Australians at War Film Archive

Charles Lovett (Chiller) - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:41 You want me to start off, my name or...?

No, just tell us about your early days, your childhood days, where you were born.

Well I was born in Camperdown, Victoria, on the twenty-ninth of June 1917. And

01:00 we were currently on a property out at Pomborneit, which is about nine or ten miles actually from Camperdown and as you can imagine, 1917, it was mainly horse-drawn carriages. I went to school at Pomborneit up until I was about eight or nine years old.

01:30 When we moved share farming to a property out at Kariah which is about six miles from Pomborneit where I was a senior student at about ten years old. And from there we moved down to Pomborneit North again, share farming, where I finished my school days when I was about twelve and a half.

02:00 And from there on I just went labouring and milking cows and from Camperdown, ah, rather, Pomborneit North we eventually finished up share farming on a property just outside Camperdown. And I was about sixteen when

02:30 the City of Geelong Regiment decided to form companies in the CMF [Citizens Military Force] up along the coast—Colac, Camperdown, Terang and Warrnambool. And in 1934 I suppose we were loyalists and this

03:00 battalion being formed, a company was decided to be formed including Terang and Camperdown combined, which was C Company. It was called the 23/ 21st City of Geelong Regiment. And I've got to say that

03:30 most young blokes in the district joined. And I'm speaking of Colac, Camperdown, Terang and Warrnambool and they were really strong units. In 1934 we formed the guard of, one of the guards of honour for the Duke of Gloucester who came out to Portland for the

04:00 Centenary of Portland Celebrations. And C Company Camperdown was part of the guard of honour for that visit by the duke. I must add it was a great job. During his tour up the city, our job was to hold the crowds back off the roads and

04:30 fortunately enough where I was, there was three or four young Sheilas or girls and we had a great time holding them back while the duke passed by. I joined when I was sixteen because I wanted to get away to camp. And that first camp was at Lara, just out of Geelong.

05:00 And we were billeted in houses, I suppose you'd call them commission houses today. And it was a pretty rugged camp, it was in summer time and it rained and I can remember walking in and out of the house, we had mud on the floor about six inches deep. And the officers gave a prize for the

05:30 cleanest house when we left and C Company Camperdown got the cup for having the cleanest house from the Lara camp. After that in the CMF we used to have a bivouac once a year, the whole battalion and brigade.

06:00 And we went to Seymour two or three times, Ballarat once and where else? Oh I was detached and went down the peninsula with one of the Melbourne regiments because I couldn't get away to the,

06:30 my own camp. This is all as I was in the ranks, only a private in these days. And I might say here that when the company was formed in Camperdown, Colonel Godfrey was the CO [Commanding Officer] of the 23/21st Battalion.

07:00 And he gave an opening talk to all us civilians as we were at the time and one thing he mentioned was that the yellow races were stirring and this is why they were pressing to increase numbers in the CMF.

Whether that was

07:30 known in those days or not, I'm not sure, but as it turned out he was right.

So let's just go back a bit and find out a little bit more about your early days and what it was like growing up on a farm in the country. Also the

08:00 **First World War was happening when you were born, so I'm curious to know if you had any relatives or if your father had fought in that war.**

Well no, my father didn't, he was exempted from serving and I'm not sure why, I think unfit or because he was a farmer or something, I'm not sure really but he did have a

08:30 screed to say that he was exempted. But I had one uncle who joined, I don't know that he got away, but he was in the Light Horse and I'm not sure whether he got away or not. Between the years of 1934 and 1939 I did all the usual things young blokes did

09:00 in those days. I was chauffeur to an orchestra, we had an old 1926 Dodge car, in which I used to take the orchestra out of an evening to perform—was called the Cuckoo Orchestra, old time. So we had some pretty hairy nights coming home in the fog from various placed like, Peterborough and

09:30 Derinallum where I met my wife at one of these balls. And up until 1939 that's what we used to do, milking cows and driving an orchestra, playing football for Camperdown in the Hamden League. In 1939

10:00 when war broke out, we were called up immediately for guard duty down at Queenscliff. And C Company was billeted on the Queenscliff football ground and we had places like the lighthouse and a beach front on, and

10:30 oh, two or three other points we had to have posts on. By this time I was a sergeant in the CMF and we had a problem with sailors who were working the lighthouse at this particular time. One of the points, we had a guard across the track up to the lighthouse, and these

11:00 sailors used to try and put it over our boys, walk in without the password and what have you. So one night a couple of them tried to do this and one of our blokes put a round up the spout of a rifle and forgotten he'd done this and pressed the trigger and fired a shot out over the lighthouse. I can tell you they gave the password then very promptly, always afterwards.

11:30 From there we handed over to—first war diggers took over our duties there in late 1939 and we were moved down to Mount Martha to do more serious training like digging slit trenches and that kind of thing. And

12:00 whilst down there I was sent away to Seymour to do an officers' training course and from there I was commissioned in 1938. Can we break here, for a moment?

Sure.

I'd like to show you...

Well what was life like in the country, I mean the Depression years? You would have experienced the Depression as a young boy.

It was tough, yeah.

12:30 **But just before we start...**

Well to go back to my boyhood days I suppose you'd call them, I can recall at Pomborneit School in 1928 I think it is, the opening of Parliament House in Canberra, the school

13:00 headmaster at Pomborneit had a little crystal wireless set and we were all lined up outside so as we could hear the opening of parliament in Canberra. I think that was '27 or '28, I'm not too sure, I think it's '28. Yes, we went through the Depression years.

13:30 As I said we were farming, I think butter was fourpence a pound, that's what we were paid for our butter fat. And it was pretty tough. We used to do a lot of rabbiting, my brothers and I. I had two brothers and two sisters, I've only got one sister alive who lives in Maryborough here.

14:00 But in those days we lived a lot on rabbits. And we caught, skinned them, foxes. We had a fair pack of dogs and that was the way we did our weekends really, up until we moved into

14:30 Camperdown. There was a butter factory at Pomborneit North; one of my brothers had a job there for a while. They used to make malt. They're pulled down and gone now, many years ago.

So how big was the farm that you had?

Farm we were on—my father's farm was about a hundred and twenty acres. Mainly

15:00 stones, at the start of the stony rises, Pomborneit is the start of the stony rises, which runs through towards Colac. My brother used to build stone walls, one of my brothers built stone walls, what else can I say?

There are a lot of stone walls, amazing stone walls down there isn't there?

Yes,

15:30 Yes.

They go for miles and miles and miles.

Magnificent, some of them are magnificent walls.

So that provided employment for young men?

Well yes, in a way I suppose it did. Most of the wood walls were built prior to my time. What else can I say about that? From

16:00 Pomborneit North, as I said, we moved into Camperdown onto a property share farming, on which we were milking a hundred cows by hand until 1936 or thereabouts, we put in a milking machine. It would have been probably one of the first to put in milking machine, which was, as you can imagine

16:30 milking from, by hand to machines was magnificent as far as I was concerned. But I used to race off of an evening to go into football practice in Camperdown and I played for Camperdown in the Hamden League until 1938. We won

17:00 the Premiership I think it was in '38, in the Hamden League.

So you worked on the dairy farm…?

Yep, up until the outbreak of war, 1939.

And, but you left school at the age of twelve to go to work on the dairy farm?

That's right, on the dairy farm yeah, yes.

So tell me a bit about what it was like, what was, you know, you'd get up, what time did you get up in the morning and what did you do during the…?

Well, in those days we used to

17:30 get up about five or six o'clock and milk the cows and then you had to take it to the factory, milk to the factory. And during the day you did various farm duties, fencing, that type of thing. And we had some pigs had to be fed and looked after.

18:00 And generally there was always something to do. In 1932 I think we bought this old second-hand 1926 Dodge Tourer, I suppose you could say it was an air flow, because it only had a canvass hood and certainly the

18:30 air flew through it when you were in it. And in those days they only had hand operated windscreen wipers, had to do it by hand. And we had a lot of fun out of that old jalopy.

When you say we, who do you mean?

My brothers and family,

19:00 if they wanted to go anywhere, we went in the old Dodge.

So who did you work with on the farm, on the dairy farm, who was with you?

Well mainly with my eldest brother and father and mother. My other brother, he went out on his own, share farming. And my sisters, they got various jobs,

19:30 house maids. I don't know what else I could tell you about that. Perhaps the farm in Camperdown, where we were milking a hundred cows. We used to milk them and take the milk to the Camperdown Butter Factory, as it was known then. And we would have about twenty cans, twelve

20:00 gallon cans and one to put your milk in. Sampled, weighed, and then you had the job of washing a can, they provided facilities at the butter factory for that. And this was done by horse and cart. And then war broke out.

20:30 And from there on I never went back to farming.

So why did you decide to join the CMF, what was it about it that attracted you?

Well I don't know really, probably everyone was doing, all the young blokes were joining, for various reasons no doubt. Some like myself, a bit of adventure and

21:00 to get away to a camp, break the monotony. And probably a bit of loyalty to the crown I suppose, you would say. And which really happened, as I say, we trained once a week, they had a drill hall in Camperdown which was burned down during the

21:30 war apparently, I'm not sure about the time. But we, as I say, went to Seymour to camps, and Ballarat. Ballarat I'll never forget because we were sleeping on the ground in one of the parks in Ballarat, was our billet. And whilst it was in the middle of summer it was freezing in Ballarat I can remember that.

22:00 And we used to manoeuvre out, where it's all Alfredton, open paddocks it was in those days, and now they're all housing estates and what have you.

Describe a manoeuvre to me, what did you actually do?

Manoeuvring? Well mainly marching out to a position, which

22:30 none of the rank and file knew much about what the strategic part was, I wouldn't think. But we'd go out and dig slit trenches and have a field of fire supposedly which, well all we had was Lewis guns and rifles, and then you'd march home. And I can

23:00 recall marching home one night and one silly bloke pulled his bayonet out and was flicking it between the marching feet. And you can imagine what happened, bang, it goes through one of the other bloke's foot. So you can imagine what he had, explaining to do. I think they were still trying to sort out what had happened when we went off to war, about three

23:30 years later. But we had a great time in those camps, mainly went by train to Seymour, the old camp. The railway siding I think was about four miles and we used to get off the train and have to march to the camp. One experience

24:00 I do recall, and this was after war had broken out, we were in camp at Ocean Grove. The 23/21st Battalion and they decided to give us inoculations. And I don't know what they were for, I suppose dysentery, well wouldn't have been malaria but diphtheria and

24:30 these things I suppose it was, but there was three things in the one inoculation. We got up next morning and I remember the sergeant major rushing down the line calling everyone out, you know, reveille, reveille. And he got to the end of the row of tents and he collapsed. A fella called Maurie Payne, sergeant

25:00 major of our company. Well we got out on parade, roll call the whole Battalion, and they started to drop and out of the six hundred or so that were on parade, I would say two hundred collapsed on the parade ground. So they decided that we'd have to do a route march to work the

25:30 serum through our blood stream. So away we go for a ten mile route march. I can tell you what, it was pretty hard too. Any rate that's what happened at Ocean Grove, two hundred of 'em collapsed on parade.

And what about on the march, did any...?

No, no, they seemed to get going and everyone was alright after.

26:00 I think the doctors reckoned it was psychological, happening on, a part of it was psychological, happening on the parade ground, you know. Bloke'd go down beside you and while you were looking at him, you'd go down yourself. Fortunately it didn't affect me, I must have good blood. Well I did prove I had good blood along the Burma line.

26:30 We were in camp at Mount Martha and by this time I was an officer and we're coming out from dinner one night and the adjutant bailed each officer up as he was walking out of the mess hut and asked, "Did you want to join the AIF [Australian Imperial Force]?" And fortunately, or unfortunately I said, "Yes."

27:00 And within a month our CO, a Colonel Robertson, had a battalion in the 8th Division or the 27th Brigade and he was allowed to take five officers with him out of the CMF Unit and fortunately, or unfortunately again, I was one he sighted. And

27:30 we were whizzed up to Victoria Barracks within a day or two and I actually enlisted in Victoria Barracks. And that's where I thought I better correct my age. And I said to the guy taking our particulars, "I better do something here that, and have corrected,

28:00 I'm not 25, I'm 23." And he said, "No problem, we'll soon fix that." So I had to tell him the story then of how I joined up at sixteen when I told them I was eighteen, so we had that corrected at Victoria Barracks, which I was pleased about too.

Was there any backlash or repercussions?

No, no.

28:30 No, he fixed it on the spot and I heard no more about it. They were, well in, that would have been about October, 1941, no 1940. And in November we had been moved to the Geelong Racecourse for

manoeuvres.

29:00 That is the 23/21st, and we got orders that the five who had been selected would join the AIF at Bonegilla in November 1940 which we did. We went up on the same train as the Colonel to Bonegilla and there the 29th was formed.

29:30 **Okay, so something else I'm curious about was how your dad was going on the farm when you went off and joined the forces?**

Well, yeah well fortunately we had the machine as I said, the milking machine. But as far as I know they battled on, I'm not sure for how long, I don't know for how long, my wife could tell you but I went off to

30:00 war in 1941 and when I came back my brother had bought a place in Melbourne and so we were no more share farming. So I don't really know what happened.

So how did your parents feel about you joining up?

Oh, yeah I think they realised that I would do my duty, I hope they did, I hoped I would.

30:30 I think, I don't know about my father, but I know my mother was always apprehensive. And as it turned out she had good cause. Any rate we were formed up at Bonegilla. We got a lot of troops from Shepparton and around training camps; I'm not too sure where they all came from. But a lot of the 2/29th were

31:00 boys from up around Shepparton and over in Western Victoria, Ouyen and places like that. And that was in November 1940. By the end of November I think the Battalion was pretty complete and we started

31:30 normal Battalion training. We were camped about a mile from, Bonegilla camp that I was in was about a mile from the weir, at (UNCLEAR) there at Albury. And this is how silly we were, before reveille we'd get up and run down to the

32:00 weir and have a dip in the weir and be back in time for reveille. When I think back now, how silly we were. But whilst there, we had a brigade get together. I'm just trying to think who came to inspect us, I'm not too sure who it was.

32:30 But that was towards the end of 1940 and when we got back from holidays or leave, we used to get four day's leave a month where you'd come home. And we got back just after Christmas or New Year and we were on the move, told we were on the move to Bathurst, and we moved to Bathurst in February

33:00 1941. And there, we nearly froze for the first month and till they woke up that one blanket wasn't enough. They also put us into long johns which were very acceptable and issued us with another blanket. And we did manoeuvres out of Bathurst through the hills.

33:30 And all the talk at that stage was we were on our way to the Middle East and up to the caucasian area to try and cover the oil, any rate that turned out to be false eventually. But one interesting manoeuvre we were out on, the boys had knocked off a

34:00 sheep and cooked it, skinned it and cooked it, and the owner of the property came down and he was gonna play hell. And one of the boys in the back of the rank yelled out, "Wouldn't a fire go well here?" He jumped on his horse, disappeared, we never saw him again. He was going to have us locked up for

34:30 stealing one of his sheep. We were there to fight for our country, he was going crook because we'd knocked off one of his sheep. Anyway, that was part of it.

Who were you being trained by? Who were the officers that were training you? Had they been through the First World War or…?

Well our CO had been, Colonel Robertson, he'd won an MC in France .

35:00 I don't think we had, except the padre, Padre McNeal, he was a returned serviceman from the First World War and probably I think he had an MC too. He'd been a fighting soldier in France but when he came home he went to the cloth and I think he saw

35:30 action at Muar if I heard it right. Any rate that's a long way off yet. I might have a drink. Any rate we got to Bathurst. Was cold, we did manoeuvres out through the mountains, out of Bathurst, I don't know whether you know it or not. But

36:00 one job I had from Bathurst, after the first desert push in Africa where they suffered heavy casualties, they decided to take ten percent of each unit from our Brigade as reinforcements to go to Africa. And for better or for worse, I got the job of bringing the ninety

36:30 troops from Bathurst down to hand them over in Darley in Victoria. I think I had a couple of NCOs [Non-commissioned officers] but I was on my own. I'd like to tell you this story because I reckon it was tough. We got on the train, I forget the name of the siding out of Bathurst where we used to entrain.

37:00 But we had to go to Sydney where I was to get my secret orders. And I say this because everyone knew

where we were going. So we set off from Bathurst and get down to Sydney, and the divisional people picked me, picked me up at the train to go out to Randwick Racecourse to get my orders from where to I was

37:30 taking these ninety blokes. But any rate I told them before I left that there was a meal provided at Central Station before we left on the train for Victoria. Cut a long story short, I go out to Randwick Racecourse, get back in a couple of hours and there wasn't a troop left on the station, they'd all disappeared into Sydney somewhere. Any rate

38:00 come about five o'clock they started to wander back to Central Station, a lot of them. And I went to the restaurant on the station and spoke to the woman in charge and she's going butcher's hook because she's provided ninety meals and there's only about sixty turned up, she was screaming her head off. I said look, "I'll sign for ninety, no worries, you'll get paid."

38:30 But any rate after we'd had the meal and they're calling me to the train to inspect the train before we left for Victoria and I think there were three carriages. My ninety were occupying two and there was one carriage occupied by some other crowd who were going to England. But I was made OC [Officer Commanding] Train, I don't know why they picked me.

39:00 But any rate we're standing there about seven o'clock and the train is due to go and the guard was prancing up and down and the engine driver was blowing the whistle. And I could see four or five of my blokes, two or three stations away you know, several stations, and talking to Sheilas. Any rate in the finish I said to the guard, "Let the train go." I said, "If they're going to get on they'll get on,

39:30 no good me chasing 'em." So away we go. We get to Albury and blow me if I'm not made OC Train there, so I missed out on breakfast. We had to change trains at Albury, it was, you know, different gauge, rail gauges, Victoria and New South Wales in those days. And we get down to Melbourne and we got a two

40:00 hour wait in Melbourne before we go up to Darley. So I went over the pub and had a beer and lot of the boys did, we had no money, we hadn't been paid. And likewise when the train pulled out, I didn't know whether they were there or not. We were in old dog boxes, I can remember that, I don't know whether you know what I'm talking

40:30 about. They were compartments which seated I think, four on either side, no toilets or anything. You can imagine these blokes been in the pubs and what have you and they were…publican giving them free beer and what have you. And they just sang out the window on the way up to Darley, wasn't safe to put your head out the window I can tell you. Any rate we

41:00 get up to Darley and I hand them over and would you believe there was ninety. But any rate I heard afterwards that that night about sixty of them went AWL [Absent Without Leave], I don't know how many they got back but I got me ninety there. But during the inspection on the train from Albury to Melbourne, when I got

41:30 off, the transport officer in Melbourne, one of his jobs was to inspect the train. And he came back and he said, "Look there's a soap box missing out of one of the carriages, was it there when you left Albury?" I said, "I wouldn't have a clue." But any rate I'm telling you this story because they were still chasing me to pay for that soap box when I left Australia in 1941.

42:00 The brigade said they would sort it out and I never heard anymore.

Tape 2

00:30 **That was a responsibility that you had wasn't it, doing that?**

Yes.

So did you find yourself in this position of having a lot of responsibility but not having enough training or not knowing enough about what was expected or…?

No, no, no, I don't believe that. But to take charge of ninety blokes and travel, it was

01:00 how shall I put it? It was out of my control in one way but I, looking back on it afterwards, the fact that they hadn't been paid before we left Bathurst, I believe was a factor that got them there because they knew they'd get paid at Darley, you know, when we got there. And

01:30 they hadn't had leave for some time so most of them wouldn't have had any money with them. So they sought to go all the way, which was fortunate for me. I believe the brigade gave me a tick for getting them there, brigade headquarters.

02:00 An interesting thing there, the brigade major, he became our battalion commander in Singapore when our first battalion commander was killed at Muar. When the battalion was reformed the brigade major, his name eludes me,

02:30 isn't it ridiculous? Colonel Pond, Colonel Pond became the battalion commander. And I think in a way and I don't mean this as derogatory or anything,

03:00 when we became prisoners of war and Pond was in charge of our Battalion, I believe he had some kind of a gimmick about original officers. And when the battalion was ordered to send, excuse me, a working party

03:30 into the Godowns in Singapore Harbour, it was noticeable to us that the original officers were left behind. They only wanted five hundred or what have you, there was a hundred and fifty-odd original troops left in Selarang Barracks, and we were the ones that went away on A Force. And I did not see our

04:00 regiment again until I came home, so I believe Pond had a little thing about not being an original officer of the 2/29th. Because the ones that were left behind were Major Lloyd, myself, a Captain West, a Captain Sumner, not Sumner,

04:30 I'm sorry, I retract that, not Sumner, was a couple of others, original officers and we went away on A Force as prisoners of war. But, where were we?

Did you want to go to the Middle East?

Pardon?

Did you want to go to the Middle East?

Well

05:00 I suppose we thought, our thinking would have been Middle East right from joining up and certainly our training in Australia was Middle East. But when we got to Malaya it was totally different. And an interesting story, can I go on to that?

Yeah, absolutely.

Well when we were,

05:30 got orders to embark around about June 1941 I was sent on the advance party to the ships, which were in Melbourne, from Bathurst. And they were two Dutch ships. The Mannix Bahn, Saint Eldergon, which was the one that the 2/29th eventually went on

06:00 and the Johann van Wildebeest was the other Dutch ship. And they had been passenger tourist ships of the Dutch to the Middle East, to Java and, which Holland was the, oh, what do you call it?

The Dutch East Indies?

06:30 Yeah, Dutch East Indies, that's right, good thinking. And they were beautiful ships, twenty thousand tonners and but they were hurriedly changed into troop ships here in Melbourne. And the chairs and things in the lounge were in-laid with silver and beautiful. Anyway away we sailed.

07:00 We get over to Fremantle and we've got the yellow flag up, somebody's got something and they weren't gonna let us land. But any rate they sorted that out, it was only the mumps, they thought it was oh, eludes me at the moment, more serious than mumps. But any rate, I was picket officer the night we were in

07:30 Perth and they eventually allowed us to go onshore. The 2/3rd, ah, Mannix Saint Eldergon crowd went on one night and then we were allowed to go onshore the second night. And I've gotta say the people of Perth were magnificent. I had everything organised and I was Picket Officer. I had a

08:00 hall set aside for the picket, manned by twenty or thirty women and girls. And the ones that weren't out on the job, they had a dance with the girls and supper provided, and it was a ball. But I've gotta tell you this story. We had a bloke in battalion headquarters who could imitate bird

08:30 calls and he had a magnificent gimmick, a dog being run over, which he'd caught most officers with… They'd go in of a night to Albury, and go to get out of your taxi and there's a dog being run over. Course everybody'd be down, looking under the car for this dog, and it was this Cave that used to do this call. Any rate,

09:00 being picket officer the night in Perth, never thinking about this character, he got at one of the intersections where there was trams, this 1941. And the tram went to move off and he let out this dog being run over business. Well within minutes there was trams in all directions, people looking, tram conductors out looking under the what's-is-name.

09:30 And after about twenty minutes or half an hour I went up to him and said, "Look, you better shut up and let 'em get on their way." Which he did. But later on in the evening he went out to the railway station, Perth back to Fremantle, and did the same thing. And jumped up, down off the platform and picked up a skinned rabbit. And course people were howling

10:00 and, was this bird, his name eludes me at the moment, he was killed in action too by the way,

unfortunately. But there was one bloke from the other ship, off the Mannix Bahn Saint Eldergon , who had got drunk and on Perth Station he walked up to a plate glass cabinet

10:30 and put his fist through it, and took a great slash out of his wrist there. And the station people tried to treat it and they said, “Look, the best thing we’ll wrap it up and take him back to the ship.” Well he wasn’t from our ship but we took him back to the

11:00 Mannix which was our ship and into the sick bay where they had several cases of mumps. And sure enough, a fortnight later in Singapore I get mumps together with eight hundred of the ship. And we were sent to a hospital area

11:30 on Singapore Island. Some were in the Selarang barracks area, but they were quite a problem for eight hundred. I myself only got it in the throat but as you know it can be serious for a fella. Some of the poor buggers there, I really felt sorry for them.

12:00 But one other thing I’d like to tell you about the night in Perth, from Fremantle, the picket had a special carriage to Perth on the train. And in the carriage was a civilian sitting with me, only the one. And as you come into Perth, you pass

12:30 Roe Street, which was the naughty street in Perth in those days. And he said to me as we drove past, and he was right, he said, “You see those fellas there,” and they were lined up twenty in front of every door. He said, “Six months ago, they were Japanese.” What a turn of the wheel. Any rate I’d like to tell you one other little story, take

13:00 this off the record. Along the Burma line I had a fella called Arnold, one of my old, older Company blokes. And he was dying, excuse me a moment,

13:30 silly me.

Do you want us to stop?

Arnold was one of the ones that, this house he told me, and he said, “You know sir, I stood there for two hours with me ten bob in me hand, and when I got to the door, madam

14:00 come and she said, “I’m sorry boys, the girls are knocking off for a cup of tea.” I thought that’s humorous. Arnold, Ernie Arnold.

So you’ve got some good memories from that time in Perth,

14:30 **sounds like that was special?**

And buried at the hundred and five.

Let’s just stop for a minute.

In Singapore we went to Katong,

15:00 were billeted in a school at Katong, I think it’s towards the east actually of Singapore. And from there, after about a month, we were sent up to a place called Segamat, which is about two hundred miles I think from Singapore, where a new camp was built, being built

15:30 for us, 2/29th. And shortly after we got there, B Company was sent back to a place called Kluang. Around about November 1941 it looked as though Japan were going to come into the war at that period.

16:00 And we were sent back to Kluang to set up on the aerodrome at Kluang as aerodrome defence. I did have a Bofors ack ack gun [Anti Aircraft heavy machine gun] on the edge of the aerodrome and we had two Wirraway [light fighter] Australian

16:30 aircraft and we used to have a beer occasionally with the pilots. And they said no way will we be able to take off this aerodrome if the wind’s in the wrong way. I can tell you they took off alright that day the Japs’ nine bombers came over, and with the wind, excuse me, so that was a fallacy.

17:00 But just before the Japs bombed the aerodrome, the rest of the battalion had come down to Kluang and were billeted around in various areas. But B Company was on Hospital Hill as it was called, it was a well laid-out hospital

17:30 at Kluang. And the morning that the planes came over, the nine, the CO, Robertson was holding an orderly room, some of our boys had played up over the Christmas period and a couple of them had been charged with being drunk and disorderly I think. But any rate, he was holding an orderly room and

18:00 somebody yelled, but fortunately we had dug slit trenches and I can tell you I reckon I won the long jump of the world that morning when we saw these planes coming, tree top high. And I went straight down this slit trench, the poor old CO, he just went to the ground and they dropped about a hundred bombs.

18:30 And we had one killed, which was a signaller and two or three wounded. But I can honestly say that that

raid gave our boys some confidence and we didn't have any trouble in the future for them to sink a slit trench. Up until then the boys were a bit loathe to do this digging, but after that

19:00 they had, we had no problems. But the CO lay there, fortunately he wasn't hit; only the falling debris off the walkways fell on him. But I admired the English boys on the Bofors gun, I could hear, or we could hear the commander

19:30 yelling out, "Hold it, hold it, hold it, fire." They hit one plane we believe, only, as they went away from us, we could see smoke trailing out of one of the aircraft. But other than that, I don't think they were hit. They didn't come back, thank God. But we said to the

20:00 RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force] blokes afterwards, "Where were you fellas when we wanted you?" And they said, "We were sitting out about six miles watching it." What hope did they have with a Wirraway? They were training aircraft, made in Australia, I don't know whether you know all this, yeah.

I know a little bit about the Wirraway. So they were out training, they were doing a little bit of training were they, when the planes came over?

Yeah, yeah. They were

20:30 the only aircraft they had on the drome at the time of the raid. Later there were a couple of Dutch planes came in; I don't think they were true bombers but they were using them as bombers. They never came back, whether they were shot down or, you know, went to another drome or not, we never knew. But a couple of times fighters came over, Zeros [Japanese fighter], and

21:00 strafed us with machine-gun fire but I don't think any of us got hit with that. But from there we were moved out to another aerodrome, out at a placed called Kluang, which was out towards the east coast. And they had a couple of dummy planes there. But I got a couple of broken

21:30 ribs there, or cracked ribs. We were pulling down a tent that was standing there, out of the road. And like a nong I hadn't gone round to look inside it and they had a slit trench in the tent and I went down, cracked a couple of ribs. But we're only there a few days when we

22:00 were moved again and out towards Anndale, and we were there for a short time. And then we were moved up to the front, I'm not sure whether, the name of the village but back up towards Segamat and on the Yong Peng Road. And we were

22:30 due to take over from the 2/30th Battalion on the seventeenth of January. They'd had a very successful operation against the Japs at a place called Gemas. And before we could take over from the 2/30th we were warded out to Muar where the Japanese had landed

23:00 by sea in small numbers, we were told. So on the morning of the seventeenth we were moving out to Muar Road, towards Muar from, whatever place we were at, I forget its name. And on the evening of the seventeenth of January we struck the Japanese just forward of a place called Bakri, B-A-K-R-I.

23:30 And that's where we holed up for the night, dug in, ready for action in the morning. Well we got action but we didn't move. About nine o'clock on the morning of the eighteenth these Japanese tanks started to roll down the road in front of us. C Company were forward on the left,

24:00 that shows it. And B Company, yeah, C Company 2/29th, B Company...

On the other side.

on the other side of the road and that's where we were, B Company.

24:30 We had an anti-tank gun, as you could see, forward, with us there and another one back in the battalion headquarters area. Well first gunner opened up with armour piercing shells and we could see them going straight through the tanks but it didn't stop them. Two got through into the battalion when the forward gun

25:00 realised that they'd have to change to APHE, Armour Piercing High Explosive. And brave men, this 4th anti-tank, they swung the gun round under fire and got the second tank, but the second gun knocked out the

25:30 first tank we believe, opened up with AP [Armour piercing]. But any rate they knocked out five in the first shoot out which was half an hour or so, all the time C Company were engaged on this side of the road. We had snipers on this side of the road and they'd killed one of my platoon commanders, a Lieutenant

26:00 Clarke, and we were having a problem with these snipers so. I should mention that we only had one Bren gun, machine-gun, and three Tommy guns [submachine gun], the old American Tommy guns, which had .05 [calibre] bullets. And a magazine, as far as I can recall,

26:30 held fifty bullets and very heavy. As you can imagine a half inch bullet, they were solid and very heavy to carry. But we said to our forward Bren gunner, swing the gun up through the rubber trees we were in,

and see if we can shift some of these snipers, which they did. And whether we got, or whether they got any or not, we'll never know but

27:00 we had no further trouble in B Company from the snipers while we were there. Well we were there all that day and C Company were engaged all that day and it's a strange thing, the Japs seemed not to fight at night. So when it became dark, and by hell it was dark there in that period,

27:30 couldn't see an inch in front of you, they had some respite during the night. Although I believe C Company when they woke next morning there were a couple of Japs in one or two of the slit trenches in with the Australians. Well you can imagine, short work was made of them. But

28:00 all the next day, oh, on the morning of the eighteenth, the battalion commander, Colonel Robertson, and his dispatch driver had been back to a conference through Bakri at, to brigade headquarters. This I might add has only come to me after

28:30 we come home, because we were in action, we didn't hear, we did hear that Colonel Robertson was killed on the way back from brigade headquarters, we knew he'd been killed, but the details we didn't know at that particular time. But on the eighteenth we were engaged all day,

29:00 on the nineteenth we were still engaged, C Company heavily. We'd also realised at this stage that we'd struck the Japanese guards division who were very well equipped. To go back onto the tanks, they'd knocked out five and about an hour later

29:30 three more came into view. One of them actually went up over one of their own tanks. And of course the gunners, 4th anti-tank gunners were able to knock those three out pretty smartly, so we had eight tanks knocked out. About an hour later, a mob of Jap cyclists come riding down the road towards the tanks.

30:00 And I'm not sure, we weren't sure how many, but we estimated about a hundred, with their rifles strapped to their bikes and just riding along. Well our machine-gun was able to account for them, and rifle fire, and as far as we know we knocked out the lot.

Did they ride into that, unsuspecting?

Yeah, well,

30:30 they must have known, you know, there's eight tanks, some of them burning, you wouldn't believe. Just behind me in my position, one Jap officer had tried to get out of the tank and our battalion RSM [Regimental Sergeant Major] he dropped a grenade in the tank and they were all killed, we knew that. But Jap officer

31:00 was laying on the ground, outside the tank, he must have jumped out and was killed instantly. But as far as I know he was still laying there when we pulled out on the night of the nineteenth. We got orders to withdraw and try and join the 2/18th, ah, 2/19th Battalion who had come up to assist us

31:30 and they were holding the Bakri crossroads, which I noted there.

So what were you doing Charles, during this battle?

Well when Clarke was killed, I was, went and joined number 11 Platoon, which Clarke was the platoon commander.

32:00 I settled them down, they were nervous as you can imagine. And we were just sitting there, holding our section, that's all. We did not see a great deal of action, during the eighteenth we did see.

32:30 On the nineteenth we hadn't seen hardly any Japs, on our right was a swamp water. But any rate on the night of the nineteenth, the evening of the nineteenth, we got orders that we would cover the withdrawal of the battalion. So B Company sat where we were and the rest of the battalion moved off back

33:00 to Bakri to join the 19th Battalion. Now after they had gone and disappeared and I believe they got mauled pretty badly, Oliff, Second in Command, or who had taken over the battalion, Major Oliff, he was killed. Because they went straight back down the road, and the Japanese

33:30 had a machine-gun there on the side of the road apparently just forward of Bakri. But when we come to withdraw, by accident, not by design, we kind of moved out away from the road, slightly. And we got into this water which was up over our knees and we

34:00 were doing a westerly, through the swamp in single file. And I don't want to sound smart or anything, but I was leading the column if you like to call it that, and just on dark we came out into the open and there was Bakri's crossroad. Purely by

34:30 accident we came out at the right spot and made contact with the 2/19th. We were hit and had one killed in that swamp, we'd been told it was by our own mortars, I don't believe that, I believe it was the Japs

35:00 mortar fire, but any rate, unfortunately we had one killed.

Why did you think it was the Japs and not your own?

Well I can't believe our own, who knew we were coming in, they would be expecting us. And I, well we'll never know, but I believe it was the Japs. Whilst we were in these forward positions, I

35:30 should have said, I did say we were doing nothing, of course we were doing something. We had no aircraft support, we did have a couple of Bren carriers which were magnificent. They were useless really because the Japs had armour piercing bullets in their machine-guns. But the Bren gun carriers did a wonderful job extricating wounded and what have you. And

36:00 we were being mortared by the Japanese in these positions, and Zeros had come over and we had Indian troops who'd come into our area. And, you know, they were young boys and untrained and very frightened, like

36:30 we all were I suppose. And as soon as the planes appeared the Indians'd move and of course they'd be picked up and they'd cop a burst from these Zeros. Well we were in the area and you had to keep your head down, pretty smartly.

What sort of weapon, weapons were you using?

We only had rifles,

37:00 the old .303 [Lee Enfield rifle]and two of these Tommy guns which were that heavy that, well they were alright for close combat but useless as far as long range stuff went. And one Bren gun, I stress that point, per company. And I got reprimanded for

37:30 firing ours, before the blue started. When I was in charge of the company at Kluang, we got or, we got this Bren gun, and got orders from the battalion as I read it, fire six rounds per man. The company commander had gone on holiday, gone on leave to Kuala Lumpur and I was in charge of the company.

38:00 So we go out to the range, rifle range in Kluang or out of Kluang, and fire six rounds per man. And when I rang our battalion headquarters and spoke to the adjutant to get the ammunition replaced, he says, "Hell, what have you done?" I said, "I've fired six rounds per man out of the Bren gun." He

38:30 said, "It was six rounds per gun." Well I don't know, I thought I read the orders. Any rate, the upshot of that was, and this was about a week before the Japanese came into the war. The old man came down, there was a colonel, and after dinner he said to me, "Lovett, I wanna speak to you."

39:00 So we go for a little walk, and he said, "I'm here to reprimand you for firing six rounds per man." He said, "You know, you're the only company that knows how to fire the gun."

39:30 Any rate, he said to me, "You know the Japanese are on the move, we'll be in action shortly." And that was about a week before they did declare war on Hawaii.

40:00 Any rate I digressed there for, why? Any rate we got back to the 19th at Bakri...

Can I ask you something about that? That you were leading this column of men to Bakri, yeah after that. And what did you have to work with, did you have a map of the area, did you have the co-ordinates or anything?

No, no, we had no map.

40:30 We'd run off maps, we didn't have any maps of the area at all. Any rate we got, made...

Tape 3

00:31 So we're at Bakri.

Bakri, yes, you've just made it to the crossroads.

Right. We're back at the—and right on dark, we could just see to get through. So we made contact with the 2/19th and Meagher, my company commander, he was the senior officer still

01:00 alive at this stage. And he spoke with Colonel Anderson, VC [Victoria Cross], and made arrangements for us to bed down for the night within their perimeter. And by this time you can imagine we were exhausted. We'd been

01:30 in action for two and a half days and hadn't had a feed and I must confess that I slept. Until the Indians panicked and started firing and it took—at shadows that they were firing at—it took half an hour to settle them down.

02:00 And the rest of the night was quiet. Well during that time, Anderson had no doubt made his plans, as he

was in command from hereon. And once again, B Company, 2/29th was doing the rear guard action and the rest, 19th and the rest of 2/29th which was A and C Companies

02:30 were to go on and try and break through back to Parit Sulong, which is what they had in mind at this stage. Well right from the jump from the outbreak, they run into heavy Japanese fire. And I am not sure of

03:00 the real action, I've only heard it hearsay. But I know the 2/19th and the 2/29th C Company and A Company were attacking all the time on the way back towards Parit Sulong. We could hear a lot of the action, didn't

03:30 know what was going on. I'm trying to hold the troops together to do a rear guard action, which we were not attacked, but two or three times we had Japanese guards approaching and they were polished off. Plus the fact that we had a Jap aircraft over most of the time

04:00 and you had to keep very quiet. At any rate we were moving slowly all day. Now the 2/19th and the remnants of the 2/29th as I said had several bayonet attacks which, and which one of them, Anderson, was

04:30 awarded a VC, it'll be in the history. One of my friends, a Lieutenant Carr was killed, doing an attack. At any rate, the upshot there on the day of the twentieth I believe it was, come night fall, we're

05:00 at a road block, they dropped several rubber trees across the road and we could not get our transport until we cut through that. Now I believe Anderson had ordered Number 12 Platoon unbeknown to me to do an attack down the left hand side of the road, which they did, and cleared any Japanese that were there, just to this

05:30 road block. Well, as usual, come nightfall, the Japs disappeared and we were able to cut through the rubber trees and get our transport through. Once we did that we were moving all night towards Parit Sulong. Just her carriers, twenty-five pounder, carrying

06:00 our machine-guns and rifles and just moving. When it came daybreak, I would believe on the morning of the twenty-first, we were not far from Parit Sulong. Was me, with B Company, well back at the rear, so we didn't know that really.

06:30 But when they got there Anderson entered the village, outskirts of the village of Parit Sulong. Anderson asked some of the natives, you know, who held the bridge. And I believe he was told it was held by the Norfolks, which should have been there, which was a British Regiment.

07:00 At any rate Anderson made these civilians come with him, and when they got within sight, of the bridge, of course it's held by the Japanese. And I believe Anderson took swift and sure punishment out on the two that told him a lie. Any rate, as we got closer in,

07:30 he established that on the other side of the bridge was held strongly by the Japanese with machine-guns, cause they hadn't got their tanks through because we'd knocked em out. And it was a curving bridge and finally I, B Company were allotted a

08:00 position at the rear of the 2/29th and 19th and about five o'clock at night we were heavily shelled and mortared. I copped a piece of shrapnel in the back

08:30 and was bleeding rather severely, and one each side of me had been killed and I must confess I was dazed but I was able to walk to the RAP [Regimental Aid Post] and got my wound dressed and then came back to the Company. By this time it was just on dark, and once again, the

09:00 fighting, as far as the Japanese, was over. Well I must have snoozed during the night I must confess because late in the evening the Japs had bought up more tanks or another couple of tanks. And I believe the 2nd, the twenty-five pounder

09:30 was able to take care of them and knock them out of action. You can imagine squeezed in around the bridge was a fairly strong river. Looking back in today's scenario we would have called for an air strike

10:00 on the machine-gun nest, no problem. We had no planes, so they held all the aces. Any rate Anderson did try and get the ambulances across with the wounded on, or some of them, but they refused to negotiate unless we surrendered. And he would not do that. Well, we were with

10:30 him on that. But my company commander was killed, about nine thirty on the morning, I think it would have been the twenty-first, we got orders to break off the action and try and make our way back to Yong Peng. Which

11:00 we did, I believe the toughest day of my life, to walk away and leave the wounded there. You turn it off.

Do you want to take a break?

After we

11:30 broke off the action and we were making our way around to the left, that's what Anderson told us to try and keep north and go west. And there was a back water, I can recall, about twenty of us were holding hands to get through this water, it was up to our chest.

12:00 And Zero over the top spraying us. Any rate, fortunately didn't hit anybody in that lot. Once we got through that water we were in, oh, not jungle but not heavily timbered country. But we were able to move reasonably well and we just kept moving,

12:30 the party of about five of us, kept together. And we just kept moving and finally about five o'clock at night we came into friendly troops and we were back at Yong Peng, which was about a twenty mile hike

13:00 I think without looking up the maps. And I don't know how many got back there but my own personal experience was we were in a CCS hut, Casualty Clearing Station, and provided with a cup of tea. Mine was black tea in a spittoon and it's the most

13:30 wonderful cup of tea I've ever had. And we were given a plate of stew and during the night we were put into ambulances and taken down to... I'm not sure whether it was the 10th AGH [Australian General Hospital] or the 13th AGH, I was put into, but we were . It took them a little while to realise back in Singapore

14:00 that I'd been wounded and that I was an officer. I tell you for why, we took our pips down very early, because the Japanese, as far as the Indian brigade, picked off all the officers first. And left them

14:30 without officers which demoralised them. We took our pips down because of the theory our troops knew us anyway. So back at 10 AGH, I was put in a large building, all officers, wounded

15:00 officers. And we were bombed three or four days later by the Japanese, several were killed, several officers were killed plus others in the hospital. But then I was moved out to a rehabilitation house. And

15:30 I must confess that I believe I squibbed it a bit, I should have tried to get back to my unit sooner than I did. But I was, as you can imagine I was under instructions from doctors to convalesce a bit before rejoining my unit. Any rate, in the meantime, the Japs landed on the island, and it

16:00 was a couple of days later that I rejoined my unit and saw the fighting on the island for the last three days, with my battalion. Can we leave it there for lunch?

Yeah, we'll stop tape.

little horse.

Charles, before we talk a bit more about Singapore—t sounds like there were some

16:30 **amazing acts of bravery in Malaya there, Muar and then Bakri and going further south, Yong Peng. What was it that, obviously the Japanese were very well-supplied and equipped, was it a case of the Aussies and the English and the Indians not being, not having their supplies up to scratch or...?**

Well no, I think as far as the Indians were concerned, they were young. And of course once their officers

17:00 were knocked out, you know, they were disorganised and ran as soon as a plane was heard. Look, I don't blame them because they were boys really. As far as we were concerned, looking back now, we were under-

17:30 equipped. Nowadays every soldier has a machine-gun, we had one for a hundred a twenty, it was ridiculous. Bren guns had just come in, you know. If you read the story, you know, our defence force knocked them back, they didn't want 'em originally. A Bren, what was the other gun? I read the story the other day.

18:00 They put it through every test and still they knocked it back. And but we were outnumbered twenty to one, a Japanese division against two battalions. We had no aircraft, they did what they liked overhead, and it was just an impossible situation. Anderson was

18:30 magnificent apparently, as a leader.

Did you, Charles, have a sense of what the bigger picture was, in terms of strategy and...?

No, no, I didn't, I never spoke to Anderson during the whole action, I was back at the rear all the time, didn't know what was going on. Other than around where I was, trying to keep a

19:00 Jap from pinching our transport, which you know, I'd a hundred and twenty, some of them had been killed. Clarke had been killed, but they were good soldiers.

19:30 **Can I ask how, obviously you were having to command a hundred and twenty men, and you said you had to lose your pips so the Japanese couldn't spot the officers. That aside, how were relations, I mean how was it enforcing discipline and looking after men?**

Oh they were good troops, I mean our, they did what they were told, and some of

20:00 the attacks apparently, the 2/19th and the ANC Company were magnificent. And I don't know whether you've done any of these interviews before, but some of the 19th Battalion officers told me that they did bayonet attacks and you know, they literally had to kick

20:30 the Japs off their bayonets, they died hanging onto the bayonets through them, and they were brave men also. Out-numbered. Any rate, back on the island,

21:00 they did manage to get some Hurricanes [fighters] to Singapore I believe. I don't know whether they got any off the ground or not. We didn't, certainly didn't see any, saw plenty of Zeros and their bombers. But the last position we were in, we were shelled

21:30 or mortared at eight o'clock, at eight thirty it was all over. We had three killed and three or four wounded in B Company, half an hour before it was over. Silence, unbelievable. There again, we were not in the picture, we didn't know what was happening really. The following morning we

22:00 had to turn in our arms, which were all made in Morwell I might add. Grenades and stuff were thrown in slit trenches, probably still there, and filled in. We were there for a day I think and next day we were marched out to, we went back to Selarang Barracks.

22:30 I was never in Changi myself, only after the war. Wasn't there as a prisoner of war, we were in Selarang Barracks. But on the fighting on the island, we could see the Japs couple of miles away, hundreds of the buggers. Our artillery weren't allowed fire on them, so.

Why was that?

We were

23:00 out of the big picture. The hierarchy no doubt, were engaging in negotiations then. I do know Singapore itself took a pounding a couple of days before the end, and I believe sixty thousand people were killed you know, in the bombing raid, in Singapore itself. But there again, these are hearsay.

23:30 But where we were, we were still in action.

Obviously there'd been quite some losses in Malaya, had there been reinforcements when you were in Singapore?

Yes, yes, I should have gone on to that. After Malaya I was in hospital and the battalion was being

24:00 reinforced. We had, during the Battle of Muar, thirteen officers killed, wounded and missing and about two hundred and eighty-five killed, wounded or missing so we were down to half strength, virtually. And when they reformed the battalion I believe they got some personnel

24:30 who hadn't even learned how to load a rifle let alone fire one and these boys were in action within a month. So it must have been difficult for them but I missed that part of it because I was in hospital. And yes the battalion was reinforced and

25:00 they were in a position somewhere up near the causeway when the Japs landed. And later on I was with some of the 2/4th machine-gunners, which was a West Australia unit. And they were somewhere east or west of the bridge and their guns ran hot,

25:30 when the Japanese did the assault on Singapore. Their barrels red hot, they couldn't change them. They were piled high the Japs, they had the numbers, over-ran. Plus they had aircraft and tanks and artillery.

26:00 Out-numbered. Anderson run into one Jap officer as a prisoner of war, he was telling us, and they reckoned he was at the landing on Singapore Island, this Jap Officer. And Anderson said, you know, "I was there," had the map. And he said, "Oh we put twenty-thousand through there the first

26:30 night." Well Anderson had what, eight hundred, a battalion. Over-run. Our crowd were the same, just over-run. Numbers. Any rate Anderson said to this Jap Officer, "Bit unfair, wasn't it?" And he said, "The art of war." True. Numbers.

27:00 Still the same I suppose, you got the machinery, you only got to look at the Americans now. Numbers and machinery. Anything you want to ask me about the fighting there, that's about the finish.

So the battalion had been reinforced and you came out of

27:30 **the hospital, the AGH there. What sort of state were they in when you rejoined? I mean obviously the fighting was pretty much on I take it?**

Yeah, well actually when the last two or three days, there was no fighting as far as we were concerned, only in the last half hour, we were ordered. They'd no doubt had our positions well plotted. But

28:00 one of my friends who used to live in Maryborough, he's dead and gone now, he was laying in a slit

trench, two shells nipped into the back of the trench, both duds. Lucky, how lucky can you be? Harold Hawke. I'll tell you another story about him later, when we get onto POWs [prisoners of war].

28:30 Well that's about the end of the fighting for me, fifteenth of February, 1942.

So there was surrender?

My wound I might add was still open, was still healing then, still open a little bit. I tried to get, I did try to get a pension for it once,

29:00 but I didn't, got knocked back. Made a bit of money unfortunately in the dairy business, had a few bob, got knocked back. Still got two pieces of steel in my back. I picked this up on an x-ray up here, one x-ray they did, a girl doing the

29:30 x-ray, she said, "There's something in your back shouldn't be there." She said, "Were you in the war?" I said, "Yes, I was wounded in the back." "Oh." She said, "You got two bits of steel still there." Still there.

Has that given you gyp [trouble] over, through your life?

Yeah.

Can you feel it?

No I don't feel it. No. See them on the x-ray.

30:00 But couldn't get any pension for it.

Charles can you tell us a bit about, I mean we'll sort of keep going in terms of the chronology, but I just want to, I'm just curious about your relations with the natives in Singapore and Malaya. Did they help you and how or what was that like?

Look generally they helped. Our relations before the blue broke up

30:30 were very good. Segamat, we had a very good rapport with the natives there, the local people. Well of course during the action we didn't see any of them, they got out of the road, good on 'em. After we

31:00 became prisoners of war the Chinese were magnificent I believe. They were very severely treated by the Japanese, which you would understand, as they were fighting them in China. But one story I do know. One of three or four of

31:30 my boys that were left in Singapore were on a job building a tunnel in the later part of their prisoner of war life. Was twenty-one of them and every night, ah, every morning when they'd go to work in the tunnel there'd be twenty-one portions of rice or something there for them. So May and I went for

32:00 a trip to Singapore in 1972 and this friend asked me to look this bloke up, Kai Kai Kwek. So when we got to Singapore and I found him in the phone book. And rang him up and made contact with him and he came to the hotel and we had a great old chin wag. And it would

32:30 seem that he was in a line-up with his brother in front of him and the Japs cut his brother off, in front of him, they were all shot. He was left because he was an official, I think it was with Shell Company or one of those crowd. Delightful bloke.

33:00 And his brother was shot and he got spared. But they did it tough, but they helped POWs where they could. I will tell you a little story about POWs, how they helped us, when we get onto the POW stuff. But yes, no the natives, after a very short while of the

33:30 Japanese, most of them became very pro-allies, that's my experience.

Was there any differences, I mean there was the Chinese, the Malays, the Tamils, were they working as one do you think or did they have different opinions of...?

Well I would say early on that the Tamils and the Malay

34:00 generally were pro Japanese. But after a year or so, they were changing. Changing time. There was still the odd one naturally but generally they became pro-allies, that's my experience.

34:30 But I left Singapore, we were only in Singapore and Selarang Barracks for what, about March or April I think 1942, we went away on A Force. I never got back to Singapore until we were on the way home in 1945. How's

35:00 the tape?

I think there's a few minutes. Can I just ask a little, some questions? Maybe next tape we'll start talking about the POW experience after lunch. I just want to get a sense of, obviously you had all this training in Bathurst and New South Wales and, do you feel that that really prepared you for what you encountered?

I believe it hardened us. We did some hard marches in Australia and what have you and our troops were

pretty tough, I believe. But Malaya

35:30 was a different climate and I used to have three or four showers every night, the water was always lukewarm. So it was always, I don't know whether you've been there, but Singapore is a hot place. But our troops acclimatised, I believe.

36:00 And we did training in jungle and what have you and yeah I think we, we didn't have enough weapons, or aeroplanes.

When you look back do you, what's your take on that, obviously you were under-equipped and you didn't have enough men. Was this just a matter of there not being enough time or do you think there was more to it?

Oh well at the time

36:30 they were concentrating on Europe and you know not on Singapore or the East Asia. But also as far as weapons and that, well

37:00 Australia were just starting to gear up. You know, we were fortunate to look through the Ford factory when they were changing, when we were in the CMF back in '39. We had a look through the Ford factory and they were changing from civilian production to war production. And they were,

37:30 what were they doing? Mines I think when the day we were there, they were making mines, land mines. But as I say, one machine-gun per company, we didn't have a hope, when you think about it. I would like to say too, the first, some of the first Japanese that we killed, C Company,

38:00 they were carrying, amongst other things, satchels of white powder and we believe they were drugs, now whether they were or not, I don't know. But some of the early captures they had this white powder with them. And you know they were pretty lively soldiers, those boys.

38:30 Any rate...

So it's possible that they were made to take these drugs to...?

Yeah, yeah, to go into action. Well I told you about the bike riders riding past, eight tanks burning and they ride down with their bloody rifles strapped to their bikes. What hope did they have? We still had a machine-gun there.

39:00 **So your battalion actually did take some prisoners, some Japanese prisoners?**

I don't think they remained prisoners long. They were just finding out who they were and what have you, what they were carrying. As we thought in the early days that they'd use gas, and we had gas masks. But they found out the Japs weren't carrying them and

39:30 so they discarded them, gas masks. But they were a, they were hardened soldiers too, they'd been in China, before coming to Malaya. The thing a lot of people don't realise there was three divisions of Japanese.

40:00 That's, in Japanese, that was about sixty-thousand fighting troops. I don't know what they had, the English had, but we had one and a half brigades in Singapore, fighting troops. We had a lot of others like non-fighting, non-combat troops. Hospitals, transport, and back-up troops but not

40:30 fighting troops. I've read Gordon Bennett's, have you read his book, Why Singapore Fell? I can tell them why they fell, I can them why it fell. No aircraft, no guns, not enough. And, as it turned out, no navy, the [HMS] Prince of

41:00 Wales and Repulse. Stupid, they send 'em up to meet the Japanese without air cover, what hope did they have?

And the Aussies copped a lot of flak didn't they, the soldiers were copping flak?

Yeah. That Kluang, we could hear the bombs in Singapore when they bombed Singapore, we could hear them in Kluang.

41:30 Yeah, lunch time.

Indeed.

Tape 4

00:32 **Okay, tape's going now Charles. So there was something more I believe you wanted to tell us about Singapore?**

Yes, there was one thing I wanted to mention about Singapore when, just after we got there, or a little while after we got there. That was, the 2/29th Battalion hosted the divisional officers one night to

01:00 hear General Wavelle, who had been to Australia and was on his way back to the Middle East. And he spoke to all divisional officers in Singapore this night. And we were the host battalion and I don't know whether you know any ritual about battalion messes or officers. But they have a ritual called passing

01:30 the port. And usually a junior officer proposes a toast to the King or Queen, which ever is applicable. Well the night Wavelle, General Wavelle spoke in Singapore I was elected Mr Vice and had to propose a toast to the King. The reason I mention

02:00 this, our band was lined up upstairs to play God Save the King with a bloke planted down at the bottom to give him the drum. When I'd made my speech, he was looking the wrong way. And I get up, raise my glass and propose the royal toast to the King, George the sixth, fifth was it, sixth?

02:30 I'm not sure now, be the sixth, yeah. And stood there waiting for the band to come in with God Save the King. And finally I had to say, "The King." Band come in afterwards, but as it turned out, it worked out alright. But one of the little things that happen,

03:00 but I was Mr Vice. General Wavell, but one thing he said to us that night I've never forgotten. He said, "Gentlemen, you will shortly, probably, be going in to action." He said, "You'll be frightened, but I hope you don't show it." I remembered that, I hoped I didn't.

03:30 But I was frightened.

What were the men like, I mean obviously you were a lieutenant at this point of...?

Yes, lieutenant.

So you had some responsibility. What were your relations with your superiors like?

Oh tremendous I believe, yes, yeah. Colonel Robertson, I believe I was one of his white-haired boys, we came from the same

04:00 regiment. I didn't know I was going to be promoted captain, I've got to add. When I , just before we went into action I was told I was a captain which really surprised me, I didn't know I'd been put up, but I was thrilled.

And so that was at Robertson's

04:30 **recommendation?**

Yeah, yes, he, I would have been, amongst others, I mean there were several. He, himself, the night I told you about when he came down to tick me off about firing a Bren gun, he told me then that he was being sent home, that he was too old. And as it turned out he

05:00 didn't get time to do it, got killed instead. We've met his son and daughter at some of our reunions, and whether he knew it or not I don't know, but his son was in the RAAF and was shot down over somewhere in Europe and was a prisoner of war.

05:30 And whether Robertson knew that before he was killed or not, I'm not sure.

So you were made a captain at the age of twenty-three; would that have been a young age to become captain?

Yes, it was pretty young. I was, let me see, 1941, I was seventeen, that would have been

06:00 twenty-four, I would have been twenty-four. Yeah, that was pretty young for a captain.

And most of the men in your battalion would have been, I guess late teens, nineteen, and twenty, is that right?

Oh they would have been yes. Some of them were young, not too many, a lot of them would have been in their early twenties, yeah. Our, for instance, our QM, the company quartermaster sergeant was

06:30 a fella called Bill Burton, who was killed in action, he had four children I think. One that he never saw, was born after he was killed. He comes to our reunions, yeah.

And you would be married when, it was not,

07:00 **just before you went off, is that right?**

Who?

You.

I was married in 1940, just after I joined the AIF actually. Yeah, we were married in September 1940 and yeah, it was just after I joined the AIF.

How long was it before, after you married that you had to go into training, when you had to leave your wife?

07:30 Well we went into, we were in training at the time. I think I was married before we actually went to Bonegilla, just before we went to Bonegilla, I, we were married, and we were in training then. Right up, actually we only had one night, honeymoon, I was called back

08:00 within a day or so, onto duty, into duty, so, it was a pretty short honeymoon.

And what about when you disembarked when you left for Perth and then Singapore, was there a chance to have some leave and see your wife?

No. I did see her, somehow, oh, as I

08:30 said, I was on the advance party, well I rang her from the ship and she actually came to Melbourne and whilst the gates on the wharf were locked we didn't actually get out, we were able to speak. She came down to the wharf and we were able to have a few words before we actually sailed.

09:00 Yes, that was the last time I saw her before, on the wharf, South Melbourne. One other thing I wanted to say too, we were escorted all the way from Melbourne to Singapore by HMAS Canberra and it was later sunk during

09:30 some of the battles up north.

Was there any, on that journey from Perth to Singapore, any threat from the Japanese there?

Well we, one day there was a scare I believe, Canberra whizzed off away

10:00 from us, went away in front of us. They reckon there was sighting of a submarine but you know, who knows, they might have known, we certainly didn't on the ship. But two-up was supposed to be banned on the ship but the boys used to play it. I never played that game myself; I used to finance a couple of my boys.

10:30 They'd come and borrow a quid and then come back an hour later and here's your quid back, they'd had a win. You might wait a week, but that was the way it went.

How would you have occupied yourself on that haul?

How?

How did you occupy yourself on the ship?

On the ship? Well we had, supposedly lectures on

11:00 jungle and tropical action. I've got a photo somewhere of myself taken when, we knew no more than the fellas. We were reading it out of a book on Malaya or something and trying to tell them about the weather and this kind of thing. But the food was very good, they had Dutch cooks in the kitchen and they used to turn out beautiful

11:30 bread for breakfast and dinner, yes, it was good on the ship. There were three ships in the convoy, the one we were on, Mannix and the John and Sabb-eye-ak, another smaller one. But we had a pretty smooth crossing really,

12:00 not that I'd ever done any sailing but I didn't get sea sick myself but some of them did, and they went green. Yeah, they reckon you go green, you get a proper dose of sea sickness, and they did, some of them.

What was it like, obviously for most men in the forties, the thought of going overseas is the furthest thing from anyone's mind

12:30 **but now in wartime you're doing it. What was that like to actually...?**

Well would have been like myself, would have been an experience, magnificent, really, when you think about it. And some of them really enjoyed it. Crossing the equator a lot of them got their hair, head shaved, apparently an old sailor's thing, when you cross the equator, you get your

13:00 hair shaved, lot of them did, lot of my boys. But no it was good, really.

And what about disembarking in Singapore in this foreign port, what was that like?

Yeah well rain and I've gotta say, as I say we had no aircraft and what have you. When we were coming into Singapore they had

13:30 some Beaufort fighters, which we thought were really terrific seeing them for the first time and Blenheim bombers, Beaufort bombers. No, what'd I say? Beaufort 'bombers' and ah, Blenheim bombers and Beaufort fighters, that's right, yeah. But they didn't have, oh I don't know how many, not too many I know that, but we used to see them flipping around,

14:00 thinking they were wonderful. Useless they were against the Zeros—they were, Zeros, you know, very modern, Japs. I don't know that I could say much more about them. We certainly never saw any of them in action.

14:30 **And what, you were saying before that what struck you was the humidity, the heat. What else struck you about this part of the world, you know, you're suddenly in the tropics?**

Well as you would imagine it was, would have been an eye opener to me and everybody else. An Asian set up and they're cooking fires in the street and you know, it was, I suppose,

15:00 exciting times for us. A lot of them were able to send home souvenirs. I sent May a couple of hand broidered tops, night gown, too small apparently, when I got home. I

15:30 did have a set of silver spoons with the crest of each state, well the blue broke before I got them out. So they were in my trunk which disappeared whilst I was a prisoner of war, all that gear, plus my money which I'd put there, to go on leave. Actually I was due to go on leave the night it was cancelled.

16:00 And I had my return ticket, sleeper to Kuala Lumpur which I never ever used. Sleeper, to Kuala Lumpur from Kluang. Cancelled the night we were, I was to go.

16:30 **And so your time in Singapore, you were able to correspond, to write home?**

Oh yeah.

When you came back for that short period before Singapore fell and you were in hospital, you were still able to get some letters out then?

Ah no, I don't think so. I don't think I wrote when I was in hospital, I don't believe I did, I don't think so anyway no. Course the Japs had command of

17:00 the air and the old Catalinas were just too slow, which they were using to come to Singapore.

Do you know what was the last your wife heard of you before you were taken POW?

It's more than I could tell you really. She knew I was in action because of the papers, they mentioned

17:30 Colonel Robertson was killed and Major Oliff and Bill Carr and a lot of them she knew, so she knew I was in action. But I think I've got the, oh, it's out in the other gear.

We can have a look.

Yeah, we can have a look at it later. I've got the telegram,

18:00 or she has got the telegram that she got, saying that I was wounded in action I think.

Can you tell us, before lunch we were talking about the defence of, the final defence of Singapore and the final occupation there. Can you tell us in a little more detail what that, what actually happened, the process there, when the surrender came, what you were told

18:30 **to do and how the men were sort of…?**

Well we were just told that we were to lay down our arms at eight thirty on the, February the fifteenth. I, thinking that we would, as officers we would be interrogated, I think they only came down as far as colonels

19:00 for interrogation, so we didn't have to do any of that and which I was very thankful for. On the second day I think after the capitulation, we marched as I said to in Selarang barracks, which was quite a long march and it took

19:30 all day and half the night before we got there. When we were put into the barracks, they were quite good quarters. It was where the British regiments used to be billeted before the blue started. They were quite good barracks, three storeys I think, and we were quite comfortable there in the billets.

20:00 And we were starting to grow some vegetable, we used to cut the lawns by every man sitting down, he had to do a metre, to mow the lawn. We had to dig our own latrines, which they used the post hole diggers, just dig down a hole about that deep and well like I say, wasn't

20:30 bad. We did a bit of, they brought in the officers, we'd do a bit of squad drill, which we did. They started schools, like mechanics, had a couple of old engine, car engines and they'd, anyone that was interested, they had mechanics, you know, qualified mechanic would take you through the engine and show

21:00 you how a car engine worked.

Sorry, these were things the Japanese were organising or internally you were?

No, no, this was being organised by our own, we were all, senior officers and all, we were all there. And then, all of a sudden they wanted working parties in Singapore and that's where 2/29th were taken in,

we were left behind. I gave you the story

21:30 on that. And we went away on A Force, Japanese, to a place called Mergui, we were dropped off. First of all we went to the ship in Singapore, a seller ship called Sellerbese Maru had been an old English tramp steamer I think, about five thousand ton we estimated.

22:00 And on which a thousand prisoners were put, and I can tell you it was cramped. I was in charge of a party of two hundred and eighty-five placed in the bottom hold, which was level, subdivided between floors, and you could only sit up,

22:30 you couldn't stand up, you could only sit up. And because our boys had, well, this was what we reckon, they'd got into some canned onion, and when the Japs went to put them on, they were all gone, our boys had them. So we sat in the harbour in Singapore down the bottom hold, my mob, for two days. And I can tell you it was bloody hot.

23:00 And we sat there doing nothing for two days, they'd bring us up one hour in twenty-four, and hose us down with salt water. And I can tell you, they used to lower our rice down from the top in buckets and you can imagine the boys being hungry and whatever, was hard to manage them.

23:30 Try to keep 'em, you know, so everyone got a share of this cooked rice. Any rate, we settled down after a couple of days.

How did you manage that Charles?

Well we still they were, you know, still soldiers and realised that

24:00 unless they did these things, they were rabble. So after a couple of meals, everybody was happy, everyone got their share. This side'd go first, next time this side'd go first in their rice, and that's the way it worked. But we went across from Singapore to a place in Sumatra called Madang.

24:30 And we picked up another five hundred on our ship, mainly English people, which as you can imagine made it pretty crowded indeed. And from there we went to Victoria Point where they dropped off five hundred I think, under a Major Green. And then we went up

25:00 to a place called Mergui or Mergui and Colonel Ramsay, an Australian CO, 2/18th CO I think he was, he was in charge at Mergui. And the remaining thousand went on up to Tavoy under Colonel Anderson I believe. But we had this Colonel Ramsay and his adjutant

25:30 who was a Captain Hence and to me they were brilliant. They very quickly learned psychology on the Japanese. If they wanted something, they'd suggest it, knowing it'd be knocked back. In a couple of days time the Japs'd come and suggest something the same, and we'd get it. But for the first month at Mergui we were in a school

26:00 there, a thousand, about not much bigger than our house yard, two blocks anyway. And you can imagine, very basic toilet facilities and some of the men starting to get dysentery and diarrhoea and it become very prevalent. Well we were like that for

26:30 about a month until they built us a barrack building, and, but in that period, you know, life was pretty rugged. I was in charge of, oh, about sixty blokes in a room about this big. And you can imagine, really only sitting room at night. During the day some of them'd go out on working parties of

27:00 some kind. At night, when they were all asleep, mainly sitting up. Any rate after a month they started to spread out a bit and they put the officers over in a house which was a club house, a Mergui hierarchy had this club. But I tell you, there, there was scrub

27:30 up to the knees at the back of the house and there the natives started to throw parcels of food over the back, unbeknowns to the Japs of course, they would have skittled if they'd have got caught. But they'd throw over a box with fifty boiled eggs in it or something like this. We started to live like kings. But I must tell you this, I

28:00 had an old dressing gown which I hung up on the wall on a nail. Well when we moved out I went to take my dressing gown, there was only the outside left, the white ants had eaten the lot, except the cotton on the outside. I thought that was rather neat. Needless to say I didn't take me dressing gown any further. But we moved into barracks

28:30 which were three storeys and very well built at Mergui, and we used to work on the aerodrome, napping stone for the aerodrome, extending the runway. Rain, was in the rainy season, rained every day I think we were there. But I told you the story about the plane

29:00 coming in and we're all shouting crash, and it did.

Well can you? You didn't tell us on camera.

Didn't I?

No, that was out in the living room. Can you tell us that story again?

Well whilst we were working on the aerodrome, napping this stone, a Japanese plane was coming in one day, the only one we'd seen, I think it was the only one we saw there. But we were all shouting, "Crash, you so-and-so,

29:30 crash." And it did. But the Japanese took punishment out on the pilot, they gave him a hell of a thrashing when he got out of the plane because he crashed the plane. But as I told you earlier, the boys started to snaffle some of the parts off the plane and I was made a spoon to eat my rice. They made cigarette holders

30:00 out of the pipes of the aluminium or whatever it was on them and there wasn't much of the plane left when we left Mergui. Which was by boat, sitting room only, wasn't a very big boat. I would say there were three hundred on it when I went on it. And we were

30:30 being moved up to Tavoy. And the toilet facilities were nil, they had a rail round the outside and if anyone had dysentery or what have you, they just stood over the, on this rail over the, on the side of the boat, that was the toilet facility. But they also had a, one of our

31:00 two pounder anti-tank guns as their fire power on the front of this boat. Well we had some anti-tank blokes with us and during the night they got up to the gun, took the firing mechanism out and threw it over the side. That's the type of thing they would do. But also the natives at Mergui were

31:30 very, very friendly, pro-English and they had a Catholic mission there. It was manned by nuns, I didn't get to meet them myself but one of my fellow officers, Major Lloyd, he actually was allowed to go and speak to them.

32:00 And they actually gave him some buckles made out of shell, what's the stuff called in the shell? "Are you there, May? No." But any rate, they gave him

32:30 about half a dozen of these buckles made of this shell and he gave me a couple as souvenirs. I got them home but I had them out in the shed and bloody mice got in and ate them, got in the box I had them in. Oh, what's it called, cuttle? No, that's not right. Doesn't matter anyway. But any rate,

33:00 that, and another thing, I only heard this recently from Major Lloyd, who is ninety-nine by the way. That a couple of nights before we left Mergui the Japanese officers took our senior officers down and gave them a dinner, down Mergui. If we'd have known that, there'd have been a

33:30 riot I reckon. Any rate, that's what happened. We were pretty well looked after at Mergui after the first month. And up to Tavoy and we were placed once again in a big old school there. I think it was a university, and we came under

34:00 brigade command there, of the brigadier, oh, I'll think of his name directly. But Colonel Anderson had his crowd there and once again we were on building the aerodrome at Tavoy. And finally we were moved out. Varley, Brigadier Varley, who I think went

34:30 down on the ship that was sunk by the Americans in 1944 on the way to Japan. I don't know whether you've heard that story or not. That's where a lot of our fellas went down too, on that ship, 1944, that's another story. At Tavoy we were fairly well cared for, rubbish in rice, but you know, it was something to

35:00 eat and you ate it. Aerodrome building. We had this race meeting there that I told you about earlier, and you were able to buy a few sweet potatoes and cooked 'em yourself. We were able to help our men.

35:30 We had started a fund that, the captain was paid a hundred and twenty dollars a month or tickles as it was known, not, no I'm sorry, not in tickles, dollars. Sixty was deducted by the Japanese for board and lodging and protection,

36:00 which was pretty ironical.

What's that supposed to mean, protection?

Well, I don't know whether, we didn't get any, if you did something wrong you got hit under the chin or a bash over the head or something. But that was their claim, they deducted sixty out of a hundred and twenty. We set up a fund

36:30 which every officer paid in forty dollars for the sick and medical supply. So I actually ended up with twenty dollars in my hand at the end or twenty dollars yeah, the end of a month as a captain. And well you had your own

37:00 personal friends who you tried to help, and a dollar might be lucky if you bought an egg. You wouldn't know whether there was a chicken in it or not. I can tell you what, I ate some pretty high ones, I didn't come at any that had chickens in though.

Where was the money coming from sorry?

From the Japs. We were paid,

37:30 the boys got paid when they worked, they got paid ten cents a day, Japanese money, it was only paper money, just printed like newspaper, wasn't worth anything, really. But twenty cents'd buy an egg, if you could get one, or a sweet potato or something like that, bit of chin-de-gah. You know chin-de-gah? The sap out of a palm tree which sets

38:00 like a brown sugar in a, and you use it for sweetening, a sweet. And everybody tried to buy a bit of chin-de-gah. You'd mix it with a bit of water and put it on your rice to help you eat it. Tavoy, one of the highlights was the race meeting,

38:30 which was held on the first November, first Tuesday in November. As I told you earlier I won the high weight and have that painting to prove it, that was the trophy.

Can you tell us about that again, cause we didn't, that wasn't on camera, obviously. So what was the, who was behind that, how was that…?

Well the fella behind it was a fella called Sutherland,

39:00 Jim, Jim, that's right, Jim Sutherland who had a retentive memory on race horses and classical music. And he organised this race meeting. The idea was to carry someone on your back for seventy-five yards, and they had the track all, by permission of the Japs. I don't know who got that, probably Ramsay and Hence organised

39:30 that permission. They also got the Japs involved in it and had front-line seats for them, there weren't many there. And they ran three or four races. I carried a Lieutenant Badger from the 2/19th Battalion and won the officers' high weight,

40:00 and Wilson Mills had painted that picture of the trophy. Our horse, Sweet Potato, by Ali Barbar out of Canteen, he won the cup. And his family have still got that cup, I believe, if they haven't given it to the museum. It was a coconut

40:30 and they'd got two pieces of copper piping from somewhere, probably pinched off a Jap truck, I'm not sure about that, which made the handles. And they'd made a base plaque for it and that was the Melbourne Cup. And Wiff Muir, Wilf Muir, he was a horse, Sweet Potato.

41:00 And he carried Bluey Campbell, and he was out of our stable, he won the cup and we won two hundred cigars off the book makers, so we were smoking up big that night, and it was a hell of a day and that was at Tavoy.

And you said that some of the Japanese actually had front row seats there.

Yeah.

You were saying also earlier about the, sort of, psychological

41:30 **tactics that some of the men were using. Can you tell us a little bit more about…?**

Tape 5

00:38 **So, you're still in Tavoy, can you tell us a bit more about the sort of interesting things I guess, the entertainment that you made for yourselves?**

At Tavoy

01:00 two or three times we set off to move out and for some reason, either the ship didn't turn up or something, we were back, back in camp. So eventually they decided to move us by road transport. And oh, before I go there, at Tavoy, working on the aero-

01:30 drome, the boys had found a heap of soap in cases and of course they, we hadn't seen soap for a year and it was very nice thank you, we'll have some of this. And of course when the Japs went to collect their soap there was very little left, so they went berserk searching

02:00 who'd got this soap. Well they bunged on a search in the camp and they did find two blokes with bits of soap. Well they were very smartly wheeled up to the Jap guard house and severely done over. And they, the CO, Colonel Ramsay, next morning, when we were all on parade,

02:30 suggested that all those that took soap own up to it. Cause his theory was, or he and Hence, that if they got enough to admit, there'd be that many that they wouldn't, you know, deal out any more punishment. And as it turned out, that's exactly what happened. Twenty or thirty blokes stepped forward,

03:00 and they were more or less let off and once they'd owned up to it. Well then, oh one little amusing thing happened there, one morning. The boys were all on parade, and one of the padres, we had a tong or a well that we used to get water out of for

03:30 washing and what have you. And one of the padres this morning came out with his towel around him only, and bent over to get his bucket of water and his towel dropped off. And one of the boys in the ring yelled out, "Yield not to temptation father." This was his bare arse over the edge of the—you can imagine the boys

04:00 yelling and roaring. I don't know whether the Japs noticed the mirth or what have you. But any rate.

So did the Japanese, the guards, did they get involved in things that you were doing very much? When you said before that on race day...?

In Tavoy and those places they weren't, I know we lost, at Mergui I think there were two or three shot there trying to escape.

04:30 And when they were caught our senior officers tried in vain to get them let off, because it was their duty to escape if possible. But no way, I've got a screed there, can I get it, show you?

Yeah, of course.

05:00 Oh, where were we?

Well you were talking about the Japanese, about the guards and how many men you think were shot for trying to escape. So you were talking about how they treated you and...

Well generally at Mergui and Tavoy we had plenty of

05:30 blokes punished by doing the wrong thing in the Japanese view. Such as, sneaking off trading with the locals or answering, swearing at the Japanese, which they picked up

06:00 pretty quickly, the swear words, and understood it pretty quickly. I might say at this stage, we were still with the men and most work parties the officer took the orders and passed on to our own men. And if something went wrong the officer got probably a bash over the ear or. But

06:30 the men, if they couldn't understand, you know an order from the Japanese, they would be done over. But, looking back, after being on the line, we were treated, you know, fairly well at Tavoy and Mergui. And there were some bashings like, the soap episode.

07:00 Some of the boys were done over pretty severely there until they got enough numbers. And...

How do you mean they got enough numbers?

Well admitted that they'd pinched the soap. Yeah. I might add here that we also had a wireless, somebody operating a wireless, right through.

07:30 In fact the whole of the way through my prisoner of war we were getting news all the time and that was one of the things they were looking for when they bunged on the searches, not that we had a great many at Mergui or Tavoy. But our senior officers would hear the news and

08:00 then perhaps when it was a month or three or four weeks old, they'd spread it out to myself, who were like officers, and we would tell the men what we knew. And there was too old for the Japanese to pick up, there were, you know, like the landing in North Africa and those things. We knew that they happened, when they happened because some of these fellas had

08:30 illicit wireless. So we knew if we could hang in there long enough that we were going to make it. But this was early days, we didn't know about the railway line then.

So how did people, how did men get hold of the wirelesses?

Well in a team of a thousand men, from all walks of life, you had blokes who

09:00 had a bit of grey matter and these were signals people or someone like that. And they knew what to look for, blokes were going out through the wire, they'd go down to Mergui into the town, they might be able to purchase a couple of batteries or something like this. The Jap trucks had magnetos on them, I don't know much

09:30 about it but they tell me you rub a bit of steel on a magneto long enough and it becomes a magnet. And this is what they did, they made an ear plug in one camp that I was in, and out of a nugget tin, and were able to listen to broadcasts. Sounds ridiculous but they were able to do it. And they were taking their lives in their hands

10:00 too by doing it. Any rate we got orders to move out of Tavoy and we were going up to, well we didn't know where actually. But the, we went by trucks, forty on a truck, an open truck, hair-raising. And as we left Tavoy we were singing out, "Get stuffed you yellow so-and-soes,"

10:30 to the guards as we went past them. But they took us by truck half way, could you give me that bit of paper...

This one? This one.

Think that's the one. From Tavoy up to Ye, Y-E. We went by truck half way and marched

11:00 the rest, about, I think it was about a hundred miles or so. But we marched about forty or so I think, to get to Ye, where we stayed a couple of days there. The party I was with, recuperating because we hadn't done any marching that you could speak of and

11:30 you know, sore feet and what have you. And actually we stayed near a Buddhist Monk, ah, Buddhist Temple. And from there we went on by foot up to Thanbyuzayat, which was the base camp for the Burma line in Burma, and that was a tough march.

12:00 I finished up carrying about four blokes' gear, and you know, it was hard. Any rate we got to Thanbyuzayat, and we were there and our interpreter, a Captain Drower who spoke and knew, wrote Japanese better than the Japs themselves. And

12:30 they had signs, he told us, they had signs all around the camp at Thanbyuzayat, "These are Australian POWs, they're tough and they got to be kept under..." words to that effect. So you know, the guards became tough. And any misdemeanour, if you didn't cooee, bow or salute, you got a hit under the chin

13:00 or a bash with a rifle. But any...

So morale after the long march, because that's what, a hundred and fifty kilometres...?

Yeah, yeah, well that just where, at Thanbyuzayat was the base camp, the start of the Burma line. Now one thing that amused us there, we observed the Jap engineers training. And they had a heap of sleepers, railway sleepers

13:30 about six feet high. And these tough Japanese were made to jump off with a sleeper on their shoulder, every second one was getting a broken collar bone or a broken shoulder or a broken arm. So they woke up eventually, that they were tough, they weren't that tough. Jump off a heap of sleepers with a sleeper on their shoulder. Any rate, we were moved

14:00 on after about a week or a fortnight in Thanbyuzayat out to the twenty-sixth kilo [kilometre], and that's where we started to work on the line. It was summertime and we were just forming a track, it was open country and it was,

14:30 we were moving about a metre per man per day. The officers, our officers would take out a party of perhaps a hundred and they were expected, they were broken up into ten working parties of ten men and they had to move ten metres of soil or what have you per day.

15:00 Well some of them started moving it, you know, they were finished by lunch time. So the Japs very quickly woke up, so they made it one point three metres per man per day. And finally when we finished up, it was up to one point eight metres per man per day. But what you've got to understand, when we got to the cuttings,

15:30 through the hills, to move the soil out, they would move a ledge every metre down the side of the cutting. And one man would do the digging and the rest'd be up the cutting handing the soil out. They didn't, couldn't understand or they didn't understand, or they wouldn't understand

16:00 I should say, that really only one or two men were doing the digging. But they still had to move a metre point eight per man per day, at the finish, and it was tough work. But at the twenty-sixth kilo our blokes started to go downhill, dysentery, diarrhoea, malaria, beri beri, malaria,

16:30 malnutrition, ulcers. Well when we moved from the twenty-sixth to the seventy-five, a place called Meiloe, it was speedo, they were getting behind. So we used to go out at six o'clock in the morning and come home perhaps midnight

17:00 and the boys were only getting from midnight to six o'clock rest each day. Little did the Japs realise that during the night they'd be shovelling, they mightn't be, every third shovel would have a bit of dirt in it. The others were empty, they were just going through the motions, the boys were buggered. At any rate, at Meiloe our

17:30 boys started to really go downhill. We were cutting through virgin jungle, cutting the track through the virgin jungle about a hundred yards wide and ulcers started to really go bad. The doctors had absolutely nothing to treat them with and you know, some of the

18:00 ulcers, indescribable really, and they'd go overnight. I've seen them you know, six inches of bone, exposed there and nothing to treat them with. We finished at the seventy-five and went to our last camp

18:30 on the line as we were concerned, to the hundred and five kilo by road. And that would be the, one of the toughest marches I've ever did. At the finish I'd go fifty yards and sit down for ten minutes and go

another fifty, and everyone was doing the same, absolutely buggered. Well when they got working at the hundred and five

19:00 there was, the nearest water was two miles away down at the river. Soon as our engineer blokes got there, they very quickly sunk a well in the camp, so that stopped having to go to the river for water. They had, we had a well built in the camp by our own engineers.

19:30 This was the last section of line that we worked on in Burma. But the last month the Dutch hadn't finished their section over in Thailand. And we used to take a working party, myself and two or three other captains, used to take a working party every day, by

20:00 transport thank God, into Siam and do our one point eight, while the boys'd do the one point eight metres and come back at night, well that was halved. It was a pretty deep cutting and like I say there was two blokes doing the digging and the rest up the wall, in baskets hurling it out. And

20:30 one guard took to one of our blokes one particular day there, I was up on the cutting and I yelled out, "Stop it you bloody mongrel." And he come up and give me a hell of a flogging, with a metre stick. I thought he'd broken my arm but he hadn't thank God. And

21:00 they had to stay there until they finished their one point eight, eighteen metres. We didn't get home till after dark that night I can tell you. And ...

So you were heavily guarded when you were working on the line?

Pardon?

Were you heavily guarded, were there a lot of guards there?

Not a lot, not a lot. Look, you could have escaped, but you had

21:30 three or four thousand kilometres of jungle between Siam or Burma, where we were, and the nearest Indian. One of my friends a Captain Dave West, a captain that slept next to him, he did escape, him and two other, three other blokes

22:00 were with him. They got about fifty kilometres before they were captured or were dobbed in by the natives. They had a price on their head, they got so much for dobbing them in. And but Dave West he was flogged with a dried bull's pistol, because he hadn't told the Japanese that, I forget the captain's name, it's in the book somewhere,

22:30 escaped. But poor old Dave got the hiding, and he got home thank goodness. He reckons the only thing that saved him that day was that they left his shirt on while they flogged him. That was at the hundred and five kilo. Something I must tell you, which was interesting there. As you can imagine our own engineers were

23:00 interested in all these things, and they decided that not far from the hundred and five camp that the grade was too high for the engine. So they decided to lower the rail by six, two metres, six feet six. And there was some great betting on how much would have to be taken off the rails themselves.

23:30 So when they were lowered, one met perfectly, the other was six inches too long and all bets were declared off. But the one, that rail was cut off by hacksaws, twenty men and an NCO, hacksawed that bit of rock, took 'em all day with a hacksaw blades,

24:00 pathetic. Oh some amusing things happen. We had one crew that they were getting the levels, and this particular young Jap, he had the three levels, well he had one level and further down a hundred yards and put one in between and sight it and you'd see how much had to come out of

24:30 the drain. His idea was to cut a bit off the sighting stick and make it level. Actually in the finish they were forcing our men, our, you know, impossible, because they were so ill. Our senior staff, an engineer said, "Look,

25:00 if you let us handle it, we will see that it's done, when you want it finished, we will do it." And towards the finish that's what they let us do, at the hundred and five. We, our engineers, more or less took over and finished the last bit. Whether we saved any lives or not, I don't know, but hopefully we did.

25:30 But it all ended on the end of December 1943, we're on the way to Siam. We set out on the railway line for about three days before the train come along and we were able to sit out on top of the thing, went off down to

26:00 Tamarkan in Thailand.

Just before you get there, we'll just wrap up on the Burma section. You said before that if anyone escaped that the local people would send them back, can you tell me what that was about?

Well you can imagine the local people were starving, they were dying by

26:30 hundreds, they were pressed into working parties on the railway line like we were. And I suppose to be given fifty dollars, to hand someone in, it was like a fortune to them and unfortunately that's what they did sometimes. I don't know, we used to, oh, when we walked in Siam from Burma, we used to go past

27:00 these little old three pagodas. I don't know whether you know ancient history but old Khan went down the Silk Road past the famous Three Pagodas [Pass]. And we used to go past 'em every day, they're only old, little old heaps of mud brick. But the locals, if they went past, they'd pick up a pebble and put it on the temple. We didn't of course.

27:30 **So how did it come about that you were moved from the one hundred and five camp…?**

Down to Tamarkan?

Yeah.

The line was through. They opened it, I think in October 1943 or November 1943, first trains went through. And some of my dearest friends were going through to hospital on some of the first trains that went through.

28:00 They were F Force, sick people and they went through to a hospital camp at the fifty kilo, ours was at fifty-five, our hospital was at fifty-five. But I want to tell you there about these ulcer cases. They, we had some Dutch in the same camp as I was in, but we didn't think much of them, but

28:30 there was one bloke, a Dutch chemist. And he was able to extract one of the chemicals in the quinine, I think it was out of quinine and was able to, the doctors were able to use it as a spinal anaesthetic. And down at the fifty-five kilo hospital I believe they did use, when they were

29:00 amputating blokes limbs, they were able to use this anaesthetic that the Dutch chemist had extracted successfully. But other than that, all they did was hold the poor buggers down and with a pair of scissors open up a leg or with an ordinary

29:30 saw, take a leg off.

So how common were the tropical ulcers, did everybody get them and was it a very serious problem?

Most people had them one time or another. I must have good blood, I got hit on the leg with an axe once, I thought I'm gone. First morning looked like an ulcer, going to be an ulcer. It healed up itself. I don't know, had no

30:00 anaesthetics or, no antiseptics or anything, just lucky, yeah. Oh a lot of people had them yeah, yeah. A lot of them, I couldn't do it myself, but a lot of them were able to walk, you know, on the ground without boots or shoes. I couldn't do that, I had to have clogs under my feet which were bits of wood with a lump of old tyre

30:30 for the toe part, over the toe.

How long altogether did you spend then on that section of the line?

On the land, on the line? We were on it about twelve months, not quite twelve months. I'm not sure exactly when we started, we certainly finished

31:00 in December 1943. But I, and West, took a working party back in 1944 in Siam, maintenance on the line for a couple of months, but that's another story, it was a breeze. The Japs were starting to realise they were not going to win. And the guards

31:30 and engineers we had on the second term were reasonable.

Where did you have the Korean guards?

Where'd we?

Where did you have the Korean guards? I understand you had Korean guards at…?

Korean? Oh yeah, oh the guards yes. The Korean guards and Japanese engineers on the line, yeah. Korean guards and

32:00 they were treated just as bad as we were, really. If they did anything wrong, they were bashed up just the same. But I can recall we were building a bridge and they used to have ten men each side. I don't know whether you know anything about it, but they had a monkey, what they called a monkey, was a five hundred pound weight of steel, or iron, on a centre bar.

32:30 And they had ten men each side and one, two, three, four, you walked out four paces and then let it go. And that five hundred pound weight punched the pile into the ground. Well we had one day, one of the engineers was going crook, boys weren't doing it either quick enough, or something went wrong and he was screaming his head off.

33:00 And the monkey jumped off the centre bar and he had to get up to steer it in. And when he was steering

it in the boys let the monkey come down, onto his hand. He couldn't pull it out but he got the message. He never yelled again for that day.

33:30 They would have taken his hand off. Elephants, they had elephants which they treated terribly, but they were marvellous animals. They'd pick up a thirty or forty foot pile, pole and carry it you know, through the trees ready

34:00 to be put in the bridge somewhere, marvellous animal. And Japs didn't feed them properly.

So what was the relationship like between the Korean guards and the Japanese engineers?

Not too good. I can recall one day, something went wrong and the

34:30 Korean guards told us to go home to camp, and Japanese engineers took to them. And they chased us home, we were getting back to camp as quickly as possible, and followed by the Korean guards, followed by the Jap engineers. I don't know how that ended up, we had a day, afternoon off anyway.

35:00 It was a hair-raising ride to go down on the train. When I went down a couple of times on the train when we—back in 1944, I had to go back down to base for something, I just forget what it was now. Where the F Force had done their stint,

35:30 they'd actually cut into the side of a mountain and the rail line was virtually strapped onto the side of a mountain. And they used to have to have an engine in front and an engine behind pushing to get up the grade. Well in that section you didn't know whether you were going to end over down the side or not. Because sometimes the

36:00 engine drivers used to have a row I think, one'd be pulling and the other would be pulling the other way and was a pretty rugged ride. You're only sitting out on, outside, not in a truck or anything, you're sitting out on the top. Yeah, I did that a couple of times, hair-raising. One bloke I remember once, we were coming down and he said, "I can

36:30 smell hair burning." They were using wood for, to fire the engine, train engine. "I can smell hair burning, somebody's on fire." He said, "God, it's meself." He'd put his hat on and one of the sparks had got on his hair, and he'd put his hat on over it. Started to burn.

Who else was using the train?

Pardon?

Who else was using the train, who were the passengers?

Just prisoners,

37:00 just prisoners. We were pulled up once and there was a Japanese train going the other way full of guns, what have you. Just as well none of our planes come over, we'd have been a goner. Was the luck of the game. Where'd we get to, down to Siam, Tamarkan. Magnificent.

37:30 January 1944. Paradise, we were able to buy bananas and an egg, occasional egg, stuff like that. Started to eat a bit. Course we'd left a lot behind up in Burma and Thailand. And any rate this, I must tell you this. They decided to

38:00 test us, the Japs, to see if we had worms or parasites. You'll forgive me if I use crude language.

Use whatever language you like, it's fine.

We're all out on the parade ground and they started off with glass vials. And the theory was that they'd do ten and put them in a—disinfect it, and then if

38:30 there was anything wrong, they'd have it down to ten. But the glass vials didn't last very long so then they had pieces of fencing wire which were about so long, with the end made into a circle. And you'd bend over and ... this was the way I was tested. Unfortunately for a couple of blokes, they perforated

39:00 their bowel. They got ulcers, gone. But crude, they had nothing. The senior doctor along the line they reckon was a first year dental student, couldn't tell our doctors anything. Our senior doctor was a Colonel Coates and Major

39:30 Crantz and a Captain Cumming, they were magnificent men. The other F Force had Weary Dunlop and his gang but our senior officer was Coates. He'd—First World War man—came back and became a doctor, and a brilliant surgeon. He'd go along, I know one of my

40:00 sergeants, Sergeant Playstead, he'd go along and look at him and say, "No, Playstead, I won't take that off today, you might, we might be relieved tomorrow and you would curse me for the rest of my life." But any rate he had to take Playstead's leg off. And he was one of the lucky ones that had a

40:30 spinal. And Coates, they used to, had an old, well it wasn't white but it used to be a uniform. They'd have a billy of water boiling or a tin of water boiling and Coates' orderly'd pick his tunic out of the

boiling water and he'd get into it before he'd start an operation. And

41:00 he was, took Playstead's leg off, and he had it in his hand, showing Playstead why he had to take it off. And he was smoking a cigar, which had an ash on it. And Playstead said to him, "Look out for your ash sir, it'll fall on me leg." He said, "You couldn't get anything better on it."

41:30 Playstead...

Tape 6

00:33 Right. We had an officer allowed to go down to the hospital camp once a month, to take pay down, a Lieutenant Farmer. Lives in Sydney, if he's still alive. And, this, we were

01:00 able to send them down personal money, not much, would have been five dollars I suppose. It's about all I could have afforded and to keep any meself. But that was a note sent back by Playstead with Farmer. And Playstead couldn't recall writing it. I said, "There it is." I've kept it.

01:30 Playstead died seven or eight years go, but he ran a paper over in Stall for long. Used to go dancing, had a leg off, he used to go dancing and do everything.

So how long would he have spent in hospital and how long would it have taken for his leg to heal?

How long?

How long would it have taken for his leg to heal?

02:00 Look, I'm not sure about that. Once they went down to hospital, we very rarely saw them again. But they had people working on the prosthesis, you know, making feet for them, leg for them, joints, out of bamboo. And they, whether

02:30 Playstead got one of those I'm not sure. But they would have been set up when they got home of course, they would have got all new and. But these blokes, Coates used to tell them down there; actually he was carried in to the fifty kilo hospital on a stretcher with typhus,

03:00 malaria and dysentery I believe and got himself better and started to run the camp. This is Coates I'm speaking of. And he used to tell them, go into a hut of a night and give them a lecture on any subject they wanted to speak about. And they tell me he used to always end up by saying, "Your ticket's home

03:30 in the end of your, in the bottom of your dixie [pot], eat your rice." I did, I ate mine.

So you said before the doctors...

And got home.

the doctors were magnificent, the doctors were extraordinary. Were there doctors right there in the camp?

Oh yeah, they lived in the same huts as, we lived in the same huts as the men. We had a section for the officers.

04:00 Field Rank, usually that's major and above, they had a little hut on their own. But captains and lieutenants, we lived in the same huts as the men and fraternised with them. Still do.

So you were able, men were able to go to the doctors if they had an ailment, was that...?

Yes,

04:30 yes.

What happened?

Well they had to be really sick before, the Japs used to, when the pressure was on to build the line, they didn't believe in sickness, the Japs. All they were on, figures, out to work. And whether, who was responsible for that, I believe were the guards. Not, I'm sorry, not the guards, the engineers.

05:00 Figures, they wanted out working, and they drove men to their graves. We fared better I believe, A Force and F Force, because we came away in 1942 to Mergui,

05:30 which was tough for the first month, and then Tavoy, and I believe our troops listened to the officers about boiling water, particularly boiling water and hygiene. A bloke wasn't allowed not shave with us, if he wanted to grow a beard, he had to grow a beard. But if he was shaving,

06:00 he had to shave every second day at least. And I used the one blade myself for two years, just an

ordinary safety blade. I had a bit of old cup that I reckoned I used to sharpen it on, I kid myself that I sharpened it, I don't think it did, pulled 'em out I think. I had me head shaved, we used to say, "That's the last time we'll have it shaved, we'll be free when it grows."

06:30 Finally it was. We were. When it grew. Any rate 1944 was a good year really. We took this working party back, Dave West and I, up to a place called Tamarkan. It's listed on one of those maps I drew. Any rate we were, they used to let us go to a

07:00 village nearby every weekend and we'd get a few papayas or bananas and we did pretty well. The guards were good and the engineer, he didn't care two hoots as long as we were out for the day. And we used to call him Piano Teeth; he had a full mouth of teeth.

07:30 One little story I'd like to tell you there about Tamarkan. We were on the side of a stream, the kitchen was built on the side of a little stream, wasn't too big, only three or four feet, five feet wide. But we had steps dug in up to the bank and the cooks, they were able to get blokes who were sick, perhaps had ulcers and what have you. We were

08:00 getting a few onions, quite a few, they were little, small, and they'd come in a big basket. Well the cooks used to get some of these crook yokey blokes, sick, down to wash the skins off these onions. And they were sitting there one day when Syd put his head up, and Syd was an eighteen foot snake. Well

08:30 there's one bloke there with a crook leg, the others reckoned he jumped three steps from the river to the top step, and he couldn't walk because he had a big ulcer on his leg. But they reckon when Syd put his head up in the river, he jumped alright. But you'd be sleep during the night and some silly bugger'd yell out, "Has anybody seen Syd?" This is the snake.

09:00 They caught one, they had him skinned and eaten and they had his hide, one bloke was going to make a couple of belts with his hide, had it hanging up a tree. Yeah. "Has anyone seen Syd?" But we were out on the working party one day and a Jap major came back on a trolley,

09:30 came down the line. And he called our engineer bloke over, I could hear them talking. I didn't know much but I did know enough to understand that they were moving back in Burma, they were being driven back in Burma. So, I said to the boys that night, "Hang in there." But we were only there a couple of months and we were

10:00 taken back to Tamarkan, about the end of 1944. No, before the end of '44, and the Japs were picking out all the white blokes, fittest, to take them to Japan. I think they were going to use them for propaganda amongst other things. They were

10:30 going to use them and say they were just captured. But if you've read the history, most of them were sunk on the way to Japan. But I missed out because I had malaria at the time so I've been lucky. We turn, West and I took a working party back up, as I said, to Tamarkan. When we came back towards the end of

11:00 '44, we were bombed by our own planes twice. Our camp was just near an ack ack, Japanese ack ack position, anti-aircraft position and they were going for it, and hit our camp. We were lined up being

11:30 counted actually, and I think there were seventeen killed, I don't know how many wounded. But two I know were blown outside the camp and they were grabbed by friendly Thais and were taken down the [UNCLEAR] and they radioed out and a submarine come in and picked them up, two of 'em, and they were home in 1944.

12:00 And I think one of them mentioned that he'd met me along the line.

Did you hear that story while you were over there or was that years later?

No, about the two being...?

Yeah.

Oh no, we heard about it yeah, yeah.

How did you hear about it?

We would have heard it from the Thais I should imagine, friendly. The Thai people were very friendly

12:30 to prisoners of war, they did a lot for us. And I suppose a lot of them suffered for it too. But yes they were very friendly the Thai people. But in February 1945 the officers were segregated from the men. And we went down to a camp at Kamburi [Kanchanaburi],

13:00 which is further in towards Bangkok and we were just officers there, the men. Well I'm not too sure how they, I know our senior officers spoke to the NCOs and gave them the advice that they, any advice

13:30 they could. But from February '45 we were all officers jammed into a three acre compound, machine-guns on every corner. We had a wireless buried under the cookhouse stove. And

14:00 it got hit one morning by one of our own planes and there was panic, they thought the Japs had found the wireless, they didn't. But we had, they were going for an engine just sitting outside the camp, under a tree. And they hit the camp with one bomb, one or two killed

14:30 I think, two or three injured. But oh, before we left Tamarkan, we were raided by one of our own planes with incendiaries. Why the Japs wouldn't allow us to mark it as a POW camp, and this is something I cannot understand. How the Thai's

15:00 hadn't, or the Burmese, hadn't notified the allies where the POW camps were, and I've never been able to understand that. But however, this boy came over this day and dropped a couple of incendiary bombs on our camp and we were up putting fires out in the huts and roof, from our own planes. We were a bit unhappy about that.

15:30 **I've heard of that happening, you know, raids on POW camps by the allies. It seems odd to me that they wouldn't be aware that that is a POW camp, that there's an establishment…?**

Yeah well it's something I could never understand. But I must tell you this other story, I was gonna tell you earlier in the day about Harold Hawke, this Harold Hawke, marvellous man. The Japs had an ack ack position outside

16:00 the back of the POW camp, about four mile, on a big hill. And our boys used to have to take the food for the Japs, up on the guns on the mountain, well wasn't a mountain, was a big hill. And Hawke was on this party, they did it regular,

16:30 every second day I think. Hawke was on this party, and the Jap guard was a nasty bit of work apparently. Once they started at the bottom, he wouldn't let 'em have a stop until they got to the top, and it was pretty tough going, he reckoned. At any rate Hawke used to make puzzles out of wire and he

17:00 thought, I'll get this Jap interested in these puzzles. So before they'd go up, Hawke'd bring out a puzzle in front of the guard you know, and all of a sudden it'd come apart. The Jap, after about two days, Hawke handed it to him, "Have a go at it." Course he had no way of doing it. So

17:30 finally the guard used to sit at the bottom trying to do Hawke's puzzle and they'd go up and stop several times on the way up. So that cleared that little problem up. Hawke'd produce a new puzzle with wire, and his nibs'd sit at the bottom trying to work it out. Psychology. But going on from that,

18:00 we believe, when the Americans started to come over with their Fortresses and go for the ack ack, that they used to use that hill as a guide in. And twice they went up our camp with all guns blazing, and that was frightening. They hit

18:30 the camp once with a bomb, I don't think anyone got hit with machine-guns, well I can't recall anybody, but that happened twice at Tamarkan. The first time they, we did have seventeen killed and quite a number wounded.

19:00 But we were winning.

Now you said that the officers and the rest of the men were separated. And it seems to me that up until that point the officers were very, you know, key people, they were very important to the morale of the men. You know, they were the ones who were saying, "Hang in there."

Yeah, without skiting, I believe we did help

19:30 save a lot. We insisted on hygiene, we, not me so much personally but we had hygiene officers. We'd go into a new camp, first thing they'd do was dig a latrine, you know, otherwise they'd been anywhere. And made sure we had boiled water.

20:00 I must tell you this story, when we got down to the officers, segregated, one of our jobs to keep us occupied I suppose was to pull water up for the Jap guard, out of a well. And our engineer had made a pulley and a long piece of piping about

20:30 eight feet long I think it was, with a trap on the bottom. And the idea was you ran out twenty yards and pulled it up and you ran back twenty yards and this dropped down a well and filled with water and the trap'd close, then you'd run twenty yards and pull it up and tip it into a barrel. And this was being done, all the water for the Jap guards.

21:00 Well one of my friends, Plunkett, Lieutenant Plunkett, very red, fair skin, not that I'm having a shot at red hair. He decided he wasn't gonna do it one day and he was very smartly put in front of the guard house

21:30 for disobeying Jap orders, and to stand there all day. Well I'm talking about temperatures of forty-five or fifty. And he stood there for about three hours, and he was slowly, only had G-string on, slowly being burned red. And he thought, "I'll throw a sixer and they'll drag me

22:00 and throw me in the shade of the guard house." Can you imagine he decided to do this, which he did, he dropped down and he said the ground was that hot he had to get up. Didn't work out. But George finished up like a beetroot, he stood there for two days I think, in front of the guard house, slowly got

burned.

22:30 But he got over it. Plunkett, George. He got a decoration after he got home, he was coming home from Sydney once and somewhere near Albury there was a car on fire. And he jumped out and pulled someone, a woman I think, out of this burning car, and he got a decoration for that.

23:00 No brains of course, he doesn't know why he did it, but he did it.

So did you have any contact with the other men, after the segregation?

No, no, we were entirely segregated, never, never saw them again, until we got home. Well I might just say here, when we went away

23:30 on A Force, I lost my unit, 2/29th as a unit and I really knew more people from New South Wales and Queensland, they were the ones that were on A Force. So I ended up knowing more New South Welshmen and Queenslanders than I did Victorians. Never got to meet the reinforcements,

24:00 as they'd all gone into Singapore on the Godown. Any rate, how are we going?

(Off camera: I'll stop there for a bit.)

go on to the final part of my POW days if I may. In June 1945 we were going to be moved, we were being moved.

24:30 And I believe I made one mistake. My friend Phillips was on the first list, four hundred, to be moved and I said, "Phillips, I'm coming with you." I'm wishing I hadn't said that, no I don't. We did it tough. On June the twenty-ninth we were put in a train and shunted off down to Bangkok

25:00 that night. We got into Bangkok and were billeted in some old [UNCLEAR], which were knocked down by our allied planes every now and then. But we were billeted on a couple of unexploded bombs in this hut, covered with sand bags, and we were there for about three or four days,

25:30 when we were moved on to the rail yards in Bangkok and into cattle trucks, which were sitting room only. And I'm not sure how far we went, but about half way I think by train, up, as it turned out to this place, called Nakom Nayok. We didn't

26:00 know the name of it at this period. But we got to the rail head which was twenty kilometres I believe short of Nakom Nayok and started marching. Well that, I believe, was the toughest march I ever did. The last four kilometres were through a swamp of water up to our thighs. And we were

26:30 got onto a hill which was just covered with lalang, grass that is. And there were four hundred of us and we were billeted thirty-six to a tent for a month before we got a hut built, which we built ourselves. And during that period

27:00 we had a tropical downpour every night I believe, we were marching or walking out five kilometres to carry bamboo back to build our own huts. Five kilometres out and five back every time, carrying about three fifty or sixty foot bamboo spars on our

27:30 shoulders, and only a buffalo wallow to wash in. You'd get in to have a wash, you'd be lucky if you got out without a couple of buffalo leaches on your leg or on your arm or somewhere. And tropical, they call it tropical [UNCLEAR], broke out, which is

28:00 scabies in other words, under the arm and in the crutch. And as soon as you start to sweat and the salt got in it, it was pretty traumatic. But any rate they got some fish from somewhere, the Japs I'm talking about. And, fresh fish, and they only, we only had a sheet of iron to cook it on. Ha.

28:30 So they cooked it this particular night and we all had a fish. Come half way through the night and three hundred and ninety had poisoning out of the four hundred. And I can tell you that's a lot of belly aches, and I mean belly aches. Phillips and I and Badger I think,

29:00 thought we were through it, we'd escaped it, when it struck the three of us. Well they could have shot me, I was that crook, I wouldn't have cared a damn, but we had poisoning. But one bloke in particular, I must tell you this, a Lieutenant Campbell off HMAS Perth, I reckon he ate three fish and never turned a hair.

29:30 Never got it, he was one of about six that escaped ptomaine poisoning. That's where we ended. Out of Nakom Nayok, about five or ten miles on the side of a hill, we were not told officially until the seventeenth of August. We had a wireless

30:00 and knew it was over. In those two days our bloke who could speak Japanese, and what have you, got bashed up badly. And one bloke

30:30 who had taken some money off a Thai somewhere and got caught, was ordered to stand in front of the guard house to the end of the war. He stood there for about four days. To keep himself alive, the Jap guards used to put out fruit in front of the guard house for the Gods. And of course during the night, a

bloke or Stan had, he'd

31:00 sneak off and eat this fruit to keep himself alive. But his legs was fat at the bottom than they were up here when he finished. But the night, the day we were told, that night, somebody produced a Union Jack, we got up and hauled the Japanese flag down, or somebody did and ran the Union Jack up. And I've never

31:30 heard a cheer like it. We, some of the boys knocked off a Jap Officer's WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s, he had three or four WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s in a bit of a shed there. They knocked 'em off, he got himself blotto, so he didn't care and we ate his WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s.

32:00 But my second mistake here was, the senior officers called for volunteers, there was an ORs [Other Ranks] Camp about five kilometres from where we were, which we didn't know about. Volunteer officer to go down and take charge of that camp and I volunteered. And it was oh, I suppose it was alright, but some of the boys started to

32:30 play up and made it very unpleasant for a while. But I went out through the wire there a couple of times down into the village with one of my own boys. We had a drink of wine, a feed of chicken. I had a signet ring that I'd kept hidden all the time and the natives wanted to buy it that night. Could have sold it for five hundred dollars, but I brought it

33:00 home and Jeffrey, my son's got it, May had given it to me. And from thereon it was all downhill, Nakom Nayok was where we finished, as prisoners of war . The boys started to get restless, that's where we took the list of names, forgot to put my own on it. And the boys started to get restless

33:30 so I went down to Bangkok and asked them to stir up, you know, getting them down to Bangkok. I should mention in this camp, Lady Mountbatten came in to this camp, after we'd got down there. And this was

34:00 about three or four days after the Jap capitulation and she came into the camp, she was just going around with her entourage. And you know, half of them were in the, you know, half the blokes had nothing to wear. Oh, she didn't mind but she expressed a desire to meet the officers, which she did . I did,

34:30 never kept it, but there was a photo of me shaking hands with her. And unfortunately I never kept it. Such is life. But ...

Why did you forget to put, or how did you come to forget to put your name on the list?

Oh I don't know, bloody stupid.

What was the list, first of all? What was the list exactly?

List of all the troops in that particular camp. Should have put 'em down first, I don't know why we didn't,

35:00 stupid. We were out, you know, trying to get it away in a hurry and that's the only excuse I can think of. But any rate, we got home.

So, this was the first time it would have been recorded and released as to who was in camp?

Yeah, yes, yes. Yes, that we were alive.

So when did your wife find out that you were alive and you were coming home?

I don't think she found out,

35:30 oh I think it was a fortnight or so. "Is that right, May?" Voice from the deep, the voice of doom. I daren't say that too loud. Yeah, well that's about all I can tell you I think. Coming home, yeah, come in. (Off camera: Did you call out?) Yeah, I did.

36:00 When did you get notified I was alive. (Off camera: I don't know the exact date). No, fortnight, after the end? (Off camera: Oh no, no, don't you remember I got a telegram from somebody supposedly in Koran?) Doug Holme. (Off camera: Koran, to say that they had seen you and that was the first I really

36:30 heard. And then the Red Cross rang me, cause I'd been in the Red Cross in Queensland). We were called out, when we got down to Bangkok, there were few incoming troops, allied troops

37:00 and we were asked to provide a Provo to keep the peace in Bangkok. I would like to show you now, if you'd take that off I'll go and get it...

Tape 7

00:30 **you have here in your left hand?**

Well I, did I tell you about the Provo [Provost marshalls- military police] that we're on in Bangkok after the, peace was declared? The incoming land forces were short of troops and they asked ex-POWs to provide a Provo in Bangkok

01:00 for a short while until they, troops arrived. And this is a letter that I got after I arrived home, from General Evans, thanking us for our services during that period. He also told us, unofficially, we could select a souvenir and this is the one that I

01:30 selected. This is the one that I selected.

And how did you come about getting your hands on this…?

I managed to get it home in my kit bag, put it over there out of the way, and nearly lost it after we got home.

02:00 Took us all day to chase it up. General Evans was the General commanding 'Seeak', an Indian Division, in Burma at the time and he was the one that allowed us to bring home the souvenir.

02:30 When the Provo finished we were flown down to Bangkok in good old Dakotas [Douglas Dakota transport plane]. My first flight in a plane was from Bangkok to Singapore, which was a flight in those days of about six hours. There were, as far as I can recall, five planes took off, two of them made

03:00 forced landings on the way down the Malayan peninsula. We had one scare, I thought we went up, I know my hair did, but the pilot told us we dropped down in an air pocket, going through an electrical storm. Any rate we got safely down in Singapore and we had

03:30 absolutely nothing to do until, except wait for a ship to go home. We did get an issue of a bottle of beer a day, I think it was a Westralian or South Australian beer, and being off it for so long, I used to be quite full-up with one bottle.

04:00 We were more or less outfitted there in Singapore, I did try to get a copy of that photo I spoke about, with Lady Mountbatten but they wouldn't give me a copy. They had it but they wouldn't give me a copy. But any rate finally we ended up getting a berth on

04:30 a ship called the Cassia. It was a liberty ship and had been in, used in the D-Day Landings they said and they'd come out to operate in Burma. It was pretty rough as far as comfort goes but there were four VAD [Voluntary Aid Detachment] Nurses on it, which caused

05:00 some activity amongst the younger officers coming home. In fact one of my friends, Ian McDonnell, Lieutenant Ian McDonnell, he took a shine to one of them and finally ended up marrying her. And they had three girls I think, but he died of cancer about two years ago.

05:30 And very sad. But we used to meet up with him and various other officers that I'd met, during our POW days, when we used to go north. Mainly we'd meet at Tamworth and have a night of good cheer there, we did that for several years. We're still in, most the others are all dead now,

06:00 but May and I are still in touch with their widows, we send Christmas cards every year. Coming home on this Cassia we called in at Fremantle and Perth people turned it on again for us. They had private houses, which

06:30 took us in for a meal and we were able to ring Victoria and speak to our people, from Perth, free of charge of course. And I rang May, wasn't home, naturally. They'd shifted, so I didn't know about that.

07:00 Any rate on the way around from Fremantle to Melbourne he, the captain pulled close in, when he knew we were Victorians, towards the Victorian border near Port Fairy. And he only sat out, you know, two or three miles, right along the coast up to Port Philip Bay, which was fantastic.

07:30 And we got in to Port Melbourne. I, coming up the bay was carrying my 38 Revolver still, I thought what am I taking this home for? So one night I walked out and threw it over the side of the ship and I congratulated myself for doing that, so it's in the bottom of Port Philip Bay

08:00 somewhere. When we were unloaded at Port Melbourne when we came in, they had a team of carriers there to pick up our gear and take us out to Royal Park to meet our families. Well when

08:30 we got to Royal Park, my gear and another officer, Major Lloyd's gear, hadn't turned up. But in the meantime May and I had walked past each other and hadn't recognised one another, and I suppose that's understandable after four and a half years. But any rate we got together. But to chase

09:00 up our gear and get it, I went with Major Lloyd and it took us all the rest of the day to chase it down. But we still got it and that is my souvenir that I nearly lost when I got home.

Where was the gear?

Pardon?

Where was the gear, how did you track that down?

Well Major Lloyd, he knew Melbourne being a Melbourne boy and he just got on to the carriers

09:30 and asked where they'd taken. And he found out it'd been, our two kit bags had been dumped at an old warehouse. So he, we got on the taxi and around we went, and sure enough it was there, we half fixed it ourselves.

10:00 **By that time you and May had recognised each other?**

Yeah, we had.

And how did that happen, if you didn't see each other, recognise each other the first time?

Well we recognised after walking past, we kind of, I suppose, realised we'd done that. And I think eithershe turned round or I turned round, I'm not sure which now. Plus the fact that my mother and father

10:30 were there and everything turned out alright. But it was disappointing that she had to go off and I had to go off chasing my gear. Any rate we were home by nightfall and from thereon it was.

11:00 After a couple of days we went back to Camperdown, I got a real welcome there, they'd, half the town had turned out to welcome me home. And my brother had moved to Maryborough which I wouldn't have known about, and after a week or so we decided to come up and visit him

11:30 in Maryborough, and that's where we've stayed. But in the meantime I had shingles just after I got home, which were pretty rugged. I don't know whether you've had them or not but they can be damn sore. And also after we, I, got going in the dairy, we were delivering milk, households, I got five boils

12:00 on my hip and I did it pretty rugged. We had two children pretty quick, I suppose I was pretty keen when I got home, that sort of thing and we since had another son, so that completed our family. We've lived in Maryborough

12:30 fifty-seven years. Still blow-ins I suppose in a way, seen a lot of changes here. I don't know about some of the stories, what would you like to hear?

There are lots actually. I'm interested to know when you came back and obviously no-one had heard hide nor hair of you for three

13:00 **and a half years. When you came back, what impression did you get of their take on where you'd been, what you'd done and how you were; what were their worries and concerns?**

I suppose my family were concerned but generally, I'd been away four and a half years, and as far as friends were concerned,

13:30 they'd all gone, their own lives, got married, moved away, and I virtually had no friends other than my family. I suppose that happened with most of the crew that I was with. 22nd Brigade, which was the New South Wales Brigade, they were away five years.

14:00 So some of their family wouldn't have known them either. I did want to tell you that we got one Red Cross parcel during our three and a half years as POWs. We know the Japs got them and used them themselves. We had one

14:30 in 1943 divided between six. And it was an American Red Cross parcel and it had a very good combination of things including cigarettes which, I never smoked before I went away but I started smoking when I was a POW. What a fool, rubbish,

15:00 we used to smoke. Any rate, that's life.

So you're saying that Red Cross parcels were delivered, they made it there, but the Japanese just never passed those on, is that right?

No. I personally never saw them but I do know people that did see them and knew they had them—they used them themselves.

15:30 **Do you want to tell us about that Christmas, was it Christmas…?**

Christmas dinner 1943. The Emperor in his magnificent gesture gave us a couple of pigs in the, at the hundred and five kilo for the prisoners of war,

16:00 or the South East Asia Prosperity Sphere, as they called themselves. And we had about a thousand in the hundred and five kilo at the time, thousand POWs. And we got one square of pork, about an inch square and turmeric water, for Christmas dinner 1943.

16:30 And I can tell you it was pretty rugged. Turmeric water, turmeric I believe is the colouring in curry.

What else can I tell you?

I'm really curious about, you said for most of the time you actually had a wireless set, so you're picking up

17:00 **on news from the outside world. And obviously as the war is changing and then the allies are starting to get the upper hand, you're getting a sense of that happening and that must affect morale too I'm sure.**

Yes it did, we did have a wireless, I don't know who had it naturally, during the—I found this out a few years ago that it was a friend of mine, he was one of the ones that had it. Lieutenant—

17:30 God, MC, God, isn't it terrible? Any rate he's still alive and we used to meet him, Watchorn, Arthur Watchorn. He was one of the ones that had a wireless until they were very near caught and

18:00 Anderson made him ditch it, which he did. He's probably home and alive today because he did. They'd caught one Englishman with one and dragged him behind a truck in front of his troops until he died, then threw him in the lavatory.

18:30 At Kanchanaburi I believe, before we went there. They had, they had one team of English Officers I believe they made work, along the line on the Siamese side. We, at Tamarkan—

19:00 to go back—when we were working, they'd brought a steel bridge from Java and rebuilt it over the river at Tamarkan, the Mae Klong I think it was called. And in late 1943 I think or mid-1943 they'd knocked it down, the allies had bombed it and

19:30 put it out of action. So they decided to build a wooden bridge and we did work on that for quite some time. There were twenty-three spans on it and I know when we were there, we'd just get it about ready to hook up and over'd come the allied planes and knock it down, half of it down again. So we never ever did see it finished, where I was. But

20:00 I've no doubt they finished it sometime. They used to fly in from Rangoon I believe. That's one little thing that I thought was quite amusing. One of my fellow officers, prisoner of war, JS Carey, Captain, he

20:30 had a brother who joined the RAAF, which Jack didn't know about, I don't think. But when we were released, his brother used to fly in from Rangoon to Bangkok. And Jack'd buy up a bit of silverware and his brother'd fly it back to Rangoon and flog it off to the nurses,

21:00 back in Rangoon, that's the story we heard.

Charles, people of my generation, their knowledge is based on movies, you know, like A Bridge on the River Kwai and that sort of thing. How does a film like that actually relate to what really happened; I mean how close to the truth is that?

That was a good film, we got to see that for free, you know, when it first came out. All POWs

21:30 got a free seat up here when they filmed it. Yes it wasn't a bad film. But I couldn't say that about the last one I saw on the ABC.

Which was that?

Oh I don't know, whatever it's called, about two or three years ago. I thought it was poor.

22:00 **Now, sorry, I just asked before about the hiding of the wireless you carried with you throughout that period—a ring from May, the signet?**

What was that?

A ring, you carried a ring with you, you hid a ring that May had given you?

A ring, yes, signet ring.

Signet ring. How?

I kept that, screwed, bored a hold in my shaving brush and put the ring in there and put the bristles

22:30 back in. And that's how I kept it. And could have sold it down at the village one night after we were released, five hundred dollars. And I brought it home, Jeffrey has it. I showed you my meal ticket,

23:00 identity ticket, a little silver boomerang on it, I got that before we went into action at Muar, in a letter from May. I go to return on it and I carried that on my meal ticket for the rest of my army days.

When you got back Charles,

23:30 **was it possible to communicate those experiences to people?**

No, I found it, ordinary people no, it wasn't easy. People who had done service yes, at RSL [Returned

and Services League] nights and places like that, I suppose one loosens up a bit.

24:00 And but no, ordinary people, I found it difficult. I couldn't explain really, nobody could understand the hardships along the Burma line. When we went into the hundred and five kilo there were three dead bodies in the, laying under the slats, in which we were to

24:30 be billeted in. We had to clean them all up before we could go into them. At Tamarkan we had little tables in our huts, and Tamarkan was near the Mae Klong River and it used to flood, obviously.

25:00 Because one morning we woke up and there was water up to the slats, about three inches off the slats we were sleeping on. One night when I was going out to the toilets, which you did about four times a night, when you were eating rice only, I got bitten on the arm. I thought it was

25:30 a scorpion, it stung for about a week, they had nothing, doctors had nothing they could give you for it except try and put hot poultice of some kind on it. But we decided to have a look under the table and we found five scorpions under the table. I was lucky, I was unlucky I was only one who got

26:00 bitten. But I don't know whether you've seen jungle scorpions, they would be eight inches long and claws like that. But I can tell you their sting is pretty, doesn't kill you but it stings. Yeah.

Were there times when you felt you were close to the end personally?

Yes.

26:30 I believe when we left in June on the last tour up to Nakom Nayok, we only had to hang in there, and we were right. As it turned out, we heard afterwards, the camp that we were billing, ah, we heard this from the RAAF blokes we run into, after it ended, that our camp that we were building

27:00 was down for demolition, about five days in front, so we were lucky. I had a woman come here many years ago wanting me to sign a petition against nuclear power. I said, "No, I won't sign that." I'm here today because of the nuclear bomb. She slammed the book shut, disappeared,

27:30 never came back. We were goners if they hadn't have done that. We found out afterwards, we were back in the third line of Japanese defence at Nakom Nayok and we were down to be shot, if they were pushed back, Japanese, POWs. I don't know how they hoped to cover

28:00 up, you know, their atrocity. When we got, oh, when we got to Kanchanaburi, the officers, that was one way we kept busy. We used to be allowed to go to the Kanchanaburi Cemetery where a lot of POWs were buried,

28:30 and we used to do the garden, mow the lawns there you know, mow the lawn. They used to pull the grass, keep them looking, you know, spic and span, which they were. I believe they still look after them, I don't know. I've never been back to Bangkok, I've been to Singapore, I know the Kranji Memorial there

29:00 is well cared for.

Did you, when you went to Singapore, did you meet up with, I think you told us earlier, Kai Kai Kwek?

Yeah.

Did you meet up with him?

Yes, we did meet up with Kai Kai Kwek. We were with friends when we went to Singapore that time and they wouldn't come with us, although he was a returned man, he wouldn't come and meet Kai

29:30 Kai. Met he and his wife, they took us out to luncheon and a real Chinese luncheon. I reckon we had twenty or thirty bowls on the tables of this, that and the other, and bits of this and bits of that. But he was an interesting bloke really and his wife, Chinese of course.

30:00 They'd been home to China and they were surprised at the magnificence of the railways in China. And they were interesting people to talk to and they're, being an old POW they were interested in my, bits of my story as well. But

30:30 did we get that on tape about the twenty-one meals they used to leave?

Yes.

We did. I'd like to have that on tape. He's probably still alive, I don't know.

You worked for a year, wasn't it, on the line?

Pardon?

31:00 **You worked for, it was one year...?**

Yeah. Altogether, I, we worked from about February 1943 to December 1943 and then I took a—West

and I took a—working party back in 1944 for about a couple of months.

Now during that time did you have any other, any knowledge of the other forces, for example F Force?

No, no,

31:30 only what we'd picked up after we came off the line, we knew they'd been up but we didn't have any contact with them. Although we would have been close when we were helping the Dutch out, we would have been very close. That was near a place called Nieke and they got up as far as Nieke I believe and built the line up as far as Nieke. And

32:00 but no, we didn't really. So I didn't see my unit again until I came home and went to a reunion, But one or two of the facts in our book are wrong. Bowring reckons he was the only company commander that got out.

32:30 Well here's another one that got out, of the Battle of Muar. Meagher was killed so I took over the company.

Is there anything else that needs correction?

I would like to make a couple of comments if I may.

Certainly.

33:00 Conclusions that I have reached, I have mentioned them during the talk I suppose. First we struck three Japanese fighting divisions, the guards, 1st Guards Division, the 5th Division and the 18th Division. And that, and all their equipment, planes

33:30 armour, push bikes and everything. We had, as far as I know, one and two thirds brigades, fighting troops in Malaya. The 27th Brigade, which was the 26th, 29th and 30th, one from each state. And the 22nd Brigade which was the 18th, 19th and 20th. And

34:00 the other brigade I'm not sure, I think the 21st Brigade which was spread out in the islands, back Rabaul and Ja—not Java, but in that area, the 22nd, ah, 21st, 22nd and the 40thBattalions. I've read General Bennett's Why Singapore Fell, well my conclusions

34:30 are we fell because we had no air support, we had no real armour, not that it was a great advantage in jungle warfare. And we had no sea power after the Prince of Wales and Repulse were sunk but mainly because we had no planes

35:00 and in today, and lack of machine-guns. They are my conclusions why we lost Singapore. Some say Tobruk held out, Tobruk was supplied every now and then with armour and what have you.

35:30 General Wavell told us when he spoke to us in Singapore before the blue started, that on paper he had 'x' number of divisions of armour. He said, "In actual fact, it's all at the bottom of the Mediterranean." He said, "I've got divers down there now, trying to get it up out of,

36:00 into Egypt." But as far as the politicians were concerned, he had 'x' number of divisions of armour. It was all sunk on the way to Alexandria. One or two other things I'd like to say. Some of the crew off HMAS Perth we met up with

36:30 along the line, they were brought from Java. And the RAAF pilots, we had about ten of those with us as prisoners, and they worked along the line, they were all Officers. But we could tell when the air, Japs had suffered

37:00 an air knock, cause it wasn't safe for the airforce to put a jacket on or one of their caps, otherwise they'd be done over, on sight. So we knew the Japs were taking a battering from the air. Just an interesting observation. I don't know whether there's much more I can tell you in this short space of time.

Well,

37:30 That's about it.

We've probably got just a couple of minutes, we've got four minutes. If I can just ask a general question, or maybe two, but one in particular? Working on the line, and the camps at Mergui and then working on the railway line and throughout—I mean three and a half years being held captive—what was it that kept you and the other men going?

38:00 I would say a lot of it was comradeship. I personally had a close affinity with about a dozen officers, junior mainly. Ramsay, our colonel and Hence his adjutant.

38:30 I believe they became psychologists, they read the Japs minds pretty well, and they would be the reasons that, I believe that we survived. Ramsay got home and I believe he was one of the blokes on the dam, ah, the electricity, what are the, Snowy,

39:00 Snowy River, he was a publicity officer on that, got it going, Ramsay. One of the other senior officers, Major—his name'll come to me directly, but he was country roads in New South Wales and he got the Pacific Highway by-passes going

39:30 up from Sydney up to Brisbane, instrumental in getting those going, Major—oh, I've forgot his name temporarily. This Arthur Watchorn, he came home, went into engineering of some kind, sailed across the Pacific, he and

40:00 his wife, in a yacht of some kind. She's lives to tell the story. Very frightening apparently it was, couple of times they ran into storms. But as far as I know, he's still alive. We haven't been—we used to all meet, up there when we used to go for our holidays up north. Captain Drower, our interpreter,

40:30 the last time he came to Melbourne he went down to Tasmania to see some of his friends and we met in Melbourne and had lunch with him there. He was going blind, but a marvellous man.

Got one minute left.

41:00 **Charles, obviously you had to, in those camps, you were ministering almost to sick and dying men, what was that like and what sort of words could you use to encourage people in these situations?**

Never give up. At night, most officers would go to the sick hut and try and talk to some of them

41:30 to keep them going. You would say something like this, "You got so and so at home," if they were married or, "You got children at home, try and hang in there." Knowing that you couldn't do a thing for them. The doctors, you know, they'd say, "Look, you've got to have steak and eggs"

42:00 knowing that they had no hope.