

# Australians at War Film Archive

## Reginald Drew (Drewie) - Transcript of interview

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<http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/817>

### Tape 1

00:31 **Okay we're recording now, let's start with that summary.**

Just that I was born in Warrnambool 1922. And I was one of a family of eight. My father was semi-invalid

01:00 later in life. The years I am talking about are the depression years. We had a pretty hard life as children, we had a good home, good parents it was just that we had no money. I went to the Christian Brothers school in Warrnambool

01:30 and I left there when I was fourteen, and I had two or three jobs in the first six months after I left school and I finished coming out here to Nestlé's, which is a big milk company here in Dennington which is a suburb of Warrnambool. I worked there for

02:00 forty-five years, that included two years that I had in the army, and I retired at the age of sixty and I am just going eighty-two now. So I have had nearly twenty-two years of retirement. I think that's about just

02:30 sums it up.

**Can you tell us about your service history?**

During the war, I was called up as soon as I turned eighteen, but the fact that I was working... Nestlé's was declared an essential industry because of the food producing.

03:00 Because this was just when the European war was going early in the piece and they didn't conscript any people from Nestlé's. You just got called up and registered and then you went back to work. The conscription wasn't as

03:30 strict in those few years. But as soon as the Japanese came into it, that was all aside and as soon as you turned eighteen you were called up. By the time that war started, I was nineteen and I got called up and that was in

04:00 February just after the bombing of Darwin and so forth. And I went down to Mount Martha and I was there for two or three weeks, and then we were moved over to the Watsonia Camp near Heidelberg, which had just opened. It was a new [camp], prior to that everyone went to Mount Martha and Belconnen.

04:30 But when Watsonia opened up, that's where you went then. So we were in.

**Just pause, right we're recording again, so you were saying after Watsonia?**

Watsonia, well then I was only in the army about six weeks and

05:00 a Saturday afternoon we were put onto trucks and set back to Mount Martha. They said you are joining a unit down there; you have been transferred into this unit. And there was no one around, only heaps of straw where people used to be and what had happened, this unit was due back

05:30 on a boat on a Sunday morning and of course practically all of this unit was from Melbourne, or Victoria mostly, and they all headed off home. And they landed back on the Sunday morning. We slept in heaps of straw that was there, and there was no one to look after us. And we were put onto a train in Frankston and taken straight up to the wharf, put on a boat

06:00 and left Melbourne on the Sunday night. So that was the introduction to our new unit. It took us eight days to get across to Fremantle and there were two boats in the convoy. The boat I was on was the City of Paris, and the other boat was the City of London. They were two old English troop ships that had brought troops out here

- 06:30 and then they were on their way out to America then to pick up more. We had an American destroyer and a New Zealand merchant cruiser escorting us. We had to zigzag all of the way. And I spent three days, they were all frightened that they were going to get sunk and I was hoping they did, I was that sick.
- 07:00 Anyhow I came good and in the last two or three days it was a good trip. Anyhow we got to Fremantle safely and half of us didn't have a uniform. The group that came with me from Watsonia, we had nothing. No rifles,
- 07:30 half a uniform. We got over there and we marched from the wharves out to Melville, which is near Fremantle. It is a receiving place like Mount Martha and there was troops camped everywhere. We spent about six or eight weeks there. And I realised
- 08:00 that all of the troops that were south of the Swan River, if the Japs had have bombed the bridges, they were all marooned there. So they all had to shift north of the Swan and we went out to Swan View and others that were
- 08:30 all up around Midland Junction, troops everywhere. We were there for about another six weeks and then we moved up to a place called Moora, which is half way between Perth and Geraldton. Another six weeks there and we were moved up to Geraldton then. And we were
- 09:00 spread along the coast, very thinly, just sections here and there. And the first night we were there we were put straight into operation patrolling the beaches. And our section was, we had a lookout on the hill and we had a field line back to battalion headquarters. And we were told to look out for
- 09:30 coloured fairy lights, and if we saw one go up we had to ring up and tell the battalion what colour it was. And also the place was blacked out, they said to us, "If you see lights", they gave us five rounds of ammunition and a 303 rifle. "If you see lights shoot at them".
- 10:00 Couple of us did let a couple that go that night, and we were talking the next day and we were telling the officers all about it, and they said, "Which way was it?" And we said, "North of where we were". They said, "That's the city of Geraldton itself." So I don't know whether anyone got shot or not, I never heard anything of it. But that was our introduction to Geraldton, first night. So we were there for about six months at
- 10:30 Geraldton, just patrolling the beaches day and night. Mostly the night, night time you had to patrol a mile and a half each way of your section. And you met somebody coming a mile and a half from there so we were three mile apart. So one bloke would go a mile and a half there, and another would go a mile and a half down there.
- 11:00 And we all had various duties to carry out. It was pretty rough living there, we never had a tent. We just slept in the bush and made little humpies, I have a photo of that there, and slept in the bush when you got a chance to sleep. We spent a lot of time there,
- 11:30 Reveille would be half past six in the evening. And you'd do your marches or training through the night, and lights out would be half past six in the morning. So you would spend your time trying to sleep in the heat, so you can imagine you didn't sleep much. And of course you couldn't sleep at night because we would do this three weeks
- 12:00 alternatively, live at night for three weeks, and then live during the day normal. That was in the peak of the Japanese coming down through Malaya and Java and the islands. But as the pressure, they sort of realised they weren't going to come here,
- 12:30 they would have had to come down, see; they couldn't have landed in big numbers anywhere above Geraldton because of the tidal effects. Like you get to Broome and you have a thirty-foot tide. So boats up there when the tide is out there and they are on the mud leaning against the jetty. That would have been impossible to invade that way. That's why the troops were concentrated from Geraldton right down
- 13:00 around to the south, because that's the way they would have had to come in. Down there. Anyhow, my unit did a couple of hundred mile marches up there. We used to march thirty miles, we would start off at midnight and we would march right through until three o'clock the next day.
- 13:30 And then we would have a day's rest. Then we would do another thirty miles. It used to take a week to do the hundred miles. We used to go through this spinifex country, we all developed, I think the correct name of it was impetigo but it was commonly known as Barcoo Rot [19th century bush name for scurvy, broadened to include other skin diseases]. And we all developed it from the knees, we didn't wear trousers,
- 14:00 we only wore shorts. Bare legs down to the gaiters we used to wear. And the 6th Battalion, which I was in then, we were that bad they sent the whole battalion to the beach. And we were camped on the beach and we had compulsory swim parades two or three times a day. We had to go out in the salt water and then come back and
- 14:30 they would paint our legs with triple dye they called it. Blue dye. I forget how long we were there: for a

week or fortnight something like that. Anyway we were shifted, we were brought out of there then and brought back down to a place called Gingin. And we were sent out on work parties.

- 15:00 The group I was with was cutting poles for the signals; they were putting up the sig [signal] lines. And we were out there, and the CO [Commanding Officer] of the unit came out one day just to see how we were going, I suppose he was going around the troops. And I hadn't really got cured of the...my leg was still crook.
- 15:30 wasn't getting any treatment for them, and somebody must have told him and I finished up going back to the main camp, in the CO's car, which was unusual because I had probably never seen him before that. Anyhow I was back in camp and there was an exchange of troops. The 32nd
- 16:00 Battalion was being disbanded and they were going to be turned into an anti-aircraft unit, which only needed about five hundred men, whereas an infantry battalion was eight hundred. And they created the 32nd Battalion had a band, a battalion carried a band. An anti-aircraft one
- 16:30 didn't carry a band so they and the 6th Battalion had a band and they were getting short of numbers. So they decided to swap the bandsmen from the 32nd Battalion up to the 6th and they had to replace them with other blokes. So they must have gathered up all of the no-hopers as they called them and swapped them, but they were two short.
- 17:00 And another chap and I who were there getting our legs treated, they asked us, "Would we like to go?" So I transferred from the 6th Battalion to this other one because it was, we had been nearly twelve months over there and the only place we had ever seen was Geraldton, and it was full of troops. But this anti-aircraft one was based in Fremantle, and I think that was the big
- 17:30 thing that made us decide to join them. So I went down there and I got lined up the first morning we were there, and a bloke said to me, "Where is your other crime sheet?" and I said, "I didn't even know I had one." And he said, "Well you've got one here and there's nothing on it." "No wonder," I said, "I have never", apparently all of the others they sent, all of their crime sheets were full.
- 18:00 That's why they got rid of them. So he said, "Have you ever done any first aid?" and I said "Well I was in the scouts and I passed all of the tests." In the scouts they do tenderfoot first grade and second grade and all of that. And he said, "Well we are short of first aid people. Would you like to be one?" So that afternoon I went out
- 18:30 in charge of a hundred and seventy blokes that were going out on manoeuvres, and I went out as their RAP [Regimental Aid Post] orderly. And I didn't hardly know how to put a bandage on a bloke. Anyhow not long after that they got two blokes, they were bringing home the troops from the Middle East and there was two
- 19:00 first aid corporals came to our unit. And they only carried two and I was already there doing the job, but I didn't have any stripes or anything. So they had to find me another job. Anyhow, the hygiene sergeant they had there, he decided
- 19:30 to go to Fremantle, and unfortunately he went up to the canteen a bit too early before he caught the bus and by the time the bus came there it looked like it wasn't going to stop so he ran out onto the road to stop it. Stopped it all right, it ran over the top of him. So they were short of a hygiene sergeant,
- 20:00 so they sent me to this school I sort of got in there the books, and I qualified at this school and as soon as I came back they gave me one stripe and the other two had to be confirmed by some other crowd. And before it came through, I got called up to the
- 20:30 orderly room and they said, "There is a manpower release here for you. The Nestlé's people have applied for your release." I hadn't been home for two years, and this bloke said to me, "Would you like to go home?" and I said "Where do I go?" So that's how I was released from the army then to go back to Nestlé's, which I did do.
- 21:00 And I worked from there then, that was 1944, and I retired in 1981. Been retired twenty-two years now.
- 21:30 **Okay that's great, all right well I would like to take you back now and ask if you can tell us about your early life and your childhood?**
- Well as I said before I was one of eight and my father was an invalid. He could only
- 22:00 do light work. He had a window cleaning business of his own, he had little ladders and he used to go around just cleaning shop windows. And we relied mostly on the generosity of other people. Same as in the Depression years, there was no dole in those days. There was what they call sustenance, and there was no pensions.
- 22:30 For older people,

**Just wait a moment.**

Keep going? Well there was different, well I suppose you would call them friendly societies, women's groups. And each week you would go down to the fire brigade station and you would get parcels of meat

- 23:00 and then you might go to one of the scout halls or something and you might get a few groceries. Just like today where the people go to the Salvation Army and that and got food packs and that. But in those days, it was all you had and could get. So therefore, a lot of big families those days,
- 23:30 you know seven or eight that wasn't even one of the big families. A lot of people had ten or twelve children so it was necessary for these other people to provide you with food. And of course, as soon as you turned fourteen you left school, and fortunately by the time I had turned fourteen
- 24:00 I started off working at a chemist shop. The Christian Brothers School got me a job; I was getting ten shillings a week. And I had to buy a bike to deliver this chemist's bills. So I finished up buying this bike and I had to pay two and six a week off the bike and I gave my mother five shillings, so I had two and six a week. Then I heard
- 24:30 about the wool mill. They give fifteen shillings a week down there, so I left the chemist and got a job down at the wool mill. Then I heard about Nestlé's and there they paid thirty-two shillings a week. So I went up and fronted the manager at his house, my sister worked at Nestlé's at the time. And I put it on him for a job.
- 25:00 And in those days there was that much unemployment that every Monday morning over here at the factory everybody had to ride a bike or walk because nobody had cars in those days. Only the rich people and there wasn't many of them. So they'd be lined up over the factory, or ride their bikes out and they would be lines right along the front of the factory.
- 25:30 And the manager would come in his car and he would get out and he knew how many people they wanted, and in those days in the springtime and as the milk rose, they employed more people at Nestlé's just for that spring period. By the time Christmas came, the milk had dropped, and so you knew you would only get a job there in the springtime, the majority of people. Anyhow I got on
- 26:00 I was there the next Sunday night and on the Monday morning I was out there and he got out of the car and called me over. So I started there and I retired forty-five years later so I was lucky in that respect. And I finished up a production super intendant.
- 26:30 **Tell me about your parents, were they Irish Catholic?**
- Yes. All of my ancestors for a mile on both side were. And my grandfather Dennis Bourke, my mother's father, he lived out at
- 27:00 Allansford, that's five or six miles the other side of Warrnambool. And he was a real typical old Irishman; he used to wear the bowyang [rope tied below the knee] around his trousers. He was brought out here, he wasn't sent out. He was brought out by a bloke that started growing hops out at Purnim, which is an area north of Warrnambool. And this is
- 27:30 what he had done over there, he had worked in hop fields. He was an expert at growing hops, and he was also an expert at partaking in the finished product, the whiskey. He loved the whiskey, and he would walk into Warrnambool or pick up a ride every pension day
- 28:00 or whenever he must have been getting a pension. Anyway he took a fancy to me and I used to go out and stay with him sometimes, old Denny Bourke. He was on his own in his old house there, and one Sunday afternoon two blokes came up a little lane
- 28:30 off the main road to his house. And they came up there and one fellow had a handkerchief around his face. And they asked if they could get a drink of water because this fellow had a toothache. And he said, "Oh come inside. I will make you a cup of tea." So he took them inside and in those old homes they used to have a bar across an open fireplace
- 29:00 and they would have their cooking, they would always have hot water in buckets and that on the [hearth]. I don't know how he done it but one of them grabbed the bar and they belted him up. Cut all of his head, and then they started going through his house. They reckoned he had money there, and he was on his hands and knees and he crawled up
- 29:30 a hundred yards to a house. There was a family of share-farmers in this house. And the boss grabbed his shotgun and he ran down to the old house and these blokes must have known he was coming and they ran off down this little lane to get to the main road and he let off a blast and he got one of them in the behind. Of
- 30:00 course he had to go to hospital so they picked them, they got them. And the old bloke recovered, and my parents. We lived in Warrnambool, opposite the hospital in Warrnambool, and I went over to see the old bloke and they had him tied into the bed. They had a leather sort of a thing laced along the side of the bed because he kept wanting to get out. He reckoned he was all right. Of course I came there on a Sunday,
- 30:30 and he said to me, "Undo these straps for me." And I didn't know what was going on so I undone the things and then he went swoop, straight over to my parents place, and then of course they had to go and get him and bring him back. He was a tough old fellow, he lived until he was about ninety-five. And

he got over it.

31:00 **As a boy, there were a lot of mouths, how did your mum manage to feed you all?**

I don't know to be honest; I often wonder that myself how she managed. She herself through childbirth had a very large hernia. And she was an invalid more or less too.

31:30 But the property where the old bloke lived out there, that was left to her and it was sold and we bought this small home that we had in Warrnambool. And she still had a few pound in the bank. And I think she just had enough to be able to go and get a little bit when she wanted it.

32:00 But as I say as soon as we turned fourteen, I was down the list. I had two brothers and two sisters older than me. Well they were out working. But the woollen mill in those days, as soon as you turned twenty-one they would put you off, you had to get the adult wage.

32:30 Under that you got a wage according to your age. You would get a rise each year until you got up to a certain thing by twenty, but then when you turned twenty-one you had to get full adult wage then. And of course when that happened

33:00 my older brothers to get work then was harder. One went to Melbourne, another went up north and he got a job at a station up there. So they left home so they didn't have to feed them because they weren't bringing anything in either, because they more or less just worked their keep in a lot of those places.

33:30 The girls, they all worked at Nestlé's. So we got through. But it was, once we got to the age where we could work and bring in, then the pension came in too and my mother and father both got that. But unfortunately for them it was nearly all

34:00 after we had all left home and their illnesses got them, they died reasonably young. They never got into their seventies or anything like that.

34:30 **What sort of things did you do for fun as a boy?**

Well we made our own fun. There was no TV of course naturally, so all

35:00 leisure time was spent outside of the house. We would get an old football cover and stuff it up with paper. We might get one, now and again, that had a bladder in it. But once the bladder went, we couldn't afford to get another one so we filled it up with paper then. Nighttime we would get out under

35:30 the lights on the street corners and play kick the tin. Where you put a tin down on the middle of the road and you could see it with a light, under the light. And somebody would be 'he' as they called it and he'd have to walk around the perimeter of the light, and you had to lay there, you weren't allowed to move, and if he spotted you he had to sing out your name and race back and

36:00 put his foot on the tin. But if you raced back and kicked the tin and beat him back, well you could run off and hide again. That was kick the tin. And that put in a lot of the, well, show the light was another one. Have a box of matches or something and you would race around and hide. And whoever was 'he', he'd sing out,

36:30 "Show a light" so no matter where you were you had to strike a match or do something, you might have a torch. And you know. We'd put that in, during the daytime the beach of course. We could all swim like fish, because we spent all of our weekends at the beach at the breakwater. We would go over there and

37:00 gather periwinkles. They were like a little snail in shape and so forth but they were very tasty. We'd always take a tin with us and we would light a little fire and fill it up with salt water and periwinkles. We'd eat them. Take some home. Crayfish, there was crayfish everywhere

37:30 along the rocks and you could catch them. We used to just dive down and grab them by the, they would have their feelers out under the rock ledges. We would grab them and pull them out. Cook them and eat them. We didn't live a great distance away from the abattoirs and we used to go there and they would give us a sheep's head.

38:00 And we take that home and make soup out of it. Lamb's fries.

**You were telling us about the sheep's head, what other sort of things did you get for food?**

There was a little shop beside us

38:30 we got all their damaged fruit. Broken biscuits. It is just sort of coming back to me now, they were good people. But we would do work for them, we would clean up or bundle up old cases and take them home and we'd burn them in the open fire.

39:00 We kept the place tidy for them. But there were other people near us that would quite often make a cake or something like that and send it to us. There was others that didn't like us at all, they reckoned we were rowdy and so forth. No, the abattoirs was a good place, we got a bit there, we spent quite a bit of time there.

39:30 I have a story I could tell you on one of our escapades there. Where I was...

**Actually probably we could tell that on the next tape because we've only got about a minute left on this one.**

40:00 Orchards, a lot of people used to grow their own fruit. We used to keep a pretty good eye on it for them. And when it got ripe we used to pay them a few visits of an evening, get a few apples, and there were others that had mulberry trees and pear trees, and if you went and knocked on the door they would let you go in and get a little box full. Weren't allowed to take too many.

40:30 That was when you did the right thing; if you tried to jump the fence and pinch them they'd chase you. But if you went and knocked on the door they'd give you a feed. So we knew who the good ones were and who weren't. You know you had to live on your wits a bit. Get to know people.

**Well we'll pause there.**

## Tape 2

00:30 **I wanted to ask you if most of this area was Irish Catholic people?**

Yes very much so, right from Port Fairy to here. Dennington. You have got the Colliani [?], Crossley, Croydon, all that area is

01:00 predominantly Catholic, Irish Catholic. There is Maddens, McEvans, O'Briens, O'Tooles, Duffys, Ryans, Gleesons, Flavins. I think that

01:30 is enough of the names that I can think of.

**And from here over in the other direction, were there Protestants?**

Yeah Warrnambool itself is far bigger congregations at the churches, the Catholic Church is the biggest church in Warrnambool.

02:00 There are, if all of the Protestant different groups were like the Catholic Church just one group, they would probably be bigger in Warrnambool. But the fact that they are fragmented, each one is smaller, Uniting, Church of England, the Baptist, Presbyterian,

02:30 then you have got those little way out churches I suppose you'd call them.

**Was there ever any tension with Protestants?**

Not tension, but oh I don't know,

03:00 how you would put it. Animosity, put it that way, but there was never any violence; each one sort of looked after their own more or less. And Freemasonry was pretty strong in Warrnambool. It was, not so much now,

03:30 it's more open now. It was a sort of a secret society business for years but now it is quite open. But even here in Dennington, the Catholics and Protestants, a little bit of friction, well there was, once again that

04:00 Seems to be disappearing. But there is a couple of beautiful churches out around Croydon and Crossley. Really, really nice. They're what would you call it?

04:30 Inside you know, big lovely old stone buildings.

**As kids did the Catholics and Protestants tease each other?**

Well I went to the Christian Brothers and once a month we used to have to go down to the Catholic Church,

05:00 **All right.**

It was either the first Thursday or the last Thursday of the month now I just forget now. From the Christian Brothers College as we called it to get to the main church in Warrnambool, we had to go past the state school. The biggest state school in Warrnambool, the primary school.

05:30 So we'd be walking down to the church, our hands clasped in front of us, very pious. And we would get to the state school and they would be lined up against the fence. And, can I swear?

**Yeah.**

We would be walking past you see and these kids, "Get out, you Irish bastards."

06:00 Well then it'd be on. We'd be over the fence, they would be over the fence to get out. And there was one

fellow in particular, his name was Sid Street. And him and I we always used to, we would always clash. We were both about the same size and we would fight and as soon as one of us got a blood nose that was it, we were finished.

06:30 **Right, you were telling us about Sid Street?**

Sid Street, we'd fight and that's how it would finish every time. Whoever got the blood nose give in then. We often used to meet in the pub years after and laugh at what we used to do, we turned out real good friends.

07:00 But that did happen every first Thursday of the month; it would be on for young and old.

**Apart from 'Irish bastard' what other things used to get called out? Did you call out anything to them?**

Oh just, we were pretty good, we were always, we weren't the aggressors.

07:30 But we fought back pretty well. Well I say we weren't aggressors, we wouldn't tease them much as we were going past. I forget what we used to call them. But that's the one that used to get us going.

**Did you go to church regularly?**

No not me, I went when I had to.

08:00 We had too much to do like going to the beach or something like that. But I was saying to you about going from the nuns' school to the brothers when you turned seven. Well I don't know what the reason was but I think when I turned

08:30 six they sent me to the brothers, I went with the group that was going that year. And I shouldn't have went until the next year. Anyway I got up there and I went through the first year at the Brothers, and I don't think I did anything wrong or anything but when they, when I went for the Christmas holidays and then when I

09:00 started back at school then you would go up a grade, and the first year they didn't let me go up. I had to wait with the new group that came in and stay with them for twelve months to get back to my own age group. For some reason or another. So at the end of that year, I think there was ten subjects, and you got ten marks for each one

09:30 and I finished up with a hundred marks. But I had been in the same grade for two years. And I got dux of the school. And I had to go on, they used to have a concert to wind up the year in the town hall in Warrnambool, and I had to go out on the stage to get a book prize for being dux of the school.

10:00 And I got up, and I can always remember the name of the book, it was The Tales of Robin Hood. It took me about six months to find out what dux of the school meant, that's how clever I was. I thought it was a punishment or something. Here I was dux of the school, the main reason was that I was in the same grade for two years,

10:30 I got ten out of ten for the ten subjects. I was pretty clever at school, I never ever got it again.

**Did you hunt for rabbits at all?**

Yes, I forgot about that when you were talking about food.

11:00 The road that we lived on there was rabbits. If you couldn't get any you could buy a pair of rabbits for nine pence. Nine pence. Now you pay about nine pound for a pair. But yeah rabbits were plentiful, everyone had ferrets. And we would trap up around the showground. A lot of vacant space around those days. No where near what it was.

11:30 We lived on the outskirts of town so we didn't have far to go. Rabbits were great.

**Did you get anything for the fur?**

No it wasn't worth, I don't know. The older blokes done that I was only one of the little blokes, I was on the outskirts,

12:00 by the time I got fourteen I was able to go straight into a job. I went straight from the school down to the chemists shop, about ten or eleven o'clock in the day. He was short of a, must have had a kid and he didn't turn up or something so I got the job straight off. So I was, in my whole working life from the day

12:30 I turned fourteen and started that chemist I was never out of work for one day in that whole time. So anyway.

**What sort of work were you doing at the chemist?**

Washing bottles, delivering prescriptions, bills. Setting the fire up in the lounge room, cutting the wood and setting it up so that when he

13:00 knocked off he would just go and put a match to it and it was going. And I would knock off a couple of biscuits out of the tin in the kitchen while I was there doing that. So, yeah. But I had to, as far as work goes, I was never out of work one day in my whole working life.

13:30 I don't say we done it easy, we had four children, two boys and two girls. Now I think we have got a tribe of about thirty.

**Did you have enough clothes? Shoes?**

When we were young? We mainly wore sandshoes. I don't think, oh probably about ten or eleven or something before

14:00 you got a pair of shoes. You always wore sandshoes. But you know we were never cold and we always had a bed. Our house, we had no electricity on the house, we had the old kerosene lamps, and there was many a time when,

14:30 with the old kerosene lamp; it had a bowl at the bottom and a glass and a wick that went down into the kerosene. And if the wick got a bit short and you didn't have any, if the bowl wasn't full of kerosene, there might be a bit in the

15:00 bottom, but if the wick wouldn't reach it you had no lights. So the thing to do was, you'd unscrew the business and fill that bowl up with water and the kerosene would float on top. And that would bring it up to the wick and even though it had water underneath it, the kerosene would be on top and you had light again.

15:30 Many a time we done that because we didn't have the money to go and buy kerosene. But then as a few of us grew up and we were getting a little bit of money in the house, we were able to put the electricity on, and that was one of the things that we, we all only wished

16:00 our parents could have lived a bit longer to enjoy that. But they didn't. It wasn't long after we got the power that they passed away. Well they done the job, we always had animals, cats. Various, we didn't have dogs. Birds and cats and WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s.

16:30 And we had our own WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s and a bit of a vegetable garden in the back yard. So we survived. And I have got a brother, the eldest brother, as a matter of fact I thought he would have been around to interview really. Because he went

17:00 to the Middle East and Syria and then he came back to Australia for a little while, and then he finished up in New Guinea. But he wore glasses, and he was, his medical, I was A1 [army medical fitness classification]. He was B2 I think it was,

17:30 because of his eyesight. I am only telling you this just to, he worked in a hospital unit. And when I went to this anti-aircraft crowd and I finished up being hospital orderly more or less, I used to have to drive the doctor

18:00 around; we kept getting different doctors. And in the naval base camp that we were in, we had a small hospital and we always had a doctor. But there were other units around us that were smaller and didn't carry a doctor but they still needed medical attention. So I used to have to drive him around to different places, and I thought well I am in the medical orderly now, in the army

18:30 if you have an elder brother in another unit you could apply to join them . And he was in New Guinea and I was sitting on my bum in Fremantle, and I applied to join him. And I got word back. I got taken up to the orderly room and they knocked it back because I was A1 and he was B2.

19:00 He was in New Guinea and I was in Fremantle and I couldn't go to him because I was too healthy more or less. It was the way things worked out. But he has had a couple of strokes. Still alive, but he has had a couple of strokes and he fell over and broke his hip about six months ago so

19:30 you know he is pretty incapacitated now.

**Are you going to tell us the story about the abattoir?**

Yeah well the abattoir, it is a true story .We used to go out there and we would be playing around, fooling around. And I did something to one of my sisters, I forget now. I must have clipped her over the ears or something. I

20:00 was running backwards and she was sort of chasing at me. And I didn't realise that they had a pit, and when they cleaned out cows as they killed them, all of their manure, I will put it that way, ran into this pit. And it was just

20:30 deep enough for me to be up to my neck. And I stepped backwards into it. Up to my neck in shit. So what are we going to do? So there was a railway line running along the side of the abattoirs, and there happened to be a

21:00 couple of big petrol tanker type things, and one of them is there with the lid open. And there was about



a foot of water in the bottom of it. So they made me get into it, strip off to the nude, wash my clothes in the water that was in there, and then I passed them out to them and they hung them on a barbed wire fence, and I had to stay in the petrol tanker until my clothes dried enough for me to get out and put them on.

21:30 So yeah that was one of our eventful days at the abattoirs.

**Did you, in a small town with a big family, did you play mostly with your family?**

Oh no we mixed up. We mixed of a night, three or four different families, you know in that area, and

22:00 we always got on pretty well. We would have arguments with, we lived in West Warrnambool, and kids who came from East Warrnambool they had their own groups. And when the groups met we would have a bit of trouble. Nothing, it was never

22:30 vicious or anything like that. You'd just have a bit of a punch up. Never, anybody using knives or things like that. That was unheard of. We would have a good old stoush. Probably then we would be all down the beach swimming together after that. It was pretty good. No complaints.

23:00 We used to pick football teams of a Saturday morning; Croyd [Croydon?] Street would play Lava Street. And we would pick up, it was I organised, yet we would always get a bloke to umpire for us and play it under the rules. No jumpers we would all have a different jumper on but we knew one another.

23:30 Same with cricket. We used to play cricket of a Sunday afternoon. Held bike races. Just you know organise them ourselves, there weren't clubs or anything like that. I seem to

24:00 you know I seemed to be able to organise things. I seemed to be able to get a team, you know, at the drop of a hat. I could whip around and get a few blokes to form a team and play of a Saturday. And I always sort of organised, when I went into the scouts I finished up troop

24:30 leader of the scout troop I was in. And even in the army, in the infantry that battalion had been going for years, it was a peacetime militia. It still is, it's the Royal Melbourne Regiment. If there

25:00 is any ceremony, ceremonial parades they always have the 6th Battalion marching. And that was the one that we were put into. Well we were sort of newcomers and these fellow had been together for years and had all of their own NCOs [Non-Commissioned Officers], and their officers were all ex-lawyers and accountants, you know.

25:30 So it was pretty hard to break into that hierarchy. But then when we got into the new one and I was there I cracked it practically from the start. I would have been a sergeant had I stayed there probably another month. I had one stripe, and I would have never got one in the 6th Battalion I don't think.

26:00 We were sent down from Geraldton down to Moora to the division headquarters, and they used to, every fortnight they seemed to

26:30 They would send a platoon down to do the guard duties of the division. Take over houses and shops and all of this business, records office and all of these things. So they picked out a platoon from our battalion to go down. And they, there was

27:00 another bloke from Warrnambool and I, we were always sort of picked out for anything that was ceremonial because we kept ourselves clean, and we both sort of said, "Well we are in the army now, if we want to get home we have got to be as fit as the blokes", well we were talking about the Japs. We have got to be as fit as them, we have

27:30 got to be as well-trained as them. And the only way we were going to do it is to do it ourselves. We didn't say that to one another, but we both had the same idea that we would, we never pulled out of a route march, we were always, if there was unarmed combat to be given, we'd give them.

28:00 If there was battalion, I was a Bren [light machine gun] gunner and this fellow was a number two man. And you would have competitions between different squads and different battalions, whether we would be picked to represent our battalion. And so they added us to this platoon that went down to Moora,

28:30 because we acted the part better than most of them, I suppose you'd call it that way. And on the way down they had to appoint one bloke in charge of the, we put in I think it was a shilling. Each bloke put in a shilling

29:00 for the two weeks we were there. And we would give the cook this money and he would buy stuff in the town, extra sausages or extra eats. So on the way down who got the job of being in charge of the catering? We were only added, there was a whole platoon of them and us two were just added to them, and we finished up running the show.

29:30 I'm not skiting I am just.

**Well I don't want to get too far ahead of ourselves. I would like to keep talking about your youth before the war.**

I sold Heralds, I sold Heralds every night. I

30:00 sold lollies at the Capital Theatre in Warrnambool. Used to have a white cap and little box with a strap around it and you used to go around and sell the lollies to the kids of a Saturday afternoon. And of a nighttime you'd have a different one. You'd have an adult's tray. Little boxes of chocolates for the blokes to give to their girlfriends. And if they were open, some of the tins

30:30 You could open the little lid. And you'd take one out of that. And the bloke would buy one for his girlfriend but he wouldn't know there was one gone out of his. We used to look after ourselves. Sold Heralds and sold newspapers. Done anything to sort of make, you know

31:00 get a bit of money to do something which I couldn't get from home. Saturday night we would get paid. Might get five or six shillings, which was a lot of money to get in those days. And we would all go to the café and have a little pie with sauce on a plate. Get a little teapot, that was the celebration for our week. And we would go home and give the mother the rest of the money.

31:30 **Did you watch a lot of films?**

Yeah they used to be, not a lot. But we'd go to the pictures, they used to have serials, Tarzan, and we used to go every Friday night, only cost you about four pence to get in.

32:00 The four pence took a bit of raising at time. But we'd always follow Tarzan the serials. They were terrific, but not, I can't remember going to a film just because there was a film on for the night. We'd follow the serial. Not a lot of films no.

32:30 **When you were working at night did you ever watch the adult's films?**

No we wouldn't go into the theatre, we would be outside playing around or something and then about ten minutes before the half time we would go down and you could get into the...

33:00 they used to have doors down at the end of the theatre on each side. A little room there, a little foyer. And you'd go down that passageway outside the theatre and you would come in there and you would wait until the lights come on and then you would come out and walk up and down the aisles. You could go out the top door, but you couldn't come in the top door because you would disturb the patrons.

33:30 So you would come in around the bottom, and they wouldn't know you were in there because it was a little foyer in the corner on each side. And then as soon as we finished we would go on home. No we wouldn't wait and see the film. Films didn't interest us.

**Do you remember seeing any newsreels in the 30's?**

No not in the early days no. Only, you know, when I came home

34:00 from the army. Oh when my wife and I were going together before the war, newsreels were pretty popular. The old Fox movie turn, yeah I liked newsreels. My wife and I used to go to the pictures. But I can't ever remember what we used to, the first film I can remember looking at was when I was in the army.

34:30 Got twenty-four hours leave in Perth and I think I saw about three films. There was Mrs Miniver, Blossoms in the Dust. I can remember those two films because they were sort of classics. But I wasn't an avid filmgoer at all. I was more outside, I played football, I played cricket. Then I took

35:00 on bike riding and that's the road championship I won in 1937 I think it is.

**It's beautiful.**

It's got a plaque on the bottom with the year that I won it. It's one of the only ones I have got, I had a few.

**Were your parents strict?**

35:30 No not strict, they were real easygoing people; neither of them drank or smoked. And I never had a drink or never had a smoke until I went in the army. I started having a few beers and I have always had a few since I came

36:00 home but I never ever, I never drank to get drunk. Probably do it at parties sometimes. Very seldom smoked. I don't smoke now. I would have an odd one. One of the blokes that I was in the army with when we came home, he played for Hawthorn, bloke named Cash Fitzgerald.

36:30 And he was a rep for WD & HO Wills [cigarette company]. And at one stage this area was the area he was the representative. He used to come around and see that they had supplies. Bring advertising, and every time he came he would leave a carton of cigarettes here. My wife smoked, she learnt to smoke when I was in the army. She never smoked before I went and when I came back she was smoking

37:00 like a house on fire, but she always smoked then. And she smoked right up until about three years ago and she had a bowel cancer operation. She hasn't had a smoke since. But no, my parents, they were

good

- 37:30 parents. They weren't active parents because of their health. My father, he was a musician to a certain extent. He played the drums, he lived out at Tower Hill, Crossley,
- 38:00 Croydon area. And he played in an Irish pipe band in Croydon, he was the drummer in that. And my mother could play the accordion. The old button accordion. So we used to make our own enjoyment. They would sit there and they would play the music.
- 38:30 We had a good life because there was never domestic trouble, the two elder brothers they used to fight a bit but not too bad. One of them was pretty religious, he used to go to church
- 39:00 and so on. But the younger fellow he used to call him Saint Peter and then it would be on. That was about the only trouble we had. Sisters always got on well together, we got on well together with them, the boys and girls.
- Did your father ever get his belt out?**
- 39:30 Oh yeah. A couple of times. Wagging from school, raiding orchards or things like that. But it would never hurt, wasn't bad. I was probably the one that got the most I think. Because I was the crankiest.
- 40:00 **Were there any Aboriginal kids around?**
- Very few, there was none in our area at all. We sort have had no contact with any of them really. But I have always got
- 40:30 on well with them, I have never noticed them I suppose because I never had any trouble with them.
- What about different ethnicities, were there any Germans at school?**
- No. Nothing. No racial, the only thing
- 41:00 was these Protestants. The ones that jumped the fence at us or we jumped the fence at them. Sid Street he was the only enemy I had. No trouble with any other kids.
- 41:30 **Okay we'll pause there we are right at the end of the tape.**

## Tape 3

- 00:30 **Okay with your pre-war life before the Second World War, I am interested in your schooling life with the Christian Brothers. Actually, because I have been myself to Christian Brothers, I suppose it would be interesting to see how they taught you at the time. Tell us about it.**
- Well I was
- 01:00 always in the school choir. They used to reckon when I was going home from school in the afternoon and pinch the green apples, and they reckoned it was the green apple juice that was giving me the sweet voice. So I was always in the choir. And
- 01:30 I could always read well, I was always a good reader and a good speller. And if we wrote a composition, we called it composition, you had to write something out of your own mind, come up with an experience over the weekend. On a game of football you had played, you had to write an article but they called it a composition, and I could
- 02:00 always write a pretty reasonable one. And at the end of the day you would have to get up and read your own composition to the class. So I done it pretty easy at school. I am not saying I was smart but I understood things
- 02:30 easily and I could express myself. Maybe when it came to maths and things they were way above me, but I wasn't interested in it. I could add and spell, yeah, I done schooling pretty easy. The only thing I did have trouble was going there.
- Going to school?**
- Going there.
- 03:00 I would get half way and it would be a real nice day and I would turn off and go to the beach. When I was going to school, the harbour here was in operation and we always had boats. And the Casino and the Coramba both got wrecked along our coast here. And they used to come here, there
- 03:30 was nearly one in all the time. They used to come in here and pick up loads of spuds, bags. And Nestlé's products, they would take them down to Melbourne, cases of condensed milk. So you always had

somewhere to go if you wagged it, that's what we called it, we wagged it from school, you could always go down to the breakwater. And you would meet another three or four blokes down there doing the same thing.

04:00 So it was a pretty hard job going to school but once I got there I managed it all right.

**How big was the school?**

Well it was the only Catholic School in Warrnambool. The primary school, boys weren't allowed to go on there. They are now, but they go onto a higher grade than what we used to go to.

04:30 But I suppose there would be two or three hundred at the time I was there. It went up to about twelve grades. You know start off about third or fourth grade,

05:00 so you go right up through that. It was a two-story old school. The old school is still there, it has been all built around now. It has got a new name now, they call it some college. And we had a convent, the girls' convents, and the boys EVC [?]. But now they have merged and it is co-ed now or

05:30 something. They have lessons at the Brothers school and then you'll see them walking down changing over, the girls going down here and the boys going up there. And it's all up in the one area. About I suppose four or five hundred yards apart. The old convent, they have got no nuns there now, they are all gone and they have civilian teachers.

06:00 **What was the discipline like at school? I know Christian Brothers were quite strict.**

Oh very strict. They had a strap about that long, about that thick, about that wide. And they knew how to use it too, they'd get you up there. They were pretty strict but not overly. If you

06:30 needed bringing into gear then they would do it. I got brought in a couple of times, because of my absenteeism. That was my only thing I had. As a matter of fact, sometimes my sister would have to take me to school, right to the gate, make sure I got there. I wasn't allowed to detour half way off.

**Is this your elder sister?**

Yeah.

07:00 There were two sisters older than me, two brothers older and one of each younger.

**Now you said that you had to leave like everyone else at the age of fourteen? Is that right? Leave school?**

Leave school and get a job.

**I know that was the done thing at the time.**

You didn't have to, but we could do it.

07:30 **What grade were you at then?**

About sixth or seventh something like that. I wasn't up in the higher, they had the higher grades up in another part of the school. I don't know what they started off with. Third, fourth, fifth, I'd say it would be the sixth

08:00 grade, which is what do they call it now?

**Form one, year seven?**

Form one. Yeah. But I never passed any. I never got leaving [School Leaving Certificate] or anything like that. I didn't go long enough for that.

**Were you encouraged by your parents?**

08:30 To go to school? Yes.

**To go higher than when you left off?**

I think they were anxious for me to get a job when I turned fourteen. They were very placid both of them, you know. They had a hard life, they did, because they both weren't well.

09:00 My father, I think it was pleurisy or something got him, and he couldn't do hard work. And my mother, she had this large hernia from childbirth, childrearing. And of course medical

09:30 service weren't so good in those days, especially for poor people. And another thing was that she had diabetes in later years, and so they couldn't operate on her. Diabetes in those days, bleeding is a problem. And she never ever got operated on

10:00 and that's what got her in the finish, that she had, what they call it when the bowel sort of, something to do with the bowel sort of tangled. I can't think of it. They had it pretty rough.

10:30 I am sorry that we never got the chance to do something for them in their old age to make up for what they done for us when we were young.

**Does that upset you now?**

At times I get a bit... yeah. So I try not to think, I try to just push it aside really.

11:00 But if I do think of it, it does upset me.

**The depression was a very difficult time for a lot of people.**

Yeah see we were brought up right in the thick of it.

**How do you think it impacted on your character as a person?**

Oh

11:30 I definitely never got into any trouble, you know like I think it made us, I have got a brother that, he finished up owning about three farms down towards Mount Gambier way. And the other bloke he went to

12:00 Melbourne and he finished up an upholsterer. And he would come up here and he would say, "That chair has got a bit of a lean on it", and next thing you know he has got it upside down doing something on it. You know he finished up foreman of an upholstery store, Bendix or whatever they call

12:30 themselves. The three sisters all raised families and lived out their life with their husbands. There was never any split ups. We all turned out reasonably well.

**It made you strong?**

I think so.

13:00 We always kept in touch with one another. Every Christmas we get together if we can. Three died, the younger brother he had a

13:30 severe stroke.

**That was in more recent times, yes?**

The youngest one that had a stroke, he was given something that he shouldn't have been given. He had a splitting headache or something. It was Melbourne Cup Day and he had the day off from work, holiday.

14:00 And he decided to paint the ceiling of the kitchen or something. And he was up on the ladder painting overhead and he developed this severe headache. And apparently he was given something that he shouldn't have been given and it caused his blood pressure to go up and he had this massive stroke.

14:30 So he got over the stroke itself but he was left with this arm and that leg, he had an iron on the leg. He never worked again.

**I am curious to also find out about your family and how it was effected by the First World War?**

We had no effect

15:00 whatsoever.

**You father didn't decide to join did he?**

No I don't know why. I don't know. He was a farmer, worked on a farm.

**And he lived at Warrnambool as well?**

Yeah he lived out here at Tower Hill, out in the Croydon Catholic Irish area.

**Now Warrnambool was a what, predominantly Catholic area?**

15:30 **Irish Catholic?**

Between here and Port Fairy, Irish Catholic, you have got that whole area. From Dennington, Illowa, Southern Cross, Crossley, Croyd, Killarney, Tower Hill, all that area there was all Catholic. So they have all got an O in their name.

**Between here and Port Fairy?**

Yes.

16:00 **I see. Now you also mentioned very interestingly before about a German area. Which area of Victoria is predominantly German in its heritage?**

The Wimmera. Up around Horsham, Nhill, Jeparit, all of that area there.

**Hamilton?**

Yeah starting off at Tarrington.

16:30 **And moving westwards?**

Northwest.

**To the Mallee area?**

Yeah.

**Now this is very interesting, did your father ever speak of the First World War, looking back retrospectively?**

No I can't say I ever heard him mention it.

**What about Anzac Day? How was that celebrated amongst the Irish Catholics in those days?**

17:00 **You know the 30's and the depression when you were around?**

Well I was only a kid. You see I was born in '22 so I didn't take any notice of things like that in those days. I sort of had nothing to do with the army or Anzac Day, nothing at all until the Second World War.

17:30 **You had no interest in the army what soever?**

No. I was in the scouts, in the scouts for year. And that was a sort of semi-, you know it was an army-like group. When I look back on it, we were in sections, in platoons. We had everything bar arms.

18:00 I mean you had to march, you had to form, you had to drill.

**But Anzac Day, you must have early memories of the marches in 1938? '37? In Warrnambool, when they used to have Anzac Day? Tell us what they were like.**

No I can't really

18:30 tell you because I had no interest in it whatsoever.

**So you never went to the marches?**

No. I didn't live out here, I never moved to Dennington until I came home out of the army. When we got married I lived in Warrnambool right up until then, I lived

19:00 in Warrnambool right up until I joined the army, and I lived in Warrnambool when I came home from the army. And then my wife's father died, and they had to move out of the house. They had a large family and mother was left with two young boys, so they moved onto a share dairy and that house that they had lived in became vacant

19:30 so my wife and I moved out into it. We had a flat in Warrnambool and I worked at Nestlé's so it suited us to move out and live out here. And I have lived here in Dennington since then.

**Was there much of a Protestant enclave around this area?**

In Warrnambool there was. You had the Freemasons, they were very strong in Warrnambool and they looked after one another very much too.

20:00 **How were they seen by the Catholics?**

Oh ghost riders. They called them ghost riders. No they didn't, then the Catholics started up the Knights of the Southern Cross, I was never involved in that really.

**The Catholics started Knights of the Southern Cross? Tell us about that.**

20:30 Well I don't know much about it because I was never in it. But I knew that the Freemasons, they were very secretive, nobody was admitted to be a Freemason and then the Knights of the Southern Cross sort of came out of nowhere. Someone said one time about so and so, he is in the Knights of the

21:00 Southern Cross. But they started to look after the elderly Catholics. I think they helped one another in getting jobs and things like that, same as it was with the Masons. But it was never a big subject.

21:30 **Was it mostly younger chaps who were involved in the Knights of the Southern Cross?**

Yeah younger.

**Younger generation?**

Blokes about thirty and up to that age.

- 22:00 I think they were blokes that resented a bit the way the Masons controlled everything. The factory over here where I worked was very heavily controlled by the Freemasonry and they finished up with a Catholic manager, and he straightened things up a bit. You know, blokes that [were]
- 22:30 chief electricians and that, you couldn't talk to them. There was hierarchy. You asked them to get something done, "Oh it'll be right". But when this bloke came in and he asked to something needs doing. "It'll be right", "Never mind about it'll be right. Do it." You know, they would do something if they felt like doing it. But when he came and took over,

**And they were Freemasons?**

- 23:00 Yes. He straightened them. It didn't matter to him whether they were Catholic or not. But if you had a job to do over there you done it when he wanted it done.

**Now also, you must know this of course. There was a considerable division between the Protestants and the Catholics as a result of the First World War, and before that even.**

- 23:30 **Like Ned Kelly for instance was a Catholic, quite a few bushrangers. Now I am curious to know whether you can speak at the time or now in retrospect about that division. There was a lot of Catholics that were very angry with the Protestants, with the Conscription referendum for instance, and the Irish rebellion of 1915.**

- 24:00 No knowledge of it.

**Did you know anything of the division at all?**

Oh no it never affected me. Never affected me at all. I was never out of work so I had no reason to, if I had have been out of work and I couldn't get a job because I was Catholic, then I might have. But no I got

- 24:30 on well enough with them. Because I was never a devout Catholic, let's put it that way. So I never sort of mixed with the devout Catholics. Probably that is one, probably I was acting more as a Protestant, but I wasn't with the Proddies either
- 25:00 I was my own fellow. You know when I come to think of it, I had no interest in either of them. But I was a Catholic and if I went to church, I went to the Catholic Church and all of my children were married in the Catholic Church.
- 25:30 Christened and all of that. But I never ever made the kids go to church, if they wanted to go, which the girls, they were always pretty good about it. The boys were a bit like me I suppose, they were not very interested in whether they go or not.

**Now what about the Germans?**

- 26:00 **That area the Wimmera you were saying, did you get much chance to associate with people from there at the time?**

Yes. No not at the time. When I had anything to do with them was when this daughter here. Her and her husband, they both worked at Nestlé's, both worked at the laboratory over there. Joy was educated at

- 26:30 the convent at Warrnambool. John was at the Christian Brothers. They are good Catholics, they go to church every Sunday. They have kept it up and they both did prior to the marriage and so forth.
- 27:00 But they went into business, they had a shop in Croyd, that was the first one they had. And then they shifted from there to a place called Balmoral, up between Hamilton and Horsham. Not quite into the real, but there were quite a few German people
- 27:30 and one bloke especially. Bloke Schultz, he had a zed in his name. He wasn't very popular in Balmoral, I can't think of his first bloody name, I know it well. He wasn't very popular for some reason that
- 28:00 they. I was in the pub one night and I was talking to one of the local fellows about this Shultz and I said, "Why do you always rubbish this bloke? I have struck him a few times and I find him a nice genuine bloke." He said, "He has been president of the bowls club, president of the football club. But", he said,
- 28:30 "he does everything right. And then all of a sudden he will do something cranky." He said, "He reminds me of a cow that comes into the dairy that puts his head into the ring, and puts his leg out to get the leg rope on him, let's his milk down and does everything right. And then you open up the thing
- 29:00 and he pulls his head out and he walks out, and just as he gets to the door, he shits in the milk bucket." He said, "That's why we don't like him." He said, "Everything he takes on, he gets the football club going and then all of a sudden he does something bloody stupid and buggers the football club." And he said, "That's what a cow does." He said, "He is leaving, he is selling out."
- 29:30 And I said, "Yeah he told me." And he said, "They are going to hold his send off up in the phone box."

**I wanted to ask you as well about if you had had any family members, like distant family,**

**uncles or cousins who were involved in the First World War?**

30:00 No. I don't think so.

**On your mum or dad's side?**

No I don't, my father had five or six brothers and I don't think any of them were in the army. My wife's uncle

30:30 in the Second World War, he was killed at Crete. Her uncle was in the First World War and he owned the house here that her mother and father had lived in. And this bloke lived in Melbourne and worked in Melbourne, but he

31:00 bought this house here before he went down, and he bought it through the war service homes. And when they were living in it all they had to do was pay off the payments that he would have had to pay. And then when we finished up taking over the house we were under the same.

31:30 We only had to pay about twenty dollars a month I suppose. All he wanted was someone to pay the house off for him, didn't matter how long it took. But anyway when we got into the house and saw him and asked him would he sell it to me and he did. So we bought it and we paid five hundred pound for it.

32:00 **So he was a digger was he? In the First World War?**

Yeah he was a digger in the First World War.

**Did you know much about his service history?**

No nothing.

**Did he talk about it?**

I only ever saw him the once and that was when I went to talk to him about buying the house. He was a good bloke apparently. I mean he let that house out. He could have been getting twenty pound a week. All he was doing was they were paying twenty pound a month, paying off the house for him.

32:30 **Were there a lot of diggers around here from the First World War?**

Not that I know of. No. See by the time, I turned eighteen I was associated with the Second World War, and that's all I have been associated with since then.

33:00 I am in the RSL [Returned and Services League] in Warrnambool but I don't, I have only started in the last five or six years I suppose. We have a little memorial here in Dennington and they started to hold a little service down here. And because of me being in the army I have been laying a wreath on behalf of the people down here. So it is only in the last few years I have been going to the march itself. I have never gone to the march in Warrnambool.

33:30 Not that I had anything against it or anything, I guess laziness. But I have always been tied up in other sporting bodies. Started a cricket club; we never had a cricket club here in Dennington. So I was an original member of that, then we started a football club and I was president of that for fifteen years. I then started the

34:00 bowls club and I was an original member there. And you can see up there I have got four life memberships. Three of them: the golf club and the football club and the cricket club, and also the Warrnambool District Football League. I was president of that for five years. My life has been tied up in sport.

**But that is post war. That's well after the**

34:30 **war. What,**

Before the war I played football and bike riding.

**I would like to stick to just around the time of World War II now. You said you liked reading so I take it you may have read the newspapers?**

Oh yes. And I read a lot about the First World War too.

**So what did you know about the First World War from what you had read?**

35:00 Well Gallipoli was a complete fiasco and should never have happened. We were landed in the wrong place in first instance. We landed about eight miles from where they were supposed to land. We were supposed to land on a beach with a gradual [slope] and they were landed at the foot of a bloody great cliff. And I believe old Winston [Churchill] was one of the instigators of Gallipoli.

35:30 I mean we have always been glorifying Gallipoli but it really was a bloody massacre of Australian troops.

**What about with the Spanish Civil War? Did you hear about that in the newspapers at the**



**time?**

36:00 Read about it but just glossed over it.

**You didn't take any interest in it?**

Not a bit.

**What did you know about communism at the time?**

36:30 Very little.

**Tell us about that.**

Well they seemed to be people that protested too much and cause disruption to life and it never did them any good. That's the way it has turned out now

37:00 though. Well the Russian part of it anyhow, it has proved a complete fiasco there hasn't it? I mean all they have got now is China.

37:30 No I am not an anti-communist or anything like that.

**Did they show themselves around Warrnambool?**

No. Never heard of them really. I only ever read in the papers about them.

**Tell us what empire meant to you**

38:00 **at the time?**

Well yeah I was quite happy with it. The Commonwealth, it didn't sort of have much effect on me. In 1934 I was in the scouts

38:30 on a Saturday and we had the Governor of Victoria come up here. What was his name? Huntingfield or something like that. But anyway he came up here and he opened up the gates of the gardens. And the scout troop I was in we formed a guard of honour for him. That was Saturday morning, and then Saturday afternoon we got on a truck

39:00 and we went to Portland, and this is 1934 in the centenary year. And the boat pulled up at Portland, the Shropshire and the Duke of Gloucester and his wife they came ashore in a small boat from there.

39:30 And they had a re-enactment of the Henty Brothers landing, bringing the sheep over and so forth. And then he came ashore and he unveiled a monument over there and we were the guard of honour for him as he walked up the steps to this. So that's about all I had to do with empire.

40:00 And the Governor of Victoria pulled up in the, when he was going along past the guard of honour, and he asked me my name and how old I was. The Duke never said anything to me. I think, my wife and I were over in Portland just a few years ago now and Charles and Diana arrived there

40:30 we have got a photo here of them driving past us in the car.

**How did you celebrate Empire Day?**

Oh Empire Day we used to have bonfires. On all of the hills, we could see the one at Pannier on the mountain and ours was on the hill out near the Hoskins. I think that was Empire Day, we had the bonfire.

41:00 if I remember rightly.

**So as an Irish Catholic you were still proud to be a part of the British Empire? You think most Irish Catholics at that time felt all right about that or?**

Yeah. It didn't, there was no talk of the IRA [Irish Republican Army] or anything down this way.

41:30 **Did the Freemasons celebrate it differently?**

No not that I know of. You couldn't find them. They kept under cover. No one admitted to being one. They all had their fancy business that they wore around their neck here, and all of their regalia that they put on. But I never ever saw one; I knew that I knew quite a few of them. But I didn't let them know that I knew they were Masons.

## Tape 4

00:43 **I'd like to move towards the beginning of the war. Now you said that you were aware that**

**there were some sort of rumblings going on in Europe with Hitler?**

01:00 **Through the newspapers?**

Well there was quite a few joined up here right from 1939 like we certainly knew that war was on. I think for a start there was a lot of fellows,

01:30 between twenty-five and say thirty-five that were out of work, and a lot of those blokes were amongst the first. I am not saying they weren't genuine fellows with the Empire spirit and so forth, but quite a few went looking for the free trip around the world.

02:00 The chap in the house across the road here, he was on the first train that left Warrnambool, he was on it. So we were conscious that the war was on, but no, young fellows, of course students and that, they all had jobs. And they weren't that

02:30 interested in war because...

**So a lot of these chaps were sussos [receiving sustenance payments]?**

A lot of the early ones yes.

**To join the AIF?**

Yes. I am not going to say all of them. But quite a few did, you know they were out of work, it was a free trip around the world and they were going to get paid and fed.

03:00 There was some good lads. But once the Japs came into it, it was different. The whole thing changed, everybody was anxious to get into it. I never joined up myself but I wasn't sorry when I did get called up.

03:30 I couldn't let on I had to just, I was quite happy to be called up. So when I got in I thought, "Well I am in here now, I want to make sure I get home and the only way I can do that is to be sure that I am as well trained and fit as any bloke I'll ever meet."

04:00 So I done everything I had to do.

**So you joined the militia?**

Well when you're called up and put in you become part of the militia. But then you have got the opportunity to transfer to the AIF [Australian Imperial Force], which I did do then after I had been in a while. They were even, when we got

04:30 to Western Australia, we were only over there for eight weeks or something like that and they were offering, if you joined up they would send you home to Victoria for a week by train. You know, well of course the bloke that was, when we got over to Perth, that took over as CO of the Battalion, was a fellow named Tom Egan.

05:00 And his army number was WX12, which meant that he was the twelfth bloke to join up the AIF in Western Australia, so you can imagine how keen he was. He went overseas and then when the Japs came he was sent, his battalion, the 2/11th back. And he was given the job of making soldiers

05:30 out of the rabble that we were. Because you know, we had only knocked off milking cows and about six or eight weeks before he saw us over there we were supposed to be soldiers. So he was keen to get everybody in the AIF so I suppose it was him that was offering this week. Some of them took it, I didn't.

06:00 When I joined I didn't get that, I didn't want it. As a matter of fact when you're under twenty-one, and my wife, even though I was married she couldn't sign. I had to get my mother to sign it. And I signed it myself. I signed her name. But no one ever knew. But I had to get permission, because I was under twenty-one, permission to join the AIF.

06:30 So I just signed the bloody thing and no one knew any different.

**Did you sign up with your mates?**

Some of them did yeah. Not a lot of them. I was sorry in the finish that I did leave that 6th Battalion and it was only that I told you about how I had a crook leg so I was sent back to camp and while I was there they had

07:00 changed over so many out of one battalion to the other and they were two short. But I was sorry I did leave the first mates, because I never palled up too much with this other crowd. Well I didn't get the chance to. Just before we came home we were camped at a place called Guildford, and we

07:30 were right beside an aerodrome and these little Boomerang fighter planes, they used to fly over us all day and they would be dog fighting and practicing. Anyway we had our breakfast one Saturday morning and we heard the difference of the roar of the planes up top. And we ran outside and here is one of them just spinning around and we could see him, he

08:00 was falling over there and the tail of his plane, they had collided. And one bloke was able to get back to the aerodrome, and the other one came down and he was spinning around in circles slowly sort of. And there was a lot of houses but there was one big bush paddock. And I am sure that that bloke manoeuvred that plane and got it, but it crashed into the paddock and

08:30 he hit the biggest tree in the paddock. He got it. And it would be only say down to the highway from here, a hundred fifty yards or so.

**This is in Warrnambool?**

No this is in Perth.

**In Perth?**

Yeah before I came home. So as we ran past this was one of the few times that I was in a camp where we had huts.

09:00 And on the door of all of these huts was fire extinguishers. And I had had a bit to do with fire; we had a fire brigade here at Nestlé's. And I knew that there was one that you just tipped him upside down and that activate it, so as I ran past the hut I grabbed one, and the plane was just starting to burn. And it was loaded; I didn't know this at the time,

09:30 but they were ,these planes there had to be two planes in the air at all times. They were protecting Perth so they were fully armed. And of course when he hit the tree and she started to burn, I ran around, I got around the front of it where the fire was, and I upped with this bloody extinguisher and I kept spraying it on the bloody plane and bang, bang, bang, bang.

10:00 It was the bloody bullets exploding under the heat. And I did hear later that he did have one bomb on, and I am glad that never got near the heat. Anyhow I sang out to one of the, there was other blokes come over, and they were hiding behind trees and so on. And I

10:30 sung out to one of them, "This thing is nearly empty get me another one." So this bloke ran over to the hut and go me another one. So I put two extinguishers on it and kept it down enough for two other blokes to come around the back of the plane, and they got him out, the pilot. They may as well have left him there anyway. He was smashed to pieces. But they got him out anyway for his family.

11:00 I got interviewed about three times by the air force. I don't know if I ever told them that I had the extinguisher. I just kept saying to them, "I didn't get him out, these other two blokes got him out. I was just trying to keep the fire down." Anyhow then that only happened about a month before I got sent home.

11:30 **Now what about, I want to trace your trip back to, you were shipped with your battalion?**

The 6th Battalion.

**Yes. You started your training initially in Victoria? Tell us about the training.**

Well it

12:00 **Where did you train and what did you do in Victoria?**

In Victoria we went in Mount Martha. So we would get up every morning and march three or four mile down the road and then come back and have breakfast. Then we were talking about digging trenches,

12:30 you know, where would you put the dirt? If you dig a trench where would you put the dirt in front of you or behind you? And you know sort of elementary sort of things, no good putting the dirt in front of you, you have still got to get up and put your head over it. Better off to put the dirt behind you and they can't see your head come up. Anyhow, a bit of rifle drill. But you would only get a lend of a rifle and you had to take it back to store,

13:00 we never had a rifle of our own to look after. It was mainly marching and getting needles. Sort of getting inducted I suppose you would call it. Getting the army pay books, things like that. When we went up to Watsonia it was much the same up there. We were in, what do you call it?

13:30 Barracks. We had training. It wasn't until we got to Western Australia that we started to get armed. And once I saw the Bren gun I thought, I'll never carry an old 303 around, I am a Bren gunner. So I moved in and I finished up as a Bren gunner. But when you marched you carried it for ten minutes, and then you would swap around

14:00 and the bloke behind you would take it and you would take his rifle. But then we started to do night marches and compass marches and unarmed combat. It was mainly marching, they would get you up any time, you would be sleeping peacefully, two or three o'clock in the morning, and they would come around and you'd have

14:30 to get up and march ten mile. What they call a forced march. You can imagine what it was like; it'd nearly kill you. Half asleep and you've go to nearly run, what they call a forced march. That was the hardest part these forced marches. But the others

15:00 didn't worry me. I was all right. Some of them would say they were chafed and their feet were sore, anything to get out of marching.

**How did you like the training and army life?**

Oh I didn't mind it. I enjoyed it because

15:30 I knew it was what I had to do. It was no good not learning how to operate the machinery or whatever it was. Guns and that, because if you had to use them, you had to know how. Had an experience one night with,

16:00 we were in town we went out, there was two companies in the bush. And this, wasn't a mate of mine but he was in the same unit as me. He and I were sent out to find the other ones in the dark to find them and supposedly

16:30 what equipment did they have. Anyhow we got half way, we got through a fence or something and next thing up, we got captured. So this little Luke Inner, he was real fair dinkum joker, he took our bootlaces out, hands behind our back and he tied our thumbs together.

17:00 And he was going to take us back to their crowd. And we got along and we had to get through a fence. So by this time I had my fingers out of it, I think I still held my hands behind my back. And this bloke stood there, and he has got a revolver in his hands,

17:30 and he holds the wire open for us to get through, and we got through, And once we got through I put my foot on the wire to let him through and when he came through he has got the revolver out in front of him. And I give him a whack across the back of the hand and grabbed the revolver and pissed off. Anyhow we got back to our own mob then and I finished up giving the

18:00 revolver to one of our sergeants. And he must have give it back to the bloke. And the next day I got called up, and I forget, Bennett I think his name was, he has put in an application he wants me to be his batman [officer's servant]. And I said, "No way."

18:30 I didn't want to be a batman and carry washing and wash clothes, I said, "I am in the army." So anyway nothing he could do about it so he said, "Off you go." But he must have thought, "Well this bloke will be able to look after me."

**And this all happened in Victoria or WA?**

Over there. Victoria was sort of nothing.

19:00 **Did you go to Bonegilla?**

No. Just down to Mount Martha, from there up to Watsonia and then they put us on a truck on a Saturday afternoon and took us back to Mount Martha and that's where the 6th Battalion was. They were supposed to all be there camped but we got there but there was no one there when we got there. They had all gone home for the weekend because they were catching a boat the next day. They knew we didn't.

19:30 Anyway they all ended up back there; some of them didn't come back.

**What do you mean?**

They didn't turn up on the Sunday and when they did come back they were, a week later they were put on the Queen Elizabeth in Sydney and they came over on the Queen Elizabeth. They all got a fortnights CB [Confined to Barracks] or something like that over there for that.

20:00 **So tell us about your voyage on the City of London?**

City of Paris. The City of London was another boat that was there with us, it had the 5th Battalion on it. The worst part about it was that when we got onto this boat, all I had was an army coat, a greatcoat and boots.

20:30 And we had to wear these big Mae West life jackets. You had to put them on and you weren't allowed to take it off. You had to sleep in it. And we were way out there in this big old English troopship. And just down there on the other end of the wharf was this beautiful sleek ship. Flash looking

21:00 thing, and here was the Yanks coming off onto the wharf fully armed, and I thought well this is good, they are bringing a load of Yanks into Melbourne and sending us out to go and face up to the Japs, without even a bow and arrow. Anyway this old boat, we headed off Sunday afternoon about three o'clock.

21:30 Down through the, it was a secret trip, no one was to know. And they were lined up from Station Pier down to Earlscliff. They all knew there was a convoy going out. She was rough. I told you, somebody reckoned that we were eight hundred mile down off the coast.

22:00 We had to go down that far to get past what they call the point of no return for the subs. If they came

that far down they wouldn't have enough fuel to go home again. That's what we were told. But it was cold and rough and I was that sick I didn't care where I was.

**So you became seasick?**

Oh shocking. And I was

22:30 serious but I was one of the good ones. Some of them couldn't even get up, we were down in the hull, the old cargo ships and in the hull they had, you'd go down ten or twelve feet and there would be a deck. Go down another ten or twelve feet and there'd be another deck. They had decks right down it. Up the top was a square centre and you could see right to the bottom.

23:00 And there was blokes laying down there on the bottom of the boat, they couldn't get up. I never ever went down there, I went down the first night, and when I got, I woke up sick in the morning, I never went down in there again I slept on the deck.

**So the weather was shocking?**

Oh cold.

**And the waves?**

Yeah she was rolling and pitching. The Yanks, there was a Yank

23:30 destroyer and it was a fair size one too. And it would be oh say a quarter of a mile away from you. And it would go out of sight, down into the troughs. You would see the masts and that. But it was that rough that,

**Now at this point Japan hadn't entered the war yet?**

24:00 Oh yeah.

**They had?**

Oh yeah.

**What point was this?**

This is when they were just,

**What year? Do you know what the date was?**

It was in March 1942. They were up the top then.

**So they had bombed Darwin by then and Singapore had fallen. What effect did that have on you?**

Well we were all, we didn't know where we were going. We didn't know we were going to Western Australia,

24:30 we thought we could have been going up there to fight. It seemed people sending people to Western Australia by boat when you could go by land but they didn't have the trains to take that many across. Oh well we were all a bit windy I suppose.

25:00 Once we got over to Perth and got off the water we were all right. It was panic stations.

**On the ship?**

Like everywhere in Australia. The Japs were, they were expecting them to land any time. Because they had taken everything

25:30 before them in such a short time. The Philippines, they were still fighting in the Philippines, they hadn't taken them. Macarthur hadn't come over as yet. He didn't come until the middle of '42.

**Was that a shock to you that the Japanese had taken Singapore and bombed Darwin?**

26:00 Oh yeah it was.

**Were you also panicked?**

Oh no I didn't panic. You know I was a bit perturbed. I was,

26:30 **How long did you stay in Perth or in WA?**

Two years.

**Two years in WA?**

Yeah I spent the whole war.

**Where about in WA were you stationed throughout?**

Oh well I did Melville for a start.

**Where is that?**

That's at Fremantle.

**Outside Fremantle is it?**

Outside yeah close. Then we shifted to Swan View

27:00 which is, what happened was that they realised that all of the troops were south of the Swan River and if the Japs had come over and bombed the bridges, that went over, all of the troops that were marooned. Just say they bombed the bridges and then landed north of Perth, no troops could get there

27:30 in time because all of the troops were south of the river. So we had to move then to Swan View.

**And how far north is that?**

Oh thirty miles north of Perth.

**So it is further up than Melville?**

Yep. Then the next thing we moved to Moora. Which is another hundred and fifty mile up. Then we moved from there to Geraldton, which is about three hundred and fifty miles north of Perth.

28:00 And we were spread out from a place called Northampton, down to a place called Durian Bay, right along that coast. I got,

**You can show me later that's okay. So tell me now, you disembarked at Perth, what was Perth like at that time?**

28:30 Oh we didn't see Perth, we were in Fremantle. Fremantle is about fourteen mile from Perth itself, from the city. And we were camped out at Melville then, which is outside of Fremantle, south of Fremantle. So we didn't see much of Perth at all. We went to,

29:00 we never got any leave or anything like that. We went from Melville to thirty mile the other side of Perth. But I did see Perth when I came back twelve months later, when I came into this anti-aircraft. And Perth was, oh well when I say, I only went to the pub, had a couple of beers. Didn't spend much time in Perth.

29:30 We were stationed about twenty miles south of Fremantle a naval base camp near Garden Island where, it was an American submarine base and that was just in front of us. Like it was very heavily, troops around Fremantle, the

30:00 big guns in case for anti-aircraft. There was troops everywhere around Fremantle.

**30:30 And did you have a chance to, I suppose there was a lot of Americans there I suppose?**

Yeah there was the submarines and a Catalina [flying boat] base and they took over all of the hotels along Scarborough and right along the beachfront. And that's where their submarine crew rested up when they came back.

**31:00 What were the Americans like?**

All right. I had no trouble with them. I got in a brawl with them in Geraldton one night.

**With Americans?**

There was that many troops around Geraldton it was always that they would get leave and come into the town at night.

31:30 And there was provos [provost, military police] looking after them but they couldn't control them, there was too many of them, they couldn't look after them. So a different platoon had to go into Geraldton every night to assist the provos. You had to wear the steel helmet and the bayonet and the full dress. Just to observe and help keep the peace. So anyway one night we got picked, and this mate and I were walking along the street

32:00 going past, it was a yacht club. Walked into a foyer and on each side of the foyer there were little dressing rooms on one side and the other. Anyway we went in, they called us, and we went in and there is this big brawl going on in the men's side of the room.

32:30 And we went over and they pushed and shoved, and of course Australian blokes from one of the other battalions had got into this blue with them and as soon as they saw us, they must have thought we were provos, and they all went 'boom', cleared off. Of course, the Yanks didn't know we were; we weren't in the blue or anything

33:00 Anyway they were there pushing and shoving and I finished up on the floor with about three or four Yanks on top of me, all big blokes about six foot bloody six. And my mate, the last I saw of him was a

bloke had him by the scruff of the neck up against the wall and whacked him. And I sung out, "That's enough." Anyhow I must have said it pretty quick and loud,

33:30 it all stopped. And we got up and the next thing the Yanks were getting us glasses of whiskey and I had never drank before I went in the army. Then we were all mates see. And then there were blokes coming over and congratulating us, we were able to stop them. Shaking hands with us. Anyway we left them and had all of these,

34:00 when they came down from the Philippines, these Yankee nurses came with them. And they were all with us, they were having a dance in this place I am talking about. So away they went dancing away again and we went about our business. Next day we got pulled up before the company commander and he said,

34:30 "I got a call for you congratulating you fellows, stopping the brawl last night in the thing," and he said to me, "How did you stop it?" and I said, "Easy". And he said, "How?" and I said, "They ran out of opposition. We were the only two left and I was on the floor and my mate was over there."

35:00 We stopped it all right, they ran out of opposition. But anyhow I never had any trouble with them. They had all of the girls and they had money. Se I was getting five bob [shillings] a day

35:30 but I allotted, I allotted two [shillings] and six [pence] [to his next of kin] and I had two and six myself. Because you got everything supplied so you didn't need money for anything, especially when I didn't drink and I didn't smoke. But the Yanks they were loaded though.

36:00 Anyhow I, when I said to this bloke when we were sorting out how much to get allotted I said, "Well the government will give her three and six a day, and I will give her two and six, that'll be six bob. She'll be right and I'll have, anyway." "No," he said, "They don't allot anything." So I allotted three and six then. So I never had any money to spend.

36:30 **What about the girls in WA how did they take to the Americans?**

Oh good. Same as everywhere. Oh yes the flash uniform, with our old uniforms, and drab and tacky to what they had.

37:00 And they were all, well they were all submariners, and I don't think you got into one of those unless you were pretty smart. Other blokes on the Catalinas, they had a big base on the Swan River. So the only blokes I came into contact with, I never came into contact with the American Army.

37:30 Was all navy or air force. So they were all, decent sort of blokes.

**How did the Australia soldiers react, your mates your colleagues to the American presence in WA?**

38:00 All right.

**With girls and all of that sort of thing?**

There was no big brawls or blues over there, not like they had in Townsville. See there wasn't many American soldiers in Western Australia. They were all on the east coast. The only ones over there was, as I said, submarine, air force.

38:30 **So you were saying that they were better behaved?**

Yep they were, and we never saw any Negroes over there. There was a different class, a better, well I am not saying if there was any better person. But there was no

39:00 Leonskis over there [Eddie Leonski was an American soldier who was hanged for murdering three women in Melbourne in 1942], they never had any trouble like that. But I had no complaint with the Americans and I never heard anyone else. The only complaint we had more or less was that they had too much money. But they were good, they would get you cigarettes, the blokes that smoked you know, the Yanks

39:30 would get cigarettes for them. Because they got, when they came in, these submarine blokes they could get anything they wanted. And if you got talking to them at any of the functions and that they'd get you stuff especially if you could get them a bottle of beer.

40:00 **Did you strike any friendships with them?**

No, only, on the boat going over to Fremantle, there was a mob of Dutch sailors on the boat, they were sunk up in the Java Sea battles, they were on a boat called the Tromp. It was big, one of the big Dutch boats up there. I think it was only a

40:30 destroyer, but it was the biggest boat they had up there, anyway it got sunk and these fellows were on this boat. When it left Fremantle, it was going across the Indian Ocean it was going to America that way. Had quite a few American soldier prisoners that were getting sent home already when the others

were just arriving.

- 41:00 These blokes were getting sent home. But yeah I struck up a bit of a friendship with these Dutch sailors, probably the main reason was we used to get two bottles of beer a day and I didn't drink so I used to give it to this, he was a 'montier'. That's Dutch for electrician.
- 41:30 He was an electrician on a boat. He was about seven foot high. There was one of them, one of the Dutch sailors he had been in the water for so long and his, you know when you leave your hands in the water and they go all crinkly? Well he was like that all over. He hadn't come good again but he was getting there. So they were on their way to America to pick up an English boat.

## Tape 5

- 00:30 **All right Reg we're recording again. I was just wondering if you can tell me now a little bit more about your training at Mount Martha?**

We done very little training at Mount Martha because you weren't there very long. It was just marching down roads of a morning with the band behind us. Then we'd come back,

- 01:00 and they had some blokes there training us. One bloke said to me, "Do you know anything about training?" and I said, "No I have never done any." He said, "Do you know anything about observation and deduction?" and I said, "Oh I know a little bit." And
- 01:30 he said, "How? Give me an example." "Well," I said, "you see that bloke walking down there with a paper under his arm, going towards that building?" and he said, "Yes." I said, "Observation, man going to read the paper. Deduction, crap house." So, "Smart bugger," he said.
- 02:00 Anyway they were on the trenches, digging trenches I think. I said to the other chap this morning, "If you were in there digging a trench, where would you throw the dirt? In front of you or behind you?" and I said, "Behind you. You don't want to still put your head up, if you put it in front of you." But it was just rifle drill, marching backwards and forwards. It was a parade
- 02:30 ground training. We didn't go out on any bivouacs [field camps] or anything like that. We were only there for two or three weeks and most of that was taken up with the inoculations and the needles, things like that. Introduction to the army.

**I'll just pause for a moment. Perhaps you can tell me a bit more about training at Watsonia then?**

- 03:00 Well Watsonia was very similar. It was really the elementary training. Not any bodily training, it was more of the mind. You know just, how do you feel about being in the army? You know,
- 03:30 it was sort of an introduction to being in the army but no actual physical training.

**Can you tell us a bit more about those classes because I have never actually heard that before? Of asking you how you felt.**

Well first of all they were trying to get us to join the AIF straight away: "You're only choccos [chocolate soldiers: militia] now", and all of this business.

- 04:00 And we were all the same age group, eighteen, nineteen, twenty. Nineteen would be the oldest I suppose. So nobody wanted to make any rash decisions. So I didn't consider joining the AIF then because I couldn't see any difference, you were in the army, whether you were in the militia or the AIF you were still going to go to
- 04:30 New Guinea and so forth. So it really didn't have any interest for me at that time.

**Did they actually call you choccos?**

No, no. The word was actually mentioned, like I say there were no AIF blokes there, we were all the same.

- 05:00 The AIF fellows were going to Puckapunyal and Bonegilla where the fellows that were getting called up were going to Watsonia and Mount Martha. At that time, I don't know if it altered. Nearly all the AIF blokes when they first went in went to Puckapunyal or Bonegilla. So there was no conflict there, we never had any trouble.

- 05:30 **How did you feel about being thought of as a choco?**

Didn't worry me at that time. I had never been anywhere where there was AIF units, all the units that I was concerned with were choco or militia or whatever

- 06:00 you like to call it. And even later on, when we got over to Western Australia and they were bringing



home the divisions from the Middle East. See the 2/11th Battalion when we got over there... there was the 6th Battalion and the 5th Battalion they were part of one brigade.

- 06:30 And they put the 2/11th Battalion into that brigade. They were returned. We used to play football matches. We'd have field army competitions. Where we contested, we didn't have any actual unarmed combat with them.
- 07:00 But we would have drills on pulling a Bren gun to pieces. They'd pull a Bren gun to pieces and assemble it on a ground sheet thirty yards away. You'd have to run, put the thing together and run another thirty or forty yards and be down ready to fire. We'd have competitions like that with them.
- 07:30 No we never had any trouble whatsoever. Then they started to interchange some of the, none of our blokes went to the 2/11th, but 2/11th came back. They were supposedly to strengthen, you know show how a soldier should act you know.
- 08:00 Never caused any trouble. And the CO of the Battalion was the ex-CO of the 2/11th when they were overseas. Well they had been there done that and they knew that you had to have a certain confidence and skill about you to survive, so
- 08:30 I suppose it might have been a help to us if we had got into any trouble. But they were good blokes. We did have a bloke, Captain Howard, he was in Malaya and when the Japs came down he got out of Malaya, got out on a small boat. A few of them got out. He was a real fire
- 09:00 eater, and he became our company commander. We were B Company, and he came and he stirred things up a bit. Everything had to be done at the double. He was a good bloke, it was to our benefit that we got him, because he livened the lot
- 09:30 up, you didn't just do it if you wanted to do it, you done it in a hurry. And he was a good bloke. But it was funny, we had three live shoots, you know,
- 10:00 what's the word that you call it? Not bivouac. Exercise, we'll call it that, where we had to advance over some hills and down to the beach, and us blokes on the Bren guns were firing over the heads of the blokes that went down into the hollow. And when they got up to a certain point then we had to cut out. They'd go on and we'd have to
- 10:30 catch up to them and do that again in another valley. I always remember the first one, there was some older blokes, I don't know how they got into our unit, you can see them in a photo here. But the old blokes, some of them were a bit deaf or whatever it was. But I remember the first one we had we were lying on this slope firing over the heads
- 11:00 of the other, well over the heads mind you, you could hardly see them they were that far down in the valley. And when they told us to cut out, this sergeant or whatever he was, sergeant or officer. He said to get up and then he said, "Forward." And he said, "For..." just like that and behind us
- 11:30 'boom', there was a burst of, one bloke thought he said, "Fire." And we all went to stand up, fortunately we didn't get up quick enough, he could have killed three or four blokes there. That's how it could have happened, just because we were on a live shoot, and you had a bloke there, I mean this bloke, they took the gun off him from then on. That's the only time in any of the live shoots that I saw anything like that.
- 12:00 But could have happened. He said, "I thought you said 'Forward'." He said, "I never said anything I just said 'For...' " As soon as he said anything the bloke had his finger on the trigger ready to go. But anyhow that was all right we got out of it. Then we had another
- 12:30 one ,we had a big one up at Geraldton. It included American fighter planes. There was a great hill and we had to advance across the flat. Blokes with the mortars were firing over our heads; I think they landed a couple behind us but the majority
- 13:00 went over. And then the American planes come in and strafe this hill and so forth. It was entertaining. Fortunately there was no one up the hill firing back at us.
- 13:30 **How did you adjust to the regimentation and discipline of the army?**
- Oh didn't really. I didn't strike anybody that was really, the bloke with the most robust voice and you know a lot of instant
- 14:00 action was this Captain Howard, the bloke that got away from Malaya. But it wasn't overpowering, wasn't overbearing. It was what was required, I would say. It was decisive. And it was correct I thought.
- 14:30 That's about all I can say on that.

**Did you make a lot of friends?**

Yes I did, good friends. I have got a photo here of the early platoon, and there is not many of them left. There is one out here at a place called Winslow. He and I went in together on the same day and his people were on a farm,

- 15:00 he had an elder brother and this brother had a farm of his own. And he and his father worked what they call a home farm. So Iain got called up and six months after we went in his father got sick and he got manpowered out [required for civilian duty] to go home, run the farm.
- 15:30 He was a good bloke, and there is only he and I left around here. Another bloke (UNCLEAR) comes down every year, comes down at Anzac time and goes to the little show out here. So we have got about half a dozen blokes, a lot of them were in the air force. And another bloke was in the
- 16:00 2/2nd Pioneers. He has just passed on recently. He used to come down. And Scotty and Ian Johnson and myself. We used to meet here every Anzac Day.

**What can you tell me about the Bren gun?**

- 16:30 Bren gun was a good gun. I can't actually give you the, I think it was in the vicinity of three hundred rounds a minute. Because you wouldn't fire it for a full minute. It was a good gun, it was easily, you know, it was very simple to operate. But it was no good in sand. They found a couple of times
- 17:00 that you'd fire it in sand areas and the force of the shells being ejected would kick up the sand and the sand would get in the cylinder. You know it was gas, the gas would go down into the cylinder and force the trigger back, that reloaded the rounds up into the gun. But we found that
- 17:30 that would put it out of action. So then we stopped putting oil in our gun and we used graphite, dry lubrication. And that was much better. But we had an
- 18:00 interesting experience with that gun, or a Bren gun. On one occasion we went on one of these long marches and it was everybody, cook's assistants and a lot of the batmen, and usually blokes with a little bit of,
- 18:30 you know, weak sort of fellows. Couldn't march a long distance and some of them were a bit frail, shouldn't have been in the army most of them. Anyhow our cook's offside was on the march this day and with a Bren gun when you march you carried it
- 19:00 virtually say I was the first bloke to carry it. I would carry it for ten minutes and then I would give it to the bloke behind me, but he would give me his rifle, so he would carry it for ten minutes. And this went on around, and this cook, I can't think of his name now, it was a funny name. He came with us this time
- 19:30 and the Bren gun had, you know, the barrel you only had to twist it to the side and it came out of the slot. And the base and the magazine section, you only had to give them a twist and they would come apart. So what would happen, if you grabbed it by the barrel handle and
- 20:00 the butt, and you lifted up and twisted like that, the whole thing would come to pieces. So the first time that this cook's assistant came out with us, it came his turn to carry the Bren gun and he done exactly what I said then. When they passed it to him he grabbed it by the handle and the butt and he must have given it a twist and it fell to pieces.
- 20:30 Three separate pieces. And we were looking at it, and we said, "Well why don't we do this all of the time? Just three of us carry a piece each. No worries." We never had to worry about carrying it for ten minutes and change over. The barrel, just put it over and so the cook's offside showed us something we
- 21:00 didn't, and we reckoned we were all smart. And they were the bloody geeks. But yeah. So that's what you could do with a Bren gun, it was a good gun.

**Well you were on the City of Paris to Fremantle. Tell me a bit more about that trip.**

- 21:30 **You said that you would rather that it got sunk early on.**

Well that was just my, I got that sick.

**Had you ever been on a boat before? A ship?**

Not a ship not, I had been on fishing boats here, out on the cray boats. Not a great deal.

- 22:00 been on rivers hundreds of times. But anyway this boat, and this bloke that was up in Winslow. We got on the boat, she left at three o'clock in the afternoon and we went down the bay, and about eleven o'clock that night, I'd say it was about eleven, we went through the rip. And you could feel she was going like it was on a river and then all of a sudden you could
- 22:30 feel the motion. And this bloke said to me, "I don't feel too good." And I said, "You're right. Don't worry about it. We'll go down." So we had to go down and sleep in hammocks that night, well you could sleep every night there, that was the first night. There were hammocks hanging off the roof, you had to climb up into them, boots and everything, you didn't strip off.
- 23:00 And you had this big Mae West [lifejacket] around you, this big cork thing, tied here and there and you sort of loosened it and used it for a pillow. Anyhow in the morning I woke up and gees, I don't know how I got out of the hammock, but straight to the rail. Straight up top, flat out to get up there. And this other bloke looked around and laughed at me. He was

23:30 fit as a trout, he never got one, he was sick as soon as she started to move and then woke up in the morning and was right as rain. He has never let me forget that either. Anyhow when we were going up the, what do you call it on the side of the boat?

**Gangplank?**

Gangplank.

24:00 We're going up there and on top of it, both sides there was cases of apples. And I was always fond of the fruit and I had my army coat on, so I filled both pockets with apples. If I hadn't have done that, I would have had nothing to eat for three days because all they fed us on was

24:30 baked beans. Bloody hell. Little Lascar blokes would be coming through trying to get to the dining room and they would have big dishes of, 'hot water, hot water' that was always funny. And they were all right but every time they walked past me I would race for the rail. And the other blokes were

25:00 always frightened, they would say, "I hope we don't get sunk." And I would say, "I wish to Christ they would hurry up and do it." So I never ever went back down below then. I slept on the deck every night then. I had my big army overcoat on and I had my apples. I could eat the apples. After three days, it must have been, they had that many sick they couldn't do anything about it.

25:30 They had three decks, and if you were on the bottom one you had to be careful, if you put your head over and somebody up top let go. But it was about three days we had been out and all those that were still sick they gave us a dose, something black, I don't know what it was I don't know. It worked. It was a good trip then.

26:00 It was zigzag all of the way, that's why it took so long. It took us ten days to get over and they, I don't know whether I told you, they went down around about eight hundred miles down to get past the point of no return. From Java

26:30 as I said, if a sub came down they couldn't go too far down or they would never have enough fuel to go back. So that's why we were so far down. But anyhow we got there.

**Earlier you were talking about the blokes that carried the hot water, what did you call them?**

Lascars I called them. They were little fellows; they were little buggers they used to sit up on the top

27:00 of the hole and they would pluck, they wouldn't pluck their nose, they'd cut their nose. They were tough little buggers. Yeah they would have to get through to, it was an English troop ship and they used all of those type of blokes as crewmen, not as officers or anything, just crew.

**27:30 What were they? What's a Lascar?**

Well I think they were Indian, little I called them. Lascars I think that's what.... They weren't (UNCLEAR).

**Where do you get the term Lascar?**

I don't know.

**28:00 Then you pulled into Fremantle, how long were you there for?**

Oh I would say six weeks, that's when we realised we were all south of the Swan River. And if they had have come over Perth the first thing they would have bombed would have been the bridges. And if they did,

28:30 all of the troops that were concentrated over there were all south of the river, and getting across the river, she is pretty wide in places.

**And what were you doing in that time? Were you doing more training?**

Yeah they were really into the training and night marches. And you would be getting trained on the bayonet drill and

29:00 general looking after the rifle. But it was mainly physical business that they were concerned with. You might say march for ten or thirty mile and they would give you tea and put up your little [tent], sleep in pairs. You could sleep in one's I think,

29:30 I don't know. There was another bloke from Warrnambool I was friends with, Jim McDonough and we would make a little double one out of ours and just sleep on a side each [referring to making a double tent out of two groundsheets]. And you would be just nice and comfortable and they would come down and they would have what they call a forced march for five or ten miles. That was hard, you know, you would be just dozing off

30:00 and you have got to get up. You had had a hard day and you had a forced march. But that's what they were trying to do was to toughen us up. Get us used to that. But we did finally get that way too, in the

finish we didn't care when they woke us up, but they didn't continue doing that I think it was just to get you to a certain thing.

**Did you have decent boots and uniform by now?**

30:30 Yes we had the full uniform by now. Yeah. We used to march from the Melville camp we done that twice, to the Swan rifle range. And they would start you off at a thousand yards or something like that and you would run a hundred yards, like you might have to fire five rounds lying down,

31:00 and then you would run a hundred yards and fire five rounds kneeling, then standing. You know just to get you up to the target. To get you used to firing a gun from different positions, not just lying down all of the time. And to get you more familiar with the gun I suppose.

31:30 **Were you a good shot?**

Well I don't like to skite [boast] or anything but the first day we went out onto the target on the range, I fired eighty-five I think it was out of a hundred. And we went back the next week

32:00 and everybody who got eighty or more was an instructor. So one shoot and the next week I was an instructor. I don't know whether I done any good or not, all I could tell a bloke was how to pull the trigger. We used to have them with the Bren gun too. You'd fire, we'd go to a range and they would have a bloke up, and they would put the target

32:30 up and you would let go in little bursts and then he would put a thing on a pole, a round disc. And he would put it in front of where your shots had landed. So we were getting sick of this one day and we let go and up come this thing and we shot the bloody end off it. So I must have been a reasonable shot with the old 303.

33:00 **How did you find the conditions there? It would have been a lot warmer than here?**

Yes it was, you'll see the, there's, that's a photo of us that's how we dressed at Geraldton.

33:30 **So no shirts?**

No shirts, no boots. When we went down to, they picked out a platoon and sent them down to Moora where the 4th Division Headquarters were. They used to be a different platoon every, I just forget how long we went for, a fortnight or three weeks, something like that. And they sent a platoon

34:00 and they were two short of a number they needed, and so this fellow and myself they added us to it. And down we went and when we got there they had to outfit us, we didn't have clothes to even walk down the streets. So we got a new set of uniforms out of it.

34:30 **Did you get out into the desert a bit?**

Yes we went out, did a hundred mile march out to one. That's where we copped all of this leg infection. We only had shorts and these little gaiters.

35:00 Short socks and a little gaiter that came around here, I don't know what purpose it used to do but we used to wear them. And we walked across, there was no tracks, and there was all that spinifex grass, barbs on the end of it. And we must have been getting on, and on the way back from there, I looked at my leg one day and I said "By Christ my legs are swollen"

35:30 And had a good look you know and it was all infected, puffed up. And it went right through the whole battalion. And they sent us to the beach at Geraldton for a week I think it was, and we used to have three swims a day in the sea. Then they would paint us with a blue dye. That's how I

36:00 came to get, I am repeating myself again. That's how I came to be transferred to the other unit because I was in camp getting treatment for my leg again when they switched blokes from one battalion to another. And they were short and they offered us two blokes the chance to go with them, so we volunteered for it, worst thing we ever bloody done.

36:30 **What happened then?**

Well I got down to this unit and they were short of a medical orderly and I got called up to get checked in, and this CO said to me, "Have you had any medical experience?" And I just said to him that I had been in the scouts and passed all of the tests there. And I had done a stretcher-bearer course in Geraldton.

37:00 He said, "Right, you're the bloke we're looking for." So I got into that.

**So what sort of things did you treat?**

Well we treated everything from VD [venereal disease] to what would you call it? Piles.

37:30 Oh they were shocking, because we had a little hospital there and a full time doctor. And the other units around us, smaller units didn't have a doctor, so they would come to us or the doctor would have to go on a tour. And we would, I would have to go with him.

38:00 You have got no idea. Crabs. Bloody hell I think every second bloke in Fremantle had crabs. And VD, I went to the, one time I went to the Fremantle Gaol with him, and there was two prisoners

**Before you start**

In the gaol with syphilis.

38:30 And he had to, he was treating

**So you were telling us about the bloke with syphilis.**

Oh yes took the doctor

39:00 to the Fremantle gaol and I saw, to get the treatment was a needle that long I reckon. And these two blokes got in and he bent him over the thing and dropped his strides and give him about three or four whacks on the tail. Bang with the needle and then he went away and got the other part of the needle and screwed them together. And that had to go on for two years, treatment for syphilis. But the other, you know

39:30 we had an old ship's doctor for a start. And when the blokes would come in with the crabs, he would say, "Give them the razor and put them under the hot shower." And then when they finished he had one of these little hand sprays, fill it up with Sheltox and then spray them. Put a pair of glasses on. He would get rid of them straight away.

40:00 He had been around but he was an old bloke, but the other fellow was young, that's why I had to drive him because he didn't know where he was.

**And what sort of treatment did you use for crabs?**

That was it, the razor under the hot shower. And then give them the Sheltox. The razor got rid of the eggs, but the crab itself was in the skin and the Sheltox used to kill them.

40:30 Might have to give them two or three goes you know. It was a shocking place. That's why I was trying to get to New Guinea. Somebody said to me, "What do you want to get up there for?" and I said, "To get away from Fremantle."

**Fremantle wasn't any worse than any other places.**

Probably not.

41:00 Of course being a port, boats coming from all over the world.

## Tape 6

00:30 **I just wanted to ask you now, Fremantle as you say was a port and a lot of people coming in from all over the world and a lot of VD. Tell me where this VD was coming from.**

I don't know, off the boats.

**Were there a lot of brothels in Fremantle?**

01:00 One that I know of. A lot in Perth, Rose Street the train ran down the middle of this Rose Street and the brothels were on one side. See them all lined up outside there, all sorts.

**Did you go there yourself?**

No never.

01:30 **Really?**

Really never. Not my kettle of fish.

**Why?**

Well if you saw the blokes lined up out the front for a start, I would never go there.

**Were there any regimental brothels?**

Not that I know of.

02:00 **Were there ever any talks or instructions to the soldiers regarding VD?**

Oh yes. In here, I have got in my text books that would have been part of my job going around the units teaching them. You had sayings like 'flies carry disease', 'keep yours buttoned up'.

02:30 That was on, but yeah in there is all about it.

**What other sots of things would you tell them?**

Well it was for mainly for their living conditions and what they done with their wastes. And if they

03:00 had no way of doing this themselves, you would have to advise them and get the engineer to construct things for them. Layouts of the camps, but the thing was that they had these blue light places around Perth or, all

03:30 cities had them. They called them blue light; they had a blue light. Blokes could go there after they had been playing around a bit and get cleaned up.

**So blue light was a clinic? A VD clinic?**

Yep and they were open twenty-four hours a day.

**What sort of treatment was there for gonorrhoea?**

04:00 Well the blue lights, they were mainly for... syphilis was a very rare thing. They would mainly concentrate on the gonorrhoea but then they had the special hospitals. Three weeks was about the time they would take to clear it up.

**What treatment would you give them?**

M&B Tabs [tablets], Maine and Baker I think it stood for. They went through a course of them. If it was hard to get rid of, they would give them an extra one, a crash course. The idea was to raise the body temperature, the germs

05:00 could only live in the blood until you got, and they would raise the blood temperature over that figure. And that would treat them for the ulcers, just washouts and things like that. I never saw any of it at all

05:30 until I got to Fremantle.

**Was there any preventative medicine at all? Or things that you gave out to prevent that?**

Condoms. There was no medicine that I know, never heard of it.

**No creams?**

Condoms.

**And was that something that you gave to everyone or only if they asked?**

06:00 No, well actually I was sort of, yeah, we would hand them out, that's right. They'd come and ask. Yeah, they would come and ask. I think that they could go to the blue light places and get them, but we ourselves

06:30 in the hospital we would have them there in boxes. Some blokes would come and ask for them, but I think they would prefer to go somewhere where they weren't known.

**So after Fremantle where did you go to then?**

07:00 Home.

**Oh that was on your way back okay.**

Oh, sorry. From Fremantle I went out to Guildford and back to Swan View, I can't think, Beldon. Near Swan View, anyhow.

07:30 Midland Junction.

**And what were you doing there?**

Oh just camped there waiting to go somewhere. I don't know where this unit went after I left them, that was at Midland Junction. I don't know, I wasn't sort of, any reunions I have gone to, I have gone to the 6th Battalion.

08:00 They used to hold them in the Lower Town Hall in Melbourne. Then as they dropped off in number, they finished up going to the Commercial Travellers building in Flinders Street. Down the end towards Russell Street, down that area. You came around the Young and Jackson's corner

08:30 and you would be heading west to get down towards Russell Street, it's down there somewhere. CTA [Commercial Travellers Association] I think they call it.

**That reminds me did you go to Young and Jackson's on your way to Western Australia?**

No. Young and Jackson's was a pub, I never drank.

09:00 I had my first drink of beer in Melville and nearly collapsed. No, we weren't in Melbourne hardly. We were in Mount Martha, got off the train at Spencer Street and straight onto another train down to Frankston. And then on a truck out to

09:30 Mount Martha. So then we got to Watsonia and we were only there for a few weeks, so Young and Jackson's I didn't see much of.

**My chronology is a little bit confused now. After Watsonia you went back to Mount Martha and then over to Fremantle?**

10:00 Yes.

**And then to Swan River?**

Swan View.

**Swan View is it? Now what were you doing at Swan View?**

Oh just more training, marches. Exercises up in the ranges there. Darling Ranges.

10:30 Go there off a night, climb around the big rocks. Get acclimatised to the work in the dark. We went from there to Moora, and Moora was flat open wheat country so it was all route marches there.

11:00 And then one time Blamey came up and inspected us. Put on a parade for him one day. Real hot day and we had to march into town five mile, in full dress uniform, and then stand. There was blokes going down like flies collapsing in the heat, and then standing there to attention waiting for this bloke to come out and see us.

11:30 That's the only time I ever saw him.

**What were your impressions?**

Just another man to me.

12:00 I think he might have had that Bennett with him, I think he did. He was his offsider.

**How long were you at Moora for?**

Six weeks roughly.

12:30 **What were the conditions like there?**

All right, pretty exposed. As I say it was flat wheat country, there were no trees. It was stony, rocky. But once again, I saw more of Moora when I came back down later on the

13:00 4th Division Headquarters. We were stationed right in Moora, it was like these towns where the railway line runs through the middle of the main street. And we had our camp in where the railway line was so there were houses either side of us.

13:30 Saw plenty of Moora there. The shops and the houses that we were guarding they were all in the town. I was on guard there outside this records office, and I think it might have been the first or second day I was there. And one of these little old shops,

14:00 it had a veranda down over the front of it like you see in the old country towns. Well I had to look after that and it was only about three feet above my head. Anyhow I was there one morning and along the street come three or four blokes and you know stars, and gold

14:30 braid on and red bands around their hats. And I thought this must be (UNCLEAR) I don't know who they were. So they came along and here I am standing out the front and I thought, "Oh well I'll do the right thing seeing they're the brass and I am representing the 6th Battalion, I better make it look smart". So I gave them the slope arms, present arms. Bring the old rifle around and let her down.

15:00 Just as they got up to me, I let her go up and it had the bayonet on it, and the bloody bayonet went straight through the roof of the thing. I had to bring her down, pull it out in front of them. And one of them said to me, "Don't worry about it, son. Next time just stand at attention for us, that's all we need." You had to show some sort of respect but being a rookie at it, and the first time I had seen someone

15:30 with so much regalia in my life. Up she went straight through the roof. That finished that.

**So that was Blamey and Bennett?**

No, no. I thought it could have been, you know I just, they had that much regalia on them. I don't know who it was; it wasn't them.

16:00 Could have been the commissar from some of the theatres in Perth or something come up there for a holiday.

**After Moora you went to Geraldton and you were there for six months, tell me a bit more**

**about the life there?**

- 16:30 The life itself was all right but the conditions were pretty rough. As you can see there from the different photos of us, I haven't got any photos of the town or anything. But that's all it was, it was the, you know we never had anywhere to sleep under cover except your own little humpy you'd make. And you'd get your meals on the run
- 17:00 and wherever you were they would bring them to you. They had these Biscoll and Hop [?] kitchens, they were like caravans and they would pull them around behind. But they could cook on them, and I don't know what it must have been, gas or something like that, I don't know. But all of the things might have been cooked in a kitchen somewhere and then put into hot boxes; I think that's what it was yeah.
- 17:30 Had these hot boxes on the thing and they would just bring them around and give you so much. And the old water cart would come past once a day and give you one of these, a thing about as big as that of water and that would have to do eight of us all day. If you wanted a wash you went down the beach. Couldn't afford the water. Or even carry enough to go around too far.

**So was that about five litres?**

- 18:00 Oh around what that thing there.

**Five to ten litres.**

I have got a photo of one there. But they would hold the same as that container there. So you had to go very light on the water.

- 18:30 Mostly we would stick another old saucepan on the fireplace and put a bar or something across it and that would be there and they would just chuck a bit more coffee in it as they went past. And that would do you for the whole day. As you were going onto your guard duty or whatever you would have a cup of coffee before you went. Away you'd go and have another when you come back.

- 19:00 **What was hygiene like there?**

Terrible. You would just take a shovel with you wherever you went in the sand. This is before they ever got hooked onto this hygiene. But it would have been hard to do anything else because of the area used.

- 19:30 You wouldn't even be able to dig a hole because the sand just kept falling in on you. I am talking about a big hole. They were pretty rough.

**Was there much disease there?**

A bit of dysentery.

- 20:00 Not out when we were in sections but when we would be in a group, a company and go on a bit of a bivouac, that's when we'd get the dysentery. One of my mates got it,

- 20:30 actually we both got it in Moora. And we got back to the camp and he said, "Bugger it, I am going to RAP", so he went to RAP and I never seen him for three months. He finished up back down in Perth in Hollywood Hospital; they had a Hollywood Hospital there, same as Heidelberg in Melbourne. It was the army hospital down there. And he came back and he had left all of his gear, he only went down to the RAP

- 21:00 in his shirts and shorts and that's how they took him. They left all of his gear with us. So we stuck it all in a kit bag and stuck it in the unit truck. And when he came back, he was all fully equipped. Yeah I didn't go the hospital or the RAP, I am sorry I didn't now I

- 21:30 would have got a holiday with him, three months down in Perth.

**At Geraldton was there many insects? Flies?**

Flies, plenty of them. Yeah. Nothing else. Only little burrs, they were little round hard things, like a little marble. And there would be these little spikes sticking out from them

- 22:00 we used to call them 'Jesus Christs'. Because every time you sat down and you put your hand down, "Oh Jesus Christ." Yeah.

**So no problems with ticks or mice? Fleas?**

No, ticks, we had no worries with the blankets because

- 22:30 they would just leave them hanging over the bush every day and they would be lovely and fresh when you came back at night. But no, never seen any of them. No ticks, because we weren't near animals.

**So what sort of things did you do for entertainment to relax?**

Well some of them played two up.



- 23:00 Now and again we'd have a fun and games, they would put it down as. You know after you had been there three weeks of this night and day business and to finish they would have a fun and games night. We would round up a lot of brush timber, and we would light a fire and
- 23:30 decide where they'd put the table with the eighteen gallon [keg] on it. And all you had was an army mug, about a pint I think it was, you know the big old army mug? And we'd line up and the line would go right around the fire. So you can just imagine blokes that were not drinking beer at any stage because there was none available to them. And they
- 24:00 started drinking a bottle now and again just because there was no water, and walking around a great big fire with a pint of beer. By the time you drank it, you would be back at the bloody barrel again, so I think after about three rounds that is as far as any of them got. Be lying on the trees or climbing up trees, they were fun and games nights all right. That was one of the ways they used to get you to relax. Put on a night like that for you.
- 24:30 But we never had films or, nowhere to have them. You would get leave into Geraldton on the odd occasion and you could go in. I don't know what there was to do, nothing much else to do but go to the pub. The whole place was supposed to be evacuated, the only ones that were up there were the ones that had to be there.

- 25:00 They used to make beer up there; I think they called it 'Globe'. Just like the Geelong beer they used to make.

**Did you ever have shows? Singers or...?**

I saw one concert party the whole time I was there, no I saw a couple while I was in Fremantle. But that

- 25:30 was, at Moora, when we were there on this guard duty there was a concert party came around. And there was a bloke that became a... Kerr I think his name was. He became a pretty well known tiddly man, comedian type
- 26:00 He was only a young 'un. I am sure his name was Kerr. He was good, and some of them that were there were good. All the instrumentalists, but the thing was they could only have those shows where they
- 26:30 didn't need them. They needed them out in the bush where they could bring blokes. But I suppose it was hard to get their gear. But it was good. We would have little campfires and just sit around and talk, tell lies, listen to a few.
- 27:00 **Did you play two up yourself?**
- No I wasn't in to the two up. Never ever played it once. I didn't have the money to do it. That was one of the reasons. I was allotting half of my pay to my wife. I was only getting a small amount. I was getting enough to get by to buy the things that were necessary,
- 27:30 like toothpaste and things like that. You had to buy that yourself, you didn't get that issued to you. But everything else you got for nothing so. We used to buy extra, we used to buy little fruit cakes, and sort of bolster our tucker up.
- 28:00 We were probably getting as much as we needed but just for a bit of a change we would buy an old fruit cake.

**How did you get on with your commanding officers?**

- 28:30 Good. I told a few of them what I thought of them when those forced marches were on, but they didn't hear me.

**Just as well.**

Yeah I might have been up for mutiny or something. I found them all right especially the 6th Battalion.

- 29:00 In the 6th Battalion, a lot of the officers were from the country. There was one bloke I knew reasonably well he came from Horsham. There was another bloke came from Casterton. And even in the platoon I was in, there was one corporal I knew was from Ringwood.
- 29:30 Another bloke was from Allansford, just down the road here. Yeah they were all right, I never struck any (UNCLEAR). I think that in the finish I liked a
- 30:00 beer just as much as anybody else. But I didn't make a practice of going to the canteen every night or anything. I think it was only the blokes that went there every night and got themselves all. But it was all sorts, you met all sorts of blokes, some real nuts. Some, but generally they were good.
- 30:30 There was one bloke, his name was Ben Jollbar [?]. After the war he came home and he kidnapped his grandfather or his uncle. They were Jews and they went into
- 31:00 selling obsolete war equipment to the Arabs and the Jews in the Middle East. Anyway they were making big money and you know how if people make too much money they're all, anyway he kidnapped his, I

think it was his grandfather.

31:30 I never heard how he got on in the finish but he was a bloody nuisance when he was with us. He was always off getting stuff and he would come back and want to sell it on the black [black market]. Old Jollbar. Turned out he got transferred out of the unit into a labour battalion. I did meet him

32:00 on a bus after that. He was in the tent with us so I knew him pretty well.

**Now can you remember where you were when Pearl Harbor was attacked?**

Oh,

32:30 December the 7th wasn't it?

'41.

I would have been at work, I was still working then.

**Do you remember your reaction?**

Shocked. Shocked and disgusted with the way it was done.

33:00 The treacherous way it was done. You know they had their blokes pleading with the President over there and all of the time had these boats steaming from way out heading for Pearl Harbor. They got everything they deserved the Japs. They way they treated the prisoners.

33:30 See to them, what we class as being cruel was normal to them. Because to them, what do you do when you surrender? That was a great disgrace to the person who did it, and it

34:00 affected his whole family, they became outcasts. Religion was the trouble there, but there was no need for the way they killed kids. They were cruel.

34:30 **At that time and later when you were sent to Western Australia to guard against the Japanese, stop them coming in the back door, what did you know of the Japanese?**

Not much. Not much because nobody knew. They kept to themselves, they kept themselves isolated. You couldn't go over there for holidays and you know. It was

35:00 very hard for anyone to get into Japan at all. It was the way they were treating the Chinese prisoners to start with was enough.

**What did you know about that?**

Only what they were supposed to do, the rape of Nanking as they called it, and the way they treated the civilian population there.

35:30 **Were you shown films about the rape of Nanking?**

No not really.

**Did you see newsreels about it?**

Oh I probably saw newsreels. And read about it. And when they got into Singapore, they way they treated the people there. The way they shot the doctors and the nurses

36:00 and the sick patients in the beds. They were animals, uncivilised as we are and we know it. But to them it was just normal.

**At that time when you were working on guard duty, what did you hear of at that point?**

Oh not a great deal.

36:30 **Did you know about the fall of Singapore?**

Yes because that happened before we went over there.

**So you had heard that story about the hospital before you went over there?**

Yep. They weren't very sociable little fellows were they? But I was up in Queensland a few years ago now,

37:00 and my wife and I were sitting on the railway station right in the middle of Brisbane. Waiting to catch a train down to the Gold Coast. And it was just school closing time in the afternoon, about three thirty four o'clock. And all of the kiddies were coming from the schools to catch the various

37:30 trains. And I said, "Look at this coming down the platform." It was our own kids with the different sort of clothes on and scruffy looking, you know not dirty but untidy. And along came a group of these Asian kids, all with their little uniforms on and they were all dressed and neat.

- 38:00 I just said, "There's our own kids going down there and they're untidy and undisciplined." And I said, "These little fellows, you know hundreds of thousands of their kind got killed with the atomic bomb. Poor innocent little buggers," and it sort of hit home then. Even at the time when the bomb was dropped,
- 38:30 didn't realise. But if they hadn't done that, there would have been thousands of Americans and I suppose some Australians would have been up there too. The atomic bomb stopped all of that. I always felt they could have took out some island close to Japan and dropped one on that and said, "This is what you'll get
- 39:00 if you don't toe the line." Anyhow it is history now.
- What was it about the Asian kids on the platform that struck you so?**
- Their neat dress and their behaviour. You know they were all walking along nice and quietly.
- 39:30 That's their way of life, it's different. I think they are well schooled before they get out here too. Not to be running around and singing out and playing up. But they looked so well, they looked so nice and neat in comparison. It changed
- 40:00 my attitude a little bit when I saw the kids, it was only the kids.
- How do you feel about Japanese now of your generation? The older Japanese?**
- Time has healed a lot. I wasn't very happy with them fifty years ago.
- 40:30 But you could do nothing about it. I drive a Japanese car, and this is probably Japanese, so Germany and Japan finished up the two most wealthy countries after the war. American put all of the money into Japan.
- 41:00 And they were using the cheap labour. Those two countries prospered more than any other country out of the war.
- Probably the two most peaceful nations as well. We had better stop there that's the end of the tape.**

## Tape 7

- 00:31 **Okay now when you were doing patrol duties around the beach area in WA, which would have been a few places, did you notice any suspicious characters at all?**
- Yeah, one old bloke up at the mouth of the Greenough River. He was a bloke about seven foot high,
- 01:00 very tall bloke, well over six foot. And we used to see him, mostly at night, down around the beach. And I don't know whether it was sort of because we were keeping our eye out for something or something like that. Or he might have had traps in fishing or something like that. But he was always dressed in
- 01:30 an old jumper, he always had a black coat on. And he might have been a bit funny or something too. But that's the only bloke that I ever saw and somebody reported him anyhow. I don't know where he got to but we lost sight of him then for a while. Well not for a while, we never seen him again then.
- 02:00 Nobody ever said that, you know we thought he might have been flashing lights or something like that.
- So did you find out what it was all about?**
- No we never heard anymore about him because we moved on. There was a house there at the mouth of the Greenough River, a family lived there and I think he lived with them. And these people they were, I
- 02:30 suppose they saw a chance of making a few shillings on the side, so you could go to their house and buy apple pies, you know cakes. I never ever went there but I saw the apple pies. So I
- 03:00 take it myself that he was a part of the family that lived there in the house. Because we saw the others, there was a young girl there that we used to see rowing the boat around. I don't think anybody reported her, I think they were all quite happy to see her. But anyhow we reported the old bloke. He could have been the girl's father I don't know.
- 03:30 But he was suspicious.
- What did you find the difference was between people from your part of Victoria and WA? What were the people in WA like?**
- Good. I think they were very similar to people from the country. There was
- 04:00 one spot where we were camped, there was a farm nearby. And somebody went up there to see if they

could buy some eggs. And it appears that there was a woman living there with her mother, and the woman's husband was away with the army. I think he was overseas, and those women

04:30 I don't know how it would have come about. They arranged that we, they used to drive a horse and buggy into Geraldton, we would have somebody that would meet them where the roads met, the one that we were on and the one that they came along. And if we wanted anything in Geraldton they would buy it for us and then we would meet them when they came back. It was just like having

05:00 a brother or a sister or something. She was old, the other. I don't know what the daughter was like. I never had the money to get them to buy me anything so I didn't. And there was another crowd that was living in the house. The battalion that was there before us, they apparently gave them a hard time.

05:30 I don't know what to tell you they were, but they were very wary of us for a start. You know they would disappear and somebody went there one time to talk and they were telling them that they were frightened, that they had had a hard time with the crowd that was there. But anyway they had no trouble with us.

**What did you find that was different about the people in WA?**

06:00 **Anything peculiar?**

No, I thought they were all very nice. They were very friendly and they were quite glad that we were there. Because they didn't have that big a population over there and most of the blokes had joined the AIF

06:30 and they were sort of left, and that's why they rushed us over there in such a hurry. All of a sudden the Japs had come down through Java and here was WA left unprotected. Because most of their own blokes were overseas. So they were quite happy that we were there. They made us welcome.

07:00 They were good.

**Did you get a chance to fraternise with Aborigines?**

No not aborigines. Only one place, we went for a march inland from Geraldton to a well.

07:30 This well was on a cattle track where the cattle were taken to the market, they used to drove them down this road. When I say drove I don't mean drove them in a car. You know what I mean, I mean letting them find their own way along the road. And they had these wells at certain spots. And at

08:00 each well they had a house and there was a family or something living in that and they used to look after this well, keep it in condition, more or less caretakers. So we marched to this place, about fifty mile inland, because it was a hundred mile march we done.

08:30 And when we got to the homestead that was near this well, the section I was in we went very close to this house. And two or three little kiddies came out, and it was pitiful to see them. They had, what do you call it with the eyes?

09:00 You know conjunctivitis. Their eyes were red and runny, the poor little buggers. It was bloody pitiful to see them. Anyhow we went over to the house then to have a yarn, it was this bloke and his wife there, and they weren't old. They were say thirty to thirty-five

09:30 something like that. Because they had these, you know the kids were about seven or eight, something like that. And we said to them about the kiddies' eyes, you know, we knew that our RAP would have this archibald [?] that they used to drop into your eyes if you used to have this thing. And "Would you like that we get

10:00 one of them to come over and have a look at it?" and oh they were real happy. Anyhow we got onto the bloke in the RAP and two of us took him back there that evening, had to go about a mile back. They had the house away from the well because of the smell from where the cows

10:30 crapped around the area. Anyway we got talking to them then, and I said, "What do you do? What do you do here? How do you live out here like this?" "Oh", they said, "we go cray fishing every weekend." I thought, "Jesus, this bloke is not only bloody blind, he is stupid." And I said, "Cray fishing? Where would you go cray fishing?"

11:00 He said, "Oh, it is only a hundred and fifty mile over to Jurien Bay or some place." That was that. They go there to go cray fishing on the weekend and they couldn't look after their kids' eyes. Anyhow we gave them some stuff, left some cotton wool and things. Never ever saw them again. They weren't aboriginal, but they were living like them, you know like we see in the.

11:30 But only, we didn't get away from the coast, only on the odd occasion like that when we went into this. That was when we had the bivouac with the American planes and we had a live shoot half way out to this well.

**When you were in Geraldton, were you aware of the Japanese pearl divers?**

- 12:00 Yes. Well yeah I was aware of the pearl divers, but also made a couple of trips on a pearl diving boat. There was talk of us going up to Timor to pick up some of the wounded blokes that were up there.
- 12:30 They were trying to get some of the commando blokes on there and they were thinking about sending up a schooner [three-masted sailing vessel]; is that what they call them? To get some of them off. And they were going to send a couple of army blokes on it. And if these sail planes, if one of them come down near it, it would have to be
- 13:00 put down in the hold and covered over with old pearl shells so the Japs wouldn't find it. Anyway we did a couple of trips up the coast on one of these boats, we had to practice landing in surf. Now to me and a couple of blokes I was with, that didn't worry us because that's all we did out here as kids.
- 13:30 Play in the surf, we would go out in anything at all; we could all swim like fish. So the first trip we went up, beautiful Saturday afternoon, fairly rough surf. And they dropped this little dinghy over the side, and this little, I think he was a Philippino; he was to take us in the boat.
- 14:00 And I think we had a Tommy gun [Thompson sub-machine gun], we had our boots off and tied around our neck and away we go, and this little bloke was in charge of the boat and I think it was the first time he had ever been in one. Because he never had any idea of keeping the front of the boat facing the, you know to ride it in like a surfboard. As soon as we got in, he
- 14:30 turned the boat side on. Of course over went the boat; away went our boots, the Tommy gun. We got to the shore all right, it wasn't that deep. And we looked around, no Philippino, so he is floundering out in the bloody sea, he couldn't swim. He could dive in all right, he couldn't swim, we had to go out and get him. Anyhow we had one more go, we got up there it was too rough they wouldn't...

15:00 anyhow it fell through. So yeah, we saw the pearling ships.

**But not the Japanese pearl divers?**

No, because they were all up at Broome.

**You knew about them at the time?**

Oh yes.

**What happened to them? Do you know what happened to them during the war? Were they interned?**

Oh I'd say that they would have had to have been although a lot of them had been out here that long

- 15:30 that they were more Australian than they were Japanese I think. But still they wouldn't have been able to take the risk and leave them running around. Because they interned a lot of people in Carrington, the place you are going to tomorrow or the next day.

**They were interned in Carrington? The Germans? In the Second World War?**

Some of them were taken from there. Not a lot of them because they were all, some of them were there

- 16:00 from the First [World] War, been interned then I think.

**Were there internment camps around here? Warrnambool?**

No nothing around here.

**Hamilton?**

No I think most of them were up in New South Wales. There was one the Japs were in up there where they rioted and quite a few of them got shot.

**Cowra.**

- 16:30 **Now what about, I am not sure, I think when you were a hygiene officer, did you ever come across people who were in a suicidal state?**

Yeah. We had one bloke, used to come to the hospital; I'd say he used to come at least once a week. He was in the unit I was in. And he

- 17:00 complained about these stomach pains, and they sent him everywhere. They sent him; he even finished up at the Hollywood Hospital, which as I said was the Heidelberg Hospital of Perth. He got sent to all of the little places around Fremantle and that and then they finally sent him up there. And they couldn't find out what, they done everything. Anyhow I never ever seen him after it

- 17:30 but I heard that one morning they heard a shot, and the blokes that were on guard on the gate reckoned that it came from the road that ran along in front of the camp, and then it was the sea. So if you walked out the gate across the road kept going, you were in the water. And this is what he done, he walked out into the water and shot himself. And I never ever heard whether they found anything with him or not.

- 18:00 But he must have reckoned he had cancer or I don't know. He shot himself. Another bloke, a bloke when I got the job and was sent to the school and that, was the bloke, his name was Sergeant Rose, a little Scotsman, came from Sydney. And he was the hygiene man in the group that I was going to take over. And
- 18:30 he was a bit fond of the booze and when he got full in the camp canteen and went down to the road to get the bus into Fremantle, and it didn't look like it was going to stop, so he ran out in front and put his hands up. Straight over the bloody top of him, killed him. So he ran out trying to stop the bus.
- 19:00 But yeah there were blokes, I wouldn't know if they were trying to get out of the army and that. But they were always in sick parade. I mean, the second bloke I am not saying he committed suicide, he did, but he never meant to do it. The first bloke did, he shot

19:30 himself.

**When you were trained as a hygiene sergeant?**

I never qualified as sergeant, I passed I qualified, but I got sent home, they gave me one stripe and the other two were still coming.

**You had to do a five-week course in Melville didn't you?**

Yes.

**What sort of things did they train you in?**

20:00 I have got the three textbooks.

**Can you tell us what it was for the sake of the camera, what the basic course encompassed?**

Water treatment.

**Water treatment?**

Oh yes and water filtration.

20:30 There was malaria, VD, general housekeeping as you call it. Disposal of rubbish, disposal of refuse, layout of the camp.

21:00 You know where you would have you different ablutions and horse feeder, if you had horses where they were to drink. Fly control, mosquito control - that was one of the main things because of the malaria.

**Were there any crocodiles around that area at all?**

No no crocodiles.

**In WA?**

21:30 Not that I know of unless they were right up top. But I don't think so, too tidal.

**After completing this course you said you requested a transfer to PNG [Papua New Guinea] because you were absolutely sick of?**

22:00 Fremantle, sick of Fremantle. And there was, you know, what was I doing? Doing nothing and all of this. Especially when they brought home these troops from overseas, and they were already corporals, the units overseas when they come back here when they were

22:30 getting disbanded or dispersed to strengthen other units. And this crowd that I was with, there was two sent there. Medical orderlies, and they only carry two in that unit. So I was there doing the same work as them, and I think they were happy leaving me there doing that, the powers that be. But I was, I felt you know that I was

23:00 (UNCLEAR). Anyhow I just asked for that, and they knocked me back because of the difference in our health categories. He's still going anyhow, he is eighty-seven now and he is still alive. And he's just hanging on.

**And it was at that point where the war was winding up in '44?**

Yeah.

23:30 Well it was getting back away from here. There was still a lot in Iwo Jima and islands up near Japan, Okinawa, that's where the... what do they call those blokes? Kamikaze pilots? They nearly wrecked the American fleet those blokes.

24:00 You know it was finished more or less this way. The European war was over.

**Can you tell us what you recall of VE [Victory in Europe] Day? How did you react to VE Day?**

No I just can't remember it to be honest with you because it was

24:30 you know it didn't mean much to us. VP was the one, Victory in the Pacific, that's what we were looking for so VE Day didn't mean much to us. Because it was just a foregone conclusion, once they got a foothold in France and the

25:00 bombing; the relentless bombing of Dresden and Hamburg and those places.

**So it was pretty meaningless to most of the people around you?**

It was, but VP Day was different, we all let our hair down that time.

**Tell us how you celebrated VP Day?**

25:30 As soon as we got the word over at work, they blew the whistle and said, "You can all go home, make sure you are back tomorrow. Have a good day." So we did. Went into Warrnambool, I was living out here then. Oh we were all in at Warrnambool and stayed there. And I played the old

26:00 button accordion because I had that with me. And we were dancing and so forth in the streets that night. I don't know what time we got home. But yeah we had a quite pleasant day. So did everybody else.

**Lots of drinking?**

Yeah.

26:30 The worst part about it was that at that time beer was very scarce. You could go to a pub and get as much wine as you liked. I didn't drink wine. We would have a sip of wine at home or something like that, but I wouldn't go into a pub and ask for a bottle of wine or a glass of wine or something like that.

27:00 So no we didn't drink that much because it wasn't available really.

**Now were you corresponding with your family and your wife from WA?**

Yeah my wife.

**How often would you write?**

Oh once a week,

27:30 sometimes twice. Mainly once a week. We kept pretty close relationship.

**Were you upset in any way at not serving overseas?**

Well at the time I suppose not so much but now I often wish I had have been over there at

28:00 different times. I wish that I could have got that shift over to New Guinea, mainly because the war was nearly over of course. But I wasn't looking to kill anybody or for anybody to kill me. I went wherever I was sent without any, you know, "I am not going to go there,

28:30 or I want to go somewhere else." I just took what was there. That's all you could do, go where you were sent. I had no choice that we were going to Fremantle. I was just told one day you are getting transferred to another unit and the next day that unit went on the boat and we were gone that

29:00 night. So we accepted it.

**So after the victory against Japan, what took place the next day?**

29:30 Well I didn't go back to work. I missed a couple of days. And when I went back to work the following week they went to dock me. Anyway I put up a protest, I told them I was sick, sick leave so long as you notify payroll.

30:00 So I got paid. But they weren't going to pay me.

**How long after that was it you went back to Melbourne? After VJ [Victory over Japan] Day?**

I wouldn't have a clue to be honest. Like I didn't live in Melbourne or anything.

**No, what I meant was from WA to Melbourne?**

30:30 **Your discharge? Were you sent back to Caulfield Racecourse, demobilised?**

Well we got into Melbourne on the Saturday morning, and I don't know how, I just forget now, we were taken to the Caulfield Race Course, and when we got there, there was no one there. Couple of blokes on the gate, there must have been somebody in the office. They just said this place is closed down.

31:00 And they gave us a leave pass then to report back to Royal Park on the Monday morning at nine o'clock. And so I had a sister living down there, and I had a mate from Warrnambool with me on the boat, and I said, "You may as well come with me". He had no one to go to over the weekend. So he came and stayed at my sister's house for the

- 31:30 weekend too. And we got up on the Monday morning, and we still had all of our gear. We had our kit bags, rifles, everything. And when we were getting on the boat at Fremantle, they were taking the rifles and that off everyone there. And I had taken my gear onto the boat,
- 32:00 and I had to come back to this desk, and they gave me a receipt for the rifle, and I had the rifle with me on the boat. So I brought it home and when I got here I left it at my sister's place. And when we got out there then on the morning, we had to go to a
- 32:30 room anyway. You'd have to toss, you would say, "Haversack" [small pack] and there was a bloke there ticking off what you were throwing in. Because we didn't have half of what we were supposed to have, we'd throw the strap over and sing

- 33:00 out, whatever you call it, "Ammunition things"; of course, he didn't look up, he would just tick it off.

**Bandoliers?**

Bandolier type things. So anyhow we got rid of all of the gear we did have and we got a receipt for everything we didn't have too. And when he said about the rifle I said, "Well there is the receipt I got over in Western Australia". Well anyhow he said, "That's good enough for me."

- 33:30 So anyhow then we went around to where they were taking you in to discharge you. And they said, "You two blokes," sung out our names. We were about half an hour late getting back that morning. They said, "You have been given a job to do because you were late back."
- 34:00 So my job was to walk from the counter, the bloke looking at, pulling a heap of papers out of a pigeon hole, and he would look at it and sing out a name, and I would have to walk over to the window and sing out, 'Private da Silva' and he would jump up and come in, and he would get the papers and away he would go. And he would go through all of the rigmarole you have got to go through, you know get a medical,
- 34:30 and take you to the pay office, and take you here, take you there, and to finish up they give you a hat and a suit and kick you out the gate. So this went on for a while, and all of the blokes were sitting out on the grass and it came morning tea time. And they said, "Well just pull the window down now, we're going to stop for a half an hour". So I called the other bloke in, I said, "Come in here for a minute". So I pulled the window down,
- 35:00 and I walked over to the counter and I said, "Can you see a Drew and a Connellan up there in those things?" And he said, "Yeah there is." And I said, "Well give us them will you? Those blokes are right out there" and he said, "Well it's no skin off my nose." So he gave me our papers and we joined the queue and we were gone. We were supposed to be there all day but it finished up about an hour later, we were on our way into Melbourne. So that's how we got our discharge so quick.

- 35:30 **Were you happy to get discharged?**

Oh yeah get out and then get home then.

**How did you get back to Warrnambool from Melbourne?**

Probably on the train I can't remember now. We didn't have a car.

- 36:00 Would have been on the train because my wife was working then too. She was staying at my sister's place when I came back.

**You hadn't seen your wife for two years?**

Yep.

**Was it an emotional homecoming?**

Oh yes.

**Tell us about your homecoming?**

Oh well, she didn't know what day we were getting in, we didn't know ourselves.

- 36:30 All I knew we left Fremantle on the Saturday and I rang up, I forget what I done, but she knew I was on my way home then. But anyhow she was at my sister's when I came home. No questions asked either way and that's the way it was left ever since. That was in 1944.

- 37:00 And this is, how many years is that? Would have to be fifty-six wouldn't it?

**Since you came back?**

Yeah.

**It would be sixty-odd years.**



We have been married sixty years.

37:30 Sixty years in '02.

**You got married in '42?**

Yeah.

**That's sixty-two years then.**

There's a photo of us there, in behind the...

**We'll have a look at it after this. Did you have a lot of time to think in WA?**

38:00 **It sounds like some of the work you were doing potentially could be boring in the sense of the routine?**

Yeah.

**Did you find that you were bored?**

Not really no. No. Always something to do, no I wasn't bored. Don't think I was anyhow.

38:30 **You were doing a lot of beach patrolling too weren't you?**

Yeah.

**During that time did you get a chance to think about your life and what you might want to do after the war?**

There was one thing I can always remember, that, one night I was, it was on my twentieth birthday. And I was sitting up on this hill on my own, real moonlight, you could see things moving around

39:00 in the shadows and all this bloody thing. And I thought to myself I wonder will I ever see thirty? You know about this time the Japs were still coming, they reckoned they were anyway. So that's the only time I ever, will I see thirty?

39:30 Here I am going on eighty-two so I have been lucky. I have had, well I had to get my prostate drilled out. That was nothing, that was quite simple really. And I have got a couple of polyps in here, that they are too big

40:00 for them to take out with electric wire, they are just going to leave them there and see what happens, leave them there as long as they possibly can. So cross my fingers and hope for the best.

**We'll stop there because we are just about to run out of tape.**

## Tape 8

00:30 **Before I get to that, I want to ask you about your leave, you did have some leave, forty-four days roughly leave after your discharge. Tell us what happened, what did you do?**

Well I don't really remember. I don't know whether I

01:00 had the time or I went back to work early. Having that leave, Nestlé's didn't care. I could have started work the next day at Nestlé's as far as they were concerned. I got paid for the leave as a lump sum; as I signed off they paid me for those leave days. And they paid me what they called subsistence, when you went on leave

01:30 you got so much a day to pay for your food. So I got that.

**How much did you get paid?**

There's the paperwork.

02:00 Looks like two hundred and ninety one dollars.

**That's pounds is it?**

Yeah, sorry, pounds.

**That's a lot**

02:30 **of money for that period.**

Yeah. I might have got more, deferred pay, interest, the last three figures there.

**Four hundred and sixty two pounds?**

03:00 That's a progressive total, right through the book I think. Is that four hundred?

**For a second I thought you got eight hundred pounds then you would have been a very lucky man. So this accumulated leave and payment, how did it help your life in the post-war stage?**

03:30 Well when I came home we were able to buy enough furniture to furnish a house as far as we wanted to go: bedroom suite and lounge suite and kitchen. I know I done that, I furnished the house and so forth. I just don't

04:00 remember whether we, we certainly didn't go away anywhere, I had been away for two years; I didn't need another bloody holiday.

**Were you getting homesick?**

I sort of got used to being there.

04:30 Because the last three or four months was probably the busiest time since I had been over there. I was going to this course, we were moving from one camp to another and I had changed units.

05:00 I had this experience of pulling this bloke out, you know the fellow that crashed beside us with the fire in his plane and we got him out. So I had my hands full at the time with what was going on.

05:30 **What about Australia as your country, did it matter to you at the end of the war more than empire?**

Yes I would say it did yes.

**Tell us why?**

Well it was where I was living, where I worked. I had to raise a family. I had no

06:00 inclination at all of going to England for a holiday. I was quite happy here in Australia. So England meant nothing to me really.

**What about the British Empire?**

Yeah I liked to say it,

06:30 but it didn't mean that much to me either because there was nowhere I wanted to go to see. I reckoned I was in the best place.

**Do you think empire meant security? Is that what you mean when you say that? That the British Empire as an idea meant security to you, to Australians?**

07:00 No I think I have lost that. I think I have sort of become more happy to see us tied to America. Because America is close by. We wanted help and we got it didn't we? Of course America was helping themselves

07:30 too, but we are too far away from England to expect them to be able to help us if we got into trouble. Of course at that time we thought we're right, we are not going to get into any more trouble now. We got rid of, there is nobody else bar China, of course China was on her knees then too

08:00 because the Chinese-Japanese war had gone on for that many years that they weren't going to fight at the time. We didn't think India had any sort of expansion. No, the Empire really doesn't mean anything to me anymore.

08:30 **What about the monarchy? Did it mean anything to you at the end of the war?**

No.

**What about now? Does it mean anything to you now?**

No just a waste of bloody good money. They have got enough of their own over there.

**You're for a republic are you?**

09:00 I'll vote for a republic, but I wouldn't go up the street and tell everybody that they should go for a republic instead. I think the days of the monarchy are drawing to a close.

**Did you feel part of the Anzac tradition?**

09:30 No I didn't think. When I hear people say 'Anzac', I think of Gallipoli, no I didn't, those fellows they were awful unlucky. And they were brave and I don't know how they lasted eight months.

10:00 But what a waste of life it was. It's like, you know they say the heroes of Dunkirk, but Dunkirk in my book was an honourable bloody defeat.

- 10:30 I don't know why the Germans stopped and let them out. I think Hitler was expecting to get the British over with him in the fight against Russia, that's what he was hoping for. I don't know.
- 11:00 **Were you affiliated with the RSL after the war?**
- Yeah I joined the RSL. It's cost me thirty bucks a year ever since.
- You still are?**
- Yeah I am still a member. There is still some good people in the RSL and they look after the kids of the members, have Legacy and all of that type of thing. That's why I sort of think,
- 11:30 well any money I put into them, it is going to a purpose, they make good use of it.
- How did you find yourself fraternising with soldiers who had actually been in battle?**
- 12:00 Didn't worry me.
- Did you find a problem connecting with them?**
- No not one bit. They were like me; they went where they were told. Unfortunately for them they were in the wrong place; there but for the grace of God, alive.
- 12:30 **What do you think the differences are as a result of their experiences? Like for instance the soldiers that served in Tobruk or in Papua New Guinea or the islands?**
- Some of them gloat in the fact that they were there and sort of look at everyone else who wasn't there as "You're not in the same class as me". It doesn't worry me, I say, "Good luck to you."
- 13:00 **Do you come across that?**
- Oh nobody has ever said that but I do get the impression off some of the fellows. Just their demeanour, but nobody has ever said anything. But they are, I give them credit too, I say they have done well, those blokes.
- 13:30 **Did you tell your children about the war, about your experiences?**
- Never in any detail or anything like that. And our two sons would bloody laugh if I started telling them anything like that. They reckon I was only on
- 14:00 holidays.
- Do you think World War II was a just war? Then and now?**
- Well it was more or less forced on us. We weren't the aggressors in either one.
- 14:30 The Germans invaded Czechoslovakia and Poland and they went to Belgium and France. I mean they were the aggressors there; they were the ones that wanted to expand. They took back the Ruhr, that was taken off them, their industrial area,
- 15:00 so whether they had a cause to want that area. But the Japanese was a different show all together. They too were starved of minerals and oil and things like that. But I think they could have got it with negotiation. And if they had opened themselves up, a bit
- 15:30 more open to the world, not sticking so much to themselves, closing the, you know. But it is hard for people; we don't understand their culture. Every country has their own way they think they should live and I suppose they are entitled to it.
- Are your memories of the war the strongest memories you have?**
- 16:00 You know I do think about it a lot. And I like meeting old mates that I went to school with and played and we talk
- 16:30 about our experiences and so forth and laugh over them. I suppose it is a big thing in your life to, like even if you don't get into the fighting, the actual fighting. If you're in an area where it, as I say you are just lucky that
- 17:00 you don't get into the actual fighting part. They seem to think that only three percent of the armed forces become in actual combat. So there is an awful lot of people who went into the war and didn't do anything
- 17:30 isn't there? Because it takes so many people to have a fighting unit in the position where the war is. There is so many other people that,
- Support it, you are saying?**
- Support that's what, somebody told me that when they

18:00 were talking to us early in the war. Only three per cent of people that are in the armed forces actually get into combat.

**Did you dream about the war?**

Not really no. Often I might dream that I am talking to somebody but it has never worried me.

18:30 I only think of the good parts.

**Not the hygiene parts.**

No not like the bloke in Northampton. It was hot, very hot, no shelter, so we got this big post-hole digger and we dug a

19:00 round deep trench, latrines we called it. Board down, and we built a little cover over it, and it was the only place in the camp that you had a bit of shade. And this bloke was, she started to fill up and this bloke was given the job of, I gave him a four gallon drum of petrol and told him to tip a little bit in,

19:30 and drop a match down. Anyhow he must have, he couldn't have understood what was said because he tipped the four gallon drum in and dropped a match down. We have still got this on, haven't we? Well there was faeces for about an acre and a half. It just exploded, and of course there was only one place it could go, it

20:00 came up and it was like an oil geyser. Up went the whole bloody lot, away went the only bit of shade we had, He nearly got discharged from the army that night. He blew up the shit house.

20:30 Next question please.

**Did you notice the physical beauty of the places you had served in? WA, for instance, the environment, tell us about the environment? Wildlife?**

Well the wild flowers were very nice, especially the

21:00 kangaroo paw. I think one of the nicest sights I seen while I was over there was when they brought the 9th Division home to Australia; they had the Queen Mary, the Queen Elizabeth and the Aquitania, three of the biggest boats in the world. And I was on a hill near Fremantle

21:30 They couldn't fit into the harbour, the Fremantle harbour. They were in what they called Garden Island, where the American submarines were. And those three boats were anchored, a beautiful sight. The day was magnificent, and to look out and see those three boats and to know that they were bringing troops home.

22:00 You know, so it was a wonderful sight to see.

**The entire 9th Division was on those three ships?**

Oh well when I say entire, I suppose it would be entire. It takes a lot of troops to get a fighting unit, so all of those other blokes would be on there too. Transport companies and medical companies,

22:30 the hygiene inspectors.

**Mobile bath units.**

Yeah it was a great sight to see.

**Speaking of which, which division were you attached to?**

The 4th.

**The 4th militia or AIF division?**

It was a militia division.

**But then it was converted to AIF?**

Yeah. Because a greater percentage of the troops finished up AIF so...

23:00 **On that topic, there was a division between the AIF soldiers and the choccos, tell us about that?**

Well it disappeared. It disappeared after New Guinea. The 8th Division was an AIF Division, they ran right over the top of them, they captured

23:30 whoever they didn't kill or escaped back to Australia, they killed them. That Division was wiped clean out. And then they came down and they wiped out the 2/2nd Battalion, they were an AIF Battalion, they were on Rabaul. And all these various units

24:00 that were on Ambon and so forth right down there. And they got to New Guinea and they went to come across the Kokoda Trail, and the first mob they struck was the 39th Battalion and they were a militia

unit, and that was the first time that the Japanese were defeated and pushed back.

24:30 Every other place they had been to, they took it. And they were all AIF units. So choccos was forgotten about. Because the only unit that defeated the Japanese; the first unit to defeat them was the 39th Battalion. And that was a Victorian regiment. Quite a few of them

25:00 are still here too. So that was an end to the choccos, it was never heard of after that.

**Were you ever, did anyone ever say things like that to you when you were in the militia?**

No. Never. Would have got a smack in the ear if they did.

**That's the spirit. What about white feathers?**

25:30 No, I had heard about them but never seen them.

**What had you heard about them?**

Oh I heard that there were different people, then I heard that a wife would get the feather posted to her and she would already have a letter from the government saying her husband was missing in action. The people that sent the white feather wouldn't know about that. That was completely disgusting and obscene.

26:00 **That was used a lot in the First World War too?**

Yeah, apparently so.

**Especially against a lot of the Irish?**

Yeah because the Irish, they were neutral in this war too, weren't they. And you had to go out and kill half a dozen kids before tea. If they were Protestants, or if they were Catholics, something like that. It was fifty-fifty.

26:30 And all over religion.

**Did you know any mates that got white feathers?**

No never knew of any.

**How would you have reacted if you had received a white feather at that time?**

Well I don't know. I don't think it would have made any difference to me. I certainly don't, I don't let myself get pushed around.

27:00 If I want to do something I'll do it, and if I don't want to do it, there is no one will bloody make me. Simple as that. And if I found out who it was, I would let them know.

**Did anyone receive one in WA, any of your mates?**

No. No I don't think they were ever sent to, as far as I know.

27:30 They were only sent to people who weren't in anything. I don't think any of the choco people got a white feather.

**AIF fellows got white feathers in Tobruk. Through the mail**

God, I never knew.

**Sounds like a spiteful sort of thing rather than,**

Yeah, yeah.

28:00 **Did you forge strong friendships?**

Yeah I did.

**In WA with your mates, your unit, 6th Battalion?**

Yeah I did.

**Who are your mates? Tell us about these friendships you forged?**

Well I have got their photos in here. The main one was Jim McDonough, he was a local bloke that I knew. He used to race the bikes when I was racing.

28:30 We were very good friends, and we stayed friends, Jim only died five or six years ago now, sudden death too. But we were friends forever when we came home too. And there was another fellow Cashton Fitzgerald. Cashton Fitzgerald played about a hundred and fifty games

29:00 with Hawthorn. Cash's dead too. He died. Another bloke named Les Scott, he played for the Richmond Under Nineteens before the war, and when he came back, he went coaching and he finished up

coaching back at Bacchus Marsh. Him and his mother, she won some money on Tattersall, used to be. And they bought a mixed business in

29:30 Bacchus Marsh. His father had died. He is still alive and he comes down and sees me every year. I haven't been up there, I don't know why. But he comes down here because his wife came from, of all things, we met in the army and after we came home, I just don't know the full story of where they met. He met this girl who

30:00 worked at Nestlé's with me. And he married her. So every year they come down and she goes around and sees all of her friends and family and so forth and he comes here, and we go down the pub. Ian Johnson, he is still alive up at Winslow. We have been friends ever since. They were the main ones. We were all in the one unit, the one section.

30:30 **Obviously friendship was important to you, how would you relate to your mates when you were in WA? What sort of things would you discuss generally, you didn't go to combat so you were in a defensive role, a totally different environment, how would that**

31:00 **impact on the friendships you had?**

Oh well I think a lot of it was companionship. We just, it was someone to talk to, someone to confide in or listen to their confessions. It was just someone to put your head on their shoulder or put your head, you know.

31:30 And we were all friends with one another's families too. Like I knew Fitzgerald's family well, I knew McDonough's family well, I knew Johnson's family well. I knew his wife, who he married.

**They were all local boys from here?**

32:00 No Fitzgerald came from Inglewood. Scotty came from, some part of Richmond I think it was. He is in Bacchus Marsh now and he has been there since not long after the war.

**As far as conversations were concerned and topics of discussion, what sort of things could you relate to them on? You know I am talking about, things of substance in that regard?**

32:30 Sport for a start. We were all sporting minded. None of them had, I was the only married one, the others all had girlfriends but they weren't married at the time. I don't know just what was

33:00 going on. Survival I suppose. That we were all of the one mind, of keeping ourselves fit and not crying on one another's shoulder. We were supportive of one another rather than saying, "Oh bad luck, we're here" or "Bad luck, we're there" or whatever.

33:30 "We're going to go here" or "I wish we weren't going". That despondency or depression never came into it. We were always, I don't know what the word is. We were always satisfied with what we were doing. We took it as, that's

34:00 it and we have just got to make the best of it and we did.

**When you were hygiene officer, well not officer,**

See the thing is, when this bloke got ran over, I just carried on what he was doing. I just used to go down to the

34:30 water treatment plant and put the chemicals in it that made it settle and so forth and let the overflow run off. And see that the, they had a hygiene squad, different parts of the unit had to supply a squad for a week or whatever it was. And I just had to go around and see

35:00 that they had done their, emptied the urinal pans that were left out overnight. See that all of the grease traps were cleaned out and fresh straw in them. If they weren't, then I would have to go and rustle up somebody, whoever their duty officer was, to get it done. I didn't have to do it or anything; I just had to make a noise, like a squeaky wheel.

35:30 And...

**Throughout your service in WA did you ever notice I suppose, what's it called? Homosexuality?**

36:00 No I often think about that. I mainly think about it when I see the little humpies we were living in Geraldton, and I said to McDonough a few times after we came home, the little one we had was just his ground sheet and my ground sheet made into a little, we would cut down the branch of an old tree or something and make a little. And we each had our side.

36:30 And we would only go in there to sleep at night. I often said to him, "By gees, I hope people don't get the wrong bloody idea when they see the little pink tent we were camping in." But no, I can say that I never ever seen any homosexuality in our mob. I can't say for the whole lot, because I only saw the actual lot that were living together.

37:00 And never heard of any. Because I think if it had gone on, someone would have had to notice it but no I

didn't.

**You never heard through the grapevine of any homosexual behaviour?**

No I didn't. I heard of plenty of blokes getting out and visiting the aerodromes where the WAAAF [Women's Auxiliary Australian Air Force] were. And where the AWAS, Australian Women's Army Service, were.

37:30 **Where was this in Fremantle? Or Geraldton as well?**

Oh everywhere. Geraldton. See there was a big air force drome in Geraldton. And the biggest one near Perth was Pearce, P-E-A-R-C-E. That was like Laverton, it was close.

38:00 There was a lot of,

**So a lot of the chaps used to go and visit the girls?**

Oh yeah. The girls used to go and visit the chaps. The girls they were marvellous, those

38:30 WAAAF, the duties they carried out with the signals and all that. They were all pretty smart, you know. You didn't get into the WAAAF to clean out toilets and things like that. When you went into the WAAAF you went in as a pretty important person, pretty smart.

39:00 The WRANS [Women's Royal Australian Navy Service], navy girls, wasn't so many of those because we didn't have a big navy, and they didn't have that much for them to do. But the WAAAF, there was a lot for them, they were on the searchlights. They were a pretty important mob. Nurses.

39:30 **Speaking of which, not all chaps would have had a chance to see women all of the time because of the isolation of places. Did some chaps find it difficult to cope?**

40:00 **The absence of women in their life, or having a girlfriend home in Victoria or New South Wales whatever?**

No I can't think of anybody that caused any trouble. A lot of them

40:30 you know the steel helmet they used to wear, they would scratch their girlfriend's name on the front of it and so forth. This Jim McDonough, this great friend of mine, went with a girl who lived down in South Warrnambool. She was a twin. I forget her name; anyway he had her name scratched on the front of his helmet. He got a letter to say that she had met up with some other bloke and, you know, they weren't

41:00 engaged or anything like that. So he just turned the bloody hat around and he wrote the other girl, the other twin's name on it. He was just as sweet on her as he was on the other one.

**He believes in reserves?**

Yeah that's right.

**Well we're basically running out of time now, so I would like to ask you personally if there is anything**

41:30 **you haven't said to me or Colin [interviewer] for the historical record that you should say because this is our last chance to get it recorded. I would really like you to tell us.**

Well I don't think there is anything really, I think I have told you all I know and probably a bit I have made up.

**Any deep dark secrets you want to...?**

42:00 No, no.