was, he had a big job to do and I guess he did it well. He was Savage's, one of Savage's right-hand men. No, we didn't see I didn't see much of Savage at all. I didn't get out a lot. I spent most of my time in the Signal Office.

So by the time you're up at Salamaua…?

Salamaua?

Yeah, were,

27:30 **what so what sort of equipment were you using there? Were you using were you hashing the code or…?**

Oh yeah, we were at this stage. Yes. That five-and-a-half-month campaign from Wau, Bulolo through Salamaua to Lae, the Fuller phones were used regularly very necessary because of the close proximity that we were to

28:00 the Japanese and the possibility of them intercepting any messages. I didn't mention before, when they enciphered a message there were groups of five letters and if you can figure through our signals office we passed one day, 103,000 groups through the signals office. Now that was the dedication

28:30 and…ability I guess is the right word of these fellas, the operators that I had with Bert Richards, to handle their job so efficiently. I don't think there was any other office ever came near us.

So this was taking messages from?

From the general.

29:00 From Div Headquarters to be passed on to the Brigade. So that the brigade the general decided he wanted to take such and such a place. He'd pass this message on to his brigade commander, one of whom was Hammer. Tack Hammer. Brigadier Hammer. And then the message went down to the battalions for them to,

29:30 that they had to take this area or that area. And it was so important that the message be clearly understood because if the General said, "I want hill 2-3-2 taken," or whatever it was and somebody sent a message back and said 2-3-2 hill had been taken, and it hadn't, or they'd mixed up the word, the operator had sent a wrong word then it was, you were in diabolical trouble. We didn't have any of those problems.

30:00 **Never?**

Once only. And that was because an officer made a mistake. Not a signals officer, an officer from the brigade. And he was severely reprimanded by Savage.

So he sent the wrong message about?

He used the wrong wording. I can't remember what it was. He used, as far as…

30:30 no, I can't remember. I think he used a word starting with U-N, which in Morse code meant something quite different. I can't remember. But we overcame it.

So in your position you know where you were located on the, on the, you were on the beach there is that right?

Up the re-entrant at Tambu Bay?

31:00 Yes.

Were you under any kind of attack air attack or…from the Japanese?

Oh yes, air attack regularly. This is why the Americans were a bit trigger-happy there. Yes, they, of course there was a big air base at Lae and there were regular trips over from the enemy. I didn't see any of the fighting in Wau, Bulolo but there were a lot of, a lot of

31:30 attacks there and it was important that our aircraft got in there quickly and got out very quickly. The strip there was on a 45-degree angle and they had to chock the wheels up [place a block or wedge to stop the wheels from moving] and fire the engines up and then pull the chocks out to get them up in the air quickly. But I didn't see any of that.

But you were you located at Lae at one stage?

I was located, yes moved on, I was in charge of the Rear Headquarters

32:00 at Tambu Bay. When the Division moved on to Lae after the 7th Division and the 9th Division had taken Lae. 3 Div Headquarters had been taken or 3 Div had been taken over by General Milford, I think it was who was 5th Division when Savage went back to Australia.

32:30 We moved into Lae to supply communications for the Lae area. And this was a tremendous task and a very heavy burden on the troops that are the signals people that had conducted this five-and-a-half or been part of the five-and-a-half-month campaign to be faced with running

33:00 a base area for a certain length of time, placed a heavy…what's the word I want? Heavy burden on fellas that were really worn out. Once we moved into Lae it meant we were responsible for the Army

Service Corps, the engineers, the artillery, all the brigades.

33:30 Communications to 7th and 9th Divisions all went through the 3 Div Office. We were working also back to Corp Headquarters regularly. Right through the campaign and then from Lae. I think on our establishment we had something like 50 telephones normally. And we were working in Lae with 120 telephones on two switchboards in tandem.

34:00 And I mentioned Colonel Griffin once before. He sent for Colonel Fargher who was our CO and said to him he couldn't put up with the nonsense of the slowness of the switchboard operators. Would he do something about it? And Fargher was a very strong person and he said to him, "Griffin. Don't stop the conversation there. Come with me and have a look for yourself why you're not getting

34:30 a quick response." Because with 120 call phones and all the calls that were coming through out switchboard operators were top fellas and once Griffin saw the flaps drop on the, on the switchboard he couldn't believe that a switchboard operator could handle so much as he was doing. We never heard from him again. We had a very big Sig Office

35:00 there obviously with all these units to control.

How many staff?

Still the 78. But still responsible for all these. I think at this stage I must have been smoking 50 cigarettes a day and a pipe as well to virtually, to stay awake. But Richards Captain Richards was a top man and we shared the load.

35:30 We had concert parties there and films. We had regular raids from the Japanese bombers. And it was one night at a film that these Japanese pilots used to come over and quite a way out they'd cut their motors so that you wouldn't hear them coming. The first thing you'd hear was the whistle of the bombs and

36:00 I've never seen a film operator or what you might call him shut a film so quickly in all my life. Everybody took off once the first bomb landed. There were no real casualties. They missed the target fortunately. Lae was pretty barren space. It was decimated with the advance of the 7th and 9th Division. The 7th Division went in by air and the 9th Division went in by

36:30 by sea. There was a parachute drop on Nadzab I think and February of '44. February of '44? Early February of '44 I got a, I received a signal and they, and the office was one of the first to know that the Division was to be withdrawn and we were

37:00 to go home on leave. Word spread like wildfire really once the troops knew that we were going to be relieved. And it was something to look forward to come back to Australia after such a long time.

So you were replaced?

37:30 Yes, we were placed, we were replaced by 5th Division Signals. The CO came to me and said to me, "You know Saul, that the date we're due to depart, and I've just appoint, appointed you embarkation officer." And I said, "Oh that's very generous of you, Sir." He said, "Well, you can do the job. I'm very confident that you can handle it."

38:00 And it was my duty to see that all the stores were packed and that the troops were moved from where we were situated to where the landing craft were to be moved on to, I think it was the Westralia but I'm not sure. Got everybody I was with the last landing craft to move out to this ship that

38:30 was harboured off shore or anchored off shore is the right terminology. And the driver of the landing craft was well they were all American crew but the driver was paralytic drunk I would say. We didn't realise this until we got right out into the harbour. And then we were headed for this ship. But we were headed

39:00 directly for the sharp end of the ship. And it was all too late to do anything about it. We hit this ship head-on and the front tray of the landing craft fell in the water into the water and the CO was so worried and his immediate reaction, he was so quick with his knowledge and his ability to assess the situation he screamed out (interruption)…

39:30 **Story, yeah.**

You ready to go?

Yep.

He screamed out, "Stand fast!" Because he thought with the tray falling into the water that we'd lose troops into the water. And just by virtue of his shout, he stopped any panic at all that might've gotten people into the water. That was our last dealings with those Americans. We got

40:00 onboard ship and we were very happy. Although a lot of skin complaints at that stage. And the ship's medico was had a cure all for skin diseases was Gentian Violet. And it didn't matter where you had it, he painted this stuff on in large drapes. But we got back to Bowen and we'd got word that the

40:30 that Savage had given us three weeks leave. And we got back and anchored off Bowen and we hadn't been anchored very long and we see a small craft heading out to the ship. And it turned out to be Stan Savage's ADC [Aide de Camp]. And when he came on board the ship he said, "The general's sent me up here to tell you

41:00 fellas that he's given you another two weeks' leave. In other words, you've got five weeks' leave". You could've heard us in Melbourne. The roar that went up was unbelievable. We came back to

41:30 to Townsville and we were being made ready to ship down to Melbourne by rail. But by virtue of the fact that we'd had such a tough time and tough conditions, it seemed to be embedded in our minds that the more you could drink of alcohol, the easier it would

42:00 be, and I'm afraid...

Tape 5

00:30 **Yeah, so as I was saying Saul, it would be great if you could just tell us what the different roles were within the signals office. You mentioned the runners, operators, linies what the main roles were and what their responsibilities were?**

Well right. As far as operators are concerned they were divided into two classes. They were the wireless operators and the line operators. And their responsibilities obviously

01:00 were to dispatch any messages coming through the signal office and also to receive inward messages and to pass them onto the person in charge in the signals office. As far as the linemen were concerned they were responsible for all line communications normally from Division to brigade. But because of the type of

01:30 country side in New Guinea, they were quite often and the type of the campaign they were quite often well forward of brigade and even down beyond battalion. And their responsibility was again to maintain to lay and maintain line for communications. The type of cable they used was called

02:00 Don-8 which was five steel cables, five steel wires and three copper wires. And there was Don-3 cable, which was a couple of coppers and, or two steel and one copper. I can't remember really. On the mainland we used mainly Don

02:30 -3 because I guess it was cheaper and easier to handle. As far as the Don-8 was concerned that was the major form of communications, as far as line was concerned. This was made in Australia and was rolled on enormous wooden drums. And as much as we prevailed upon the powers that be back in Australia to reduce

03:00 the size of the drums, it didn't seem to have any affect. Why I'm saying this is because all of this was delivered by air and once the large drums were thrown out of the plane they could be 20-feet down in the mud before you could get them. And one famous story of Sergeant Barker, Jack Barker, who was in the drop site. He rang through to the CO and

03:30 said, "Cable found buried 20 feet, what do you suggest?" And the CO was always one with very used very few words, he said, "Recover it." That was fine but once it was recovered again it had to be wound on to very small reels. So that it was manageable for two fellows with an arm in between in the centre pivot of the drum to run a stick or something

04:00 through so they could unwind the cable. Failing that it was, winding it round arm and shoulder and elbow to carry it on your on your shoulder. The linemen had the most difficult job of any soldier in the, in the signals unit in the jungle areas. McMaster, Sergeant McMaster who,

04:30 he won, and MID [Military Intelligence Division] and these particular units were didn't stay at Headquarters, Signals Headquarters. They were sent out in into areas and they were broken up then so that they had groups of linies and McMaster was away for virtually five months of the five-and-a-half-months campaign. It is told that when he finally took his boots

05:00 off that the soles of his feet peeled off, with the, with the boots. He, and he and Barker were the mainstays in the looking after the group of fellows that they had to lay cable. The cable was laid on the ground mainly, but then it was found that our biggest problem was

05:30 with the engineers who either dug it up or dropped trees over it. It became a problem in New Guinea. It was then strung from tree to tree to try and get away off the main track, few feet off the track so that we escaped the possibilities of too much damage being done to it. That's the cable section.

06:00 There was a small cable group attached to Don Section that were fully responsible for the immediate area around the signal office. In other words all the connection of phones to the GOC's [General Officer Commanding] office and all the supplementary offices aside. Also to check on the connections at the signal, signals office.

06:30 You were subject to storms every now and so often and quite often the lightening would hit the carbon blocks on the on the panel and it was obviously the linies the Don Section Linie fellows job to repair all these sort of things. Dispatch riders. Well that was something that was not possible in New Guinea. Dispatch riders

07:00 became linemen. You couldn't ride a motorbike in New Guinea. The only other means of transport would've been jeep and you could only ride drive a jeep a certain way. So the Don Rs as they were known as became linemen and until such time as we got to Lae when they resumed their normal task. Apart from using jeeps they were then there was a

07:30 a run from Lae to Finschhafen and Wewak that was done by barge and they would run down in their bikes to the barge area and then take off in the barges and return in a similar way. The runners, I explained before, were responsible for carrying all the messages in the immediate area of the signals office to higher echelon groups. I don't

08:00 think there's any another segment. Of course we had a storeman in Don Section who was responsible for all the stores. Part of the unit was Emma Section, M-Section, which was the maintenance of all units that were being operated and they had a tremendous task of maintaining the wireless sets in particular and also the telephones.

08:30 There were battery chargers that they also had to look after too service the batteries that operated the larger radios or wireless sets. Apart from the 101 and the 109 set there was a 133 set which was a big set that we had communication with Corp back in Moresby. An in interesting aside there is when we were coming down from Mubo to Tambu Bay

09:00 the natives who didn't seem to have a great deal of brain power, we found out suddenly we were quite wrong. Because when we got down to Tambu Bay we found that all our batteries were missing the water that was necessary to keep the plates operating. The natives had tipped the all the water out to lighten the load for them to carry them down to Tambu Bay. So they weren't so

09:30 silly. Runners. Dispatch Riders. AG Section [Adjutant General Section]. Don Section. Emma Section. Headquarter Company obviously maintained all the records of the Signals Divisional Signals. It was the CO and a major and sergeants. Staff sergeant.

10:00 Their responsibility was to keep all the records of which we're now seeing the results of. Daily records for, of troop movements of sickness of requirements food and other requirements for parts for radio sets and so on. And transport of course. When

10:30 we were on the mainland or in Bougainville transport was very important. And that was quite a big section that operated jeeps and motor bikes.

So that was part of the Signals?

That was part of Signals, yes all part of. All in all you could say there was close to 300 men in a Divisional Signals. I might be out by 30,

11:00 perhaps 270 might be nearer the mark. Of which I said before, 78 were Don Section which was the operating and office section - was the biggest section of Divisional Signals.

So with what you've just told us how much of that was under your command?

Only Don Section.

That was the seventy?

Seventy-eight. There were two officers.

11:30 Four sergeants, a number of corporals, and the odd lance corporal thrown in here and there and of course there was the RSM at Headquarters. But he was at the headquarters, not part of Don Section. Yeah, that's about it.

And you've sort of described quite in quite some detail what

12:00 **those specific roles were. For you what would be a typical day have been for you?**

Rise in the morning fairly early. Breakfast. Move down to the…if my tent was close enough to the Sig Office I'd go to the Sig Office first and then down to breakfast. Particularly in Lae this was easy to do. Just to make

12:30 sure that everything was running smoothly. Although my counterpart wouldn't have been long off duty and I've no doubt he kept the machine running properly. After breakfast would move into the Signal Office and be there until till lunchtime and after lunch back to the Sig Office and there until til tea time knock off for tea time.

13:00 Relaxation at Lae on many occasions I'd get a phone call if I was on duty at night and it'd be the CO'd ring up. The old man'd ring up and say, "Saul what how busy are you?" "Not too busy, Sir." "Well you're

required here. Now." It was to play solo or bridge and we'd go down to the old man's

13:30 tent and stay until 10/10:30 and play cards. The intensity of the campaign down to Lae was such that I smoked perhaps 50, as I said earlier, 50 cigarettes a day. Mainly to keep awake. And when the show was really on around Mubo we were allowing

14:00 some of our section to make cocoa so that they could supply the troops at night to help keep them awake because they were on shift for quite a long time. It was a long day.

How many hours would you?

Oh, I wouldn't dare calculate the number of hours. But there was always something interesting happening in the Signal Office. Import…the messages

14:30 were written with different degrees of importance. Very important. Most important. Important, and course they were shuffled about by the sergeant in charge of the shift to make sure that the operators that weren't being weren't in use received these quickly. Or if they were all in use that they put aside what they were doing and got rid of these very important messages immediately.

15:00 **What involvement would you have if messages came through from that were particularly, of a particularly important nature? Would you need to be on hand to ensure that things were being done?**

Not necessarily. What I was trying to establish was that Richards or I would share half the day virtually. So one of us was there most of the time. The only other time would be late at night when we might knock off and hit the cot and

15:30 then the Sargent in charge, if there was anything really urgent he'd ring the phone in my tent and if I found it necessary I'd go straight to the Signal Office. But that was rare.

So sounds like you were actually privy to quite a lot of very important vital information. You were one of the first people to know

Yes, that's true.

about major movements and tactics as well?

Yes. Well not so much tactics but. Oh yes I guess so. Because once

16:00 it was established that one of the battalions had been successful in an operation and the GOC wanted to move on, then we had to be sure that his messages or any alterations to were sent and received quickly.

So it does sound like a very high stress?

It was a responsible. Yes, stress was there all the time.

Other than what other dangers were there

16:30 **inherent to the work you were doing do you think?**

The dangers weren't as you might see them. Not in New Guinea so much, apart from bombing or shelling we had no, at that stage no close conflict with the enemy.

17:00 We were not a fighting unit at all and fortunately we were able to. Or that's wrong. I put that wrongly. The infantry kept us well covered so their efficiency was our protection. It wasn't until we got to Bougainville that we ran into problems.

It sounds like you were quite passionate about your work as well? It sounds like you have to be to do it well to deal with that sort of stress?

Yes I

17:30 realised that this was another education for me and with the backing of the of the CO as I've said before was so tremendous it gave me the opportunity to learn a lot more than I would've learnt otherwise. And I'm referring mainly to the fact that I left school when I was 15 so I didn't have a great deal of education. But

18:00 the army provided me with that. And thanks to the fact that I joined early I was in a prime position to be able to use my own intelligence and move ahead and receive or have the possibility of being promoted.

What was it about the job that so stimulated you?

I think the fact that we were involved in what was going on at the

18:30 front and we were responsible for these messages getting through. This was always a stimulation. There was always a vibrant feeling in the office that that something was afoot and there was all the time. With the exception of when we moved to Lae and the show virtually had finished as far as we were concerned. But the whole move from Wau, Bulolo, Salamaua to Lae, which was five and a half months,

19:00 was tension all the way.

Yeah. It sounds like there was never a lull. I mean certain other units might have their moments of sort of inactivity but for you guys it was…

Well, the only time there was a lull was when you went off shift if you had time to go off shift. The fellas had to have a break. Some of them were working 12-hour shifts of course. It just depended on the amount of signals traffic that was coming through.

OK, can we sort of pick up

19:20 **now, maybe on your return to Australia. You were given ended up being five weeks leave, I think. Is that correct? Five…**

Yes, five weeks leave. Savage, because Savage made a notation in our book to say that the 3rd Division Signals Unit gave, what was his wording, gave far more than a commander could ever hoped to achieve. So that's

20:00 why we got the extra leave.

How did you make use of that?

Oh, partied. Drank too much. Partied most of the time. We still grouped together. I had parties at my home and many of the troops that were close by came to those parties. Of that 78 fellas in Don Section, I knew everyone by first

20:30 name. Which was very useful and I found it stood me in good stead because they appreciated the fact that I knew that they were doing the job and knew them intimately.

So you made it back to Melbourne during that period?

I came back to Melbourne yes. And a number of parties,

21:00 and a lot of the fellows were ill when they came back. A lot of them developed malaria when they came back. But even so, the thought uppermost in our minds was enjoy yourself as quick as you can because we knew there was another campaign in the offing. We didn't know where at that stage. So we partied and we partied heavily.

And you were returned to

21:30 **Atherton Tablelands after that point?**

We returned to Atherton Tablelands. I can't remember the dates. But we went back to the Tablelands and this was a training area. The whole of the Tablelands was set up for units all the divisions to retrain. And the retraining wasn't just to keep the fellas on

22:00 their toes. It was to give them an opportunity to improve their operation their operating ability and gain more money. The CO set me the task of running a school for the Don Section Operators and that was to be for three weeks. Half way through the school he

22:30 rang for me and said to me, "Saul, stop the school." And I said, "But we're only half way through, Sir." He said, "You heard me, stop the school. Stop the course. They've had enough." And he said, "Now once you stop it, inform them that there's to be one large night," he said, "and that will be a party for the whole unit and the officers will wait on the men."

23:00 Very successful. We had up there a racehorse and I've forgotten its name. How the racehorse came about was in the officers' mess, we used to have a formal night every now and now and so often a formal mess. And a formal mess is described by

23:30 you passing the port and honouring the Queen or the King, whoever was the Queen at that stage of course. And it was a special meal. And he'd gone out to one of the farms to get suckling pigs to put on for everybody and picked a particular place who had a training track for racehorses.

24:00 And he got talking to this fellow and said, "Do you think we could lease the racehorse for a fortnight and so?" And they came to some agreement and yes, we had the racecourse and one of our dispatch riders was a fellow by the name of Bennett, Albie Bennett. He joined us from the New Zealand Army. He would never have made it into the Australian Army because he was so small. He was terribly tiny,

24:30 well he was tiny enough to be a jockey and he was a jockey by profession. So that we had a ready-made hoop for our horse and they raced the horse at Atherton twice. The first time round the horses head was twisted so far round the back of it's neck to stop it from winning we decided to put all our money on the second race but there was a supposedly

25:00 a dead heat in the second race. And we still lost our money. But I can't think of the name of the horse. We got colours from jockey colours sent up from Melbourne and Bennett wore the colours very proudly. The rest of the time on the Tablelands. When I said there was a course for the operators, the CO had also decided that the transport

25:30 fellows knew exactly what made a jeep run. What made an engine run and so on and a fellow by the name of Lleweddy [Llewellyn?] was in charge and he was a top technician or mechanic I should say. And they pulled this jeep apart nut for bolt and every little part of it and reassembled it. After it was reassembled they decided, or Lleweddy

26:00 decided with some of his friends, that they'd take it for a run and there were five of them went out in this jeep and it crashed and two of them were killed.

If I'm not mistaken Saul, that after that there was another, your CO's…what's the word?

26:30 **Kindness, his tolerance was highlighted again?**

Oh, his understanding, yes you're right Colin [interviewer]. He rang the Sig Office and I was on duty and he said to me, "Quick Saul, make sure that there's no provos [provost – military police] on about at that accident." Which I did. And he said, "Righto, get me the…" what's the word I want?

27:00 Leave passbook, because these fellows had gone absent without leave and when that occurs, if anybody is killed as they were, well then their parents receive no remuneration what so ever. So he wrote leave passes for all.

How was your morale before you took off again? How was morale in Townsville?

Morale was very high.

27:30 We, Bill Fargher the CO told us what was to happen. We were heading back to Lae and we were a getting a job from Lae. We didn't know whether we were going up with one of the other divisions to Borneo or not at that stage. But we were prepared for what whatever was to happen and we were

28:00 well trained and we were a top unit after the campaign in New Guinea. We'd survived all the pitfalls and come through with shining colours. So it didn't it wasn't daunting at all to know that we were due for another campaign. Except for the fact that we wanted to fit so much into life in a short space of time beforehand. And we got our,

28:30 our movement orders to from to go down to Townsville and to embark for Lae. Rather harrowing when you get down to a wharf and there's big ships tied up to the wharf and you're marching down and you keep passing these big ships, and the only things that's left is a tub at the end of the wharf. And this tub turned out to be the Van Swoll [?] which was nothing more than a tub.

29:00 I think it would hold about 300 that's all. That was horrifying. However, we boarded the Van Swoll and two days out we hit a tremendous storm and we didn't think we'd ever survive. But our cook got burnt up and down the arms in the, that nasty storm keeping the fires going on board the ship. It was

29:30 a nasty little tub. The sailors onboard, I don't know whether they were Javanese or what they were, but heaps of dried fish hanging from the rafters which didn't appeal to us particularly if you felt a bit seasick. We got back to Lae and again the CO was waiting at the at the wharf for us as we came into Lae and he sung out,

30:00 "Richards, Spielman, I want you straight away." And he said, "Saul, you look after the troops on the ship," he said. "I want Bert to go straight to the 5 Div Sig Office," he said, "it's a bloody shambles." So Richards took off and then I followed with the troops and we met the CO and he walked round the camp he said, "Have you ever seen anything as disgusting as this? Now do something about it!

30:30 Get into that sig office and get things straightened up and moving." Which we did. We weren't there very long when we got word to say that we were to move to Bougainville. I was to look after the rear party and Richards took the advance party across to Torokina. The Empress Augusta, Augusta Bay.

31:00 And I'm not sure of the dates this was now. And I can't remember the ship I travelled in. But I know it was fantastic as far as food was concerned because it was an American Liberty ship and everything's served in clean stainless steel trays and everything you wanted was

31:30 there. Steak and eggs and bacon and what have you. And we arrived in Torokina to take over from the Americans. They were due to be shipped out later on. And we took over a rather grandiose building. It was a five-ply construction rather

32:00 large building. It was a superb sig office. We fitted all our bits and pieces into this office all the telephones and Fuller phones and the radio. We had an area for the dispatch riders out front. And being in close contact with the Americans in the take over we realised how much it was to

32:30 befriend these fellas because there was a lot we could achieve by it. It was amazing what a few cases of whiskey could achieve when you were able to get the whiskey. And it was here that we first were able to realise the value of equipment that was top class. We managed to pick up some telephones were called EE8A. Our little phone

33:00 that was comparable to their's was an L-phone. It had a generator handle on the side and you could move it run that generator handle around and you could hold onto the two terminals and you'd get a

tickle in your fingers. With the EE8A, once you turned that generator handle it'd lift you off the floor. Superb instrument and we had a number of these in time that we received from the Americans.

33:30 Christmas Day in Bougainville we had a tremendous electrical storm there and it hit the signal office. The wires coming into the test panel in the signal office, there was no wire left. There was only tiny little pieces of the insulation left that had dropped out the complete copper and steel wire from

34:00 the covering. The carbon blocks on the test panel were welded together so the liney sig office linies had to get out of their own way and hurry and get everything organised again. When I said there was, the Don-Rs were out front there was an enormous tree out the front of the signals office and the trees in the islands have these great root systems. Big heavy roots, they're superficial roots but they

34:30 hold the tree up by virtue of the fact that these enormous roots run up the side of the tree. And this tree fell away fortunately from the sig office. But there was a jeep a Don-Rs jeep parked nose on into the into the tree and the roots caught the bumper bar and it lifted it up and hung it in the air. It was like a toy on a Christmas tree. We had a couple of fellows hit by lightening up there but there was nothing too serious. It knocked them over but

35:00 nothing too bad, really.

In talking to a lot of people over the last few weeks we've got this sense that the Aussie got by on the smell of an oily rag while the Yanks were just equipped to the eyeballs as it were

That's true.

Can you think of an examples be it before you got to Bougainville even? You were there when that sort of ingenuity was at the forefront? Where without that without any sort of, what's the word I mean, improvisation that you wouldn't have got by?

35:30 We'd have got by but it would've been very difficult. It was bad enough in New Guinea but the terrain in Bougainville was much flatter and easier for manoeuvring about and we were able to use vehicles a lot of the way. But no without the introduction of this top class equipment we'd have

36:00 had a battle. Really a battle. I don't think Australia was in any position to produce equipment that was similar to the Americans. They had enough problems on their on their plate at that stage. I became I was posted for a short while to an artillery unit as sig officer and became very attached to

36:30 to a group of Americans by virtue of this artillery unit. We became very close friends. The captain in charge of the unit badly wanted me to arrange for him to join an infantry unit so that he could see how well the Australian infanteers fought. And I said to him, "There's nothing I can do to achieve this." So we overcame that. Any clothing I wanted

37:00 I only had to drop the word. I played basketball with them up there, but I might just as well have stood on the sidelines because I didn't get a touch. But we became such firm friends that when they were about to leave to Lae, they rang me up and said, "Saul, you'd better come down. There's provisions, there's equipment. Take your pick." So I went to Fargher and

37:30 said to him, "Sir, I've got the opportunity of picking up stores and equipment. What do you suggest?" He said, "Well, take three three-tonners and go down and get whatever you can." All our vehicles, all army vehicles, every unit had a particular insignia on the front of the vehicle. Ours was a 'three' over '66' on a white over blue background with a black and

38:00 white koala on one side. I tell you this for the reason that I got down and got all these stores and got back and the stores were fantastic. Amongst them were 10-pound packs of breast of turkey. Well, the officers' mess did very well but so did the troops. But about five days later I had a call from the CO and he said, "Saul, General Bridgeford wants you immediately." And I facetiously said to the CO, "Is

38:30 this for promotion, sir?" He said, "I don't think so. But you'd better get over there quickly." I walked into Bridgeford's office and saluted him and he said, "Spielman, what do you know about 'lend lease'?" And I said, "Sir, I don't know much about lend lease at all." He said, "Well you're soon going to find out." He said, "You had vehicles down in the American compound and you took away vehicles with food and

39:00 with equipment. Now how are you going to pay for it?" I said, "I don't know, sir." He said, "Well you just be careful. Dismissed." Return, oh, before he said, "Dismissed," he said to me, "Now make sure those goods are returned." So I went back to Fargher and I said to him, he said, "How did you get on?" I said to him, "General Bridgeford said I should return all the goods." He said, "Well, take a jeep and take the lot back." You can imagine. I couldn't put, fit three –

39:30 field tonner loads in a, in a jeep. So we kept all the equipment and I didn't hear any more about it.

Can I ask you before we just talk a bit more about time in Bougainville. You you'd obviously done a lot of teaching, instructing. How did you think you rated as a, as a teacher or instructor?

Not very well, I don't think. I learnt a lesson that you picked the brains of the of the students

40:00 because if you didn't, the students knew a hell of a lot more than you did. And if you didn't get wise to this fact real quickly you were in real trouble. So that carried me through. I used to ask a lot of questions preparatory to talking about a particular subject and I knew where the pitfalls were. But no, I didn't believe that I was a good instructor really. As far as permanent

40:30 line was concerned that was a different cup of tea altogether. I was right on top of the ball there and that was no hardship at all.

So why do you think you were you were given that responsibility of training?

I suppose people thought that I knew more than I did. But I didn't appreciate having

41:00 to talk to people really. I was far more a doer than a talker. However I did the job to the best of my ability and I think I got away with it pretty well.

That period in when you went back...

Tape 6

00:30 Had to build ours out of the local timber and whatever was available.

I think we're, we are rolling. Can you tell us about that experience of having to set up the signals office? What did that involve?

Well, firstly the Division decides where it's going to set up its headquarters. And the CO of the signals has got to decide the where he's going to site his signals office that's in

01:00 reasonably close proximity to the divisional headquarters and in a suitable area that we could operate from. Once that has happened then fellas were given the task of building the sig, signal office. And two brothers, Ron and Tom Limprayer, big fellas, they were wharf labourers before they joined the army,

01:30 they were capable builders and we used the local timber plus the fact that we were able to get Sisal craft, which was a paper with a bitumen bind bonding. It was quite strong and we used to use the Sisal craft for the ceilings when we couldn't get the natives to put a ceiling a roof up a roof I should say and because of the heat, the

02:00 signals office was designed in an oblong building with low sides to it so that the air could get through and the sides were covered with this Sisal craft around it. Once we moved from Torokina we moved to Toko. Toko was a delightful area because it was right on the on the coast

02:30 and our signals office was adjacent to the beach. We got plenty of breeze from the sea so that it was quite reasonable and even though it was humid. It was a big office. Big, one of the bigger offices we had. With all the appointments that we'd had in other signals offices, it was here, it was at

03:00 Toko that the CO decided that every man would swim everyday and that was a must. That was an endeavour to stop any illness and skin complaints and it was very well received. In addition, he decided that while we were swimming that we'd play with a basketball like a polo in the surf. And he engineered this and used to enjoy being amongst the troops.

03:30 And course he was the first one to throw a ball and hit someone flat in the face. Well, that was the start of something that everybody was to have a go at the CO and the first one that could hit him was doing a good job and he enjoyed it more than the men did I think. But that was a daily routine at Toko. Fairly big exercise because the battalions there were three brigades, and the battalions were spread out

04:00 in front of the brigades of course. We were on a level playing field here really. The land lie was so flat. The only big problem was that there were many rivers running into the sea and it was a case of having to navigate these rivers. The engineers did a wonderful job with pontoon bridges and the like. But the cable fellows

04:30 had a big job in stringing cable across the rivers. And it was here again with his engineering background Fargher decided that we the cable fellows would adopt a different principal of laying cable. They'd put up an H-arm and run eight-pair of cables forward from this 8 H-arm to the Brigade.

05:00 The reason for that was when there was a fault came on a line, the linies could quickly pick up that line and transpose a line over and you'd have continuous communication. And then they would follow that line out and repair it and so that that was continuity as far as communications was concerned, it was a brilliant idea.

So what's an H-arm?

An H-arm is two pieces of tree in the ground with a cross bar. And you

05:30 ran all your cables eight-pair from this cross bar forward to wherever you were headed and you built another cross bar and so your, your lines, until they got to the brigade and from then of course the

brigade signals mainly had to scrub bash to, that's cutting your way through the scrub to lay their cable. They

06:00 they did the job forward from brigade.

So when you were setting up at Toko, what where was the fighting at on Bougainville?

Let me say firstly that the Americans had almost befriended the Japanese because they'd created this perimeter at Torokina and decided they'd hit them with everything as far as a bombardment was concerned and they were decided that they weren't going to fight

06:30 them or battle them anymore. That, they'd stay within the perimeter so long as the Japs didn't bother them. And that's the way it was but when Savage arrived he decided this wasn't for him that we were going to drive the Japs into the sea down as far as Buin and so the activities took place from there. And the fight moved on from Torokina to Toko to

07:00 Marwaricka [?] and then to Mamagotta Junction and Mamagotta Junction was the last big signals office that we had built. It was in a heavily treed area and by this time we realised that the Japanese were becoming a little bit nasty because they were being

07:30 pushed into the sea. But I should state that before Marwaricka there was quite a battle took place at Slater's Knoll and the brigade or the battalion boys, the battalion boys lost all communications. The Japanese, not only did they lose communication but the Japanese virtually over ran them and it was bordering on disaster. They had

08:00 no communications and here were the Nips [Japanese] going hell for leather. We'd had a pigeon loft delivered to us in Torokina and the pigeon fellow, Keith Wrightson, yeah that's right, there were two pigeon blokes, Day and Wrightson, Wrightson was with us and he had the loft down with him and the only method of communication after

08:30 this, the Japs over ran this the infanteers was by pigeon and that pigeon came back to Div Headquarters. And we immediately got the message back to Corp Headquarters. Never mind Div, we sent it straight back to Corp and Corp sent in tanks and that was the only saviour. I've got photos of signs saying '165 Japanese Buried Here'. '225

09:00 Japanese buried here'. There was a VC [Victoria Cross] won at, yes, at Slater's Knoll and his name I think was Rattey. But once that was over we proceeded further down to Marwaricka and driving the Japanese further and further towards Buin which was their headquarters. As far as Signals were concerned, we didn't

09:30 run into any real problems until Marwaricka.

Can I ask with the pigeon did you see the message that came with that?

The message came into the Signals Office, yes. It's only a small piece of paper in a tiny little carrier. But we were able to run off a message straight away and put it through by line communication back to Corp.

What did the

10:00 **message say?**

Oh I can't remember. "Disaster. Battalion overrun," but words to that effect. But I don't really know. I couldn't remember the details. There is there was a long and we've still got it out at the museum. There was a two-page A4 message written that came after that pigeon message that to tell the whole story of what was happening and that was written by the

10:30 brigade fellows. That message which purports to be original is in the museum at Simpson Barracks.

Had pigeons been used before that? Had you had cause to use them?

No. When the pigeons arrived we were at mess one night and I said to the old man, I said, "What's the idea of the pigeons, boss? Is this Christmas dinner?" He said, "No, we think we can use pigeons. We, you never know, Saul." And that was it. That was the only

11:00 time that we had reason to use them as far as I know. And I was with them all the time, apart from two segments in hospital there. But the move down to Marwaricka was, no to Mamagota Junction, was the last move and that was the last big signals office with all the appliances there and it was then that

11:30 we realised that the Japanese were intent on not letting us go any further. Not only not let us go any further but decided to tear us apart. That was the closest I think that div signals had ever been to immediate action and we were first alerted to this with two-toed shoes imprints around our signals office.

12:00 To know that the Japanese scouts had been out. We had been alerted to the fact that they had raiding parties. And I went to hospital, I was away for 10 days, I guess, and things had deteriorated as far as these raiding parties were concerned. When I got back I was acquainted of the fact that we were

standing too,

12:30 early morning and late at night just preparatory to any from the Japanese. And that I and my troops, Richards had left me by this time, he was on his way back to Australia, and the major, the colonel at div headquarters said to me, “Spielman, all your troops will assemble over at div headquarters and you will help

13:00 supply these troops to support the stand, too.” And I said to him, “I beg your pardon, Sir? How do you imagine signals is going to continue to operate if I do that?” And he said, “Well, what’s your answer?” I said, “We’ll dig slit trenches and we’ll set up Bren guns and we’ll arrange for our own stand-tos [shelter].” And he said, “That’s impossible.” And I said, “No Sir, nothing’s impossible.” He said, “Well. I’ll tell you what Spielman,

13:30 seeing as you’re so defiant, you go back to your troops and tell them that they’ve got to have the slit trenches dug by 3 o’clock this afternoon and your Bren guns in order or else.” So I went back and I said to the cable, the beer section fellas, “Here’s the situation. We either supply guards for the divisional headquarters or we supply our own guards and we’ve got to do this and this by 3 o’clock this afternoon. Can you do it?” “Yes, Boss.”

14:00 So they dug the slit trenches and we had copper wire and we set out the areas of protection for the Bren gun lines of fire and so on. And we strung out these copper wires at calf height

14:30 on stakes and on the copper wires we hung empty 25-pounder shells with the fuse caps taken out and strung the fuse cap inside the shell. Now anybody touching that copper wire it sends off a signal like St Paul’s Cathedral sounding the bells and that was our protection there.

15:00 I did have a, oh, the colonel said he approved of this so we went ahead with it. And I was worried that some of the lines of fire weren’t good enough and I must have gone to bed with this on my mind. There were three of us in the tent. A cipher fellow, a lieutenant. The pigeon bloke who was a lieutenant and myself. One

15:30 across the back of the tent and one down either side and it was the only night that I hadn’t gone to bed with a pistol. And I’d gone through all the mail to check the mail to see that it was all OK so that there were no messages going out that shouldn’t be and they were all sitting on a table. I might add that the base of the tent was reasonably soft mud and I don’t know how long I’d been

16:00 asleep. But all of a sudden I found that I was strapped to my stretcher with arms holding me to the stretcher and I immediately responded because I thought I was being attacked by a Japanese and we fought for quite a long while. Upending the table and all the mail. Digging it into the mud. And it appeared that the cipher fellow had walked in his sleep and this was what happened. But

16:30 he still says to me that he wondered that I didn’t turn white after the episode. And Wrightson, the pigeon bloke said to me, “God Saul, why didn’t you shoot him?” I said, “I didn’t have a pistol.” But few days

17:00 later a Japanese was sighted near div headquarters, which was only 50 yards away from the signal office, and all hell let loose and he got away but we were very much on our toes from there on. But the signals still operated well and we got our messages through. Luxton and I decided we’d take ourselves off for a break and

17:30 raid the Japanese gardens. They had were growing beautiful vegetables which we weren’t able to get. Beans and lettuce and other vegetables. Not realising that these raiding, or not believing that these raiding parties were anywhere near us, this was an area that they were still coming in to get their vegetables. But we got vegetables and took them back to the cook and

18:00 two days later there was an edict issued from div headquarters to say anybody taking vegetables from the Japanese gardens must destroy them immediately. They were feeding these vegetables with excrement and it was creating tape worm. So we didn’t go back to the gardens ever again. I omitted to say that whilst at Toko we had one

18:30 tremendous storm. And when I say tremendous, it washed rivers out and it washed palm trees out but we didn’t realise this. But from the sig office it was very overcast and the storm still raging and we could see in the in the distance against the skyline what appeared to be ships and they could a been warships for all we knew and we were

19:00 devastated to think that it was possible it was another invasion. It turned out to be these coconut palms. The storm was such that the rivers had washed out coconut palms and these damn things were floating out at sea. But Mamagotta Junction had another, it was there that war ended virtually,

19:30 I think it was the 15th of August if I remember rightly, and I had a line to my tent which was about 200 yards from the signals office and I’d had a heavy day and I’d tucked in and the phone rang and the switchboard operator said to me, “Boss, Colonel from Corp wants you on the line.” And I answered the phone, “Spielman.” And he said, “The war’s

20:00 over Spielman," and, pardon me, I said, "for Christ sake, piss off. I need you like a hole in the head." He said, "You know who you're talking too?" I said, "I couldn't give a continental who I'm talking too. I don't need you at this time of the day. Don't you know there's a bloody war on down here." I later met up with this colonel who, we, after a few drinks we became very good friends. But I certainly didn't appreciate the fact. I did appreciate that the

20:30 war was over. But the big thing then was to keep a cool head and make sure that all your troops got back to Torokina without being killed off because the Japanese weren't aware of I'm sure of this. Another little incident that occurred at div headquarters at Toko was a Japanese prisoner had been taken and they were bringing him

21:00 back to headquarters to investigate whatever they could interrogate him. And the driver was sitting in the jeep and they put the Japanese in the jeep and immediately he got in the jeep he bit into the forearm of the driver and was so tenacious he wouldn't let go. They tried everything to make him release his

21:30 his bite and they finally resorted to a bayonet being pushed through from one side to the other and levering his mouth open to make him let go. That was at Toko.

Was the signals office or unit involved in intercepting signals from the enemy was that part of the general?

No. That was a separate entity all together. They were highly trained and

22:00 specialist. Because they had to learn Japanese Morse codes, which were…many more letters in the Japanese Morse code than there was in the 28 letters of our alphabet. No, that was a separate entity. We didn't intercept anything.

Did you have any other encounters with the Japanese?

No I didn't have any personal

22:30 encounters. We managed to get back from Marwaricka back to Torokina. And I said to the fellas, "Whatever you do, don't play the fool because the war is over. Keep your heads down in the back of those 3-ton trucks and make sure you get back to base." Which they did. We had lots of celebrations when we got back to

23:00 to Torokina. There were many football matches and cricket matches. And I did mention to you beer before. We, I was siting in my tent one night and a couple of my cable fellows came in and said to me, "Can we move out of camp for a while, Boss? We're got a special job to do." And I said, "What's the packs for?" And they said, "Oh, we'll tell you when we come

23:30 back. Can we go?" And I said, "Yeah, sure you can go. Any others going?" "Oh, there'll be a few." Well somebody had discovered an American dump of beer and a, the engineers had managed to get a couple of search lights and they played the search lights onto this area and then they got front-end loaders into the job and they removed these cans of beer and I was

24:00 then alerted to the fact the fellas coming back with bent over double carrying packs with cans and cans of beer. And I got so worried I went down to their tents and I said to them, "Hey, let me open a can of that beer and let me see what it's like." And it was as bitter as could be. And I think I said to them, "I think you'd better hang on for a while. Let me talk to the doc." And after I'd talked to the doc he said, "No,

24:30 it'll only give them a hell of a headache." He said, "Let them go." So they enjoyed themselves immensely. The other drinks we had was with the Americans that, I was visiting them one evening and we were celebrating and we drank pure alcohol out of a ship's compass. But this again was overseen by the doctor because he said, "We've got to

25:00 tone this down quite a lot otherwise it'll kill you." But these sort of things you get up to because you don't know what's around the corner the next day. I finished up back in hospital in Torokina after a cricket match. We'd managed to get some cement in and the boys laid a concrete pitch and as I'd kept wickets in my younger days I continued to do this for the unit and I got hit above the

25:30 eye with a fast rising ball and finished up in hospital. It blackened both eyes. I was quite a sight because once you take Atebrin it fixes the pigment in the skin and I had these two beautiful shiners and I went down I was taken down to the mess with a few of the officers the corps mess and the native

26:00 waiting on the table, when he first came up he didn't notice, but then he was standing opposite me and he saw these two black eyes and he couldn't help himself. He came round and he said to me, "Oh, what happened you?" And I said, "Oh, problem." And I said, "You know what?" He said, "No." I said, "Other fella, he stop along up top." Which meant that I'd killed the other fellow. And he said, "Oh my goodness me." But I had that with me for quite a long time.

26:30 **You said that sorry earlier in the campaign you'd had some time in hospital as well? Why was that?**

Yes, I had, they thought I had scrub typhus. But I had an infection in the sinus which was quite horrible.

I couldn't hold my head up, I had terrible headaches. And spent time in a small hospital at a place called Motupena Point. It was right on the

27:00 sea and they gave me a lot of antibiotics or whatever it was and I finally it cleared it up and I finally got back to the unit.

What was the general state of health like?

Pretty good really. Food was much improved. The cooks did a good job with what was available.

27:30 They were very ingenious in sitting cans of jelly on sides of frozen beef that they received. Before they cut it up they put the containers in the jelly to set it so that the troops got jelly and there was no possibility of having jelly otherwise. They made a malted milk type drink out of the terrible dehydrated eggs.

28:00 The dehydrated mutton was something to be held to behold. It was terrible concoction that Smorgens [?] made. And here again the cook's tried very hard to conceal the smell. You'd see a large pie with beautiful crust on it and all ready to go for your dinner and

28:30 they'd cut a piece out and you couldn't get near the pie for the stench of this terrible stuff. But no, the food was, food was much better and of course it was supplemented quite a bit from the American troops. We ate well. Had a few concert parties there. Dolly Dyer, Dolly and

29:00 whatever his name was Dyer. Bob Dyer. And at one stage his language was so filthy, I mean, we didn't care how bad our language was but we couldn't tolerate somebody from outside trying to hit us with this type of language. So with great roars from the audience they told him to go home. We

29:30 had athletic carnivals in which I participated. Swimming carnivals. It was at Torokina that George Healy died.

30:00 Pardon me. We were very lucky. We had very few deaths. From the Wau, Bulolo campaign one of our troops died from scrub typhus. A fella by the name of Booth. Bruce Booth. He died in the Lae

30:30 hospital. And Healy in the Second First AGH [Australian General Hospital], I think it was in Torokina, and I wasn't responsible for Booth but I was responsible for Healy.

31:00 **What was Healy's role?**

He was a runner. He was just another troop really. He was a nice fellow. The football over that was ours, the unit decided to name the George Healy Oval. And I wrote a

31:30 a letter to his parents. But we were very fortunate I think. Out of 270-odd troops, to have two, apart from the two who died on the Tablelands, they were the only other two that were

32:00 to succumb to the, to the campaign. I'd like to add here that when we arrived on Bougainville we were told that there were between 15 and 20,000 Japanese on the Island. And when we the campaign finished we discovered that there were some 45,000 Japanese troops and we'd have had a hell of a battle

32:30 ahead of us if the war had proceeded. That brings to mind another point. When the, I think the Japanese commander's name was Hirada, I might be wrong, but when he was he came into Torokina and they were talking with him he asked with great courtesy if he could ask a couple of favours

33:00 and they said yes. He said, "I want to ask why Australian troops were ever sent to Bougainville," because as far as we, they were concerned there was nothing the Japanese could do. They were isolated on Bougainville. They were useless really. It was all a political campaign from Australia to send troops to Bougainville and the story that was registered in the

33:30 press that the 3rd Division were just mopping up. Which didn't please the troops one little bit. Can I wipe my nose?

Yep. Yeah sure.

Fargher. Bill Fargher left us in Bougainville. He received an OBE [Order of the British Empire] for his effort and it was very well deserved. He had

34:00 seen service in the Middle East and then with the Seventh Division in Greece. So he was an old campaigner. In Torokina, something I was about to tell you and it's escaped my…

You were talking…

Oh yes, we received

34:30 information that Fargher was returning back to Australia and he was to be replaced by another officer whose name was Frank Stabb. Colonel Stabb. Colonel Stabb was a delightful man but completely innocuous as far as a CO was concerned we felt in comparison to Fargher. Fargher wouldn't let any of

his troops be trodden on and

35:00 we'd served under his banner for so long we found it hard to accept a man who was so soft and…but when I got back there I became his adjutant and it wasn't long after that that I was to be moved out to Rabaul. The only way I could get home being so young and unmarried. The only way you got

35:30 home was to have be old and have been married so you could get points so that you could get back to Australia. So I was I was to be transferred to Rabaul as adjutant of Eleventh Div Sigs under Colonel Greville. That was an interesting movement. Jim Luxton and myself went on this flight. We presented at the

36:00 airport, and I think it was a Beaufighter that we were transported in, and we presented ourselves and said to the pilot, We're your…We're to go to Rabaul," and he said, "Have you been there before?" We said, "No." He said, "Neither have I. It'll be an interesting trip won't it?" So we had a lovely flight over and coming into Rabaul, you've

36:30 got to come over the two volcanoes to get into the strip and the strip runs directly into the sea. And we weren't aware of anything. The pilot said as he got down low he said, "I'm about to land shortly. You can throw, you know, you can look out the side, do what you want." But and all of a sudden as the wheels hit the ground he did a land loop. In other words he cut one

37:00 engine and fired the other one up because a Japanese had driven a tractor out into the middle of the strip and he'd come up over the tractor to land and then he found the sea ahead of him. So it was quite an interesting trip into Rabaul. That was another exercise all its own but. It was…

So when you said you were in your tent when you got that call from the colonel saying the war's over and you just

37:30 **thought that was a bit of a, he was just taking the Mickey at the time, when was there a realisation that it was really over? Or was it just a…**

The following day. The following day we had messages coming through to verify what Hooker had told us. Positive message in the, in the sig office. Yes, we knew straight away, but again even though leaflets were dropped over the Japanese we weren't aware of

38:00 how much how many troops would be told that the war was over and how much they would observe this. I didn't tell you, but I did say that we had a, I did have a good friendship with Hooker after this but when I got back he invited me down to his mess and he was one who rather pushed the younger officers

38:30 around or ran them to their limits and he loved to get them in the mess and feed them up with drinks and when I met him in the mess he said to me, "What will you have to drink?" And I said, "I'm not a big drinker, Sir." And he said, "Well, what are you gonna drink?" And I said, "Oh, I'll have a gin and lime." I thought that was pretty easy because I knew, I'd heard that once they, they'd finished they went down to the sea and swam and didn't matter whether it was at midnight or two o'clock in the morning. Well, that didn't

39:00 appeal to me. And I had a couple of these and I, he said, "Righto, fill it up again," and I said, "No, I've had enough, thank you sir". He said, "Don't tell me that a 3 Div sig officer is gonna be a piker." I said, "You've hit it right on the head. I don't need any more." He said, "Good on you." And I then met up with him again in Rabaul. But that's a different, Rabaul was a different story altogether because

39:30 this was Eleven Div Sigs serving, servicing an area where LFC Sigs, they were a higher echelon, were moving into so we didn't have a great severity on the operators there and I had nothing to do really with the sig office. Apart from the fact that

40:00 making sure that the office was functioning. Because of the CO, it was on duty as Adjutant to make sure that the office was functioning. That the troops were fed and that they were being carefully looked after. Greville was an excellent officer. South Australian. We got on extremely well together. He gave me the task at one stage to go out and

40:30 view the Japanese communications in Rabaul, which were pretty hefty communications. They had a direct link to Tokyo and this was the big outlet to so he was interested to see whatever equipment was available.

Think we'll stop there.

Tape 7

00:30 **OK, we're rolling.**

Rabaul, that most interesting spot. 60,000 Japanese on Rabaul when I arrived there, all prisoners of war. They could've taken us apart very easily because we were so few. My association was through 11

Div Sigs as adjutant and

01:00 at one stage Colonel Greville decided he wanted more information on what sort of communications the Japanese had. So my friend Luxton and I went out this day with a Major Shoji who was taking us round to these particular areas. And the one that I remember so well was a bunker

01:30 with 15, 20-feet of concrete that had direct communications to Tokyo. Tokyo. And that was their main communication centre. If you think about it, with 60,000 troops in Rabaul, it's only half a day's trip to Australia virtually by air or less and it's rather frightening.

02:00 They used the Indian and Chinese people that were living on the island, they put them to work as labourers and they dug this these tunnels over a road from one side of Rabaul to the other and it was became known as Tunnel Road Hill. If you were game you could navigate a lot of these tunnels.

02:30 I, with a few other officers, decided one Sunday we'd go down and have a look at a tunnel. And this particular one had a wire running along the ceiling and we didn't pay a lot of attention to it. We found a lot of interesting pieces there and we got a fair way in and all of a sudden something started to tick. And we decided it was better to be out of there than stay there. Nothing ever happened but we never quite knew whether

03:00 they'd booby trapped it. The sigs occupied the old hospital area which was a delightful building. Large building big veranda. And part of it they'd moved to, and again dug a tunnel and operated a photographic

03:30 segment there. I was very interested in this because I loved photography and used it a lot copying negatives and enlarging and so on. So that that was very good in an area that we felt very comfortable with. The visit out to the, to that bunker highlighted the equipment that the Japanese

04:00 had. When I was at school, toys were sold or given to you and if they fell apart the first thing you used to say, "Oh, they're made in Japan. They were rubbish." Now the message came home loud and clear to me when I visited this area. Firstly I was able to pick up a complete set of auto

04:30 control box and a set of five automatic dialling telephones. Now it's pretty difficult to operate automatic telephone dialling in the best of circumstances. The lines have to be very good. But the Japanese evidently had acquired the know how of operating these and

05:00 I passed the information on to Corps and they couldn't believe it. The bunker itself had this enormous transmitter that was direct to Tokyo and they were governing most of the Pacific area from this compound. The operators of the sets slept in hammocks from the floor to the ceiling

05:30 six, one after the other to the to the ceiling. I did pick up here a set of candlesticks. Beautiful set of candlesticks that were pulled apart and fitted into a case that was no bigger than the palm of your hand. You unscrewed the base and took them apart and set the little handle in and then set the holder for the candle.

06:00 And the reason for these was that if there was ever a breakdown in power each of these fellows had their little boxes that they fitted their candlesticks in. Major Shoji was a delightful, although I had a great hate for Japanese, he was a delightful person and treated us with the greatest of respect. I later received, which is hanging

06:30 in my hallway, a Japanese drawing on a piece of parachute silk from him as a thank you. I disregarded it at the time because I thought he was just crawling to me. But after I'd known him for a while I realised that he was being quite sincere.

So how did Major Shoji come to take you on this tour? What were the circumstances?

This

07:00 was organised from headquarters and he was deputed to conduct us right through the area and to make sure that we were safeguarded on our travels to the different areas. We could, he authorised us to take whatever we wanted. Otherwise I think we'd a found difficultly in removing some of the pieces that we took. I don't know where the authorisation

07:30 from his end came but I'm sure it was from Corps Headquarters that they gave authorisation for him to take us around.

How long after the surrender was this?

Three months. They were very much alive, I can tell you, they, we had them in the camp. They we used them in the camp for cleaning up

08:00 and servicing the showers for the officers, and when I say servicing, they were tipping hot water into the top of the showers so that we could have a decent shower. But they were very arrogant even at that stage. And were quite starved still because on a couple of parades I had to haul a couple of them out because they'd been through the garbage tins rummaging for

08:30 for rubbish for food. While I was there, I was privy to four Japanese doctors being sentenced for murdering our fellas. They were injecting air, or they suggested that they had been injecting air into these guys to

09:00 make them tell stories and so on. I found it hard to believe that any Australian could defend them but of course obviously you've got to have somebody that can defend a person. You can't just execute him because you think he's done the wrong thing. But I found that very hard to accept. We had a bit of a scare at one stage there. We weren't

09:30 aware that the engineers had collected a lot of ammunition and put it in a dump and decided one day that they'd fire the dump and this whole thing blew up and we wondered what in the name of goodness had happened. That trip out to the bunker, we were well faded [tired] and they put up tent areas to keep the sun off us. They treated us like kings but I'm sure it was only because Shoji was there and that's why they looked after us so well.

10:00 **So you were told that you could take anything that you wanted to?**

Any anything that anything that was interesting as far as signals were concerned.

So what did you take?

Well those telephones. A telephone exchange. Electric meters for checking circuits and so on. This was Luxton's side of things he knew all about those. Binoculars.

10:30 I can't think what else. I've got two pieces down in my store room at the moment that I sent home that I kept for myself, that I was able to keep. Beautifully crafted boxes that they'd had specialised equipment in. I don't know what they equipment was.

So can you explain to me how the automatic phone system that they had differed

11:00 **from the one that you were using?**

We didn't have an automatic - when I say automatic, it was the same as our old automatic phones. You put your finger in and turn one two three four and it dialled the number the other end. Now what the intricacies of the inside of that box was I don't know. But it was far in advance than anything we would've thought of. Nothing that the Americans had anything was automatic like that.

11:30 So they were definite about on their moves so that they were going to move south.

So there were there was sort of new intelligence there I guess new information that you hadn't you hadn't realised about the way they were operating?

Exactly.

Was there anything that you had discovered intelligence that you did have that was confirmed?

No, not really. No, nothing that I can point a finger at no.

12:00 I guess their radios and so would be similar operation to ours but circuitry would be much the same perhaps far in advance of ours but I don't know.

What about maps you know line maps and things?

Never came across them, and I wasn't really interested to pick up maps. They were of no use really to us. Or I didn't think so anyway.

12:30 My main interest was any appliances that were usable as far as signals were concerned.

So just remind me again who accompanied you who did this tour with you?

Lieutenant Jim Luxton. He was a wireless man and I was, the line my interest was in line. So he was able to select whatever he wanted as far as the

13:00 the wireless section was concerned. Which he did.

Just on that subject too of capability. With the Americans did you know did you use any of their equipment? Was there any sort of sharing of equipment with the Americans?

No direct sharing. I suggested to you before it was on a Lend Lease base.

13:30 So whatever we had from the Americans was got by underhand arrangements. I don't know how they finalised their arrangements with their storeroom but they were happy to be able to give us those telephones that I mentioned to you earlier. And we were thrilled to get them, particularly the linies.

So when you arrived on Bougainville just going back,

14:00 **I'm going to jump here…**

That's alright.

and there at the moment if you don't mind. You arrived there and the Americans were there and they were going to clear out. Did they brief you terribly well? Were they able to pass on information to you that assisted you or?

Oh, yes. They had circuitry there that interested us. There were there were miles and miles of overhead lines that they'd built which some of which we took over. They were of use to us. But as far as

14:30 briefing us on anything further, no. There was nothing beyond the perimeter that was of any use to us. They had nothing. Everything that we took over virtually from them was in the confines of Torokina.

So they hadn't established anything beyond those confines?

No.

In terms of lines and…

Not to our knowledge. Nothing that was useful to us anyway. No.

15:00 **So you therefore had to go and do all that work?**

Everything that that all communications from Torokina onwards was built by 3 Div Sigs in that area yeah.

Were you surprised by that situation or were you ready for it?

No, we didn't know what had gone on. We weren't briefed on what had happened on the island before we got there. Just to say that the Americans were holding the island and that they

15:30 had communications within Torokina, and that was an accepted fact as far as we were concerned. It wasn't until General Savage decided that we'd move south that we then found that Divisional Signals was again going to be to the forefront of providing communication.

So what did you do about resources and like equipment and supplies in order to set up what you needed to set

16:00 **up?**

Well, we'd been restocked before we came back to Lae with whatever we were, we had shortages in. That was the norm for a Divisional Signals. The only the only new device that I can remember was a more up to date L-phone which was

16:30 quite a good piece of equipment that was built in Australia. And a teletype that was introduced. This is a unit with a keyboard and it punched out a tape. You had to have another unit at the other end to be able to receive it. And that decoded what was on the tape when it got to your end.

17:00 But that was only as far forward as Toko. It was very difficult to get a line that was balanced enough to operate the teletype. It had to be a perfect line balance really. And we couldn't get it always on the

17:30 cable that we or the circuits that we ran.

Right, so did that mean that you would you would need several different lines that were suitable for these different kinds of equipment that you were using?

Yes, you persisted. With when teletypes arrived you there were special circuits set aside for them and you persisted to do the best

18:00 you could with those. They were only a one line job but the rest of the circuits were all telephone or Fuller phone.

What was the L-phone?

L-phone was a was an update of the Don-5. More advanced model of the Don-5 with a handset sitting on the top of the phone. A Baker Light handset

18:30 and a magneto on the side. You needed a magneto or the line people needed a phone with a magneto on to test circuits because that dropped shutters on the switchboard or alerted to the phone the other end where you were still in contact with. Obviously it didn't where the line was broken, but you needed a generator to put that through.

19:00 So that that was the L-phone that was. Also, we had a Freddy phone which was another type that didn't match up at all to the American phones. Amongst the phones I might add was the old type PMG [Postmaster General] phones. When

19:30 I said before we had 120 operating in Lae. On our establishment we only had I think 50 phones, well, the rest of them we had to purloin somewhere or other and we managed to collect them on the from sources that are best known to us. And they were the old home telephone type of thing with a generator handle on the front but you just picked up the handset and you wound the generator and it dropped the

shutter on

20:00 the switchboard. They were the only other types of telephone that we used.

So when you got hold of some of the American equipment did you have to adapt it? Did you have to do some engineering on it to …?

No, none at all. It had two terminals on one side and you put the line on the terminals and turned the generator and made contact and voice was then operative and away

20:30 you went. It was in a beautiful leather case. Not that the leather case was any good but it added to the scene. But the cable fellas were absolutely over their out of their minds when they got these EE8As.

Were they lightweight or was it?

No not really. This didn't' cause a problem in Bougainville again because we were able to

21:00 move things by jeep a fair way, and even though the linies had to walk over the shoulder, it wasn't bad. They weren't much heavier than a Don-5 that was completely inoperative really.

So when they supplied you with this new you know new developments did they send someone to assist you with

21:30 **using them or setting them up or you feel you could?**

No. No, we had enough know how or enough bodies to know what to do and how to do it. Richards in particular was very good electrically. But it made no difference. They were pretty simple as far as the average signalman was concerned. All he had to do was put it on his shoulder. Connect up and wind the handle.

22:00 **So just jumping back to or forward to Rabaul again. You were there you did the tour what else did you do while you were there?**

Well, as adjutant I had a full day moving around the unit. As I said before it's the adjutant's job to make sure all the records are kept and records have got to be complete. Because we're finding out now that

22:30 the records from Div Headquarters and other places are forming the base of any information that is required now. If they want to go back they've got records because these records were passed on to Corp Headquarters and back to Australia. So no it was very complete really. Daily communication with

23:00 any illnesses. Any people being getting leave. Any shortages of equipment the Adjutant always took an interest in. He, we, he was also interested also to make sure that the signal office was being looked after well.

But on Rabaul what exactly were you doing there in that role of Adjutant?

That's what I was doing.

That's what you were doing?

Yes,

23:30 well I was responsible to Colonel Greville, directly responsible to him.

Right. So these were Australian soldiers that were still there that you were?

Oh yes. 11 Div Sigs were all Australian personnel. I'd not met up with them before, but I knew a few of them from past memories. But

24:00 they seemed to do well. There was no complaints. We had a big race meeting at Rabaul that Brigadier Hammer organised. The Japanese had horses there for, or ponies as they were, for carting poles and carting other equipment and there were quite a few of them and when Hammer decided to

24:30 to break the monotony, he decided to have a race meeting which was very complete really because really there were tote operators and there was betting on the races. I don't know how many races there were. Perhaps five races. I know that Eleven Div Sigs' foal that was at a, not foal, the horse that was allocated was in foal so we didn't have much chance of winning the race but we

25:00 had a lot of fun. We had numerous parties in the mess always to break the monotony again. We had nurses over from the AGH quite regularly to the officers' mess. I took a trip out. Right? Took a trip out at

25:30 one stage with another officer and two nurses to visit an area called Kakapo which was way outside of Rabaul. It was like a day's trip there and back and we visited some nuns on the way. Lovely people really lovely. They'd been very much maltreated by the Japanese

26:00 and it was hard to get stories out of them. But one of the nuns told me that she'd been beaten because she was hanging her washing on the line and the Japanese were certain that she was sending signals to

the Allied forces. We had morning tea with them and then went on our way but they were a delightful group of people. Some of the Chinese,

26:30 I met and photographed lovely families there who again had been maltreated. The Chinese men and the Indians were just forced labour to dig these tunnels so that the Japanese could evade the air raids. The township itself was quite interesting. A magnificent harbour. You could put

27:00 two of or three of Sydney Harbour into Rabaul Harbour. But the township was built on the square pattern, and I don't know what trees were, but they were built all round the square so that they would provide shade for the shoppers. They must have been magnificent when they were alive but the Japanese cut them off about two feet from the

27:30 ground so that it would give them a line of direct line of fire to cover the Rabaul Harbour. So they were only butts that were left in the ground. It was such a shame because it must have been a delightful township there. I did a bit of sailing on Rabaul Harbour. There's a couple of mounds, if you can

28:00 call it that, come up from the centre of the harbour from one of the eruptions. These were referred to as the 'beehives'. All of a sudden they'd featured coming up out of the harbour and it was quite a sight to see them. The volcanoes themselves were, it was pretty horrible, was like bad egg smell continuous and the soil was, if you could call it soil, was pumicey.

28:30 But plants grew very quickly. Any plants you put in the ground, I had a few out round my tent, and the roots would start three quarters of a way up the stem because with the rain pelting on the, on the pumice it would bounce up onto the stem and then it'd start a shoot, thinking it was going to be into the ground. We had plenty of pawpaw trees

29:00 near the headquarters. You could go and pick yourself a pawpaw whenever you felt like it and, if you like pawpaws, which I did, they were, they were beautiful. Swam a lot there also. The water was lovely and warm. Then I was moved to Fourth Brigade as a means for getting me home to Australia.

29:30 I was moved as OC Captain of 4th Brigade. Oh, I was promoted to captain in Rabaul as Adjutant of 11 Div Sigs. And then moved on as Captain OC of 4th Brigade Sig Section which was directly responsible to Brigadier Hammer of originally of 15th Brigade.

30:00 That was a pretty easy task because everything was operative and I didn't have a lot to do there apart from swim and spend my time in yachts and get ready to come home. I had a problem coming home. Received a signal to say that 4th Brigade Sig Section would be prepared to embark on such and such a date on the Duntroon or

30:30 the Westralia, or whatever it was, on such and such a date and all transport would be taken to the transport pound and you'd be given a document for placing them there. And I didn't check on the document and I embarked from Rabaul and was having a lovely time onboard ship and did a tour of the ship one day and found only three of my jeeps and I couldn't find the other two.

31:00 And instead of keeping my mouth shut I went to the Bursar and complained that I'd lost two jeeps and we were just coming up the Brisbane river and the skipper of the ship sent for me and I've never been torn apart so quickly and so delightfully by a skipper. He asked me why I'd taken so long to find out why I'd lost two jeeps and I said to him that I hadn't lost

31:30 them. I had left them in the compound and somewhere they'd gone astray from there. But he really dressed me down. We found the jeeps somewhere in New South Wales when after I'd arrived in Brisbane. Came back with on the ship with the two nurses that I mentioned before. We I spent a lot of time with these two girls and also with a Dr

32:00 Taft. He was a doctor in Bougainville with one of the battalions or brigades and we had a very friendly trip back with these ladies. In Rabaul for Passover, for the Jewish Passover, we had a service

32:30 there at which Taft, Dr Taft was there, a fellow by the name of McGregor, a Captain McGregor, somebody else and myself. I didn't know that McGregor was a Jew at that stage. And why I mention this is because after coming home I had two stints in hospital, one with appendix and at Heidelberg Hospital believe it or not

33:00 I finished up in a ward with Dr Taft who was also there being treated, and McGregor. The three of us of the four that were in Rabaul finished up in this ward in Heidelberg. But coming back to we arrived in Brisbane and then was in camp there and it was my duty to return all stores and make certain that all troops

33:30 were accounted for to ascertain if there were any AWL [Absent Without Leave] and if they were A, AWL I was to chase them and find out where they were before the unit could be wound up. Eventually got round that and organised everything and it was accepted and I'd like to highlight this. By

34:00 virtue of the fact that having started off as a signalman with Fourth Brigade Signals Section it was my duty to finish up with the same section and winding it up I thought was quite unusual.

Were there many men that had gone or any men that had gone AWL?

None that I

34:30 I had to account for. I whilst I was still Adjutant with Eleven Div Sigs I had a problem with one fellow who decided he wanted to go home and there was a ship leaving and he wasn't eligible to go home and the provos had caught him on the gang plank and I happened to be down at the wharf and spotted this his name was Vincent

35:00 and I went aboard and I said to the provos, "What's going on?" And they said, "This fellow's going AWL." And I said, "No way, he's just, I don't think he's quite with it at the moment. Let me take him, I'll look after him." And I prevailed upon them and I was able to gain his release. And it was some years after when my wife and I were at a sale in Buckley and Nunn's in Melbourne

35:30 of sheets and blankets and things that I spotted this fellow who was in charge of the department and he came up to me and he and he said, "What are you doing?" I said, "We wanted to buy something," and he called people over, he said, "Now give this fellow anything he wants." Because he'd realised that I was the bloke that saved him from being sent back to Rabaul. But he was the only one. No, I accounted for all the others. It was a laborious task

36:00 and I didn't appreciate it travelling around day by day making appointments and making sure I got signatures for all the equipment and so forth, but we got there.

So was there a lot of equipment brought back, or did you did you dump equipment over there?

No didn't dump a thing. No, not like the Americans. There was so much left in Bougainville by the Americans if anybody had had any sense at that stage could a made a fortune later on picking it up. No, we didn't

36:30 dump anything. We packed everything in panniers and in boxes and those boxes were recorded and they were all accountable for and we knew what was in each one and all the equipment that the brigade had was returned to Australia to Brisbane.

You've said a couple of times that you like you were a photographer and you liked to take photographs. Can you tell me a bit about the sorts

37:00 **of photographs you took and also the fact that you had a camera over there which?**

Yes, I had a German camera, a Voigtlander which took excellent photos. I loved photography and having been immersed in this field with Trewavis and his father, it gave me an interest. I took a lot of photos around Rabaul and of other people,

37:30 particularly the Chinese. I took photos of these Japanese that were tried and sentenced. But generally speaking, I liked the countryside and I like particularly gum trees and people. So it was I was able to instruct other people that were interested in photography and didn't know anything about it in Rabaul to take them

38:00 down to the this little area and give them some instruction in printing and developing and enlarging. The Japanese left had left all this equipment and stacks of paper and what have you there, so it was very valuable.

What about any other places for example Bougainville and the mainland in New Guinea were you taking photos there as well?

Not, in New Guinea, no,

38:30 no. It was too difficult to, although a number of the boys carried cameras, no, I didn't have a camera in New Guinea. Bougainville, I did, yes, I took photos in Bougainville. I've got a photo of the Rex Healy Oval and of the cricket team and the football team. Not much else. You, your mind was too

39:00 occupied when we were moving forward to be taking photos. Particularly from my position anyway.

There war, there were war photographers around weren't there?

Yes, I had a very interlude with a famous war photographer by the name of Damian Parer. This was in Moresby when I was at the school of Signals at Loloki. I'd made friends with an English

39:30 pilot by name of Binks. Amazing I can remember. And he was situated with the RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force] at Port Moresby and I received a call at Sogeri to ask me to if I had freedom to go down to his area because there was something urgent he wanted to show me and I had to be there within the day.

40:00 And I got leave and this was part of the Coral Sea Battle and they were printing and developing and printing films that Damian Parer had sent back on the spot and I was privy to this. And I vividly remember one picture

40:30 which depicted a Japanese ship with a wooden deck and Parer was evidently lying on his belly in the Beaufighter and they were down so low that you could see the splinters of the deck. The photo that he took showed the splinters of the deck raised. He was at Tambu Bay, Damian Parer, and we've

41:00 one of our top operators and technicians he took aside and he painted. The painting is in Canberra. Geoff Helstrom, this fellow's name was. And I mentioned before to you that you asked me whether I was efficient as a, as an instructor. Well, I realised that

41:30 you had to pick your mark and Helstrom was sent back a bit of relief to a high technical school on wireless in Australia and he finished that course and came back to the unit and his report was brilliant, brilliant, brilliant. Impossible. He knew more than any of the instructors and he let them know. Well, I didn't want to barge into that sort of problem but Helstrom was ...

42:00 End of tape

Tape 8

00:30 **We're rolling. So we'll just pick up on Damian Parer and what you knew about him and your impressions of him?**

Yes, well my impressions of him that he was one of the top-notch photographers and journalists. He was always in the front line or so close to it that it didn't matter. Some of his work on over

01:00 Kokoda was just absolutely brilliant. And what epitomises the man I think was that he was finally killed shot in the back because he was walking forward of the troops photographing them as they were advancing. He was very highly respected. There's one famous picture of him you may remember of a an Australian fellow walking up a shallow creek bed and a

01:30 patch over one eye and an arm in a sling, an infanteer that had been injured badly injured and was coming back for treatment. This had been on film a number of times. That was another one of Parer's efforts and that was at Tambu Bay. It's told that it was in other areas, but I distinctly remember seeing this fellow coming up the stream at Tambu Bay.

So you were there when Parer was there?

Yes, I was in Tambu

02:00 Bay when he was there yeah. Yes, and that's where he painted Geoff Helstrom, was in the, they just pulled him out of the crowd. He could a been washing his mess tins or something and he said to him, "Would you like to have your picture painted soldier?" And there it was.

That was Ivor He..."

Ivor Hele.

Who painted your Helstrom?

Yes.

So,

02:30 **so what sort of man was Parer? You were saying before that he was?**

Very religious man. He quite often you'd find him with his Rosary beads and particularly when he was onboard ship. If the fellas were playing two-up and using their rather shady sort of language, as soon as they caught sight of

03:00 of Damian Parer the language disappeared. They treated him with tremendous amount of respect. Great shame.

'Cause he depicted the war in a very real and truthful way?

Very truthful way, yes. I didn't mention to you either that at Toko, I had a visit from the Jewish chaplain. He'd seen service in the Middle

03:30 East for quite some time. His name was Goldman, Rabbi Goldman. Very highly respected chaplain. I'd met up with him in Lae and he, in Lae he firstly he said to me, "How are you? Are you, how's the food," and I complained about the food. And he said, "Well, what's offering?" And I said, "There's a lot of rubbish and there's bacon and eggs of a morning," and I

04:00 said, "because I'm Jewish I don't eat the bacon and he," as a Rabbi, he said to me, "Don't you know there's a bloody war on? Eat what you want to eat, son." But at Toko he came in and asked me if I had time to leave the sig office. He wanted a special favour. And I said to him, "What's this special favour? I'm a bit suspicious." He said, "Have you got a spare jeep or do you know a jeep that's going forward to one of the battalions?" I said, "Well, I can make

04:30 enquiries but I don't have a spare jeep. Our Don-R runner's already finished. But I'll talk to somebody at Div Headquarters and I'll see if there's anything going down. Why?" And he said, "Mind your own

business. Just see if you can get me a trip." And it so turned out that there were several Jewish fellows in one of the battalions right up forward and he was anxious to meet them

05:00 and he did. We got him a trip and he was one of the few, as I said, Jewish chaplains, but he was one for the boys. Loved by everybody. We got side-tracked there.

That's OK. Was that difficult for you,

05:30 **being Jewish within a, you know, within a situation like that where your needs weren't really catered for?**

Not really. I was highly respected to the degree that I mentioned when we were on the Tablelands we had officers' full mess and so and there was always

06:00 pork and pig and whatever ham, but never once did I ask for anything else and I was always given fare that had nothing to do with pork. They always found something for me. Which was tremendous. That of course went back to the cooks. They I guess I had enough respect for them to do that for me.

Well this

06:30 **brings me to something else that I'm curious about with you, and it's your role as an officer and therefore being a leader of your men and what it was like having to be a leader and what you learnt from people that you respected like Fargher and General Savage for example?**

Yes, I guess

07:00 my, I felt my education was lacking because I left school at such an early age and I had to learn everything and pick up things as I went along and be sensible and sensitive to things that I thought would affect me and be good for me. And by virtue of my association

07:30 with Bill Fargher, he was a role model for me, and I learnt so much from his ingenuity and his ability to treat troops that it stood me in good fare. Taught me a lesson of how to treat troops and how to appreciate the value of these

08:00 fellows and to look after them because after all my survival was dependant on how well they operated I imagine. He was a great instructor and although he didn't force himself upon you. I learnt a tremendous lot from him. Who else was…?

I was just I was just going to say General Savage as well but I'm curious if you an recall a moment

08:30 **or you know an incident where you realised that that Bill Fargher was teaching you a valuable lesson?**

I guess from the first time that I that, I met him after I arrived at Mubo, because he wasn't or he'd just come to the unit as CO when I was at the School of Signals, so I hadn't met him until I, I'd met him at Mubo. And

09:00 although he'd rather reprimanded me for taking too long to travel the distance it was not a severe reprimand. It was a sarcastic one, I would think. But I realised then that his ability was such that he could command troops and influence you. He was a great walker and he'd only

09:30 do, or he'd only ask his troops to do what he could do virtually. He could outdistance any of us I feel as far as walking was concerned. When we walked from Mubo down to Tambu Bay, I did mention before was quite a trip, and before he took off, his batman, who was quite a character, Hobber, he was a great reader

10:00 of magazines and comics, and he'd loaded up the old man's pack with comics and boots and a lot of other things and before he could say anything the old man had picked up his pack and he carried this weight all the way from Mubo to Tambu Bay and didn't realise until he got to Tambu Bay that he'd carried Hobber's pack all the way. But that, he

10:30 didn't reprimand Hobber at all. He thought that was a great joke. He was a very fit man although he'd had malaria two or three times, he'd be hospitalised two or three times. But he never had reason to reprimand me for, oh, on one occasion. I mentioned before we had Japanese bombers over

11:00 in Lae and we'd set up another switchboard and we'd taken, or the cable fellows had taken, a lot of lines off the patch and the switchboard operator had mislaid one of the labels. And late at night, very late at night he said to me, "Sir, every, I've got all lines checked bar one. What

11:30 do I do?" And I said, "Lindsay put the jack in the socket and give the handle a good wind and see if you can find anybody." And he did that and it was the worst thing he could've done. It was Brigadier Monni, Monaghan, 'Mad Mick' Monaghan, and after he'd hung up, at breakfast the next morning, Fargher said to me,

12:00 "Saul, I've had a ring from Brigadier Monaghan. You're to be paraded at 10 o'clock this morning," and

this is where again where Fargher impressed me so much,

12:30 he said to me, “Now, when you’re, Monaghan is such a man,” he said, “go in salute him. Stand strictly to attention. Say ‘Yes Sir’ and ‘No Sir’ and nothing else.” Which I did and I never heard anymore about it. But when I got out, Fargher with some form of reprimand, said to me, “Why the hell did you tell Lindsay to put that jack in and wind the handle?” I said because I thought it might of been somebody that we might’ve needed in a hurry,

13:00 I didn’t realise it was Mick Monaghan. That was the only reprimand I ever had from him, if you could call it such.

So that was just a random connection, was it with Mick Monaghan?

Yes. It’s easy for me to understand it. But when you’re reconnecting lines, if a label falls off and it drops to the floor and nobody notices it, you’ve got no knowledge of who that line belongs

13:30 to. So the only way to find out is to plug in and wind the handle and find out whose hanging on the other end, which we did.

So do you think Fargher represented you to the higher command you know in a, in a fair way?

Very much so. Yes, I think Monaghan would’ve torn be apart if Fargher hadn’t preceded my visit and told him

14:00 what I was about and what I was doing. Monaghan was that type of person, he was rough as bags as far as I’m concerned. He was an artillery man.

So when you’d finished at Rabaul how long were you at Rabaul for?

Oh three months or so. Possibly more.

14:30 I can’t recollect really. No, I’m not too sure Cath.

But you came home after that didn’t you?

Not home. I came back to Australia and I was then sent to Balcombe again as an instructor. They were instructing troops that were going to the BCOF force. But…

What’s the BCOF

15:00 **Force?**

That was the British Commonwealth Occupation Force in Japan. I didn’t see my days as instructing to be any more and I dodged the issue there. I didn’t want to do anything about that and I was

15:30 able to dodge pretty successfully and then I was hospitalised a couple of times from there. So I was brought up to Heidelberg with appendicitis and then after returning back to Balcombe, I then developed malaria and I wasn’t too popular with the CO. He thought I was dodging issues. But it was December when I

16:00 was released from, back to my, I was driven back by the CO of the camp there back to Melbourne and I was discharged at Royal Park. But I didn’t do any instructing at all at Balcombe. I did apply because of that BCOF Force, it was available for me to join that and go to Japan and I was quite interested, but I rather

16:30 suggested that unless they gave me three weeks leave I wasn’t interested. And they said, “Don’t tell us how to run the army. You don’t get three weeks leave.” I said, “Well, I don’t go.” So I’m a bit sorry now that I didn’t. I think it would’ve been interesting. Although I had such a hatred for the Japanese.

So by then were you happy to be discharged and to leave the army?

17:00 Yes, very.

And what were your plans?

Didn’t have any. Float about. Find work after three or four months. Go back and into the ‘rag trade’, as it were. And then I met my wife. Or she wasn’t my wife then, and things developed from there and I then operated my own business from there on in,

17:30 or businesses until 1986. So that was quite a few years. I had a number of businesses. I first I had a store at East Preston, general store arrangement, and then moved into a delicatessen in Clayton and was there for

18:00 eight years. Then went back to the rag trade and had a number of principals from interstate that I represented as an agent in Victoria – 14-odd principals that I represented in ladies outer fashion and swimwear to the stores and operators in Melbourne.

18:30 Sold up in ’86, and a person that I’d been with while I had these principals suggested that if I didn’t sell

out, I'd kill myself. So he said, "Why don't you come and join me and impart some of your knowledge as a salesperson on the selling of my swimwear and you can start at any time you like

19:00 and finish when you like." And I stayed with him for three years, from the start of his business, and he's been very successful person ever since. Not because of me. I guess I had some input in the early days. But that was the finish of my working career in 1989, virtually I retired completely.

19:30 **Did you have any regrets about your participation in the war?**

No, none at all. I don't believe I'd have learnt as much in civilian life as I learnt with the people I mixed with and the courses that I was able to attend in the army. No.

So were you aware of

20:00 **people that were conscientious objectors at the time when the call up came?**

No, I didn't. We had a few characters in the intake at Seymour that didn't want to be a bloody signalman. He wanted to be a bloody machine gunner and things like this or much harsher words than what I've used, but no, they were, they were few and far between. I didn't ever come across any

20:30 conscientious objector at all. Mainly because I think I was mixed up with the army anyway and I didn't come across the people that were either thinking or joining or dodging.

Not within your community?

No.

Near Caulfield?

No, Middle Park.

Oh, Middle Park, sorry.

Middle Park…no, no. Two of my classmates

21:00 joined, badly wanted me to join the air force. They were both killed, one over Holland, one over Germany. They were in the same grade as myself when I left school. There must have been a number of others from the school that joined the forces also, obviously. But I never came across anybody that, oh I don't know what happened to Trewavis, whether his father got him out of the services,

21:30 but it was I was never aware of what happened to him really. Lost track of him.

So when you came home, you would've caught up with your parents I guess.

Yes.

What was that like?

Oh, that was excellent. That was wonderful to be back with my mother and father. She was obviously ecstatic.

22:00 I had corresponded with her quite regularly. She was mad keen on feeding me and sending me many parcels and things which became embarrassing because either the eggs had gone bad or something else that she'd sent had gone bad. But no, it was a lovely reunion and she'd dollied the place up and made it look very smart and brought new wardrobes and things and had all

22:30 my clothes set out and yes, it was, it was very good.

How about your dad?

We really, he didn't show a great, yes, he was pleased I was home. I must be honest, but we didn't have a good rapport with each other at the best of times.

23:00 It wasn't until we were, we were married that he took a great liking to Shirley that we rather got together again. But no, we didn't have a good rapport at all. It was difficult. He had a big chip on his shoulder.

23:30 **But you must have been a different person coming home, you know, going away as a young, very young man and coming home as a…?**

Yeah, well, I must've been, I don't know how he saw it though his eyes. Obviously, he was very proud of the fact that I'd achieved what I had, but to show it or to let me know that he was proud was, I never sort of got the message. But my mother was a different kettle of tea

24:00 altogether. It was embarrassing.

So when did you meet Shirley?

1947. I left the Army in '46, met her in '47 and we were married in '48.

And where did you meet?

Met at a social, a Jewish social function in St Kilda. I think I

24:30 was head-hunted. She would hate to hear me say this but she knew so much about me and I'd never met her. I didn't know her. Again, I was madly into sport and was playing a lot of volleyball and the hall we used, she attended with her sisters and that's where she first fell foul of me. Unbeknown to me.

25:00 **So did you ask her out for a date?**

No, the, I didn't at that stage. The first indication I had was I got a, an invitation to a birthday, to a party that her family were giving and they did this regularly to a lot of the young people

25:30 in those days. Got this invitation and I went round to one of my friends that, I was at school with Jack Selige and I said to him, "Jack, do you know this Shirley Kosky?" He said, "Yes, yeah, play tennis there regularly. They got a beautiful tennis court. There's four sisters. She's a fantastic girl. What are you talking about?" I said, "I've got an invitation and I don't know whether to go or not." He said, "Don't be silly, go." So that's how I

26:00 first met up with her and from there on I've never looked back. But one of my, oh, that particular night I was about to leave and one of my friends who was also an army person, knew the family very well and he said to me, "Where are you going?" I said to him, "I've got to catch a tram to get home." And he said, "Well, don't go. Shirley wants you to stay. I'll drive you home." So he

26:30 influenced me to stay and it matured from there. We went out many times and dances and pictures, and after I met her family it was never ending. They [were a] wonderful family. Her father was a delightful man.

27:00 **So when did you have your first child?**

Oh, 1950, Robert. And then Ruth was three years later. We'd built a home at East Ivanhoe from that

27:30 general store arrangement, or drapery that I had in East Preston, we looked after a fellow and his three or four sons because his wife was seriously ill. And my father, I was looking after then because he had nowhere to live and he was, I put him beside behind the shop to live there and this fellow was so appreciative of what we'd done for his

28:00 boys and his family he said to me, "Look, if ever I can do anything for you, don't hesitate to ask." And I said to him, "Look, I don't think there's a damn thing you that could do. Times are tough, I'm building a house. I can't get steel lentils and I can't get bricks." He said, "Well, you've come to the right fellow." He said, "I'm the person who releases all the bricks from the Thornbury brickworks. What sort of bricks do you want and how many do you want and

28:30 when do you want them?" And three days later we had bricks at East Ivanhoe. So we built a home there.

Was there a shortage of materials?

A great shortage, yes. Particularly of steel, and also bricks, apart from other things. But yeah, we had a lovely home. My father-in-law brought the land out there at East Ivanhoe and we stayed there until Ruth was born and then

29:00 developed the delicatessen at Clayton and bought in East Bentley, which was much closer to Clayton. Bought a home that was designed for Frank Sedgeman, if you know the name. He was overseas and this was offering and we took advantage of it.

So you did well in business?

I think so. I don't know anybody anything. I own everything I've got. I don't owe a

29:30 penny to anybody. Gave schooling to two kids and, I hope, looked after my wife. We've travelled quite a bit. Our final fling, big fling of course, was the trip on the QE II [Queen Elizabeth II], which we decided we'd blow a fair amount of money and enjoy the latter part of life.

30:00 But no, we've travelled quite considerably around Australia and through business I travelled to Japan. Extensive trip to Germany and Israel selling or buying machinery and selling fabric in Japan. I had an interesting interlude in Japan.

30:30 I was determined to wear my Returned from Active Service badge and Shirley said to me, "You mustn't wear it to Japan. That might offend somebody." And I said, "I don't give a continental [damn]. I'm going to wear my Returned from Active Service badge." And the Japanese are very intent on any badges and cards and things, and I'd been there for a few days and at this morning conference one of

31:00 these young fellows jumped to his feet and said, "Ho ho, Spielman. You wear a badge in your lapel. What badge that?" I said, "That's a Returned from Active Service." "Ho ho, who you fight?" I said, "All you buggers." But we're still friends. But no, I, Shirley'll tell you that I could virtually walk into a room and with eyes closed I could tell you if there was a Japanese in the room.

31:30 I guess we smell the same to them. But it was pretty obvious with the interlude I had in the islands and being so close to them that and I did, I did find it hard to accept going overseas. But they treated me extremely well. I had no complaints. We did very well with them.

Were you able to resolve any of your

32:00 **resentment towards them?**

Not really, I, well, when you say resolve it was just an inbuilt thing that all the fellows that were prisoners of war,

32:30 I resented this very much. And it of course my friends that were killed. Sorry.

Shall we stop?

No, I'll be right, thank you.

33:00 I'm embarrassed.

It's OK. Digging up old memories.

Yes.

Did you stay in touch with Major Shugera?

Shoji?

33:30 **Shoji?**

No, I didn't once I left once I left Rabaul. I never saw him again after that one trip after he'd presented me with the, that painting that you'll see downstairs. I had no reason to have any further acquaintance with him. I just respected him for the way he treated us on

34:00 that day. I thought we could've got rougher treatment. He was quite a gentleman really. He seemed to be a much more educated man than others that I, that I met up with.

So your trip to Japan and the other places was part of your delicatessen business was it?

No I was

34:30 partner in a knitting factory and we were selling fabric in Japan. And on the trip to Germany I was looking at machinery that, for knitting fabric. Went from Germany to Israel. The machinery was

35:00 quite unusual. It was a circular machine, knitting machine that knitted off a 35mm film. The light and shade affected different needles and needles that weren't required for that particular pattern were discarded. It was an unusual operation in Australia. We ran into trouble with the Customs. The first films that we tried to land, the customs thought they were pornographic

35:30 and it was actually patterns that we were developing for the production of fabric. The Japanese were very interested in this and being a wool mixture fabric it was highly saleable in Japan at exorbitant prices.

36:00 Germany was, I viewed new machinery there and I finally bought a couple of machines there. But I went on from there to Israel, the Israelis had developed a similar machine but far in advance to the Germans, surprisingly. In Germany, it was typical of Germans. They were very methodical. The factory that I visited, everything was in a little slot. They had at that stage they had robots

36:30 moving down picking up parts and so on. Different set up in Israel - people climbing over each other. When I arrived the machine wasn't operating. One fellow called to the other, "Get a couple of bandaids and put the wires together," which they did. Then he said to me, the machine started to revolve and he said to me, "Can I wish you a happy Christmas, Saul?" And I said, "Yes, you can." He said, "Well, I'll do that now." And he typed onto a

37:00 the typewriter 'Happy Christmas, welcome to Israel Saul Spielman from Australia'. And while he's typing it I can see the fabric being produced and here it was in the material. Being knitted into the material. They were so advanced. It was very clever. But the company fell on hard times then and then we had to get

37:30 out. We lost everything.

What was the cause of that breakdown?

I think we might've been over capitalised really, and when the Whitlam Government came into power, rather than keep the operation going when it was worthwhile to do so, they decided to close it down and let the machinery go for a song and pay all those people for three or four or six

38:00 months, whatever it was that were staff, which was ridiculous. But no, it was quite an interesting

operation. Japan was, with the people there I contacted them by post and was in touch with a fellow by the name of Sakagami, who was

38:30 my counterpart, counterpart in Japan, and I wrote him and said to him, “How will I know you when I arrive in Japan?” And he said, “I’m a short man and I’ll be wearing a Homburg Hat.” Well, there’s 10 million other Japanese that wear Homburg Hats and they’re all small.” He wrote back and said to me, “How will I recognise you?” And I told him the story. We found each other and that was the first

39:00 visit. We did a lot of business. And when I went back, I took Shirley with me and there’d been a bad accident on the train, the bullet train. And there are a lot of people delayed and finally they got it operating and we got seats on the bullet train, but the Japanese won’t spend money on anything they think is in

39:30 excess of anything, that they don’t think is necessary. And Sakagami was relegated to the last compartment of the bullet train and we had the better seats of course. And we arrived in Tokyo and at the terminal in Tokyo, a big taxi rank with thousands of taxis but thousands and thousands of Japanese waiting for taxis. And they all form queues. One behind the other. One won’t push in

40:00 front of the other. There’s nothing like it in Australia, you’d jump the queue, but not there. And I got tired of this and the sections that were holding the people back were very low. They were up to Sakagami’s chest but they were only up to my waist. And I just put one foot over the rail and put the other foot over and commanded a taxi and came back and took bags and said to Shirley to get in the front and then I’d

40:30 lost Sakagami. Couldn’t find him. I’d thrown all the bags in the back of the cab and all of a sudden I hear a meek little voice saying, “I here.” He’d got in the back and I’d thrown all the baggage in on top of him. He was so small. That was the last I saw of Sakagami. But we had a very interesting trip there. They were very kind to Shirley also. They arranged for a lot of, lot of trips. The senior executive,

41:00 can’t remember his name, Ober, he was a brilliant, had a brilliant brain and he was developing electrics, apart from buying fabrics and so on. And he had an operation south of Osaka in a place called Iowa [Iwai?]. He had a

41:30 had special machines knitting laces for the Japanese and the world market and he’d, with his brains had built a unit that when you fitted it on the machine that told him exactly the time that the machine had stopped. Because when a needle breaks, the machine stops and he wanted to know how much time his staff was wasting before they replaced that machinery. How long it was before they got it operating…

INTERVIEW ENDS