Australians at War Film Archive

Robert Vernon (Bob) - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:27 **Alright Mr. Vernon, Bob, we'd like to begin,**

00:30 **at the beginning, as it were, you telling us about your young life. And perhaps even start with telling us something about your parents and where they'd come from.**

Yes. My parent's story, I think, is quite interesting. They both came from England. My father came out in 1912. My mother was engaged to him and she followed about four years later. And the interesting

01:00 story is, that her brother said "now if this doesn't work out, here's an amount of money to come back". Because, in those days, of course, it was four or five weeks travel by sea. So anyway, it worked very well and they were married in 1918, had three children not long afterwards, of which I was number two. My sister was older than myself. When

01:30 my father first came to Australia, he had worked in the Post Office in London, and when he first came to Australia he needed work, and he worked on the roads. Helping to build roads. But he subsequently knew people, he lived in Armadale and he obtained a job, first of all, as a manager of a large bakery in Toorak, called Willard's Bakery and then he was part owner of that.

02:00 And he did that for the rest of his life. And so as children, we grew up, first of all, with some economical difficulty but as Dad was able to earn more, we had a reasonably comfortable life. I first of all went to a small private school in Prahran called Eastly College, no longer there of course, but it was

02:30 there then. And then I went to Toorak state school, close to where we lived. And from there on to Melbourne High School.

Okay, now, you said your parents were both born in England and when did your father move to Australia?

In 1912.

And you said your mother followed a little bit later.

Yes, about four years later. They were engaged.

03:00 **All that time?**

All that time, yes. And that's why my uncle was a bit concerned that stretching the time so long that maybe he would no longer want to marry her. But of course it was a good marriage.

I see. And had he been working in Australia at various things while she was still in England?

No. His only job, well to my knowledge, of course, I

03:30 wasn't around, but from hearsay and knowing from what I've been told, he had difficulty in getting a job, but he worked on the roads. And apparently, as a labourer, working, making roads was not a difficult job to obtain and secure. But he aimed for better, which of course, he ultimately secured.

Now, your experiences as a child, at primary school ...

04:00 Well, I'm going to be terribly boastful and tell you that, I've got photos here, I think every year I was at school I was top of the class. Which wasn't good for me, I suppose. But I used to have to go in the gardens adjoining the school, and have my photo taken every year. It was a bit different when I ... I went to Spring Road, I didn't mention that, for one year. My mother ... one of the teachers at Toorak

04:30 was Vincent Kelly, and Vincent Kelly was very ardent in everything he did, and he started the Australian Boys Choir, of which I was one of the very early members, in those days. Because it started at Toorak School. But my mother had a feeling that he was communist. And she was so incensed about this, she was very ardent on behalf of her children, that she suggested I had to leave

05:00 Toorak School, under his influence. So I went, I was directed to Gardiner School. I had a week there and I said to her “I’m no longer going to Gardiner”, so I came home and had to resign from the Gardiner School.

How old are you at this stage?

I suppose I was thirteen, fourteen. Wasn’t easy. It was a very difficult time. So then I went to Spring

05:30 Road School. Now Spring Road had a very good name for academic training. And why I mention Spring Road, is because the first term, I came about fifth. But I must say, by the end of the year I was top of the class again. I don’t know if these experiences were good for me, but I always aspired to be the very best.

Did you

06:00 **understand your mother’s concern? Did she tell you why she wanted you to leave …**

Oh, yes, she told me, because she thought he was communist. I may have influenced her thinking by coming home and talking along those lines. Although I don’t ever remember being communistic. Not … but of course, you must understand, in those days, being a communist and in a few later years, was not well regarded at all. You may be thinking of

06:30 a communist today, as being reasonably ordinary, but you didn’t then.

That’s of course, in the Depression, or towards the end of the Depression …

Towards the early days of the Depression, yes. Or during the Depression, that’s more correct to say that, yes.

Was your family politically interested in any way?

No. My mother

07:00 was a regular attendant at St. Albans, Armadale. The Church of England. And we were sent there as children, to the Sunday school. And we attended that. My father didn’t ever attend church. He worked very hard. He worked six days as week. And Sunday was a day he needed to get a bit of recreation.

Being a baker means getting up at about three in the morning doesn’t it?

Well, he didn’t do the baking, but he supervised

07:30 the delivery of the carts. And there were ten carts I think. It was quite a large bakery in Toorak. Willard’s Bakery. The building itself is still there, on the railway line. Not as a bakery, it’s used as a woollen mill or something of that ilk now, a weaving mill.

You would have enjoyed fresh bread at home, I imagine.

Yes we did indeed. On Saturday morning, we’d always go down and get some fresh bread rolls. Yes, that’s right.

What did you do

08:00 **apart from your school work?**

Well, I was always, perhaps unlike my academic abilities, I was never a good sportsman, but I was a very ardent sportsman. And I played tennis, I played cricket, was in the church cricket team. Although, there is a story I should tell you about that. The story is, that I aspired to play cricket and

08:30 there was a very good fellow named Reese Fox who ran a cricket club. Supervised it and managed it, at the Presbyterian Church, so Vernon

Is that the one in Toorak Road?

No, no. It’s the one in Armadale, Denbigh Road, Armadale, it was then. So I left St. Albans and went to the Presbyterian Church. Part of the need, if you joined the team, you had to attend church at least once a month.

09:00 So I certainly attended once a month at the Armadale church.

Was your mother concerned about sectarian training, as such?

I don’t think she was, no I don’t think she was. Although she had come from England and been really interested in the Church of England. And I think she still went to St. Albans, certainly in the early years.

Tell us about the cricket team.

Well, it was great fun. I think

09:30 I finished up captaining the cricket team. No because I was the best player, but because I was perhaps

the most reliable. But it was a very enjoyable time. And getting to know some younger people apart from those I had known, was very good, good for me. And it was great fun. I used to also play tennis. I think at that stage, I mixed

10:00 it in. I later joined Kooyong LTAV [Lawn Tennis Association of Victoria], and used to play on the lawn courts. Again, as a plodder sportsman, but loved my sport. Grew up being very fond of it. And in more recent years I've been quite a, well a very ardent bowler, a lawn bowler. So that I've maintained my interest, which is great to have a sporting interest, all my life.

There were some

10:30 **interesting Test matches around that period, did you follow those?**

Yes. Do you know, you've heard of Rickety Kate, perhaps, or some people may have heard of it. But Rickety Kate was a broadcaster over 3DB of the Test matches as they occurred. And they used to get the messages over 3DB and they would give you audible sounds which they developed in the

11:00 broadcasting place here, the station here. And you'd hear the ball hit the bat, or you'd hear a six being hit, and it was all imagined. But we used to, literally, my father was very keen to follow it too, we'd be up at two o'clock in the morning, with friends, having a cup of tea every so often, and listening to the Test cricket.

And who did you support?

Well, my father

11:30 always supported England, but I've always supported Australia. Always.

The team, the cricket team that you played with at the Presbyterian Church, you mentioned was run by this chap, Reese Fox, tell us a little more about him.

Yes. Well he was a very interesting character, and I guess I'd have to say he's played a part in influencing my life.

12:00 If you asked me what he did for an occupation, I couldn't tell you. He lived in a mammoth house in Armadale. And his father was a wool buyer. And in those days, a lot of money was made in wool. And I think I'd be right in saying, that Reese, because he must have had shares in it, was a Director of Lincoln Mills. But he also would have had investments.

12:30 But to my knowledge, he never had a particular job, as I knew a job in my lifetime. But he took a great interest in a group of us young fellows.

How old would he have been?

He would have been about twelve or thirteen years older than I was, so I was fourteen, he would have been late twenties perhaps. And he used to take us for camps, during holiday periods. I remember,

13:00 he had a wonderful motor car called a Panhard Levassor, which was an imported car, and a very big car. And it was the only Panhard Levassor I've ever seen or heard of. But he had one of those. He was a very humble sort of fellow. Apart from being interested in encouraging us to play sport, he took us for Bible study on Sunday nights. And from there,

13:30 I guess I was introduced to the Reverend Vernon MacEwen, because he was the minister at the church at that time. I have to say that I soon learned that Vernon MacEwen was a pacifist. And as I had become a Christian at about that time, I felt that

14:00 that's what I had to be. I couldn't imagine Christ taking up arms and shooting anyone, if he was in that sort of situation. And I didn't think I should do that. And I've been ardent in that outlook.

How old were you at this period?

About eighteen, nineteen, I suppose.

So we're talking about the years immediately prior to the war?

'38, '39, yes.

Your schooling,

14:30 **you said you went from Spring Road to Melbourne High, and that's a ... was there a competitive examination?**

Yes, yes. And I don't want to mislead you, or I don't want to mislead you by telling you I was top of Melbourne High. I wasn't the top. But I went into the professional class, which is the top sort of class. Because I'd always wanted to do medicine. And that was my

15:00 aspiration. And I think I came fifth at the end of the year. I didn't get top. But when I reflect, it was a very good result for Melbourne High. And at the end of the second year, my report, which I have here, indicates that I should go on to University studies. Now you must understand that few people went on to

University in those days. But when I

15:30 was home to see my father about the prospects, he assured me that I had to leave school. And that was a fair comment, because we were going through the, or had been through some of the Depressive years, and shortly after that, the bakery was sold, and he was out of work.

So you completed your Leaving Certificate?

No. Intermediate.

Intermediate.

Intermediate only. And then

16:00 he told me I'd have to get a job, and I tried two or three places. I got … and jobs were not easy to get … I got a job at Kinnears Ropes, but because Kinnears Ropes was so far away, somewhere over the other side of the city, I didn't take it. Then I got a job at Kaisers in Richmond, as a clerk, and I took that for a week, and walked out. I wasn't going to stick at

16:30 Kaisers in Richmond. Any rate I then really, in retrospect, fell on my feet. I applied for a job at the Royal Insurance Company. And the Royal Insurance Company, in those days, was a very large Insurance Company. And one of the few British companies. And I started work there, and I must say that they rest of my life has

17:00 been influenced, that was one stage, by the Royal Insurance Company. They treated me marvellously, and I tried to treat them well.

I'd like you to talk a bit more about the Reverend MacEwen, and get his ideas.

Well, I don't remember a lot of detail other than that he was quite emphatic about … this was just before the war had started, you must remember … and he was quite emphatic

17:30 about Christ not being war like and as a person. And therefore people who aspired to follow him could not be that frame of mind. They just couldn't be. And Reese Fox, guess, somewhat backed him up by what he would say. In Reese's case, he was very clever. He was very subtle, the way he would put something. But

18:00 he knew that he could influence us in what he said. And therefore, he was careful in what he said. And he was of the same mind. Although, when the war did come a year or two afterwards, he did go into the services, as a clerk, but he was never a combatant, Reese Fox.

I can imagine that in that area, Armadale, Toorak, some of those ideas wouldn't have gone down too well.

18:30 No, no. You're quite right. Although, you must remember that this was pre war, this was pre war, and people were prepared to think that way. Until the war actually started and bombs started dropping, and then you were forced to have a more active thought about what your reaction should be.

Did you discuss these ideas that you were hearing at the church, with

19:00 **other people? With school mates, with family?**

Not with family. I don't think I did, I don't think I did. I was pretty close in that sort of thing. But my mind was certainly ticking over and there was an author that Reese recommended to us. Name eludes me at the moment, I've got the book there. But I was so impressed with this author

19:30 who was also a pacifist, that later on I had the opportunity to go to England, and I made it my business to go and meet him and talk to him. He wrote several books, and I was greatly impressed with the books that he wrote. In the Steps of the Master was one of the books, I remember.

This is a religious book?

Mmm. They were religious books, yeah. He was a minister, this fellow.

20:00 **I hope you don't mind me asking this. I'm just thinking about your father in Australia, during the Great War, there were a lot of Englishmen who were in Australia who volunteered for the army, as a way of getting back to England.**

Yes. Well I think I have an answer for that. I never queried my father, greatly. But he had a semi stiff leg. And he had that because he had fallen,

20:30 and he had broken his knee cap. And his knee cap, forever then, it may be different now, was wired. You could almost see the wires under the skin. So he never had a protective knee, as normally we would have. And I think that may have been the reason. I, of course, was not around. I was born in 1920, so that I never discussed it at the time. I may have known more, had I discussed it

21:00 during the war.

Can we move onto your work at the Insurance Company? You'd been about sixteen when you started?

Perhaps seventeen, I think, yes about that.

But you're still attending, you're still playing cricket, what other things would you do apart from work?

Yes. Well I maintained

21:30 my interest in the church. And I guess, there were a few social occasions at the Royal, which I would go to. I think, for one of the few times in my life, I played football for the Royal Insurance Company. I wasn't a very good footballer, but I donned the garb and had a game.

22:00 **And can you tell me a bit about your siblings, and what they were doing during this period?**

Yes. Well my sister was older than me, two years older. My brother was three years and three days younger. So my brother was still at school, and I think he would have been at Caulfield Tech. It was decided that he was going to be trade like in his

22:30 experience, and he attended Caulfield Tech. My sister, perhaps at that time, had left Toorak School and when to Zircoe's. Zircoe's was a business training college. Quite well known. Quite a good class of school, in the city. And she went from there and had several very good jobs, quite outstanding jobs, as secretary.

23:00 She was very competent. My brother was a bit careful. He was very fond of sport, much better than I was at sport. And engaged in it very ardently, and was good at it. He played cricket, and he played tennis, as I did, and swimming, he was very fond of sport.

Can you talk about the years, 1938, '39, the sorts of debates

23:30 **that were going on in public and how you responded to those.**

Well, I guess '39 certainly, '38's a bit difficult to differentiate other than I was very ardent with the Royal. I, you know, I was a young fellow, not very important to them, but I did try and do the right thing. And I met people

24:00 there that I regarded very well, certainly later in life. And so I was preoccupied with, I guess, being aware of what was going on around me at the Royal, and what people were doing. In 1939 there was quite a lot of activity with younger people, my age, in the forces. They weren't in the active forces at those

24:30 times, but they were in the militia. And I remember, two or three flash through my mind at the moment, who would have time off to go to camp and experience some of there, gain experience in peace time warfare. That's a good description of it. And then in 1939 came, and the war started,

25:00 and I remember, if you were to ask me where I was, I can tell you exactly where I was, and what I'd heard. And I'd been to Denbigh Road Church, it was on a Sunday night, and someone said to me – the war has started. And I came home, listened to the wireless, and we heard the broadcast by, I suppose, Mr. Menzies at the time, saying we were at war as England had declared war.

25:30 And so it's a very memorable time. I knew that the war had started. Having the feelings that I did, I separated myself from some of my friends, not that I in any way criticised them, who immediately joined the AIF [Australian Imperial Force] or the air force, as the case may be. Mostly with the AIF. And in no time had gone overseas.

26:00 I suppose, months, to the Middle East. And if I may, I at this stage, and what I'm saying I'd like to dedicate what I say to two people. One would have been one of those people I worked with named, Jim Downey, who died at nineteen, a sergeant in the artillery, in the Middle East, shortly after the war started. And my own, as he would be now

26:30 if he was alive, my brother-in-law, my wife's brother, who at the age of nineteen was killed in the air force in England. Nineteen years of age, her only sibling. So I'm even today, very conscious of some of those people who went away very soon after the war started and didn't come back. Paid the penalty. But I was never tempted that way, as an individual. I didn't

27:00 feel I wanted to go. And eventually I was called up. And I was what you'd call a chocco. We were called chocco's because if you had to be called up, you were like a violet crumble, I think they used to describe us as. Not that that worried me. But I hadn't been very long as a chocco, when I realised … when I was called up I

27:30 said I wouldn't fight. So they put me in an army medical unit. And I hadn't, perhaps nine months in that unit, that I offered myself to join the AIF. And I did that because I thought, if they're going to keep me in a unit where I haven't got to fight, I feel I should go where other people have had to go. And the AIF meant that you could be sent anywhere in the world. Not that I was sent

28:00 great distances, because of it. But I didn't know at that time, you know, how it would eventuate.

I just want to take you back, before the war again for a bit. I think it was in 1938 that Chamberlain

28:30 **went to Germany and had his meeting with Hitler and came back saying "Peace in our time". Were you aware of these events?**

Oh, very much so, yes. And if you'd asked me at the time, in retrospect of course a bit different, but if you'd asked me at the time, I supported Chamberlain in every way, in every way. But of course, it wasn't a very genuine arrangement

29:00 that he had, was it? That was the trouble. They had to have two genuine parties, and there was only one.

And did the events that followed that, when people realised that Hitler wasn't going to keep his side of the bargain, did that cause you to doubt some of the beliefs that you had, beliefs in pacifism?

No. No, I don't think, and I don't think if I was confronted with it today, I would change from the

29:30 aspect, that I wouldn't take another life.

Did you talk about this much with friends at the time?

No. It's interesting for someone like yourself, if I might say so, a lot younger than I am, to know that when I elected to go in to a non combatant unit,

30:00 there was more than one unit you could've gone into, but the obvious one was a medical unit. Now the different people that were in that for different reasons was very interesting. There were some people, two people, I remember, brothers. Very fine fellows, I regarded them well, named Pettingill. And they refused, they refused to take up arms and they refused to salute a soldier.

30:30 And one of these poor fellows, when we got to Port Moresby, because the officers saluted him, he wouldn't salute back. And he was put in a quarry, a quarry, in Port Moresby, breaking up stone, because he refused to. And that was the control that the army felt that they should have. But other people were so ardent with their religious beliefs,

31:00 they were what we called exclusive brethren, an open brethren. It attracted a lot of religious people, this unit. These exclusive brethren, would not ever go to church, would not ever talk to other people, they were exclusive. And they met as a gathering of people and would talk, you never knew what they talked about. They were exclusive brethren. Amazing, amazing. And then there were the open brethren, they would talk to you.

31:30 But they were there for the same reason as the exclusives. They would certainly not fight. So what I am saying is, that the people who were there because they wouldn't fight were there for slightly different reasons. I never, I never felt I had to talk to people. If they talked to me about it, I would talk. But I never felt I had to talk to people, but I would certainly state my case, if I was asked.

Did you discuss these things with people like

32:00 **Reese Fox and the Reverend?**

Oh, I think so, oh I think so. There would have been times when we had opportunities to discuss these things. Yes, certainly.

So the time came, you're working for Royal Insurance and you were obviously eighteen by now and you got a telegram, or something, saying …

32:30 I can remember, I had to report to the barracks in Malvern Road, Prahran, which is almost on the corner of … I think it's still there … of Punt Road and Malvern Road, and I had to present myself down there at a certain time. It was pretty dramatic. I suppose I was leaving home for the first time. And travelled up to Seymour

33:00 which was a terrible place, Seymour, during the war. And was part of the army.

When did you first make the statement that you wanted to be a non combatant?

Oh, I must … look, I can't recall exactly, but it was certainly when I had my call up, I think I would have indicated that. I would have received a written confirmation and I indicated I would only join a medical

33:30 unit. A non combatant unit.

Was there any stigma attached to that sort of position?

I can honestly say I didn't ever receive any stigma from the unit and I don't think I received it in any direction from anybody. I wasn't extroverted about it, I didn't boast about, but, as I've said to you, if someone asked me, I would tell them. I

34:00 had no compunction in telling them. But I didn't want … I had respect, great respect for those who were fighting, some of whom, by that stage, I think, would have lost their lives who were close to me. So, you know, I had great respect, and I still would have today.

Did you discuss with your family, when the call up came,

34:30 **did you discuss with them what your options might be?**

Oh, I think I would have. But I think they would have respected my feelings and just let me go along with that. I don't think they would have engaged in trying to influence me in any way. I don't think so. Mind you, my brother, because of his training, I suppose, at Caulfield Tech, he went into a workshop unit. He was a staff sergeant in a workshop unit. I guess he made

35:00 a good contribution in the area he was in, during the war. Although he wasn't fighting.

Did he remain in Australia?

No, he was overseas. He was in the Islands, I remember.

Can you tell us about you first training experience, then, at Seymour? You said it was not a very pleasant place.

Well, one of the things I remember, soon after I got into … well you're on floor boards with a palliasse,

35:30 which is pretty extreme, and if you know Seymour, if you look at the weather charts, it's always a good few degrees cooler. And I think I'm right in saying, I went in, in the winter time, I'm sure I did. So it was pretty ghastly, the change. But unfortunately, soon after I go in, I didn't have much ill health, apart from the end of the war, but I got a carbuncle on my big toe,

36:00 the top of my big toe. And it was very, very painful. And I couldn't walk for a time. So I was limited in what I could do. But the basic thing we did, it's interesting with the training, was walking. You obviously had to be physically fit. And although we were young fellows, and reasonably fit, there was a variation in the degree of fitness. And so the aspiration was to bring us up to a standard.

36:30 We would go on long route marches, at Seymour. The food was pretty terrible, pretty diabolical, I can tell you. We were kept alive. That's what they wanted to do. And there was a bit of first aid, I think, in it. Compared with the experience I had later, it really didn't do much for us. But they didn't anticipate exactly what we would have to do,

37:00 of course.

Were you already in a medical unit at this stage, or was it just general training?

No, I think I was in a medical unit. I think I went first of all into the 4th Field Ambulance and when I changed to the AIF, I went to the 15th Field Ambulance.

Can you explain the difference between these various designations? You were initially with a CMF [Civilian Military Force] group, were you?

37:30 Well, no. You see, when you were called up, it was a bit different to … CMF, well I suppose it was a degree of CMF. But when I was in the 4th Field Ambulance, there was really no difference between the 4th and the 15th. The only difference would have been that I immediately volunteered to go where they put me. And that could have, that could have meant staying in

38:00 Australia with the 4th, could have meant, or going not very far away from Australia, and going to the Middle East with the 15th. I mean, it was wide open. I remember our first CO [Commanding Officer], and if he was alive today, I'm sure he wouldn't mind this, because he knew he was called 'dog's body'. And his name was Colonel Bodey and he was the medical officer for the Melbourne Football Club. And so we got a bit about Melbourne

38:30 Football Club. Colonel Bodey. That was at the 4th Field Ambulance.

So when you volunteered … how long were you at Seymour before you decided to volunteer for the AIF?

Oh, it was months. It could have been seven or eight months, something like that.

Was there anything which brought about this decision? I mean, it obviously meant something to you, to make this …

Oh, well,

39:00 you know, here I was, not wanting to go in the army at all, not wanting to experience going in the army and experience the real rigours of the army and then saying "Send me where you want me". I did that because I felt very, guilty might be an apt word, that I was losing so many of my friends. They were being killed, young people. And I felt I couldn't be

39:30 separate from that, I have to expose myself, although I wouldn't actually involve myself in fighting.

Was this a hard decision for you?

Oh, I think it was at the time, yes. Oh I think it was. Once I made it, thought, you see your friends in the services, and I had some very good ones, meant a lot to you. And some of those would have gone

40:00 … it was an opportunity we were given, to join the AIF from the unit I was in. And a group of people would have gone to the 15th Field Ambulance. So I wasn't the only one making the decision, but there was only a certain number. The difference was, thereafter, instead of being a V30483, which I was, I was now VX54772, I

40:30 think it was.

Tape 2

00:27 **Bob, we've been talking about your**

00:30 **volunteering for the AIF, the change from being part of the CMF in the 4th to the 15th, can you talk a bit more about the consequences of that decision and how you saw it at time?**

Well, I anticipated, of course, it was a bigger decision than it actually was. I anticipated that it was going to be more. And I made the decision knowing

01:00 that it could have been a lot more, because it could have sent me further a field and exposed me, you know, to various aspects … you must understand that we didn't know how the war would develop, did we? Whereas, I guess at that stage, I would have thought I would have gone to the Middle East. In fact, not long after that, the Middle East soldiers we had, were coming back to protect Australia. And so in the

01:30 ultimate, I doubt very much whether it made a lot of difference. It gave me … you may or may not appreciate that all of the officers, with the exception of one or two, in a medical unit, were doctors. And I guess, in retrospect, I can say that joining the 15th brought me in touch with an

02:00 outstanding man that I've admired all my life called Colonel Refshauge. Colonel Refshauge was made a General, in the ultimate. He was knighted and he was Secretary of the World Health in Geneva. He's still alive, living in Canberra. He was an outstanding man. And I had to do with him, and I guess,

02:30 the 15th Field Ambulance under Colonel Refshauge, was pretty dynamic.

Well, we'll talk a lot more about that, I think, especially your specific experiences with the Colonel. You mentioned that while you're training, you're learning about some of your friends and their experiences and their deaths …

Yes. Intermittently, of course, because, you know, you'd hear, every so often

03:00 from home or have a letter. Or when you'd go on leave, you'd hear something. So it was intermittent.

This is throughout 1941, is it?

Yes, I guess, '42, '41 yes around that area.

Whereabouts were you when the Japanese entered the war?

That's interesting you ask

03:30 me that, because whereas I'm very conscious of the start of the war, I'm trying to think where I was. I think I was in the North of Australia. But where I was, I can't recall that, to be honest.

So you'd already volunteered for the AIF at this stage?

Yes, yes.

Can you explain some of the training you had at Seymour, for the ambulance?

04:00 Yes. We were adjoining what they call a CCS which is in army category, there's an ADS which is Advanced Dressing Station, as CCS and an MDS, and MDS and a CCS, MDS is a Main Dressing Station and a CCS is a Casualty Clearing Station. Now that's jargon for when you're in action, but they kept it up even though it's Seymour.

04:30 And there was a CCS which was not more than a building used as a hospital. And if there were people in the services who had motor accidents or they were fairly seriously ill, they would go in the CCS. So we would have a period helping in the CCS. I guess, we would get some experience as what you would call Nursing Orderly.

05:00 Although in actual fact, in action, I was never a Nursing Orderly. And I'm quite happy that I wasn't, because some of the things I had to do gave me great experience. Although, Nursing Orderly, there was nothing to cry about it. The soldiers who were unwell had to be cared for. I guess we would have done menial things, such as take temperatures and things of that sort. So

05:30 we had a bit of experience. As I've indicated, we had route marches. I think they were really breaking us in for army life. And it was probably the best thing they could do, is to get us physically fit, push us around a bit so that when they had to push us around further, we would succumb to it pretty readily. That's how I would describe it. There was no great medical experience that we had. First Aid we certainly would be taught. But I never had to practice First Aid in

06:00 the Field Ambulance, in my experience.

Did you kick against army discipline at all?

No I don't think I did. No, I mean, you would talk about it, you'd see the folly of some things. You certainly, you would have, whilst I said that mostly, if not the majority of officers were doctors, and I had respect for most of them. But we did have an

06:30 RSM, a Regimental Sergeant Major, who wasn't a doctor, and he would carry on a bit. And, you know, we'd talk behind his back and laugh at him a bit. But I think we went along with what we had to do. There was no choice, there was no choice. The war was on. You know, the war was on and you were reading about the extremes of the war. London being bombed. And you were influenced by that. You couldn't separate yourself.

07:00 **At this stage, do you find some of your beliefs and opinions evolving?**

I suppose I did slowly. Although, they wouldn't have changed to any extent. I mean, I have Christian belief and I guess, there are other people, don't forget, there were quite a number of people who when into the Field Ambulance, were Christian folk. Some of them in extreme situations. And I

07:30 could never get over the … but I was never that way inclined, and I never wanted to be. But there were some good friends that I made. I have never ever been to an army reunion. But I have maintained associations. Although, most of them have died now, with some of my army friends who were in that category.

Did you keep up your religious practice at

08:00 **Seymour? Were you able to go to church?**

Oh, yes, yeah. We would go to church parades whenever we could. I think there were times when we'd go to Bible Study groups. We had some padre's of course, and we would be in touch with them. It was catered for if you wanted it. It wasn't pushed at you at all, but you were catered for. We used to go

08:30 into Seymour. And I think, I remember, having quite an association with one of the churches in Seymour. We'd go in of a Sunday if we could get leave.

Were any of the members devout atheists?

You know, I don't know if I was ever confronted with any one in the army. You would know if they were.

09:00 But do you know, it's an interesting thing, I hope my Christian benevolence has given me this attitude, but we had one or two fellows that were as rough as bags, they really were. There's the other side to this, because there were some … the unit came from Brunswick, and I don't think they'd mind me mentioning, I think they've both died now, but the Wind Brothers were really

09:30 rough. And they'd use the F word at a drop of a hat and you know. But do you know, when we were in action, at least one of those, if not two of them, were stretcher bearers, which I never was. Never had to be but I would have been if I'd have been asked. And they made a great contribution. So, you did learn that you might have people who were atheists, you might have people, but you know, they

10:00 practiced a standard of their own. And it was admirable in the conditions we were in.

Why were they volunteered for the ambulance, do you think?

I don't know. I can't honesty answer that. I can't … you know, you'd have to be in their head to know. And I don't know that I ever discussed them. I guess, you were put into a unit, you did say what you wanted to be, but it doesn't mean everyone that

10:30 finished up in the Field Ambulance were there because they asked to be, some of them were there because they were put there. There was a service section of the Field Ambulance, and they drove the ambulances, and they carried rifles. And so, you know, everyone didn't have to be non combatant in the unit other than those that were tending the sick.

Did you have rifle training?

11:00 No, I would never take it.

Did that cause a problem?

I don't think so. No, I don't think it did. No, it was accepted. I guess, I wasn't alone, although there weren't too many that would say they wouldn't have the rifle training, but no I never had the rifle training.

At the end of the training at Seymour, what happened

11:30 **then?**

Well, it was pleasant enough. Because, I think we went first of all to Bonegilla, and Bonegilla in the springtime is a delightful area to be. And, once again, I remember going into the church at Albury and having some friends there. Not alone, a few of us would go in. And you know, Albury was a very refreshing

12:00 and a very nice place. So we were there for a time. From there we went to Casino, where we really knew some nice people, and I was quite fond of a young lady there, at one of the churches. It never came to anything, but I always regarded her very nicely. And from there we went to Lismore. And that area of New South

12:30 Wales, I've taken my wife there since, because I used to think it was the most perfect part of Australia. Casino, Lismore area. Beautiful area. And then we went up to Cooroy in Queensland, again had some contact with church folk. And then to Caboolture, which was a pretty terrible place, just outside Queensland.

13:00 Ran a camp hospital there. And we had an interesting experience. I guess we had our first real patients, if you think of casualties as patients. The Americans were flying some planes out from America to Australia, and they didn't quite make it, they landed in the drink. And they lost their planes and we, because at this stage I guess, the Americans

13:30 may have entered the war, and we had a couple of them in hospital. They parachuted out and we were able to look after them for a time. So they were our first casualties, but not of the opposition, they were our own side.

There's a lot of moving about. Did you feel in any way frustrated that there didn't seem to be any direction in what was happening?

No, no. Well,

14:00 no. You see, when we were at Cooroy and those places, we were above the Brisbane line, and it was considered that that was a part of Australia that would be attacked by the Japanese. And we needed to defend it from there. So I don't know how realistically we thought about it, but we were in the action line, in the North of Australia. And I think a lot of troops would have been kept

14:30 in that area for a time, anticipating the Japs would land.

Can I just take you back? Before you started heading north, did you have any leave back in Melbourne?

I think I had one lot of leave, if I can remember correctly, that would have been a few weeks, a couple of weeks. You didn't get a day's leave, you got a few, you know, a couple of weeks.

15:00 But my life, by this time, I was in touch with my parents, unfortunately, I think, about that time, my father had lost his job, so things weren't easy at home. But my brother was in the services. I was in the services. I think my sister was just about married. And so I suppose we looked on her as looking after Mum and Dad.

15:30 So my concern was not for the family. You must, I must bring you back to the fact that the war was on, most people were away and there was no right that we had to be home. I mean, we had to be involved, as they wanted to make us involved. And although it may not appear in Brisbane, but you really did think that you could be called on to participate in the war from Brisbane

16:00 onwards.

Did your parents or sister, were they ever involved in any work for the war effort?

It's interesting you ask me that. My mother would have been in local things, but my sister had a job with the American army which was so secret that she never ever revealed what it was.

16:30 She wasn't allowed to. She'd dead now. So I never ever knew the details of it. She worked in St. Kilda Road and in a very secret part of the American army.

At Victoria Barracks, wasn't it ?

Yes.

Did you know at the time that she was doing something?

Not really, although when we'd go on leave, we'd know there was something that we weren't

17:00 supposed to know about. But we didn't know until later that she'd sworn never to reveal what it was. But hard to understand, isn't it?

And you never spoke to her about it?

No, we didn't ever press her for it, no never.

We might talk about that later. These camps you were in, in Brisbane,

17:30 **you say the first time you're actually called on to do some work, you were treating some American airmen. Where were you posted after this?**

Oh well, we continued to go up the coast. We went to Cooroy, which is about, oh I don't know, about a hundred K north of Brisbane. Caboolture first, and then Cooroy, and then I think

18:00 we would have gone to Townsville. And went overseas from Townsville.

And what period was this now?

I think it's probably getting to 1942. Whenever the Centaur was sunk [14 May 1943], you could relate the date. Because we went,

18:30 it was a most unusual thing, you weren't even allowed to smoke a cigarette on a boat during the war, because that cigarette, just the ash, could be seen by torpedos, or by submarines. But here we left on the, did I say the Manunda, the hospital ship?

This was from Townsville?

Yes. Well it was on the Manunda,

19:00 and it was a blaze of lights with a mammoth red cross either side. The lights extending out over the side of the vessel, shining on the Red Cross. And we were allowed to walk around at night. Any rate, we didn't honestly know where we were going. We finished up in Port Moresby. Two days out at sea, we were getting into Port Moresby, we learnt the Centaur

19:30 had been sunk. The Centaur was sailing exactly the same as us, as a hospital ship.

With the same lights?

We heard, I think we heard through Tokyo Rose that the reason they sunk the Centaur was because we were carrying arms, the Manunda.

Was that true?

Well it was partly true. I told you that we would have a service section, and as a complete unit,

20:00 we all went on the Manunda, and the transport drivers were on board, and they carried their rifles on board. And some how or other, the Japanese broadcast within days that we were taking rifles on the, weapons, on board the Manunda. And that was true, they had their rifles with them. But they were allowed, under the Geneva Convention, which, of course, the Japanese were not members of,

20:30 to protect their patients. So they could carry a rifle in their ambulance, if they were attacked, not to protect themselves, you wouldn't blame them if they did, but they could protect their patient with a rifle. So that was interesting. That was the reason we were given at the time, that the Centaur was sunk. As you may remember, I think there were two nurses that were saved. All the rest were killed, drowned [actually two hundred and sixty-eight crew, hospital staff and passengers from a total complement of three hundred and thirty-two died].

And on your ship,

21:00 **was it just the 15th Field Ambulance? Were there other units?**

It was all medical units. It wasn't a very large vessel. And I think that would have been so, because it was going to Moresby to bring back patients. And it had a lot of beds on the hospital ship, of course. And so, you know, the purpose was not to take an empty ship. To take us, which they could do as passengers,

21:30 because we were non combatants. Legitimately, under the Red Cross. But the Japanese made something of that. The fact that we were not actually abiding by the Red Cross Convention. And they weren't members of it, so that …

Tell us about that voyage on that ship? The conditions on the ship.

Oh, it was quite splendiferous.

22:00 I guess that was, I had been over, yes, it was my first voyage over seas. And it was very, very relaxing. Very pleasant, and not in any difficulties at all.

You weren't sea sick at all?

Don't think so, no.

And did you have a cabin to yourself or were you sharing a cabin?

Don't remember that. I guess I would have shared a cabin. I don't remember details like that.

22:30 **You say that the ship was lit up with lights. Were you confident that the ship was safe?**

Not really, no. Because I knew, I'd become aware, that you weren't even allowed to smoke on the deck of a ship. And don't forget, in those days, most people smoked. If not, you know, the majority, fifty percent of the majority were smokers and so they wouldn't like the

23:00 thought that they could be a ship and not allowed to smoke on deck. But we could.

Were you a smoker?

No, never a smoker.

The Centaur, now that had a similar arrangement. It was a hospital ship?

Yes. About the same size.

Did either of the two ships have any escort?

No, I don't think so. I'm almost certain we didn't. And the Centaur for

23:30 the same reason would not have had. As a hospital ship, you know, if you had escorts, you were immediately putting yourself in a situation where you could be fired on, because of the escorts. But you had to clearly indicate that you were an ambulance ship, and you had to be careful not to break the rules. Because it was an ample opportunity, wasn't there, if you wanted to carry cannon or bombs or things,

24:00 you could put the red cross up and off you'd go. But I don't think the allies ever did that. And we didn't, certainly, intend to do that with what we did.

Did you see any aircraft?

No. No, I don't remember seeing any enemy or any … no none at all. It was about six days, seven days, voyage I suppose. Not so very far.

What did you do on the voyage to

24:30 **pass the time?**

I guess we had a bit of … we certainly had some regimen that would be introduced by the unit. I just forget what that was. We would have had some duties, because we would have had to contribute to making up a meal or something like that. But we didn't do anything in particular. It was a very pleasant voyage.

Tell us about the unit at this stage.

25:00 **What's the morale like? What are the thoughts about what you might be facing?**

Well, we were all pretty fatalistic, I think. We, you know, after all, you probably had a brother who was in the services. You certainly had friends. Some may have even had a father who was in the services. So you couldn't feel separate from it. And at that stage we had a pretty good stay in Australia. We'd made

25:30 good friendships, we'd seen new places. And here I was, going to see another new place. Mind you, you were pretty hard when you got to Moresby. I'll never forget it. It was a first real sense of the tropics, very hot, and there was a hill just outside Moresby, and we were unloaded and marched to this hill. We may have gone in trucks, I think. And here we were, with all our

26:00 gear and probably heavy unit that we had on, that we had to carry with us. And we were told to use our emergency rations. And a tin of bully beef was about five or six inches long, tapered towards the end, with an opener attached to it. And I remember unscrewing this opener to eat from my bully beef, and the fat rolled out of it. It was

26:30 liquid because it was so hot. And I didn't enjoy that as a meal. Then I guess, we would have gone to an area where we had tents. And we were there for quite some period.

It may seem a funny question, but tell me what bully beef is?

Well, it's beef. But I think, being bully beef, it's the poorest section of the beef.

27:00 And it's pressed into the shape of the tin in some fashion. And it's, you know, not select and lean, it's very ordinary meat. And I guess it would have been, you know, on necessity, it would have to be pretty ordinary meat. Because they had a lot of people to feed in that way. They had to carry it to eat it.

What other things did you have in your

27:30 **own rations?**

We had very, very hard biscuits. And that was it. Bully beef and biscuits. No butter.

When you arrive at Moresby, as you said, you were sent up to camp, were you given any indication as to where you might be going?

No, no, no. No,

28:00 for good reason, it was all kept very secret as to where your next step might be. As a matter of fact, our next step was an interesting one, and I blame, applaud Colonel Refshauge for this. He was a pretty hard task master. He was … can I just tell you, I had two experiences, later, personal

28:30 experiences which told me something about Ref, as we used to call him. I was at an area, which I'll talk to you about later, at ADS Kelly's. And I had to organise, be told, when patients were coming in and I'd have to convey that on with a Sig. phone to others who would have to attend to these patients, operate on them. For instance, they'd come in

29:00 without a leg, you know, it was very raw. Any rate, one day I got a message that patients were coming up, and they had to come along a riverbed. And one of the questions I would always ask – have you got an escort? Because you were allowed to escort patients. And usually, and that was an armed escort, to protect the patient, but usually that was done by the infantry battalion, where they were coming from. And

29:30 this patient was coming up. And they told me something about the patient, and I said "what about the escort". And they said "oh, Ref's coming up, he's going to escort him". So about two hours later, along comes Ref. He was up to his waist, he was a Colonel, up to his waist in muck and carrying a rifle. I'd never seen him carrying a rifle, to escort this patient. And I think it was at that time, someone wanted to speak to

30:00 him on the Sig. phone. So I told him that somebody wanted to talk to him. And he nattered on for a few minutes, and he said to me "Another bloody (and he didn't use expletives) yes man". He had no time for people who agreed with him, necessarily. He really was a man's man. So they were two things about Ref. But Ref organised something from Moresby which he thought was good for us. He may have known that

30:30 we were going to be flown … you ask me if I knew, we didn't know … we were going to be flown to Bulolo, which is near Wau, further up in New Guinea and in the highlands, to walk, because there was no other means of getting there, down towards the front of New Guinea, the north coast of New Guinea, where the Japanese were. So Ref thought that we should walk the Kokoda Trail. So a few of us, I don't think it was very many, a few from B Company,

31:00 had to walk the Kokoda trail. You not only had to walk it one way, but we had to walk it back again. So most people that had walked the Kokoda Trail, walked to the other end. We got to the other end, and saw where the Japanese were at Buna and Gona, we couldn't go any further then, and then walked back again. And he thought that would train us to walk the double mountain trail, which we had to walk from Bulolo. We were flown into Bulolo. And an interesting thing about aircraft in New Guinea

31:30 was that they were, literally all the transport planes, were DC3's. DC3's lasted forever, they were Douglas's

Dakota?

Dakota, yes. Even today they'd be flying around. And you know, they were new then. And the thing about the DC3's, they were never pressurised, so they couldn't go up very high. The pilots would have oxygen masks, but the passengers would have nothing. And so

32:00 they, because they had to fly through the gap, which was, the mountains were ten thousand feet high, it was pretty high, and they had to fly through the gap, in New Guinea, which was a couple of gaps. One near Bulolo. And I think we went up at least twice. We got up, the first time, and were told Zeros were in the air. Of course the DC3 was no match for a Zero, so we came down again. So we had

32:30 about two or three shots to get to Bulolo. Because the poor old DC3 had to get through the gap, and couldn't get too high and was frustrated by the Zeros.

Can I ask, when you arrive in New Guinea, what was the state of the campaign?

Well, the Kokoda Trail had just been fought. The Japanese were pushed off the Kokoda Trail. But

33:00 they were all in the north of New Guinea. And they were at Buna and Gona and Salamaua and Lae, and those areas in the north of New Guinea. And so we had a couple of air raids in Port Moresby. I can see

now, about fifty Japanese bombers coming over, and I guess they were Kittyhawks, our planes, flying right through them, right through the fifty of them, coming down, trying to shoot them

33:30 down. It was an amazing sight. And they bombed the air drome. We had a couple of air dromes, and they were crucial. Because they would continue the bombing in northern New Guinea, from Moresby. And that's why the Japs were over, trying to damage the air dromes, which they did, they did cause damage.

Now, I'm amazed about this forced march up and down the Kokoda trail. How long did that take?

34:00 Oh, I guess it took about three weeks. I don't remember the day to day. But we went all the way to Owen's Corner. There were two corners that've got similar names. One is Ower's Corner and the other is Owen's Corner. Ower's Corner is near Moresby and Owen's Corner is right up near Buna and Gona. It's quite high and you're looking down, as

34:30 we were. Owen's Corner, because it was a Colonel Owen that was killed there, on the Kokoda Trail, not long before we went through there. And it was very tough, it was very tough, the Kokoda Trail, because we had all our equipment, our gear. And it was a very difficult thing to do. I don't know if Double Mountain was any less difficult. Of course there was no other means of getting from the

35:00 south to the north of New Guinea, other than walking. There were no roads, no roads across New Guinea.

Did you see evidence of the fighting?

Oh, yes. Oh, yes, of course. Oh yes, it was everywhere. We had to cross streams on a wire, just a wire. One wire above and one below. And you know what that does when you're trying to walk across a wire. We had a fully laden

35:30 kit, had we fallen we would have … you know, we were all young and we accepted these things. But when I, on reflection, know that … we didn't really know that Ref was preparing us for the Double Mountain trail, by sending us on the Kokoda, he didn't tell us that. But that's what he did. And we were really doing it as an exercise. In very, very crude situation.

36:00 **Did you get a chance to speak to any of the Australia soldiers who'd been fighting the Japanese?**

Oh, we would have seen some. We continuously met up with infantry. We would have seen some on the trail. Yes, that would have been so, yes.

Did they talk to you much about their experience?

Well, you were having your own. You know, you didn't want to … you wouldn't have talked to anyone about your experience and they wouldn't

36:30 talk to you about theirs. I guess if you sat down, and wanted to find out. But you were accepting of your own situation and you were accepting that they were having a situation. You didn't want to quiz them about it.

I understand, that at the time, there had been some discussion about the way the Australians had performed, the 39th Battalion. Blamey came and there was a big address

37:00 **at Moresby. Were you aware of some of those discussions?**

I was present at one of them.

Can you tell us a bit about that?

It was pretty disgusting. You can imagine, we were in the tropics, and we were told that General Blamey was coming to talk to us. And we lined up on a

37:30 metal air drome. I mean metal, it was interlaced metal, it fitted in to make the drome, to make it a suitable area for a plane land on. And I don't want to misrepresent the situation. We were hours, standing up, full regimental dress, for General Blamey. And eventually his plane lands on the air drome. And he stood up

38:00 in a jeep, and did his inspection, running up and down the lines. And I don't know that I heard all that he said at the time, but I do know, and I think it was at that time, where he made comments about the poor way that the Australians had behaved. And they saved Australia. And they were reservists that had been called up. You know, they weren't AIF men. But I'll never

38:30 forget standing there for hours, for this General Blamey to come … stand up on a jeep, holding on either side and going up and down like that. He didn't even get off the jeep. And it was blazing hot, and we were in regimental dress, standing like that, for two hours for him. Wasn't very pleasant. We didn't regard him well after that.

Did you speak with any of the blokes who had been fighting that campaign about

39:00 **how they felt?**

No. Because, no, I don't, I can't put in perspective, when Blamey spoke. And, you know, the reaction that we would have had and they would have had. I think it was a little after that, that the reaction set in as to really what he'd said. Because, you see, people in Australia may have thought they didn't fight well. But they did protect Australia.

39:30 They were as gallant as any other soldiers.

Why do you think Blamey spoke the way he did?

Well I think Blamey was out to get a lot of good will for himself and he'd just come from the Middle East and, you know, it was different fighting that I don't think he understood. I really don't. Although he was in charge of the army, he didn't understand that fighting in the jungle was quite different to putting down a barrage

40:00 in the Middle East. Which is the way they fought. See, we were subject to … I don't say I was that might, but sniping and the track was quite narrow that you were going down. You were fighting on that track. They'd have holes dug either side to protect yourself. To stop the Japs coming in beside on the track where you were, and coming in behind

40:30 you. It wasn't like the fighting in the Middle East.

Tape 3

00:30 **We were just discussing this parade where General Blamey has come back from the Middle East and he's addressing the Australian troops and he's making some criticisms of the Australians who fought on the Kokoda Track. You said it was difficult to hear everything he said, he's driving up and down in his jeep.**

01:00 **Can you remember talking about it with your unit, at the end of the day?**

No. I really think what he said and the criticism he may have had, didn't sink in immediately. I really think that. You see, we were built up to an occasion. Here's the General of the Australian army, ultimately Field Marshal,

01:30 and you were accepting of what was going on around you. So I don't think … and when we walked the Kokoda Trail, we really, and anyone who has, and we were people who had, really realised what that trail was. Now, I guess, to say in fairness to Blamey, he never walked it. Pity is that he

02:00 didn't. And then perhaps if he'd made a comment, he might have had reason to. But until you know what a narrow track it is, and there are steps on that trail made from timber pieces, that the steps would go up seventy or eighty steps. Now, they go straight up. And because the earth had come away from cross beams, you had to put your

02:30 foot on that cross beam, and to do that seventy or eighty times with a full pack, even coming down that, was even worse than going up. Because, what do you hold onto? There's no rail, there's no rail. And you'd fall straight down. It's a precipice. So that track was very tough. And to fight at the same time, which I was not

03:00 doing. I was just doing the track. It was an extreme situation for a soldier to be put in. In was entirely different. I'm not criticising the Middle East, that was bad enough, but it was entirely different. And I guess the only person who could make a fair comment was someone who at least saw the track, let alone fought on it.

Did that occasion

03:30 **change your perception of what you were doing, and how you might be appreciated, or not?**

No, no. There was too many other people involved that, you know … no, it didn't change my perception.

When you were walking with your unit, up and down the trail, were there any injuries?

Don't remember that there were. But there were always people … if you ask, injuries, … there were no

04:00 battle casualties. But one of the things that soldiers suffered from, greatly, was tinea. And that was because their skin was always damp and wet and, you know, goodness only knows. I'm sure I didn't have a shower in that full trek, either to or fro. I might have jumped in the … there were a number

04:30 of rivers we crossed, but, so … and your uniform was pretty rough stuff, that people had, you know, skin problems, continuously, continuously.

What about other diseases?

Oh, yes. Well there was malaria. Although, I must say, I only had malaria once during

05:00 the war. If you took your Atebrin, Atebrin they found, later on, I think, by this stage, that you could be bitten by an Anopheles mosquito that would inject the malaria into you, but the Atebrin would suppress it. The interesting thing was, and this was done pretty regularly, when you got home, you were supposed to continue to take your Atebrin, but if you stopped taking it, you'd immediately get malaria.

05:30 Because it would suppress it, but not cure it. You had to have a course, another course, of plasma quinine and Atebrin. And you didn't have that all the time. But if they gave you Atebrin, you took one every day. As a matter of fact, my CO Refshauge, was the first to introduce Atebrin being taken on an Atebrin parade. You had to line up on a parade, bring your water

06:00 bottle, they'd hand out an Atebrin, and you had to take visibly in front of an officer in the unit. So that every one … because malaria was such a casualty. It could have wiped out the Australian army in the tropics, unless it was controlled. And it was controlled by taking Atebrin.

Describe this tablet?

It was a little yellow tablet and when you were taking it, your eyes were yellow and your skin was yellow. And it wasn't until you get home,

06:30 that people would see you and say "Ooo you're all yellow". And it was because of your Atebrin. There was some dye in it. But Ref, as the senior medical officer in the area, introduced having to take it under supervision. And that controlled it, because it was a real problem. There were two real problems in the tropic. Well there were a number, but two

07:00 that were difficult to resolve. One was malaria, resolved by taking the Atebrin. And the other was scrub typhus. And scrub typhus was caused by a little mite that would bite you. And it usually bit you in the crutch or under the arm. And when it did bite, you had what they called an S scar, a little brown scarring where it bit you. Now, when you presented

07:30 to the Field Ambulance and said you had a very high temperature, you could do a blood test, but that couldn't be done in the field very readily, but you would look for this S scar. And if the person had the S scar, he was immediately made a stretcher case. Because not only did scrub typhus affect you with very high temperatures, but it affected your heart. So you were … the difference

08:00 between malaria, you could wander on and have another course of Atebrin and anti malarial tablets and you could do it by sending the person on foot. But you couldn't if he had scrub typhus. He was immediately treated as a stretcher case. But you had to look for that difference in the patient. Because there was similar symptoms with rising and lowering temperature.

And what would happen if

08:30 **it wasn't identified?**

Well, the person would die of heart failure. It affected your heart directly. And there was no direct cure, in those days, for scrub typhus, other than rest, and just letting the system beat the scrub typhus.

There was something else I was going to ask you

09:00 **about. Once you get back from walking the trail, you're waiting in Moresby to be sent wherever …**

09:30 We didn't know, no.

Are you working at this stage? Are you having patients come in to the hospital?

Oh, well, it was more a keep fit thing. I don't know that I was. I think that I was in the best section. Because we certainly had the most to do. On that Kokoda Trail, there was only a small section, comparative to the unit, which was about two fifty.

10:00 Maybe twenty people were sent to and fro on the Kokoda Trail. Because we were the people, we didn't know, who were going to form a, what they called, an advanced dressing station, behind Salamaua. We didn't know it then. But we were flown to Bulolo, which is pretty well opposite Salamaua, but up in the highlands, where there is an airstrip, of course. And after one or two

10:30 misses, going back to Moresby, because of the Zeros that were approaching. We got to Bulolo, and then we were sent on the Double Mountain trail, which was the equivalent to the Kokoda. But it went down … there were two major peaks, and they were ten thousand feet high. You went up and then you went up again and then you went down. And then we finished up,

11:00 I'll never forget this, only a very small group, to form an advanced dressing station. The action was due to start on about 30th June. And we were the day before. And I was with a man, who've I've rung in recent times, a doctor called Dave Churton, C-H-U-R-T-O-N. He's a Taswegian. And we were supposed to

11:30 look after the initial thrust of some of the battle casualties, and send them on. Just to administer, you know, what was necessary. Tighten a bandage or etcetera. And when we got to our destination, we had no medical equipment at all. And the thought was, that it had either been stolen by the natives. Which sounds unusual, because they were very co-

12:00 operative. But it was either stolen, or it was mislaid. So we took our blankets, and the natives who were with us, took strips off some of the vines in the trees, and sewed them and put two poles through them, so we at least had a bed. And low and behold, the very first casualty to come in, was a fellow who was injured

12:30 by one of our own mortars. He was a spotter for the mortars. One of our own fellows. And the mortar, in being fired, flicked a piece of bamboo above him, and exploded and got the front of his face. Well when David Churton saw him, he said "Just put him in a bag". He was dying. And we just left him there for the night to die. There was not a thing we could do for him. Not a thing. Any rate, from there, we went as a group and formed

13:00 what was well known, it's even marked in maps, I'm glad to see, as Kellys, K-E-L-L-Y-S, and we formed an advance dressing station.

Just before … you've reminded me of what I was going to ask you. If I can just take you back to the Kokoda, for a moment. Did you have much engagement with the Papuans, at the time?

Well, we began to, yes. And they were terrific.

13:30 They related very well to the Australians. We were a little bit suspicious that some of them may have been helping the Japs. And I guess they may have been. And whether they bribed them, or how they … but we soon learned that they were very friendly. I have to say, and it's not a popular thing to say, their intelligence seemed so much in advance of the Abos that I would have met in Australia.

14:00 But I'm only saying that, because, perhaps the Abos I would have seen in New South Wales, and a lot of those had succumbed to the bottle, the grog.

Where had you seen those? You mean on your way north?

Yes, yes. My first introduction to the Australian Abo in his crude state, I guess.

Would they have been camp hangers on?

Yes, yes. But the New Guinea fellows

14:30 were outstanding and if you give me the opportunity to say more later on, I can only do it with the utmost praise.

Please.

Well, when we got to Kellys, all of the casualties that occurred on that Salamaua northern perimeter, at that stage, came through us. And my job was on the Sig. phone.

15:00 It was the only Sig. phone in the area. And I would have to take a message as to what was coming. And they'd tell me something and checking on escorts and things. And I would convey that to the medical team we had with us. Before they got to us, two hours before, say.

How was this phone established?

It was just a Sig. phone that was laid, a piece of wire down the track.

15:30 And you could imagine, the Japs would have great pleasure in cutting it occasionally. And we'd have no Sig. phone. So our fellows would go along and find out where … and they'd either repair it or replace it. And so it was a very active group of signallers in the services. Whose job was to do that very thing. And to get well forward to maintain the Sig. phone. So that …

16:00 I would then convey what was coming. And there would be six to eight aborigines to each stretcher. The stretcher was two poles, tied together with a cross beam either end and extending quite some way so that there could be two natives on each corner of it. And they would sing out in their native language, drop it the other end, or you know, they were talking to each other

16:30 as they … they were marvellous. There was no doubt, many people owe their lives to the fact that the aborigines carried them. There was no other way of getting them to us. And then when they come to us, maybe they had a leg blown off, and that would be made a clean amputee by the surgeons that were with us.

How would that be done?

Oh well, they would

17:00 use … I later on assisted with this. We would saw off the bone area, leaving quite an extended flap. Bring the flap around, and sew the flap on. And that was his … he was repaired, at least for the time being. There may be times … he would have to go from us, be carried over that Double Mountain track,

for at least a week. He's a sick

17:30 man, on one of those stretchers, after he'd been operated on. The aborigines would come, and I'll never forget one morning. You can imagine if we had ten patients going, there were eight to a stretcher, there were eighty aborigines, Papuans, there waiting to carry them. And usually a white man who supervised. What they called ANGAU [Australian New Guinea Administrative Unit]. They ran the

18:00 natives, spoke their language. They were usually people who had lived in New Guinea and knew the language well, and they would supervise them. And I'll never forget this morning. They all came in and kicked up a hell of a din. And I'd played my part, so I went back to bed. I was up all night, some nights. I mean, I just looked after this for four months, this Sig. phone. And when they'd

18:30 gone, you can imagine, it'd all quietened down, and we knew they'd gone, and all the patients had gone, and the fellows who were in this area, the Australian soldiers, immediately came to me and said – my pants have gone off the line, my shirts gone. They'd nicked all the greens off the line. So we got in touch with ANGAU, and they said – don't worry, we'll get them at the next stop. But that was the only thing that I remembered that the

19:00 Papuans did that was perhaps in for a dig. Pinched all the things off the line.

Would they have wanted to wear them?

I don't know. I don't know. Well, they can make a lap lap out of them, because, you know, clothing, anything like that was very precious. You know, they had a minimum of clothing and they would need a lap lap.

Did you see, did you manage to spend any time in a native

19:30 **village?**

Oh, went through them, but don't know that I spent time, I can't say that. But I have the utmost respect for them. I remember, I'll relate one little tale to you. One of the boys who were on the stretchers, came in one day and presented himself to me … and it was interesting to note that they got pneumonia, very readily, I don't know how, what the reason. I guess it was an infection. Any rate, this

20:00 fellow came in and his nose was running. And we had, at that stage, some marvellous tablets call M and B. They were the introduction to penicillin. And of course, that hit pneumonia very readily. So I gave him some of these tablets. And about a week later, and you didn't see this among the, they never

20:30 wore … the girls, the marys as they call them, never wore grass skirts. They always had lap laps on. And this girl presented herself to me with a lap lap on, with a bunch of bananas almost as big as herself. And she related to me in her pidgin, that I had cured her brother. And she was so grateful. And she gave me this whopping big bunch of bananas. Bananas,

21:00 bunches of bananas are very big in their natural growth. And anyway, I gave them to the cookhouse. I don't know if she was presenting herself for any other reason. But I was certainly too fearful to enquire at that. But she was a very attractive young girl. And the sister of this fellow who had been cured from these May Baker, M and B's that we gave him.

Was there any fraternising between …

21:30 Not really, no, no. They were all regarded well. And I remember one fellow who came and talked to me one day and his name was Whybalom. Because it was where he lived. He called himself Whybalom . You'd relate to them well. But I don't think there was certainly, I wouldn't, I've never heard of any fraternisation between the sexes. I don't think it ever occurred. Don't think it ever

22:00 occurred. And you wouldn't entertain any of them in the tent, or anything like that. I don't know why, but you wouldn't. And they wouldn't aspire to that, I don't think, either. But they certainly, you know, they really did save the lives of many of the Australians. And when I read, as I do, of recent times, that some of them are now wanting some sort of pension, who … the point to know, really, some of those

22:30 who really did the job. It was so long ago now, it's difficult to know. But they certainly earned it.

Can I take you back again to that first advance station that you set up, where you didn't have the supplies. How many of you are there?

Oh, you mean Kellys?

I think that's the one.

Yes, well Kelly's is marked on the map behind Salamaua. I don't,

23:00 to be honest with you, I don't remember. Except there was some of B company and there were some medicos, some surgeons, who did the earlier operation. Which was, if there was infection or … you see, when you get a large wound, you always get dead flesh amongst the wound. And the thing you've got to do, is take that out. And the way you pick what is dead flesh, is get long tweezers

23:30 and squeeze it. And if blood comes out of it, you know it's still being serviced with blood. So you don't cut that bit out. Because you had to reserve all the tissue you could. But if that didn't happen, you'd know it was dead, and you'd cut that away.

What would you use to cut it away?

Oh, scalpel. I didn't do the cutting. There was a surgeon usually, but I certainly helped him. And we did the initial, we stabilised the patient.

24:00 And the amazing thing was, because we didn't always know who survived, because we were there for four months, and they'd gone on, may have died on the way. But you didn't always know. But they were young fellows. We were beginning to get anti biotic which were a life saver. Later on, on Bougainville and Solomon Islands, we had penicillin, which is an injection.

24:30 And you could see it saving peoples lives. Marvellous.

I was interested in that time, when you said the chap had come in, had been wounded by the mortar. This is pretty much the first casualty that you had to deal with.

It was the first one, yeah, yeah.

And yet you've got nothing to treat him with.

It was pretty hard because we heard him die. You know, he had the death rattles

25:00 and that. What the doctor said was absolutely true. There was nothing we could do for him. I think he had half his throat blown away, or something. The mortar exploded about him and got the front of his body.

What was that … you've had all this training, you know you're there for a job, and yet you're unable to do it.

Well you had

25:30 confidence. You see, when you say I had all the training, I only had first aid training, that's all I'd had and physical training. You see, I was beginning to learn on this area. Because when I was at Kelly's, I would be the first … the RAP [Regimental Aid Post] would attend to the … there was always a doctor at the RAP. RMO, [Regimental Medical Officer] at the RAP.

26:00 And he would initiate some treatment. He would give him morphia, and mark on his forehead that he had given him morphia. So we knew when we got him. And fill in what they call a 3118, which was a form that was attached to him, a hard, cardboard type form, semi stiff, that was tied on around his neck. So that we knew something of the circumstances, from the medical officer. They'd bring him in,

26:30 and I would be the first to see him. And I would have some prior advice which I would have relayed. That four stretcher cases were coming in, or one ambulatory, and something of their wounds. But I would be the next to see them. And I can honestly say, it was more than one occasion, where the fellow had his leg blown off and it was lying on the stretcher beside him. They just thought he'd promptly die and they'd bury the leg

27:00 with him. And the carrier that came in would say to me "He thinks he's still got his leg". Which he did. Because they didn't always know when they lost a leg. They knew they had a wound but, you know, you don't have feeling beyond where it's left you.

Did you have to institute any process of triage,

27:30 **working out who you needed to treat and who perhaps …**

Oh, well, it would be talked about before they came in. And sometimes they may have said "Well he can wait, and he can wait". We certainly had a priority. But by the time I had finished with them, they went into the surgeon. I don't think we had very many at Kelly's, but we certainly had a couple.

28:00 And you never knew when they were coming in. You'd have some prior knowledge, but you wouldn't know whether it was night or day. And invariably it was night time. So that you were on that phone all the time. You never left it, never left it for four months.

I suppose nothing can prepare you for seeing all this, injuries, and witnessing death. Did you find

28:30 **that you dealt with it easily, or did it cause you any particular …**

Well, my sister recently died and I don't think I handled her death very well. And if you're saying to me, that the experience I had should have prepared me better for that, you're right. But, you see, that was fifty years ago and it was around us. Everyone was confronted with it to some extent, to some

29:00 extent. And so, you know, I don't know that I coped with it terribly well then. But I was accepting of what was going on.

Bob, we're just talking about how one copes with the first time you see injury and death.

29:30 Well, it's very difficult to put into words. And thankfully, I don't know that I have any more than anyone else. Certainly, if you think about servicemen, and I don't, you know, I described in a graphic way, having a case coming in with a leg stuck on the stretcher beside him. We saw a bit of that. But what I would do, I'd pass that patient on to someone else, in the operating

30:00 area, that had to be tended to. And, you know, I guess because you knew that everybody was confronted with something that was extreme and unusual, you were accepting of it. I think I was. I certainly didn't go under. You know, I was prepared to be confronted and confront

30:30 what I was trying to do, because I felt that I had a job to do, and I tried to do it as well as I could.

Were any of the other blokes in your unit affected forcefully?

Well, I've seen people who have been. You know, if I described them as raving lunatics that would describe them. They couldn't stop shouting and singing out and, you know, really off the beam. But

But are

31:00 **they soldiers or …**

Oh, soldiers, oh yes, soldiers. But you see, once the war was over, and I was in a small section, and I pretty well stayed in that section for quite some time. And then I was separated from the unit. And then I was on Bougainville, and I was in a small surgical unit then. So I wasn't part of the unit as a whole.

31:30 I was still 15th Field Ambulance, but attached to a separate part of the medical services

Can you talk a little bit more about the time at Salamaua? How long were you at the advanced dressing station?

Kelly's. We were there from June until something like

32:00 early September and then the Japanese went … the 9th division landed at Lae and we took Buna and Gona which meant that we had an area that our troops could occupy, which was further down the coast from Salamaua, to the right, or to the east. And we could evacuate patients from there.

32:30 And so that relieved the pressure of Salamaua. We walked into Salamaua, and one thing I, first things I saw, was pretty distressing. And I only learnt of recent times, something about this fellow, because he was a friend of a close friend of mine. His name was Newton, he was a flying officer. And what I saw

33:00 was a single grave, by itself, fairly, well, quite recently dug, with a white cross on it with the name of Newton on it. And the circumstances of his death was, that he'd been shooting down the Japanese by plane, and they shot him down. They got him out of the water, I don't know whether he got out with a parachute, and they brought him ashore, made him dig that grave that I saw, he stood at the head of it and with cutlasses,

33:30 they chopped his head off, let his body fall into the grave, filled the grave, which I saw. And he was subsequently awarded the VC [Victoria Cross]. Now that fellow, the name Newton, went to Melbourne Grammar with a close friend of mine who knew him well. But, you know, that was pretty dramatic. So see what the Japanese had done.

How did you know the story?

Well, look, that's an interesting question. I don't know how soon I

34:00 knew it. But of course, they did exhume the body because it was by itself. And so they would have seen that it was decapitated. And he got a VC so they must have … they may have had other Australians that witnessed it, or the Japanese may have admitted what they did. I don't honestly know that.

When you arrived in Salamaua, you just saw the grave?

Yes, with a name on it. And you see,

34:30 some of these things that I mention, that we would have become aware of, fairly soon after … I think the Centaur is one … where Tokyo Rose … do you know what I mean by Tokyo Rose? Well this was an American, so called, who was on the air waves from Tokyo, and who would speak on behalf of the Japanese to the world, as to how successful they had been and what they were doing. So

35:00 whether it was Tokyo Rose. Because that would come to us by the wireless, you know, within a week, or if not straight away, in some cases.

Describe Tokyo Rose's voice and her mannerisms?

Oh, well, I remember it was American. It was an American slant on her voice. And I think she was American. Whether she was Japanese American, I don't know. But, you know, she was well known. And I think after the war, they caught up with

35:30 her. I'm not sure of that. But I think … I don't know if she would have been put to death. But she was caught up with by the war's end.

When you heard her broadcasts, did you …

Oh, it was disgusting, of course. And to think that she was speaking with an American accent. I don't know whether she looked like a Japanese. I would never know that. But she may have been a Japanese American.

36:00 **Back at Kelly's, you were there for four months. Did you get a break?**

No, none at all. Oh no, no, no. As a matter of fact, suppose I had a friend in this fellow, his name was Marcus Rosefield. He was an outstanding officer and he was older. He was a Major in the unit.

36:30 And he called me up one day and said "How are you feeling?" This was after we got into Salamaua. We went from Salamaua up to Wewak and Finschhafen , up the coast of New Guinea. And it was about this time that he said to me "How are you feeling?" And I said "Oh, I'm alright". Now we'd had no fresh food at all. They tried to drop us bread, but when we got it, it was mouldy. There was no communication other than carrying it down this track.

37:00 And we certainly had dried, the natives would carry in big drums, one drum to a native, of dried carrots and stuff like that. And we'd have the bully beef. There was no fresh meat. And I suppose four months was a fair time. We had no bread, we'd eat these dry biscuits. And he pulled up my trousers, and he started pulling at the hairs on my leg. This is Marcus Rosefield. And

37:30 I said "What's that telling you?" He said "You feel it?" I said "no". He said "You've got a bit of miosis, you've got to go home". So he packed me off for, I think, three weeks. Flew me home by myself, by myself.

Did you ever think of eating local fruits and vegetables?

No, no. No we didn't. See, we would get some food. But what we were lacking in was knowledge of how nutritious

38:00 it was or wasn't. And, you know, it certainly wasn't very nutritious. Lacking in vitamins. He said I had very, very avitaminosis and he sent me home straight away. And as I said, I went home by myself. The only one in the unit, from that area. I don't know about any others that were further away.

Tape 4

00:24 **Bob, you spent four months at this isolated**

00:30 **outpost on the Sig. phone and obviously helping in the dressing station at times. Did you get much chance to look at your surroundings?**

No, I didn't really. I remember that if ever a Zero or a plane was flying over, it was very difficult to see. Because the foliage was so dense above you

01:00 all the time. And of course you would select a position, as ADS Kelly's was selected, that was covered by the undergrowth so that you wouldn't be spied and seen, certainly from the air. So, you know, you were getting there from walking down the Double Mountain track. It was such a narrow track, that you were trying, applying

01:30 all the time to keep your footing. And you were either going up hill or down hill, pretty precipitously one way or the other. But you didn't have opportunity to wander off. And as a matter of fact you wouldn't have wandered off. You'd be doing a very silly thing to wander off to any extent. Because you knew the Japs were in the jungle. They were all around you.

How, I mean, how close were you to the fighting?

02:00 Oh, well, Kelly's was … there were a lot of ridges close by, and they were within a kilometre or two kilometres. And the fighting had stopped at the ridges. The Australians were dug in deeply on very steep ridges. And they, the Japs, were trying to get over

02:30 those ridges to come further inland. But the Australians, the 58/59th Battalion were one of the prominent ones, were very dogged in keeping them out. And so it was a stationary, that four months was a stationary warfare. And every so often, you'd hear what we called, the woodpecker, which was the Japanese gun. And that would got pop, pop, pop, pop, pop. Whereas, the Owen gun,

03:00 which was our automatic weapon, very easily carried, would go tut, tut, tut, tut. So you knew whether it was a Japanese gun or an Australian gun being fired. I think on one of the tracks we saw one tank, oh, I'm sorry, didn't see one tank. We saw a tank on Bougainville, and it was shot up. But I … there were no

03:30 tanks that could mobile, that could get some men to get along the track. So it was only small fire really, with the Japanese wood pecker machine gun that he'd have in place and our own automatic guns and our rifles.

And a few small field artillery pieces?

No, no field artillery pieces. No, that was surprising, but not. Didn't have … don't remember any shell

04:24 wounds at all, as such.

How far away from the dressing station, is your camp?

Oh, I was situ in that dressing station all the time, night and day, didn't move from it.

So your camp bed, as it was, what did you have to sleep in?

I don't remember. I probably had a palliasse or,

04:30 you know, a blanket. I think we would have had something to keep the rain out. Because, don't forget, it rained dramatically every afternoon. Really drenching rain. And we're right on a river, where the camp was. So that the patients used to walk up the river. That was a safe way to come, up the river to us. They would be carried if they had to be carried.

You mentioned that you were walking up and down the Double Mountain track

05:00 The Kokoda Track, didn't go up and down … the Kokoda Track we went up it and then out again. But the Double Mountain, we walked all the way through to Kellys and then got out through Salamaua and that area. So we went out, I think, by sea.

Oh, right. Were you ever attacked at the station?

Oh, no. I don't think we were ever attacked.

05:30 We were very close to the fighting at times. And, you know, it was due to the 58th Battalion, 24th Battalion and some of these others that kept the Japs at bay. The Japs were on the, a little bit on the run, at this stage. A little bit on the run. You know, they didn't have planes because our fellows were bombing the

06:00 airstrips that they'd operate from. And they had Mitchell bombers, American bombers, which were doing a lot of damage in that area. And the Japs were really battling in the jungle. They didn't have the medical support that we had. I mean, I mentioned to you, the Atebrin. Malaria would have been a real enemy to the Japs. And so they were a little bit on the negative

06:30 side at this stage, thankfully. Well, they lasted four months. They were tenacious fighters. They didn't give up readily.

Did you ever have to treat any Japanese?

Once or twice I did, yes.

They were brought in as POW's[Prisoners of War]?

Yes. Not often. And it was due to the way they treated some of the Australians. That the Australian soldier wouldn't want to take a Japanese prisoner. I don't say he never ever did, but he certainly would do it reluctantly.

07:00 **How were the Japanese treated at the dressing station?**

Oh, well they didn't talk to them. You know, we just did what we had to and then sent them on their way. I don't remember … we didn't go out of our way not to. But we didn't readily take Japanese prisoners. And I would say if you talked to the, and not being an infantry man myself, but an infantry man who

07:30 was in that area would tell, we didn't take any. But I did see two or three that I remember. Of course, the language was a problem, because they didn't speak our language and we didn't speak theirs.

Can you paint a picture of what would happen to a … a soldiers been injured, and how they get to you and how you treat them and then where they go after that?

Well, if you speak of an obvious

08:00 injury, a leg injury, and they were reasonably common. That would, by the Regimental Medical Officer, that would be immobilised with a splint in some fashion. They would be put on one of those big stretches that I spoke to you about. He would be given morphia

How would he be given morphia?

By injection. And

08:30 he would have on his forehead what he'd been given. So by the time we got to him, there was no, cause

you couldn't double up, they'd give a pretty heavy dose of morphia to kill the initial pain and the shock. Well then he'd come to us. And the normal treatment for a bad leg injury, would be for us to immobilise it further. I mean, it would be taken out of the splint, which is an emergency immobilisation. And we would put him

09:00 in plaster of paris. And very often, he'd bleed right through the plaster of paris, which happened sometimes. They would clean up a wound. And as I explained to you, you would have to make sure that you removed any dead tissue. Because that would turn gangrenous. Any part of your flesh that isn't getting blood supply dies. And dies and goes gangrenous. So it would have to be cleaned up,

09:30 in a pretty rough way. And then the plaster of paris, he'd be wrapped in plaster of paris bandage, and by that time it should not need any tourniquet or any thing like that. Because the bleeding should have been curtailed, if not stopped. Then he'd be on his way. Well now, on his way would mean checking that dressing

10:00 or what ever he had on his leg, and be given further morphia down the track. And noting that every time. And his 3118 which he had tied to the front of him all the time, would have been marked accordingly. And usually, I guess not always, but it would be a doctor that would see him down the track, but not always. There may be some staging posts that they just checked his bleeding was alright and you know. And

10:30 he was pretty resilient, the young fellow. He was nineteen or twenty. You know, he was pretty, he'd been made fit, he'd been given … and that would probably save his life, if he'd been given plenty of exercise and brought to standard for the fighting.

I suppose you weren't short of water, given that it rained every day at four o'clock?

No, we were never short of water. No, we were never short of water. I guess, good food we certainly

11:00 we were lamentably short. We never had bread. And they would have their rations, which were biscuits and bully beef. And I guess some of those would be in action for a week or two at a time. But the 58th Battalion, at one stage, as a unit … some of them would have been relieved, some of them would have been injured, some of them would have been sick, but they were in action for the longest time of any unit, we were told. The 58th Battalion.

11:30 You know, they just didn't get relief from another unit in that area.

You talked about the importance of marking their sheet, their 3118, and indicating that someone had been given morphia. Was there ever occasion where people were inadvertently given too much?

Oh, there could have been, but you would never know. I mean, I wouldn't think there would be. I think people were pretty conscious of that. And the RAP were conscious

12:00 and we were conscious when we saw them as medial people. I don't think that would often happen. Mind you, it's a risk you take. You've got to curtail the pain. Some of them had diabolical wounds and, you know, you had to do something to curtail that pain. And morphia was it.

Did you see occasions when wounds did turn gangrenous?

Oh, yes, oh, yes. Not in that theatre, but in another theatre, I was actually assisting with the operations. And I remember one day, a Brian Morey, who was a very attentive surgeon, general surgeon, and he'd just chopped off a fellow's leg, and the fellow had moved out, and he said to me "Where's that leg?" And I said "They put it in the tent I think". He said "Tell them to bring it back". So I

13:00 said to the fellow "Get that leg". So it was a dirt floor of course, it wasn't an operating theatre. He showed us, he dissected it on the floor, and show us. There's what you call gas and dry gangrene and he cut it open and it was black. The tissue was black. And he showed us the gangrene on the leg. Because that had been out too long. He chopped it off here, and it was the lower part of the leg and we were looking at.

13:30 Oh, it was a real risk if you had dead tissue on any part of your body that would be gangrenous. You see, the tropics seem to encourage infection too, much more. Because of the dense atmosphere. The vapour content was so much more real. And it seemed to encourage infection much more.

14:00 **If someone had a gangrenous wound, was there any option other than amputation?**

Oh, no. There was no cure for gangrene if you had it. If you were unfortunate enough to get it in your belly or somewhere there, I would think it would always be curtains. But if you had an extremity that you could remove that was gangrenous, well you had the chance of saving a life.

14:30 You see, an arm or a leg could be amputated. And I guess a fellow would be much happier to go home with losing an arm. You recovered. And that's what you do, that's what your aspiration, to save life, wasn't it.

Were there, I mean, did wounds come in with maggots and things like that in them?

Oh, yes. Oh, yes. Oh, yes. And it was, that was

15:00 caused by blow flies. See the blow flies would lay their eggs. And the maggots, we were told this, would only eat the dead flesh, they wouldn't eat the live flesh. So you didn't worry too much about maggots.

Curiously, their effect are beneficial, aren't they, in that regard?

Yeah, yeah. You didn't encourage them, but if they had them, you weren't too disturbed about it.

15:30 **I imagine there's a bit of a smell at times?**

Yes. You found that with wounds. You know, after they've been operated on, because even blood, if it bleeds under a plaster of paris bandage, it can be really smelly. And when you remove a bandage like that, as you have to sometimes to do something about the dressing underneath, it really is smelly.

You

16:00 **mentioned the two types of gangrene, the gaseous and the dry, what's the difference between those two?**

Well, one produces a gas. That's as much as I can tell you. But, this fellow, Brian Morey, was showing us the difference, because he reckoned this fellow had both kinds of gangrene on this leg.

Were you encouraged to learn more about medical things with all this?

Well, I'd always been interested

16:30 in medicine, and at the end of the war, I don't know if you know, but you were assisted with courses that you could do. And I immediately, at the end of the war, applied to do medicine. And because I'd had quite a period in hospital, and I think, they weren't trying to fob me off. They said to me "Come back in twelve months, give yourself a rest for twelve months".

17:00 So I went back to the Royal and, as I said to you before, the Royal were marvellous to me. And I like to think I tried to support them. But they said to me one day, the 2IC [Second In Charge] at the time, said, he always called me Vernon, he said "Vernon, how about a trip to England?' And this was almost unheard of for

17:30 1949, 50. And I said "Yeah, that sounds interesting". He said "We're going to send you". Any rate he sent me around the world. I went to England, I went to Italy, I went to Ireland, I went to Scotland. Both ways by sea, two months by sea. And it really set me on my feet. When I came back, they made me an executive of the company, which was a big company and well regarded.

18:00 I stayed with the Royal. So I didn't ever to my medicine. But I've always been very interested. And I'm amazed at time, the people, you know, who have an illness don't know very much about it. I've got to be careful, I'm not a doctor or anything. I don't try to speak with authority. But, you know, there are some things you do and some things you don't do, if you've got an illness. And people

18:30 don't seem to be very interested in their sicknesses sometimes.

Can I just, just finish off these vivid descriptions of Kelly's and what was around there? You said that it didn't do to stray from the path because …

Oh, well, the Japs were in the jungle around you. You knew that.

Did you get an appreciation of

19:00 **the area? Did you see wild life, did you see birds?**

Well, I did. But, you know, you were so taken up with, you know, with first things come first. And the needs that were around you and your own needs of survival, I guess. That you didn't go very much past it. And when, for instance, I was told I could go home, I didn't stay and have a look

19:30 around the jungle any more. I think I got on a plane or something, and flew back to Moresby and then back to Australia. But I must say, for all of that, Australia was pretty mundane. I didn't miss something of what I'd been through. And I guess some of that was the canopy and the foliage and all the rest of it. Because when you

20:00 looked at Salamaua, which was a very, very narrow isthmus, straight out to sea, and we used to watch from a vantage point and see our planes. They'd be out to bomb the anti aircraft guns of the Japs at Salamaua. And they'd be some ten miles out, just circling around. Out of reach of all of them. By this time we were in charge of the air, the Japs had no claims there at all. But they did have their

20:30 anti-aircraft fire. They'd all circle round, the Mitchell bombers, and then one by one they'd break away and come over and then you'd hear broof, broof. And they'd drop their bombs which went off seconds after they'd gone past, so you knew where they'd drop their bomb. And they'd endeavour to … or how flattened it was because of our bombing, it was continuous. You know, Salamaua was just flattened. This isthmus

21:00 went straight out to sea, but very narrow and nothing on it.

And you could see all this from where?

From a couple of vantage points. I remember there was one. We would see them yes. That was out of the jungle area where we were. I think it was a place called Nun's Post. It was called Post because it was a post that you could see from. And we did watch that on more than one occasion.

You said that because of

21:30 **the foliage you were pretty well protected from being seen from above. Did you have to be careful about cooking fires and things like that?**

We were. But I didn't have anything to do with that. But yes we were, we had to be very careful. And I think they had some means of taking the smoke away into the, you know, underground or something. I just don't know. We did have a cook at that stage.

And was there a black out at night?

Oh, yes, you had no

22:00 lights at night, yes. You would have a hurricane lamp in a secluded area where you could … if you had to see.

But you said that most of the, a lot of the casualties would arrive at night.

Oh, yes. Well, I suppose we looked at them. That was very difficult too, because they had to carry them. You know, six people carrying them in the dark. Wouldn't have been easy. But the natives would know the track.

22:30 You know, they'd walk along the track, they'd know it. And I guess they were used to the darkness, weren't they. I guess there were times when there was a bit of moon light too. But they were very adept at carrying the stretchers and doing that. But then, when they came in, we had, we did have, in an operating area, which I wasn't then, I was later on, we had a Tilley lamp. And it was well secluded so that it couldn't

23:00 be seen.

What's a Tilley lamp?

A Tilley lamp's a pressure lamp that you put some flammable stuff in, and you pump it. You build up pressure. And it lights a filament. It's like a, well it's a bright light, quite a bright light. And it was to be continuously pumped every so often to maintain the pressure of the gas inside.

Now, when this guy came and said you've got a

23:30 **vitamin deficiency and about to get beri beri, did you have any inkling that you were sick?**

Oh, no, no, no. I didn't. I didn't. See, I was a young man and I had malaria once I think but you'd be treated for that. No I had no real awareness that I was unwell. But I guess I was much

24:00 better at the end of my leave than I was at the beginning of it.

Tape 5

00:21 **Bob, you were telling us about the time you were sent back from New Guinea because you were suffering from vitamin deficiency that you were unaware of. Tell me about**

00:30 **the time you spent in hospital in Australia then.**

Well it was later on that I had time in hospital. There was a period where I had malaria. I can't remember exactly where that fitted in, but I think I was a week in hospital because I was pretty unwell. But with the vitamin deficiency, it was really a matter of getting back to a full diet. And

01:00 I guess, I don't know, but Doctor Rosefield who sent me back, may have thought I needed a rest. I felt quite alright. I didn't feel too unwell, but I guess, it was about three weeks, and then a period up in Townsville where I was lazing around in a staging camp, helped me recuperate. And I think I recovered quite well over that period. So I

01:30 didn't have hospitalisation then. It was later on, towards the end of the war where I had a period in hospital.

So did you go home and get well fed?

I did indeed. You can imagine my mother spoiling me.

I bet. And during the time that you were in Australia, you were on your own, obviously, away from your unit, I understand that you saw your name in dispatches.

Yes. It was quite a

02:00 surprise, and a pleasant surprise. Initially, I think, the first awareness I had was to see my photo in the paper and it mentioned that I had been mentioned in dispatches. I subsequently got a letter, of course, and I was all formal. But it gratified me because I felt on behalf of people like myself, who didn't feel inclined to compete in the war, in a

02:30 combatant way, it was still recognised for wanting to do the right thing by, you know, patients and people who were wounded.

Which newspaper was it that you saw the photo in?

Oh, it was in a couple of newspapers, The Sun, The Age.

So did you just open the paper one morning and there you were?

Yes. Yes.

And do you recall what it actually said about why you'd been mentioned?

Well

03:00 it said only, and the formal recognition only said – for outstanding services during a period. And it was the period of the Salamaua campaign. Because, I guess, not indifferent to anyone else in the area, it was a pretty trying time. You asked me, your colleague asked me the last interview,

03:30 where was my tent? Well I didn't have a tent. I was somewhat undercover, but I was in one location for four months. I wasn't fighting, so I didn't have the experience of fighting, but I felt very responsible because I had to organised burials for fellows who died, I had to organise medicos for patients as they came in, and I was the first to see the patients when they were brought in. And some

04:00 of them, as you can imagine, were in pretty poor condition with bad wounds. But I was able to pass them on to the area where we had, and they had initial operations in that location.

Actually, I must ask you, we all use the term, or I certainly use the term 'mentioned in dispatches' as if I know what this really means, but how does this work, what's the process of being mentioned in dispatches?

Well, I

04:30 don't know a lot about it other than, I guess, it has to come from your C.O. In any action they seek to recognise people who have given outstanding service. And of course, the most outstanding service is a V.C. And that has to be awarded for great valour and bravery. I wasn't in that category. And the Military Cross, the Military Medal and

05:00 the lowest of these is 'mentioned in dispatches'. But it is a recognition that the person has given particular leadership or service in an area. And it has to come, it has to be promoted by the C.O. of your unit and then it goes before the hierarchy. And my understanding is, it's not always awarded. It has to be reasons

05:30 and there are only so many allowed and it has to be in a particular area. And so it's not always awarded.

So who was your CO at the time?

Ref. W.D. Refshauge.

So he must have written some details in a report

Yes. Well I'm not aware of those things, of course. I wouldn't know.

So did you actually see any sort of specific reference to

06:00 **occasions that he might have mentioned where you did service.**

No

Just a general outstanding service.

It was his awareness. Because I guess I was in the eye, or in his eye, when he visited because I was always there and he knew what I was doing. So I suppose that's …

Do you know if anyone else …

Oh, others, yes, there were about, I think, four or five from the unit who had 'mentioned in dispatches'.

06:30 No one received any higher award that that because we weren't a combatant unit. But that was a recognition of … apart from Ref himself, I think he got a civil type award, an OBE [Order of the British

Empire], and he was later knighted. He was an outstanding man. He wasn't so much knighted for his war service, although that would have been a background to it, but he was secretary of the World Health. And he was a General in the ultimate.

07:00 That's in peace time, after the war. He was an outstanding administrator, and a doctor, of course. But I don't think he ever practised very deeply in the medical field. He was an administrator.

Now you're in the staging camp at Townsville.

Yes, Julargo.

Julargo. Tell me a little bit about Julargo.

Well, it was pretty ordinary. You were away from your mates. Two things I remember about it. It was very

07:30 hot, it was very limited in what you could do and I used to sit up all night hearing "Come in spinner". As you may know, Australians are great two up players. And they used to come off the ships, either in or waiting like me to go

08:00 out, and they would be given some money, which was the back pay. If they'd been overseas they didn't receive that then, it was credited, some of it was credited to their account, but the rest was given them in cash when they had a period in Australia. And they used to do their money on playing two up. And all night I'd hear this "Come in spinner, come and see them go". And I was not against anyone having a gamble, but I used to get heartily sick

08:30 of this two up going all night. All night.

You never played yourself?

No, never. Wasn't interested. Wasn't going to do my money that way.

No. And how long did you spend at Julargo?

Oh, Julargo. I would have been a few months, it might have been two months. It seemed a long time because you were doing nothing. And well, I guess I may have been aware I would go back to my unit, but I didn't know where I was going.

09:00 **So you were housed in barracks?**

Yes. Oh, no, it was, have only been tents, it wouldn't have been permanent barracks, it would have been tents. But very hot and steamy in Townsville at certain times of the year. And that must have been one of those times.

And did you finally get your orders?

Yes I did. And went on a ship. A cattle ship, I think, it had been used. A small ship. And went straight to

09:30 Torokina. Torokina was a base that had been established and won by the Americans on Bougainville. They had attacked the Japs before we got there, but the Japs … they left them on the island, they took them out of the base they fought them. And there was an airstrip there, at Torokina, and we occupied that. And we learnt subsequently, that our job

10:00 to go with some of the militia, and dig the Japanese out of Bougainville. It was a very stupid operation, cost wise. The purpose of it was fruitless. They could have stayed on Torokina where they were well established. And protected the island, stop the Japs going any further. The Japs

10:30 in Bougainville were at the end of their line. They'd come all the way down from Japan across Indonesia, into the Solomons. And they could have just been cut off and left there. Instead of that they fought them. And fought them ardently at every river crossing. A series of rivers went across the island. It was diabolical, the rainfall. We had, what they called, a Buin Road.

11:00 And I was sent with a couple of other fellows, again, separated from my unit, with a surgeon and a medico. And at every river crossing, as we came to it, we operated on our fellows as they came. We were the first to see them. And our operating theatre consisted of a tent fly, earthen

11:30 floor, two pedestals to hold the stretchers, a primu-s stove and a half a kerosene tin to boil the instruments. And that's the crude way. Which was done quite well. We had an excellent surgeon. But we operated on soldiers as they were wounded. The thought had developed throughout the war, that the closer

12:00 you could get to the soldiers after they were wounded, the greater the chances were that you would save their lives. In the initial stages, in New Guinea, if a patient came in with a stomach wound, the chances are he would die. And that was because he was so badly infected. And we didn't have, in those days, penicillin which was the antibiotic that was

12:30 developed during the war. Whereas, on Bougainville, we had that, and we operated very quickly on the

patients as they were wounded. And they went, they were taken not by carrier for a week by eight aborigines, but on a jeep. They modified jeeps. The Buin Road was made with a lot of slats laid in the mud. It was a very rough track, but it enabled a jeep, which was readily

13:00 available at this stage … the Americans had left them and they were a new vehicle. Four wheel drive, the first of the four wheel drives. Marvellous conveyance. They were able to get, you know, over very rough country. And so jeeps were used. After they were operated on and were with us for a couple of days, they would then be taken back to Torokina, and from Torokina they could be flown to Lae where there was a well established

13:30 general hospital or down the Port Moresby where there was also a general hospital, a major hospital.

When you left Townsville, did you know where you were going?

No, we weren't told where we were going. We were never told in transit, in active service where we were going. Sometimes there would be a rumour that we thought we would be going in a certain area. We knew we weren't going to England or to Russia. But we didn't know our location. And that was done for very good reasons.

14:00 They didn't want the Japs to know. You see, the threat of being torpedoed on the water was quite real.

Did you have an escort for that journey from Townsville to Bougainville?

I think we must have then. I don't remember the details of it, but yes, we certainly would have.

And on the ship, were there troops with you that were going into action?

Oh, yes, there were a lot of troops that were going to Torokina. I was a one off, of course, with my unit. I was the only one from the unit who was travelling.

14:30 **And what time was this in the war, then? How late …**

Oh, I guess it was the last eight or nine months of the war. Because we were in Torokina and I would have had about six months. That's why it was absolute folly to persecute the war, in a remote area where the Japs were cut off and cost lives and expense.

When was it that you realised that this operation was

15:00 **folly, that this campaign was …**

Oh, well, that's a difficult question to ask me, because I now know when the war finished, which was five months afterwards say. But I didn't know then. I could have anticipated but the hierarchy knew that the Japanese were cut off. They knew better than I knew as a soldier in an ambulance unit. And they knew they were well established at Torokina, they knew they controlled the air space

15:30 there. And, you know, they didn't have any air force to follow up where they were. The Japs had no air force at all in that area.

And was there any discussion, I mean you were there for quite some time, some months, was there any discussion sort of later in that period?

Great deal of discussion, yeah. A great deal of criticism of Blamey. Because it was blamed on Blamey directly because

16:00 they thought we wanted to have a good reason at the end of the war, which he was conscious was approaching, that he was still fighting. And he was fighting by having troops, Australian troops, on Bougainville Island.

And what was his motivation, do you think, for wanting …

Oh, his standing as a … you know, he was made a Field Marshal soon afterwards. He came in for a lot of criticism at that time. And I guess,

16:30 he was the spokesman, and I guess he was the leader, but he must have been influenced, one would think, by others too. It may have even been the government of the day that played a part in that.

What about MacArthur? Do you think his relationship with MacArthur played any role in that?

Well I don't think MacArthur needed to have a relationship with Blamey, but I certainly think that Blamey needed to have a relationship with MacArthur. And I think it was more the other way

17:00 round, that Blamey wanted to maintain a good relationship and have some say in authority. And have that say in authority by saying – our boys are still fighting.

At that time, did it affect, or did you see it affect the behaviour of any of the troops there? Was there a reluctance to engage in combat, given that people were disillusioned at that stage, about the campaign?

17:30 No, I'm not conscious of that, because I was not a combatant, so I wasn't in the firing line. Although I

was pretty close to it in that location. I think we, you know, we were prepared to do what we could. And don't forget, in all of this, I guess there was a development of a real … because of the history of what the Japanese had done, and

18:00 I guess we may have known something about what they had done to the POW's by this stage. We hated the Japanese. We didn't want them to have advantages over us. I guess that must have been … that was set in by that time, quite realistically.

Did you have the experience of casualties coming in, being treated, and then being sent out again, into combat?

That's unbeknownst to me.

18:30 Certainly not the ones that we would have had. You see, if someone had a PUO, which is a Pyrexia of Unknown Origin, in other words, a raised temperature, and very unwell, he would have sat in the jeep and gone back to Torokina, which was a half a day's drive on the corduroy track. So that sort of person may have recovered when they found

19:00 out what he had wrong with him. And by that stage they would have had laboratory people in a field ambulance unit who would do a blood test and be able to certify what a person had wrong with them, if they had a very raised temperature. Do the test in the field almost or Torokina. And if they knew that they recovered, they may have sent them back. But the people that we would have got. There were a lot

19:30 of them … the Japs used to come in behind the lines on the corduroy track, and put land mines. They knew they were defeated so they weren't facing us with fighting as much. But they'd creep in and put these mines under the tract. The next morning, soldiers would be on the track and up would go the land mine. And that would, sometimes, take the foot off

20:00 or damage the lower part of their body. And then we would get them pretty quickly, because we were on the spot. And we would come and there were times when we would amputate the leg and, you know, do the initial surgery which certainly would have been to amputate the leg. Or flesh wounds, clean them up and put them in a plaster

20:30 of paris bandage and send them back the next day on the jeep, if they were stable enough. Give them a, I think by that stage, we even had blood transfusions, that we didn't have in the early stages of New Guinea. So if they had lost a lot of blood, they could be replenished.

I'd like to get a really clear picture of where you were working at this stage. You were half

21:00 **a day's drive, is that right, from the base hospital at Torokina and you're working close to rivers …**

Always on the river. As each river was captured … we'd see the Japs across the river. You know, they were the other side of the river. And we used that river as a protection. There was one tank I remember seeing, which was one of ours, which went up because the Japs put the land mines

21:30 under it on the corduroy track. Otherwise it was only rifle fire and these land mines that were used. There was no artillery. I think there had been a couple of small guns, but they were put out of action. So really, the fighting was sort of, you know, jungle type warfare. Them creeping in and doing things. Sorry, the question you asked me?

Well, I'm just trying to build a picture

22:00 **of that environment that you had to work in.**

Yeah. Well I was with three or four others and I was assisting the surgeon, who was an outstanding man. I always remember him, because you never really knew when the wounded were coming in. They may come in three at a time, two at a time. Sometimes at night. So you had to always

22:30 be ready. And I remember seeing him sitting on the edge of a stretcher telling a fellow, I was not close enough to hear what he was saying, Brian Morey was his name, he came from Queensland, and he was a little older. He had to be I guess, to be a general surgeon, which he was. So he had to be perhaps thirty, and that was old to us. And he talked to this fellow about taking his leg off. Even though

23:00 he had the pressure of people lined up with operations. He was a very kind man. And I think I was fortunate to work with him. I was one of his assistants.

Could you hear what he was saying to this soldier?

No, but I knew he was, because the fellow had come over and had his leg off, so I knew that's what he was discussing with him, that he would lose his leg but save his life.

So, you're working

23:30 **on like a river bank, and you're in the middle of the jungle.**

Yes. Not as thick as the Salamaua area. But it was certainly jungle. Rough, very rough country.

And did you move with the troops as they …

Well, yes. From memory, we had two or three different moves. There were a number of rivers going across the

24:00 island, and as we would advance to the next crossing, we'd go to the edge of that crossing and set up our little operating theatre.

And tell me again. The operating theatre consisted of …

It had a tent fly, an earth floor, two posts that you'd put a stretcher on at the right height to do the operations. We would have gowns and we would have, one thing I omitted to tell you, an autoclave. Now an autoclave is a pressure, steam operating thing, that would sterilise the things we would use in the operating, in the procedure. And obviously, you'd aspire to be as sterile as you could be.

25:00 We'd have a gown that we put on. We'd have a mask that we'd put on. We'd have a hat over our head. And gloves. And we would then have these, what they call, wet sponges, because in a normal theatre today, you'd have sterile rags, for want of a better term, that are dry because they need to sop up the blood and stuff. But

25:30 unfortunately, ours were always wet because they'd come out of the autoclave. But they were sterile because they'd been put under high pressure steam heat to make them sterile. It was very awkward. I would think particularly for the surgeons who were used to working with proper dry sponges, to have to use these wet sponges.

So the autoclave is powered by … have you got a fire or gas?

No, it was a pressure

26:00 heater. Like a Tilley lamp, that you pumped up, I suppose it was kerosene, and got the vapour and that made it very hot and that would boil. And it was under pressure, the container, which screws on the top so that, you know, it didn't explode. But it certainly built up the pressure. And when you get very high pressure, well over a hundred degrees, high pressure steam,

26:30 you really sterilise things. They've got to be at least a hundred degree but we made sure by putting them in the pressure area, that they were thoroughly sterile.

So there's three or four of you and a surgeon under the tent fly, you're using kerosene lamps for light?

Yes, a Tilley lamp. Well it was a kerosene but it was under pressure, and therefore it was a brighter light. It was almost a white light.

And what about anaesthesia?

27:00 Yes, well, almost invariably, we had a medico with us too, he stood at the head of the patient and he administered … I don't remember that we ever had oxygen. I don't think we did, which is a normal procedure today with an anaesthetic, you have that as a supplement if you needed it. But we had what they call pentothal sodium. And pentothal sodium was a newer anaesthetic

27:30 then, it was an intravenous anaesthetic. It's used today too, in various forms. And it doesn't leave the effects of ether, which I think we may have used a couple of times, but normally we would go … Ether, of course, gets in the lungs and it distresses the patient afterwards. But pentothal did not have that effect on

28:00 people.

And when you had finished, when the surgeon had finished operating, where did you take the soldier?

Well, we would have had a back up of people. We would have had, perhaps, two tents. And they would go in there and separate people would look after their recuperation. We had no resuscitation tent, as you might consider today, or intensive care,

28:30 there was none of that. And I suppose, when I contemplate it, the explanation is that they were younger people, they were able to cope with their surgery much better, as any young person would today. They were fit people. And of course, some did not survive.

And what did you do then, when they didn't survive?

Well, I was not … whereas in

29:00 the New Guinea campaign, I was directly responsible for, you know, organising a padre of someone to come and conduct a service and bury them on the spot, which happened. But I was not involved in that. I guess, when I contemplate it, I think the body would have been taken back on the jeep to Torokina. And would have been coped with there. I'm almost certain because I don't

29:30 recall any funeral services in that area which was very forward.

So the casualties kept coming day and night and you were working, presumably, without a break. Did you get any leave during this time?

Oh no, you didn't have leave. You didn't have Saturday and Sunday off. And you didn't expect it. You wouldn't expect it.

So what sort of hours, do you think …

Look, I don't remember,

30:00 except it was night and day. I mean, I don't say it was every day and every night, at all. Because they were spasmodic as the patients came in. And that only went on for a month or so. And then the war finished. And you know, we heard about the bomb and it finished very suddenly.

And what was your reaction when you heard about the atom bomb?

Well, it was almost

30:30 unbelievable. We'd heard that they'd dropped one bomb on Japan and, you know, the Japs had given in. Which was surprising to us, because we didn't expect it to finish as quickly as it did. But it was very abrupt. You know, I don't know that we knew they were going to drop the bomb, I don't think we did.

And what was your feeling about the …

Oh well, it was almost unbelievable. You know, the

31:00 thought that the war was over. We'd been in it for a number of years and it'd gone on for five years, hadn't it? So, you know, it was a great relief to people. As time developed after the war, it was fraught with concerns because you knew you had to go back and live. You see one thing the army did for

31:30 you, was live for you. It told you what to do, it told you what to eat. It controlled your life. And you, then, had to turn round and control your own life. Some people had to go back and look after families. They may have had young children. Not many of them. Mostly they may have been married. So they had to go back and confront life. And I guess I was very conscious of that as being a concern to me. And I guess most people were.

32:00 **After the war when you became fully aware of the impact of those bombs that were dropped on Japan. What was your view? Because obviously it was later on.**

Well, it's an interesting one. And I've contemplated it since, not so much then. I was glad the war was over. But you know, one wonders how the people who perpetrated it, and there's no doubt about it, the Japanese perpetrated

32:30 a terrible war, they were more responsible they we were. War was a result of selfishness and, you know, all sorts of things, not only with one participant but with both participants. But you cannot help and think, and I have, for lost close friends and as a result of Japanese warfare. And I know how they were treated. And one close friend, he showed me, his toenails were all ripped out. He was a prisoner

33:00 in Singapore. His legs were all scarred badly. He said they kicked him. And he had a hole through his right arm, literally a hole, which had healed around it, but you could see through it. And that was a pick that had been driven through his arm. Now that was Japanese people at their very worst. And if any people had to learn a lesson from the

33:30 diabolical aspects of what they were doing in a war, the Japanese. And unfortunately a lot of the population, with the dropping of that bomb, had to pay the penalty for what had been done by the Japanese. And, you know, it's fair to say that of any country that's coveted at peace since that war time period, it's who? The Japanese.

34:00 But it was forced on them, but they were the last people that wanted a war. They didn't want another war, because they paid such a price.

In retrospect then, it's against your pacifist beliefs, which were obviously very strong, you nevertheless feel that it was something that had to be done, dropping those bombs?

Well, I

34:30 wouldn't like to make the decision to drop a bomb. But I think something extreme had to happen to the Japanese. And the powers that be decided it was a bomb. And I must say, terrible as it was, it probably had to happen. In other words, the Japanese, you know, from my awareness of it, had to pay an extreme price for some of the diabolical

35:00 things they did. They sunk the Centaur in cold blood. Killed a lot of people. And they were not people who were fighting in the war at all. And they'd done terrible things to Australian POW's. They did it to Newton. They, you know, cut his head off while he was standing on the grave that he had just dug. Can you think of anything more diabolical? People who … it's hard to imagine how they could go from that extreme

35:30 and be normal people.

What was your view of the war crimes trials after the war?

I didn't think a lot about them. But I think I would agree that there had to be something like that. I hope they were fair. I've no reason to think they weren't. You see,

36:00 the Germans did some terrible things, as we know. But they did abide by the Geneva Convention. And although the hierarchy did some terrible things, and they were the one that paid the price. The normal German soldier, as I understand it, was like the British Tommy, you know, he was trying to do the right thing by his country. Only because he was told he had to do it.

Do you think the death penalty was appropriate for war criminals?

36:30 Well I didn't have to make the decision. I'm glad I didn't. You're asking me now to make that decision, and I don't know how I'd go. But I don't think they were worthy of continuing to live by the things they did. And if that was the crime of the time, I guess it had to be paid.

Tape 6

00:18 **Bob, during the time that you were working in those forward posts in Bougainville, and dealing with casualties, was there an occasion when you found yourself**

00:30 **having to defend your patients against the Japanese?**

No. Well, that's not all together true. During the operation of being engaged with that operating team, there was not. Although we were very conscious that the Japanese coming behind us on the Buin Road at

01:00 night. But there was one occasion. It was one afternoon, late, and I'd just been … the war had not finished although it was close to finishing, although we were not aware of that at the time because we didn't know anything about the bomb in Japan. But I had just, by myself, crossed down to the river and washed out my

01:30 jungle greens, my spare set, put on the clean set, we always had two sets, and walked up on the road again, and there was some gun fire. Which I immediately recognised as an Owen gun, so I didn't take a lot of notice of it. The Owen gun went pop, pop, pop, pop, pop. Whereas the woodpecker, the Japanese gun, went pop, pop, pop. So you always knew the difference. So I thought

02:00 it was one of our fellows. And then one of our officers, a Quartermaster, came rushing in to me and said "They tried to get me". He had been down to Torokina on the Buin Road, and he was in one of two jeeps, and suddenly a couple of Japs stood up in the broad day light with an Owen gun. They'd let me go, because I'd come up at that …

02:30 because they knew, they wanted to get a couple of jeeps. So I'm always very thankful. Any rate, they sprayed down the side of this jeep and killed the driver in his car, and he was brought in to us and he was of course, what you would expect, was livid white. And charged me and said "Go to the pack store". I guess when the patients were brought in, most of them had rifles

03:00 and they were put in the store separately.

Bob, sorry about that. Let's just take it from where … you were washing your jungle greens, and what happened then?

Well, I got up onto the road and I heard gunfire which I recognised

03:30 as being an Owen gun, an automatic Australian gun, and not a Japanese gun. So I didn't take great attention to it. And then two jeeps were approaching. And out jumped Captain (UNCLEAR) of the second jeep, and the other one was stopped. And I was aware that the jeeps had been sprayed with Owen gun

04:00 fire by two Japanese I saw standing on the side of the road. They had apparently had obtained this gun, which only had a certain number of shots in the cartridge that they were able to shoot. And that was about eight or nine. So they then without any weapon. But (UNCLEAR) thought that we were being over run by Japanese, so he said to me "Go and get the rifle out of the Q [Quartermaster] store,

04:30 and you protect the patients, we're going to be attacked". And I refused.

What did you actually say to him?

I don't remember engaging in lengthy conversation, but I certainly said "No, I'm not taking up a rifle." And I surprised myself, on reflection, because it could have cost me my life. And he knew it could have cost his life too, because

05:00 I would understand that he didn't have a rifle in his jeep. Mind you, he shouldn't have had either. He

shouldn't have had. He was a member of the army medical corps. He was the Quartermaster and he looked after stores. And he'd been down to Torokina to collect stores. Any rate, they brought the poor fellow in. He'd been killed, the driver. And I guess I owe him my life because

05:30 I stood up at the same time in front of these Japs and they could have shot me first. I was an easier target, I would think. But they thought they may have got more than one in the jeeps and they disabled the jeep. Any rate, the infantry were called to chase them. And whether they ever got them, I don't know. But they must have shot an Australian and got the Owen gun from him to have the use of it.

And the Captain who gave you that order,

06:00 **what was his name?**

Well, his name was [(UNCLEAR)]. And I had an unusual experience with him prior to that. Would you like to know the experience?

I'd love to know, yes.

Well, we had a fellow in the unit who I knew reasonably well, who was a very easy going fellow and not a troublemaker in any

06:30 shape or form. And I noticed him, I think it was just before this incident I've spoken of, walking round the parade ground with a full pack on, doing a drill every afternoon. And I said to him "Why are you doing this?" And he said "Jallcome has put me on a charge sheet

07:00 and charged me and this is my penalty". And I said "Why?" And he said "Well he wanted me to pick up an American tent". And we all knew an American tent took eight people inside it, and was pretty heavy and was camouflaged. So one person would be really struggling to pick up an American tent. So he refused to do it without assistance. So he was put on this charge sheet. Well I

07:30 surprised myself when I heard about that. And shortly afterwards I left the unit one afternoon, went up to Brigade Headquarters, which was not very far away, and I don't know how I became aware of the details of this, but I did. I asked to see the Brigade Legal Officer. And the Brigade Legal Officer was a Captain, later a Major, I think, named Malomby. Well known in Melbourne as a solicitor,

08:00 I think. I think he may have died in more recent times. He would be an old man now. And he asked me what I'd come to him for, he'd had no introduction. And I told him I wanted some advice about a soldier that was suffering a penalty in the 15th Field Ambulance. So he was very courteous and told me to sit down. And the army has the AMR and O, which is army

08:30 regulations [Australian Military Regulations and Orders], which is a thick book with legal details in it, saying what you can do and what you can't do. Not that I knew much about it. But he proceeded to go through this book, and he asked me the details of the penalty and I told him that this soldier had a full pack on, walking around the parade ground every after noon, he had been. And he said – well to begin with (I think he called me Corporal, I suppose I was a

09:00 Corporal then) he said "You cannot in the tropics have a penalty that involves carrying a pack.That's something that is quite illegal.That will have to be put right. You go back to your unit, you've no need to say anything about this, that you've been to see me". He was very decent to me. So I went back to the unit. But I can tell you, within ten minutes, the RSM [Regimental Sergeant Major]

09:30 came racing in, I was in my tent, and said to me "Where have you been?" Ken Onnly was his name. And I said "I've been up to Brigade Headquarters". He said "What for?" And I said "I've been complaining about this fellow having to walk around the parade ground with his pack on every day, and I wanted to know why". He said to me "Don't you dare leave the unit without permission again".

10:00 And out he went. Well I never heard any more about it, the incident. But that panel, he was dropped immediately. I tell the story because I didn't think I'd have the guts to go up to Brigade Headquarters, a little Corporal, and complain to the Brigade Legal Officer about an incident that I thought was illegal. Which proved to be partially illegal at any rate. So I've since been in

10:30 touch with the fellow who had the penalty handed out to him and he asked me down for a cup of tea. I haven't been yet, but he lives in Burwood, so one of these days I'll go down and have a cup of tea with him.

But later you had this encounter with Captain Jallcome.

Yes. Well Captain Jallcome was not my cup of tea. I can tell you

11:00 that I go up, have been doing it for the last twenty five years, to the RACV [Royal Automobile Club of Victoria]in Healesville, for a week or two with my wife, and I see him on occasions having a meal there, but Captain Jallcome doesn't talk to me.

Were there any repercussions at the time, from your refusal to take up arms?

11:30 No. It's interesting. Nothing more was said about it. Mind you, he was under the stress of thinking we were being taken over, and we weren't. The unit was not being taken over by the Japs. There were just

two Japanese who stood up.

But of course, you didn't know that at the time.

Oh, no, no, we certainly didn't know.

Were you tempted to go and get a rifle at the stage?

No. No, I had no inclination.

12:00 And I surprised myself. But I was just not going to shoot a man. If I had it, I wasn't going to put myself in a position where I should shoot him, and I wasn't going to do it.

How many patients did you have at that time?

Oh, I don't remember, but there wouldn't be many because being on the Buin Road, as soon as a day or two passed and they were well enough, the jeep would take them back to Torokina. So there wouldn't have been many patients.

12:30 There could have been four.

What was your own physical condition like when you were in Bougainville?

Oh, I think I was alright. At no time did I … although as soon as the war finished I sort of cracked up a bit.

Tell me a little bit about that.

Well, I was not married, I was single and so I didn't have any points that

13:00 would give me an advantage to be discharged early. So what happened, we went back to Torokina and I think they built a tennis court there and I remember playing tennis. And those of us who were left, weren't many, most seemed to go back to Australia pretty quickly. And then one day, I remember it very well, because it was Christmas Eve 1945,

13:30 about late afternoon, I started vomiting. And then had very bad pains in the stomach. And because we had a sort of hospital there, I was put into hospital, and I think it was a Captain Uri who was at a festivity for

14:00 Christmas Eve, had to leave the celebration, and come and operate on Vernon, who had bad appendicitis. It was, I think, it was described later as a pelvic abscess because it was infected. And whether it burst or not, I'm not sure of the details. But it was a bad one. And I stayed in hospital for a couple

14:30 of days and then I was flown to Lae, to another hospital and from there went back by hospital ship to Sydney. And then by hospital train to Melbourne. And when I got to Melbourne, of course, I went to Heidelberg Hospital. And I had a series of being unwell. Whether it was all attributable to that appendectomy

15:00 and the results of it, I don't know. But I certainly went down in health. And I remember going out to a rehabilitation hospital in Glenferrie Road, which was Stollington. It had been a government house, where the Governor lived and it had been converted into a rehabilitation

15:30 hospital. Had a period there. And so it was quite some time before I was discharged. And, you know, I did have quite a bit of ill health.

Did you suffer any other ill effects from the war?

Well, I was given, during that period in Heidelberg, I was given insulin shock treatment.

16:00 Which was something new which was being practiced, apparently. Which was not a very pleasant experience. Whether it helped me or hindered me, I don't know. I believe it's not practiced today.

What did they do then? I don't know much about that treatment.

Well they give you insulin by injection. It's a routine that's practiced every day. So much insulin that you become un

16:30 conscious. And you're given a lot of clothing over you, and you sweat profusely, and you're unconscious for quite some time. And it's supposed to help your mental approach in some way. I don't know all the details. But it, I think it's considered no longer a satisfactory medical procedure.

How many of those treatments did you have then?

Don't remember

17:00 in detail, but it would have gone over a week or two.

And how did you feel during those treatments, do you recall?

No. No, I can't say. I don't know that I felt dramatically well after them. I don't think I did. But I don't, I'm not aware of any detail now. I've forgotten if I did have any particular feelings.

17:30 **Did you suffer any ill effect from the treatment?**

I don't know.

So you put that behind you?

Yes, absolutely.

Did the doctor ever discuss with you why they were giving that treatment?

They may have at the time, but I'm not aware of it. I'm not aware of any details of it now.

So you can't recall why they were treating you that way?

18:00 No, no.

When you finished those treatments, did you leave the hospital fairly soon after?

I think it was after then, that I went to Stollington, the rehabilitation area.

So after Christmas 1945, where you had your appendicitis to when you were finally discharged?

Would have been about August 1946.

18:30 **And that was your period of illness and then convalescence, until August '46.**

Yes, that's right.

And during that time did you see your family and …

Oh, yes. And I guess, certainly from Stollington, which was not far from where I lived, I would have had a day at home. I'm sure I did. You know, every so often. Oh, yes, I would have seen family in that period.

And

19:00 **how soon did you return to work then?**

I think it would have been about January. I had two or three months off. And went back to the Royal. And I think I mentioned before, not long after I'd gone back, they said to me "Would you like to go over seas?" And you know, it really was, when I reflect

19:30 on my background, it was the start of helping me along the way, greatly, in my working career. Because being in England and with the Royal and being wined and dined by the then General Managers. The real hierarchy of the Royal. It was a very big company in England. And being sent to Europe, in those days, in 1950, there was still great

20:00 evidence of the war. I remember in Italy, there was bomb, evidence in buildings, you know, damaged. So it was just after the war. And I was in Ireland and Scotland, to the company offices. So it was a great experience. And when I came back, I hadn't been back long, when they made me an executive of the company. And

20:30 then they gave me a free pass to go anywhere I wanted to, in Australia. Now how about that?

That's extraordinary, isn't it?

It was extraordinary. The experience they gave me. I went … all I'd have to do was draw up a program and tell the number two of the company, where I was going, and I was going to have a week there, and I was going to see the manager. I went to Adelaide, I went to Alice Springs, I went to Mount Tom Price when the iron ore

21:00 was just starting. And I obviously went to Perth and Townsville, and even went to Darwin. It was a marvellous experience, the Royal gave me. And when I came back, they wanted me to be in charge of all their inspectors throughout Australia. And there were about a hundred and forty of them. And I did that through each local manager in each state.

When did you meet your wife?

I've been married forty six years, so you work that backwards. And I

21:30 met her, as I've told you, in Bourke Street. She denies that, but that was the truth. The circumstances were, I was in Bourke Street one day, and I saw the lady who was to be my wife, coming down the street with a fellow I knew. So I stopped and talked to them. And I was rather impressed by my wife. And this fellow was a good friend, I used to play tennis

22:00 with him. And about the next week I rang him up and I said "Who was that girl again, that you were

with?" And he said "Oh, that was Betty Potter". I said "Do you mind if I ask her out to the theatre?" And he said "If you want to". So I did. I rang her up and I said "I met you in Bourke Street with George Loney, would you like to come to the theatre?" I love the theatre. And she said "Yes". So we went to the theatre.

22:30 We had a meal with Russell Collins first. I don't know whether you remember Russell Collins. That was the corner of Russell and Collins Street. And from that day, for another five years, I don't think my friend George Loney spoke to me again. Because it went on from there. And we were engaged a couple of years after that, I suppose. She always tells me I was a slow, very slow person. And we married and we bought a house in Lygon Street, here.

23:00 Oh, well we built a house. And then we built this house after that. So that's what happened forty six years ago I met my wife.

So you actually met her in '54?

That would be right.

And married?

'56.

'56. And I wanted to ask you, actually, a bit more about your family, and in particular your sister and her role during the war.

Well,

23:30 of course I was away during the war. I knew that she worked with the Americans. Not herself as a service person. But I knew the building that she worked in, which is in Collins Street, near Queen Street. And that we were always told that it was not to be discussed, the details of it. And she's died in the last six months. And I've never discussed in detail what went on.

24:00 But it was something of a secret nature. And she was a very competent secretary. So the work she would have done would have been of a secretarial nature. But the details of it I never knew.

She wasn't in uniform?

No.

That's a great pity that we don't know what she did.

Yes, excepting, I think, either my mother or she told me,

24:30 that she was sworn to secrecy for the rest of her life, what she had to do. So, you know, you didn't press it. You accepted it.

I know that your pacifism has lead you to take a particular position on the current war, in Iraq. And I wanted to ask you about your view

25:00 **of the other conflicts that Australian has been involved in over the years, Korea, Malaya, Vietnam. What's your response to those conflicts as someone who served so closely ...**

See, in the war that I participated in, I had to have a discission, didn't I? I mean I had to have an active

25:30 discussion or a passive discussion. In the other wars, I guess the Vietnam War speaks for itself.

In what respect?

Well, it was an abject failure, wasn't it?

Because the Americans lost the war or ...

Oh, well, it resolved itself. The Americans didn't win it. I guess the Afghan war, when you get

26:00 someone like Hitler or Saddam Hussein, really criminal people. I think you've got to try and divorce yourself of those people. Because they can do such terrible horror as individuals. And I guess the situation with Saddam

26:30 Hussein would have been much better resolved by someone sacrificing themselves to get rid of Hussein. I mean, if the Americans were so ardent about it, why didn't one of them stand up and do something about it? He could have been shot himself, but he might have got rid of the man, the perpetrator. Mind you, in having said that, he had supporters didn't he, and they would have risen up

27:00 and, you know, you never know where it's going to lead to. But when there's a real devil there, you've got to try and get rid of him, I think, haven't you? Someone who really is prosecuting a terrible situation for the country.

So you do believe there is such a thing as a just war?

27:30 I suppose, with the Nazis, you had to get rid of the Nazis and the horrors that they perpetrated. And so if you had to go to the extent with them and fight a war that involved, you know, how many countries in the world. Is that the alternative though? Is that the alternative, I don't know.

Have you got any children, Bob? Did you ever have any children?

28:00 No we haven't. No we don't have children. I have two nephews. My sister's boys that we've been very close to in our lives. Both my wife and I. Because her husband left her with two babies. And so we've seen quite a bit of them. And they've done well in life. One's a professor at Melbourne University and the other one is a lawyer and assistant secretary of the biggest company in

28:30 Australia.

And did you ever discuss your experiences with them? Did they ever ask you?

No, I don't think they've asked me and I … you don't impose the experiences you've had. They don't do that to me with their lives and I don't. No, I don't think I've done that with anyone. Other than, I did speak publicly on one occasion, because I was

29:00 asked to, on Anzac Day. And I felt a responsibility to say something then. And I did.

Do you march on Anzac Day?

Never. I've never been to a march, no.

Why is that?

Well, I'm not part of the scene am I, really? I'm not wanting to be. I'm not a soldier.

But you gave a speech on Anzac Day one year. Who was that for?

29:30 It was for the local church. It was packed. And I've been asked to do it another occasion, but I said no. I don't want to keep talking to other people about a situation. But of course, there are fewer people to do this today. I, another question you may have asked me, but I'll give you the answer without you asking, I am a member of the RSL [Returned and Services League]. And I've never been to the RSL meeting.

30:00 And I do that, because I'm a great respecter of what the RSL tries to do for soldiers. I had the experience, a few years ago now, I had a working colleague I respected greatly who went blind, lost his sight. And he'd been in the air force. He was in air crew, over Europe.

30:30 And I was concerned, his wife used to ring me and I was very concerned. So I rang up Bruce Ruxton and I told him the situation. And of course I was not aware that something could be done in the way of financial assistance. Although he was not badly off himself, he had a responsible position. But it would have helped to have the resources

31:00 of Veteran Affairs. And he suggested that I send him in to him. And I don't know Bruce Ruxton but I told him I was a member of the RSL. And Bruce in his usual way didn't let anything stand in his way. And my friend, Max, eventually received a TPI [Totally and Permanently Incapacitated] pension, and it was very much sought after.

31:30 It was decided that because the aeroplane he was in, was not pressurised, he was in a bomber, he did have oxygen as a mask, but the lack of oxygen in the altitudes he was flying in pretty continuously would have effected his eyes. And that could well result in the sort of blindness he experienced. Directly result

32:00 from his war experience. So I was more than encouraged to be a member of the RSL because I do feel that they try and … So you asked me if I march. I don't march. I'm not an active member of any unit, or returned section. But I am certainly supportive of what is done for returned servicemen.

Do you keep in touch with any of your mates

32:30 **from the unit?**

Yes. Well I have, but most of them have now died. Yes I have been in touch with numbers of them. But there are not many left now.

Have you ever experienced any hostility for the role that you played during the war? For the position you took?

No, because it was not, it was a position that people would know about. Well, some in my unit may be surprised

33:00 that I'm prepared, now, to talk to you and put on record some of my feelings. Because I didn't go around expressing my feelings. They were there if people asked me. I guess some people close to me would have known. But there were other people in the unit, I don't know, somewhat similar feelings. And so, you know, you didn't go round in your

33:30 unit and say, argue the toss about a particular aspect. I had no reason to do that.

And after the war did you hear of any stories of your mates experiencing any hostility?

No, no.

I think we might take a break there.

Tape 7

00:28 **Bob, I'd like to take you back to when you've first been called up and you're training at Seymour and some of the friends that you had then. You've mentioned a couple of chaps, Jim Downing and Fred Adams. Could you tell me a bit about those two friends and …**

I mentioned those two in particular because of my associations with them at the Royal.

01:00 So they weren't in the army with me, although they were in the army at the same time. I instance them both because they were different although close friends. Jim aspired to be a soldier. He felt the responsibility of the war and he was in no time a sergeant in the artillery and in the Middle East. And no sooner had he got there then they ran out of artillery

01:30 shells and they used some Italian shells in their own guns and the Italian shells, whether they were set to go this way or not, of just malfunctioned, I don't know, but they blew up in the breach off the gun and killed the whole crew. And Jim was one of those. And that was shortly after he got to the Middle East. That was Jim. And Fred was a close friend, worked in the same department. And

02:00 I always remember him with a degree of humour because he married Janet McDonald and Janet McDonald was the flavour of the month as a film actress and a singer. And Janet was a nurse who came from Wangaratta and Fred was bashing my ear about Janet McDonald. Any rate, he went off to the war and no sooner

02:30 was he there than he was captured as a prisoner of the Japanese. And for all we knew, he had been killed because we didn't hear from him. And I happened to live near where his mother lived and I used to, and on my leaves I would call on Mrs. Adams and speak to her. But we still knew nothing about Fred. But eventually he was rescued and came home.

03:00 And although he's had ill health he's led a very successful business career. He's now retired and living the other side of (UNCLEAR). So they're the two. But we thought both of them had died, but really Jim died but Fred didn't. But I really felt close to them and I felt very saddened, you know,

03:30 to lose them both.

I think, I was reading some of your notes about things you used to get up to with Fred. About going to churches.

Oh no, that was Fred Savage.

Oh Fred Savage?

Yes, that was Fred Savage. Well, whenever we went to a new move in Australia, I guess one of the first things we'd do is turn up for church

04:00 on Sundays. And whether that was in Albury where I remember going or Cooroy or various country places. And of course, being in uniform and soldiers, the people there were most hospitable and no doubt. But Fred in particular, was an organist. Very musical. He was a school teacher in civilian life. But he was an organist. But he was also very adept at tuning organs.

04:30 So if we went to a church, and some of them were in a reasonably remote area, he said to me afterwards "That organ needs a tune". So when he was next talking to the minister as he would be in pretty close proximity, he said "Look I think I'd better come and tune your organ". And they'd welcome that. And I'd be dragged along too and he would tune the organ and we'd get to know people even better. So that was Fred.

05:00 He was a character. He was very fond of his music and I was quite fond of music so we had something in common.

You were a bit of a singer weren't you?

No, no, no. Oh, I sang in a choir. Oh no, I was not a singer. No I don't claim that. I enjoyed it though. Enjoyed being in a choir. I originally, of course, I was in Vincent Kelly's choirs, a boy soprano. And in

05:30 the first choir he formed. But he went on to bigger things and I left that school. I left Toorak Central School.

You were telling us about the variety of religions that were in the unit. Can you give us a bit

more detail about those things and how that might have

06:00 **affected …**

Well it made me, I guess, when I saw the way, not in a … but in a quietly critical way, the way they behaved. For instance, we had quite a large group of Seventh Day Adventists, now they were there because they refused to take up arms. And they would never do anything on a Saturday

06:30 and I think, I can almost say, even when we were in action, you know, forward areas. They always had to observe their Saturday as their Sabbath. Nothing to do with Sunday of course, but Saturday. And I used to think this was so extreme, the way they behaved. I got to know a few of them reasonably well, but of course, they were by themselves

07:00 because they couldn't believe in the normal Christian faith. Therefore they didn't go along with those people and wouldn't attend their church. And then there were the exclusive brethren, who were very exclusive. And didn't want to, they would never discuss religion or anything like that. That was the exclusive brethren. And they didn't even meet in a church. They always met privately and very secretly.

07:30 The open brethren were different. And they were, as the name implies, they were open. They would talk to you about anything and they were fairly normal. Although they had, what they called, a chapel that they had separate. They wouldn't go to a church. So there were groups of Christian funnies amongst there. Well, not all Christians, but

08:00 believing funnies in the 15th Field Ambulance.

What were some of the other groups, can you remember?

Oh, they were the main ones that were separate. Of course, there were Baptists and Presbyterians and all the rest of it. But I like to think they were reasonably normal.

What did you class yourself as, at the time?

Well, I guess, that's an interesting question

08:30 to ask me, because I'd been brought up Church of England, I had attended the Pressy Church because I played cricket there, and I was very comfortable with any reasonable religious service. And I would go to them. And very often, the normal situation in the unit was that you'd have a

09:00 Church of England Padre, and that was, the Church of England services was the standard that was used in most units. And so that's what we would have adhered to. Although, of any person that impressed me, particularly during the months we had behind Salamaua, was a Priest and his name was Father English. And he was

09:30 subsequently, after the war, he was at Heidelberg.

What denomination?

Catholic. And if ever, and I had to organise burials, if ever I wanted a burial done, and although he was Catholic and it was a Protestant denomination, he would be prepared to walk for two hours to me and two hours back again to do the burial.

10:00 And I always remember, he was an Irishman, he had an Irish voice and I used to hand out, which to some people was pretty precious, a piece of chocolate wrapped in silver paper, a round circuit of chocolate. I could give that, it was given to me to give, I guess by the Red Cross, I'm not sure, to give to walking patients. And whenever Father English, if he had to walk for two hours, he'd come to me as he left and said "Give me my

10:30 ration D". And I had to give him his ration D chocolate. And I was more than happy to do that. But he was an outstanding man I always thought. The way he, you know, attended to the needs, the spiritual needs I guess, of the troops.

You say he had to walk for two hours. Why is this?

Well, he was one of the Padres in one of the battalions and there

11:00 was an occasion where we were, I guess, that far, we weren't that far away, but to get to us along a river bed, a creek bed, would have taken nearly two hours. And he'd come the worst for wear. You know, pretty tiring in the tropics, to walk that distance and then to have to walk back again. But Father English would always do it.

How much formality and ritual would there be with a burial?

11:30 Oh, it would be a normal burial service. It would be limited. There would be no great story of the person's life, or anything like that, that you might expect at a normal funeral service. But the formalities were carried out.

And what was your involvement?

I didn't, I was too busy at my front area. I had to be there to answer the Sig. phone and admit

12:00 any other patients who were … you know, I never left that area. So I would organise it, I would get him to come, I would tell him someone had died and I'd give him details that he required. And then he would come and see me before he attended to it. And then when he left I'd see him again, briefly.

It strikes me that in Australia in the 30's and even after the war,

12:30 **there was a fair degree of sectarianism.**

Fair degree of

Sectarianism. Rivalry between various Christian denominations. And that it's rare, perhaps, for people to be willing to engage with a variety of denominations, yet you didn't find a problem with that.

Well, you see, you speak of the past and you're correct. And if you're comparing

13:00 the Protestant with the Catholic faiths, when I was a young man it was very, very extreme. But what happened by my war experience, that has gradually tapered and you would find now that Catholic and Protestant could talk about their religious beliefs and do it reasonably comfortably, I would think. But that's been over a period of time. But what the war did

13:30 was to hasten that on. And that's what it did to me. And I came out of the war, I'd be very comfortable, well, one of my closest friends has not long died. He was a prominent doctor in Melbourne, John Carl. And John and I were close friends and he was a prominent Catholic in St. Patrick's. So, you know, I

14:00 never had any worries about that. He knew I didn't. So now days we don't think too much of it. But my … if I did have, and I guess I was the same as a lot of people when I was younger, although I don't remember that I was particularly so, but I guess I can't say that I was that different, the war hastened that on. And because of the circumstances, you know, you had a belief,

14:30 a Christian belief and you didn't differentiate between sects.

You talk about the way the Seventh Day Adventists wouldn't do anything on a Saturday because of the sanctity of that day for them. Did that cause problems?

Oh, well, it caused problems in administration. But you

15:00 just had to accept it. You know, it was paramount that someone's religious belief … And they made it so strong. You know, I think I can say they turned out to be good orderlies, nursing orderlies, because their faith would have helped them. But they wouldn't step over that line. They were very, very strict about Saturday being their faith, their

15:30 Sabbath.

With all the things you saw, men doing things to each other which otherwise wouldn't even be happening, did this cause you to ever question your faith or to analyse it deeply?

Oh, no. I think if anything it made me more

16:00 secure. I mean, what did you have? You had little. Your faith had to mean something to you and that's why when I was away, or wherever I was, if there was a church parade I'd want to go to the church parade. It was one way of expressing my faith. And I guess I didn't do it for this reason, but it showed to others, although there were many people that would attend a church service.

I'm just thinking about that notion about the problem

16:30 **of evil, for example. If we think about it, not so much the Japanese, but the Germans are Christians as well. How can God be on both sides and how can God sanction such a war to happen?**

Oh well, you know, you had to be accepting that God didn't want a war. But God does control everything. You play a part in your own life and what you

17:00 do and he gives you that freedom. I firmly believe you have a freedom and you can, you know, you hear of terrible things. People on drugs and that's their choice at some stage, or someone's led them into it and God doesn't stop that. I believe that you play a paramount part in your own,

17:30 even your own well being. I don't say you control it. If people have a cancer, you can't say that's your own fault. I don't say that for a moment. But your own well being, your state of being. I think your relationship with God plays a part in that if you want it to. But it's in your hands

Did you spend much time in prayer during …

18:00 I don't, I don't as much now as I used to once. But I certainly resort to prayer and I, my wife and I go to church. Certainly we engage.

Sorry, I was meaning during the war.

Oh, I beg your pardon. Oh, I guess I did. I don't know that I got in a state and started praying ardently. Nothing like that. But I'm sure I did, yes I did.

18:30 But that doesn't mean … I was never one that would stoop down and kneel down and make … it would be something quietly or something curled up at night to go to sleep, that you would certainly pray, yes.

You mentioned that you saw Father English after the war as well.

Yes briefly, not a lot but I

19:00 did see him because I was at Heidelberg and he was there. So I did see him, yes.

You were also telling us about some of the treatment that you had at Heidelberg. Did you ever discuss this with anyone?

No. Never discussed any details of treatment, even with my own doctor. Because I really feel that people can misunderstand it. And I'm quite sure it would have penalised

19:30 me in my future in commerce, for instance. So that I didn't see any point in discussing those details.

Did you encounter any other people throughout your life who had had similar experiences?

No. I just know the way people behaved. And I'm no different, and I know

20:00 how I would behave. If you told me that, privately, that you were having a to do with your wife and another lady down the street, I would have some feelings about that when I talk to you. And I can't help that because that's painted a picture. And whether it's right or wrong it's not for me to say. But I think there are some things in life that as a human being you

20:30 are affected by. And it's best that you don't pass those on. I feel very sorry about what's happened with the Archbishop at the moment. Whether it's right or wrong, it's a terrible position that people are playing up and talking about some of these things. It's not helping anyone.

With the rest of your war experiences, things you saw and things you had to do, did

21:00 **you talk about this with anyone after the war?**

No. Not ever. Never been asked to. Not in detail.

Did you ever feel a desire to do so?

No. I feel that the human being is an amazing person. And where I hear about people having psychological treatment,

21:20 well maybe sometimes it was quite necessary, but I think we can resort to that far too quickly. And I think that given a normal situation, for instance with family support, you'll live through most of your problems. I really do.

Can I ask then, why are you talking to us now?

Well, I'm talking to you now because it's given me an opportunity

22:00 to say something about my life. And in particular about my belief. And I hope I'm doing this in a circumspect manner. I don't want to … if people are interested, they can know that the Christian faith can play an important part. The basis for what happens later on in your life. Because I'm reflecting

22:30 now and I'm very grateful for the opportunities I've had in life. I've had a wonderful wife and wonderful … I've had good family. I think of my father and mother who came out to Australia from England and in very difficult circumstances, at times, brought up three children very close to each other. And gave us good opportunities in life. And I'm grateful for that.

23:00 **Do you think that your war experience changed any of your ideas?**

Oh, five years out of your life. I mentioned to you before, that my respect for religions other than my own were hastened on because of the war. Well that's a simple way, but that's certainly one. And my respect for other people. Because some of

23:30 the people, and they might say the same about me, were a bit insufferable that you had to do with and you had to live with and you had to have them in your tent. But it was good for you to know there are other people. I may never have known some of these people. I think I also mentioned earlier that a couple of fellows that I thought of as really rough house, and used expletives very freely, when it came to a real problem

24:00 that needed physical support and assistance, they were the ones that did it later on. So, you know, you can have feelings about people but you rapidly learn that if you put in a conglomeration of people so different from each other that you learn from each other, and I hope I did that.

When you came back.

24:30 **Firstly you had your problem with your appendix and you were ill for a while and then the treatment at Heidelberg, you were then at Stollington. How long did you spend convalescing at Stollington?**

Well I think I can relate it pretty well. That I was hospitalised from December 1945,

25:00 in and out of hospital, until, almost until I was discharged. So I guess six months in hospital, in and out. Or supported by medical situations.

And then you started work, how soon after that?

I think it was the end of ’46, it may have been the beginning of ’47. So it was twelve months after I

25:30 was first in hospital.

Did you feel at ease with the world at this stage?

Well I think I was confronted with what people were. I think I indicated earlier, that really, as much as we disliked the army, it did everything for us. It supplied our medical needs, it paid us a modest, a very modest amount,

26:00 but kept us going that way, supplied our clothing, fed us. And all of that suddenly ceased and we had to start thinking about our future. We didn’t have to think about the future, it was all catered for for us during those five years. And so it … everyone was confronted with it. And some,

26:30 I guess, were able to do this better than others. I feel that I certainly had a home to go home to. Although I went home to a father who was unwell and he was unemployed and died soon after, not long after the war was over. And so I had a mother to support and look after. But I certainly had a home to go to.

27:00 And I’ve already spoken about my employment with the Royal, who were very generous to me. It was never a very well paid job, certainly in the early stages. But at least they were one of the companies that kept the jobs for ex servicemen. I guess it was … they had to, but they did it well. The Royal did it with grace.

27:30 **Alright. I’m going to ask you some of these other questions now, Bob. They’re a little bit more casual than perhaps what we’ve been talking about. When you first left to go overseas. Was there anything you did, any rituals**

28:00 **that you went through before you left? Say goodbye to anyone or anything?**

Well, the saying goodbye was done on the way to the train, really. Because I gradually worked my way up the coast. I would have had some leave in the meantime, but then I left from Townsville. So it wasn’t a parting by sea to go overseas, as it may have been for some people who had left from Melbourne.

28:30 **So who came to see you off?**

I think I was … you see, I may not have known when I left home, that I was about to go over seas. I guess I didn’t. Because I knew I was going up north. But, as I’ve indicated to you before, we were never told “you’re about to go over seas, and sailing overseas

29:00 in a ship, and you’ll finish up in New Guinea”. Never told that.

Did you pack anything special?

No. No. No, I don’t … oh, I had a Testament with me in my bag, I remember. But that was fairly issued, I think. Perhaps everyone would have had that. I don’t know.

Did you feel that

29:30 **you were part of a tradition in any way, joining the AIF?**

No, no, nothing like that. I didn’t join the services. I was, you know, made to join the services.

You did …

Oh, I did eventually. But I didn’t do that with any noble outlook, other than, I felt obliged. I didn’t do it out of duty.

30:00 **Who did you feel you were enlisting for? Was it the British Empire, was it the nation, or was it something else?**

Well, I guess Britain, if you … you must be aware that we were much closer to Britain in those days than we are today. And I would’ve had that

30:30 feeling. And also because my parents were both English. And so there was nothing to interrupt that connection. So I guess I would have had a close feeling to Britain. And we know, don't we, that Britain was being bomb and having a bad time of it. So I guess it would have been a connection, a tie with Britain.

If there

31:00 **were a similar circumstance today, Germany and Britain, do you think the Australians would respond in a similar manner?**

Oh no, they wouldn't, the same, because it's so different. I can't say how they would react, but I think there is an alliance because we know we need it ourselves. It's more, I don't know that we knew it then, with

31:30 the Brits, but we do now know that if we don't go to the assistance of the others in some fashion, they won't come to our assistance. So there is a real block, isn't there now, that one nation does want to relate to another because of necessity almost.

Your close mates from before the war went separate ways

32:00 **when the war began, but did you develop close friendships with the people in the unit?**

Oh yes. Oh I had really close friendships. But I think I've indicated to you that most of them have now died. I'm one of the few that are still lasting. And as you get older, you don't travel as far to maintain contact. You maintain contact with people in the Bowling Club that you're

32:30 close to. So that's more my circumstance.

You've said that you were never one to march on Anzac Day or regularly go to the RSL or anything like that. How did you maintain contact with your war time comrades?

Actually by seeing them. How would I do that? We'd certainly be in touch by phone.

33:00 We would visit, they would visit. So, you know, whilst that's tapered a bit off now that I'm older and I've had a bit of ill health, it was … there was a period after the war that was quite prominent, continuous contact.

Was that … those meetings, were they to talk about day to day things or were they

33:30 **to reminisce?**

Only to socialise. No. Not reminiscing. There was a period after the war when I and I think a lot of people were the same, just turned their back on everything to do with the services. I would never discuss it in my working life. Not because I disciplined myself. That life was gone. And it was not a life that I cherished.

34:00 Although from this distance, now, I value it for the experience it gave me. Other people had it and I guess we've learned something from it.

Although you weren't a combatant, you were still in dangerous situations, did you fear …

No, it's strange, never, never. And I remember being in

34:30 an air raid that, it was a big air raid in Moresby, they were bombing the air drome and we were close enough to it. But I stood up and I was enjoying what I was seeing. I mean, here were these aeroplanes coming over. So no, I don't think … and I guess that applied to a lot of soldiers. They were not as fearful as perhaps they might have been. I mean, it would be different if someone was standing in front of you

35:00 with a rifle. Perhaps that would make some difference to you. But no, I wasn't.

What about illness? I mean, you suffered some illness, but you also … you would have been aware of the problem about malaria from typhus, did you fear contracting those diseases?

No, I was never fearful of them. We took all reasonable precautions with malaria. Which could have wiped the army out,

35:30 had it been let go. We put, we had long sleeves after dusk, after the sun had gone down, which always had to be, you know, rolled down. And we had some anti mosquito oil that we put on our face and on our hands, to stop being bitten by mosquitoes. Because the only way

36:00 you can get malaria, of course, is being bitten by a particular mosquito, the Anopheles mosquito. I didn't mention to you … the other day when we were talking about malaria that there are two types of malaria. There's what they call benign tertian and malignant tertian. And the MT [Malignant Tertian] type can kill you. It gives you cerebral malaria, and you die from it. So, you know, malaria is a very, a very

36:30 debilitating and an extreme disease to have. So you had to take every precaution not to get malaria. And the Atebrin of course, by taking your Atebrin, you kept it at bay.

Though you didn't discuss the war with anyone, did you think about, did you dream about

37:00 **your experiences?**

I suppose I did. But I'm not conscious of it now. In retrospect I'm conscious of some of the experiences, and that's why I'm able to talk to you about them. And I've still got clear, you know, fifty odd years ago now, but I can still remember. I talked to you about the air raid over Moresby. I can see this fighter plane coming down through the Japanese bombers. Just

37:30 flying straight through their whole stream of bombers. And other things about the Buin Road. I can see this Buin Road under mud with slats. So that, you know, if I want to recall it, it's there.

38:00 **You had some contact with Americans**

Not very much, not very much, no close contact.

Did you form an opinion of the American forces, or the American soldiers?

I guess one contact would have been the air force. When we were at Moresby and we watched them going over in their bombing raids. You know, they were powerful.

38:30 And they had, we had taken over from them in the Solomon Islands, where they had done the fighting. And we learnt from what we read that, you know, they had to dig the Japanese out and with a great loss of life. So we were aware they played a very big part in the war in the Pacific.

39:00 End of tape

Tape 8

00:07 Buin Road?

Tokyo Rose.

Oh, Tokyo Rose, yes I have, yes sorry.

And Tokyo Rose was well known as this woman's voice broadcasting around the Pacific. How did you get to hear or come to know about Tokyo Rose?

Well, I guess I got it from word

00:30 of mouth, what people would say. But one real source was the publication of Guinea Gold. Guinea Gold was produced, I think, by the services, certainly the government produced it. And it was a paper that gave you the news of the last week. And it was dropped to troops in forward areas from the aeroplane, and

01:00 it was distributed. And it was a real source of information. It was an important part, I would think, that it played. And I remember reading about Tokyo Rose there. They used to play it up and make a joke of it, of course. I guess, in the hope that some of the Japanese would get hold of the paper too, and see what they thought of Tokyo Rose.

Those sorts of

01:30 **publications, you know the sort of communication that happens, obviously it's censored and it's trying to achieve a certain object. Did you regard it as propaganda?**

Oh no, no. No, because we thirsted for information of what was happening in the war. I mean, we were in it, we wanted to know how the war was going. And in that publication, it was not only

02:00 the news in the Pacific, but some of the news in Europe, and the bombing raid etcetera. So, oh no, we didn't treat it as propaganda, we thought it was information we need to know.

Were there ever times when you read in that publication about things you were involved in that the printed version didn't …

I can't recall

02:30 that. There may have been if you put it to the test, because it wouldn't tell you all the details. It would be, you know, it was a broad sheet to cover not the extremes but the fact that there was a raid and where it was, and that was a week after it occurred, so it had to be that way. We assumed that.

03:00 **Did you feel cut off from home, from family?**

I guess you were somewhat. But so was everyone else. I mean, that was the war. We were in a diabolical situation we were confronted with and we couldn't be different from other people. We had … we wrote home and we received letters.

03:30 That was sometimes spasmodic because of the location you might have been in. But I think they did their very best to see they had some priority mail. And you received it. Because, you know, we had a postal orderly in the unit. One person that looked after the post. So that was treated as important.

Did you enjoy the war?

04:00 Oh, no I don't say I enjoyed it. But from my vantage point now, the experience I had, I guess I've got to say I hope I used the experience as well as I could. And I think I did, I think I did. I mean, I don't say I was exemplary but I don't think I wasted,

04:30 even though it was a war, it gave you some opportunities, and I think I tried to use those. And in retrospect, I think I did.

You've mentioned a couple of occasions when you stood up to authority, that you believed in. Can I ask, is there anything that you regret that you …

I suppose

05:00 there was, but I've thankfully forgotten those things. No, I don't … there's nothing paramount because I think I would be able to answer that question very readily to you. And I can't. I mean, you live your life, don't you and you think yesterday I could have done that better of something. But I don't think there's anything paramount that I'm mindful of that I regret.

Were there any times

05:30 **when you were treating patients that things went wrong that …**

Well, if there were times, I guess, although I was assisting … don't forget we didn't ever have nurses, trained nurses with us. And we may have been taught first aid in preparation for what the experiences we were going to have. No one

06:00 taught me how to hold a scalpel or how to hold a retractor and hold a chest open, or anything like that. Or to keep a steady arm while the surgeon was doing what he was doing. Had to learn that by experience. So I can't say that everything I did was perfect and I guess if you ask the surgeon, he wouldn't say that either. We will never know that because we did our best

06:30 and the patient went on. And we didn't know, apart from one instance which I'll relate to you, we didn't ever know whether the patient survived. Because as soon as they regained some degree of health they would be taken, in the case of Salamaua, by the stretcher bearers and carried to Moresby and beyond.

07:00 But the one experience I tell you that I checked back on, and I remember his name, his name was Jack Mitchell. And Jack Mitchell was a very big tall fellow. He was a Sergeant. And he came in one day having been shot up by the Americans. The Americans were great at strafing but sometimes they

07:30 picked the wrong spot.

Nothing's changed really, has it?

Well, I don't know. Any rate, they picked the wrong spot and poor old Jack suffered a couple of bullets in his abdomen. So he came in and we operated on him. I knew him by face, maybe by name, because he was in the same, not the same unit but the same area, and I would have come across him in some way. I remember he was a great big tall

08:00 fellow. Any rate, we did a colostomy on him, which is to take a section of the bowel out and repair the bottom part of the bowel. And so as you wouldn't use that bottom part of the bowel until it's healed, you did a colostomy, which meant the faeces went into a bag. And you rested the rest of the bowel. And you subsequently would replace that colostomy into the normal situation in the bowel. Well because it was a clean

08:30 wound, we thought he'd survive, but we sent him back with his colostomy. I guess, it was thirty years later, I'm going up William Street one day, who should be coming towards me but Jack Mitchell.

You recognised him?

I recognised him. So I went up to him and I said "Do you remember me Jack?" No, he didn't remember me. I said "How's your colostomy?" He said "What?" I said "How's

09:00 your colostomy?" He said "I forgot all about it". I knew that he'd had a colostomy, I remember giving him, being part of the team that were operating on him, and not knowing whether he survived really. Because, although it was, as I say a very clean wound, we hoped he would, but he went back with the back still in situ. But of course, it was all cleaned up. And there he was in the city one day. And so you asked me, I checked on him.

09:30 **It must have been very hard for people like that. I mean, it's a shocking thing to have a wound and then to have to deal with carrying around a colostomy bag …**

Oh, yes. But mind you, that's an every day thing with people today, too. They have a cancer of the bowel, and you know, these are medical things that you … It's marvellous

10:00 that they can be treated that way and even fully recover from it. The big advantage that the people today have, is that the chances of any infection or any problems are negligible because they clean wounds. And also they have anti biotics if they do get an infection, and thoroughly controlled. I should mention to you, in the Bougainville area, I may have just commented on it, but the dramatic … if you asked

10:30 me the most dramatic difference as the war progressed in people being cured of their wounds, is penicillin. It was dramatic. Once you could give a person penicillin as an antibiotic and how wonderful it was in, you know, driving out the infection. And I consider that antibiotics are one of the marvels of modern medicine.

11:00 Because, you know, they're saving peoples' lives. What was discovered then is absolutely amazing.

Obviously, the soldiers would have to put up with what would happen to them, but did you see soldiers who were unable to cope with either their wounds or with the situation?

Well, not many. Because,

11:30 don't forget, whenever I saw people, they were almost in transit, if not in transit. And we would do what we could and send them on. And so I didn't know what happened later on. You'd have to be in a base area, I guess, in Heidelberg or in Moresby to know when people who had been hospitalised for a period, and how they reacted, to really observe them. And I wasn't in that position. I saw them for about days only.

12:00 **What about amongst your unit. Did anyone, were they overcome with what they had to deal with?**

I don't think they were. I'm not, I'm not … if I had to think about it for a while I might be aware of something. But I don't remember. It was amazing how discerning the people, and I don't know who they were, I couldn't nominate the

12:30 individuals, but for instance, here I was in New Guinea, given a job of communication really, in a pretty tough sort of, well a very tough climate. When I got to Bougainville I was given the job of assisting operations. Now they were totally different. I don't know whether I did them both well, but I tried to. But it was terribly important that people were given jobs that they could

13:00 fit in some way.

It must have been extraordinary, assisting with operations?

Yeah.

What were you actually required to do?

Well I was assistant to the surgeon. He had a medico who was almost like a G.P. [General Practitioner] who had training and could give an anaesthetic sitting up at the end. And he didn't have to be sterile.

13:30 He could be dirty, what we call dirty, because he didn't have anything to do, really, with the operation. Well, he was there. And the surgeon was there and I was there. And we had, you know, they were experienced surgeons, they weren't young blokes who'd just come out through their exams. And so they knew that had to handle me carefully. Because they

14:00 knew that I was pretty limited, I suppose. But as time went on, I guess, I became more useful to them. And I would, they had what they called Spencer Wells forceps and they would do an operation and put a Spencer Wells, clamp them on the artery or a vein, and so you'd hold that and I'd hold that while he cut in there. Then he'd have a retractor and I'd pull one side of the retractor to open chest

14:30 while he's doing something in there. I didn't initiate things, but I was certainly part of the operation. Can I tell you one humorous event that occurred. It just comes to my mind because I was going to say to you, as well as doing the anaesthetic that doctor would also introduce a transfusion. Now transfusions were only introduced because of the means of storing

15:00 and carrying the blood. It was so difficult in the early stages in New Guinea. You just couldn't do it. And of course, you had to be careful that you gave the right sort of blood because blood's different. But we had one funny little, a Major. I don't know whether the name of Kent Hughes means anything to you, but he was a very active politician in Australia. Sir Wilfred Kent Hughes.

15:30 And he had a brother who was Monty Kent Hughes and this fellow was assisting us one day with a transfusion. And a transfusion is a bottle with blood in it. And the gravity feed they organise with a screw just the amount of drip that the person should have. And there is an air vent to let the air in as the blood comes out.

16:00 And that air vent goes with a tube right to the top of the bottle. So that if you tip the bottle upside down, it doesn't spill the blood because it's beyond the level of the blood and it just … And he thought he

would get a reverse Higginson's syringe. Now that's used to give an enema. But it pumps air. It also, it sucks but it pumps as well. So he put the reverse end of the syringe into this air vent and started

16:30 pumping. Well what happens then, you build up pressure in the bottle and the weakest part of the bottle fails. And the weakest part of the bottle happened to be the cork. And here's Monty standing up there pumping and the cork came out and you should have seen the blood over him. We thought it was the greatest joke ever. Poor old Monty, a very pompous fellow with blood dripping off his nose and his eyes. He

17:00 tried something that didn't work. It didn't work.

I think we've probably covered everything. Are there any final thoughts that you would like to give us?

No, I think you brought them out very well by asking me some of those questions. Why am I doing this? It's not because I want to

17:30 do it, not because I think that my experience, far from being anything exceptional. But they had a purpose in the way I was able to pursue my own feelings during the war. And I'm grateful for that. And I think war is diabolical and I hope we do everything we reasonably can to avoid it. But

18:00 I really feel I've got something to be grateful for, for the experience that I had over that period of time. And I think you've both brought out from me some of those things. I hope I haven't sounded pompous and I hope I haven't sounded that my experiences were anything exceptional. But I think it's worth recording and hopefully they

18:30 will be of some use to some people if they want to hear them.

Thank you very much.