Australians at War Film Archive

Martin O'Sullivan - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:30 **Good morning, Martin.**

Good morning.

Now I'd like to start today by asking you if you could give me a little bit of background on where you were born and where you grew up?

I was born in London, in 1922. My parents came from Ireland. My father came from Cork, my mother from Belfast. So it's the opposite ends of Ireland. They met in London, and that's how I came to be. He was in the British Navy in the First World War. And he, after the war, I was born in 1922, and after the war in '24, they moved to Canada.

01:00 He was working with the Canadian – as I understand it – Coastal Department of the navy. I don't quite know how because he was never a terribly well man. Something to do with his war service, I think. So I never really knew much about him. He was in hospital a good part of the time. And consequently, I was,

01:30 most of the time, in hostel situation, rather than a home situation. They moved to the West Coast, that's British Colombia, and they moved to an area called Langley. I went to school at St Vincent's Catholic School in Langley, and later, after my father died,

02:00 was put into a hostel, Catholic hostel. I'm not quite sure what age I was at that time. But anyway, when I was thirteen and about seven months, I was moved to a merchant navy school, for some reason or other, at a place called Port Hardy which is on Vancouver Island, at the top end of Vancouver Island.

02:30 In those days it was just a fishing village. They had a small ship out on the harbour, and for three months, until I was fourteen, I was learning to be a seaman. At age fourteen I was brought back to Vancouver and I was put on my first ship. I can't remember what it was, the name of it,

03:00 because after that, I was on a number of ships, and this went on for quite some years. I did go back. My mother had returned, firstly to Ireland and then to England, which is where she, apparently, had some degree of success. She was a dressmaker, actually.

04:00 And so, on one of the trips, when we went across to England, I went to see her. She had married again. I was not terribly welcome, that was made quite obvious. So I didn't stay, and I never saw her again after that. She died, I believe, shortly after the Second World War, so the relationship was severed virtually at childhood, you might say.

04:30 I wouldn't say it was a particularly childhood, and I think I found my life at sea a lot more interesting, probably because of the friendship that you get from the crew of a ship. You know, you make friends on the different ships you're on. You sign on at the beginning of a voyage in the merchant marines. And then you sign off at the end of the voyage, and you don't necessarily stay on the same ship, or sign back on again.

05:00 You may be ashore for some weeks and then go back to the recruiting office, where merchant seamen are recruited, wherever that might be. And then you sign on another ship. And this went on for quite some years, up till 1939, when on one ship that I was on, and I do remember the name of that ship. It was the Steel Traveller.

05:30 I had a fall off the gangway. We were loading drums of oil, and I landed up in the Seamen's Hospital, because one of my legs was temporarily, fortunately, temporarily paralysed and so I couldn't walk. And the Seamen's Hospital which, at that time, was in Brooklyn, had been moved because they were doing work on it,

06:00 to what was the old immigration Centre, Ellis Island, so that's where I was for a couple of weeks. And of course, during that time war was declared so I was put onto a ship, that had a partial American crew, and because it was wartime and America were not involved, they weren't able to,

06:30 American Seaman weren't able to crew a ship into a combat area. Or to Britain anyway. And that's where most of the British ships were heading for. I was put on a ship called the Monarch of Bermuda. And we went around to Halifax and Nova Scotia, on the east coast of Canada, and we picked up Canadian troops

07:00 and took them across to Liverpool in England, and then we did two trips like that. Without escort, I might add, which was quite unusual because a lot of ships were being sunk in the Atlantic at that time. But we didn't have an escort at all, for both of those trips. And then after that, the ship was used to carry, I mean,

07:30 is this interesting, this sort of stuff? It was used to carry the Italian Embassy staff when Italy declared war on Britain, to Lisbon, and they were exchanged for the British Embassy staff, which we took back to Southampton, in this case. And I had a short time off in Southampton, and then, as I say, dates are a problem with me,

08:00 so I could have things out of kilter. But then the war with, well, Germany invaded Norway, so a lot of the troops were sent to Norway, and I went with the Monarch, Monarch of Bermuda, to Norway, up to Narvik and we disembarked troops who went ashore by boat,

08:30 and then we came back to England. And I don't know what, I suppose the ship restocked or whatever. The campaign, if you have any remembrance at all of the Norwegian campaign, didn't last very long, so we went back again, almost immediately, three or four weeks perhaps, to Norway again, to pick up those who were left, troops who were left, to come back.

09:00 Because the war was over and Britain had lost that part of it. And so then I was taken off the ship and given some leave, because the Merchant Navy during the war, was under the control of the British Navy. And so I was taken off that ship, given some leave, and put on a ship called the Largs Bay. I'm encapsulating this, all these years, I guess.

09:30 Anyway I was put on the Largs Bay. At this time I was an Ordinary Seaman. I never made, I was only quite young of course. I never made AB [able seaman] which is a full-fledged seaman. We came by way of Bombay. We were carrying troops to Bombay. I guess they were going to Burma. Because there was a campaign on at that time there.

10:00 I think it was early days and the Japanese hadn't actually declared war, or we hadn't declared war with them, or Britain hadn't at that time, but we went. Anyway we went to Bombay. It's called Mumbai now, I believe. And we disembarked these troops. And we did have some Australians that we were bringing back to Sydney who had suffered in some way

10:30 in the early part of the war over there, in the Middle East probably. And we came to Sydney, and during that trip I'd had a fight with a fellow, or he had a fight with me, and I certainly came off second best. But that didn't matter. We were both before the skipper of the ship, and we were logged.

11:00 Which meant there was an entry made in the log that we'd had a fight, and we were fined a week's pay. And I wasn't very happy about this, because it wasn't my fault, if you like. So I decided when that ship left, in a rather stupid spontaneous gesture, that I wasn't going to be on it. So when the ship left, I wasn't.

11:30 Actually while we were there, I was on gangway watch. There was a fellow at the bottom of the gangway who was a wharf labourer of some kind. An Irish fellow, and we got talking, and I think because my name was O'Sullivan, there was some interest there. So I told him what had happened, and he said, "Well, why don't you come and stay with us?"

12:00 And 'us' was a family in Marrickville, living right opposite the park in Marrickville. I forget the name of the street. I forget his name. Or their names. But anyway, I did just that. When the ship left, I didn't. I hung around Sydney for a day or two, and I went with him to Marrickville. His sister was in charge of a dye house in a twine and cordage factory.

12:30 In Marrickville, and I got a job with them. Well, putting great rolls of rope or cord into this great big dye vat. That only lasted a very short time. And just about that time was when the war was declared by Australia with Japan,

13:00 and wandering around Sydney, I met a fellow who had come out here with a group called the Ameri-Canadians. They were brought out here by an entrepreneur, Jim Bendroit. He was a Canadian from Vancouver. And one of these people I knew as a boy at school. A chap called Jack Carpenter.

13:30 Anyway, I asked him what they were doing, and he said that, incidentally he was in a band working in a club in a street in King's Cross, which I believe now is the headquarters of the 2KY radio station, I think. Anyway, there was a band there. Bobby Limb led the band.

14:00 He was a sax player. And Jack also was a sax player in that band. Jack Carpenter. He and I had been to school together in Langley. Well, actually in Aldergrove, which is a suburb of Langley. So he told me that they were all being repatriated to Canada, and they were all Canadians. There were no Americans in the group.

14:30 And, but they were a bit concerned because there was no direct access to Canada from here at that time. They had to go by way of England because of the war, and they were concerned that if this happened, they would finish up in the British Army. And they didn't want that. So a number of them joined the Australian army. Jack Carpenter among them. And he said to me,

15:00 "That's what we're doing." And I thought, "Well, that sounds reasonable." So I decided I would do the same. Anyway, we were supposed to meet at the showground. Well, somehow or other we didn't. He, apparently, went immediately into an entertainment unit that had been formed by, I think he was a major at that time, Jim Davidson,

15:30 who had been a leader of the ABC [Australian Broadcasting Corporation] Dance Band before, and he went into this First Aust Army Entertainment Unit. And I didn't. I finished up in the infantry. I went to the Showground, lined up, put myself forward to be interviewed, and joined the army.

16:00 And the fellow that I spoke to, actually this Irish fellow said to me, "When they ask you where you come from, tell them you come from Wagga Wagga." So I did. And the sergeant said, "Oh, come on, where do you come from?" Quite obviously I didn't come from Wagga Wagga. So I told him, but I said I came from St Vincent, which is quite wrong because there is no St Vincent in Langley.

16:30 That was the name of my school. So anyway, on my documents I've got St Vincent's, British Colombia. There is no such place, I might add, but there is a school. Anyway, I was, I joined the army. I was put into what I understand was the 2/1st Infantry Battalion, a reinforcement battalion. But because Dubbo, which was where they trained, or were training,

17:00 was busy, it was full of troops, I together with two or three others, was sent out to the coast hospital area, where the golf course was, and there were some army huts on that land. And this is where we were living, and we were supposed to be making camouflage nets. But there was no material to make camouflage nets with,

17:30 and no material ever showed up. So we just reported to the Showground every so often, to get our pay, and then, as you said, I'm going to start running out of speed here.

Perhaps before you go on to tell us more about your army, I can take you right back to being a boy. I'm wondering.

18:00 **It's very, very young to join the merchant navy at age thirteen or fourteen.**

No, no. You can, they can apparently put you into a school, as they did when I was less than thirteen. But when you're fourteen, you can go to sea. But you can't go to sea before that.

Well, I'm wondering what type of schooling you received?

Very basic primary, I would guess, standard of schooling.

18:30 I wasn't terribly bright. I didn't particularly care for the schooling. I didn't like school. When I was in the Catholic school we were taught by brothers, who were crazy about sport, and I was not very good at sport. I was a good runner, but apart from that I was not good at sport. And unfortunately, I was no good at school work either,

19:00 so I wasn't a very popular school child. So I wasn't very happy at school because of that. I can't tell you very much more about that, because quite frankly, I don't remember a lot of it. Whether it's wiped out of my memory, or whether I just, because I don't have a good memory, there's not a lot I can tell you about it.

19:30 Perhaps if you asked a question I might be able to.

I'm wondering what you then learned being amongst a crew of older men, perhaps, on board ship?

On board ship. Well when I first went to sea I went to sea as a cabin boy. That was the very first ship I was on, and I hated that

20:00 because you were at the beck and call of the crew. So I used to tidy up their bunks and clean out what they used to call the glory hole, which is where the crew lived in the front of the ship, the fo'c's'le of the ship, and I, so I didn't like that, so when the trip ended I was able to transfer to deck crew. So I became a deck boy. And I was a deck boy from well,

20:30 a couple of, two or three early years when I was at sea. And then somewhere along the line I became an ordinary seaman. Which is next step up the ladder. The next step beyond that is AB, or able bodied seaman. But I never quite made that, so I was always an ordinary seaman, until I left the sea.

I'm just wondering how you,

21:00 **or in what way, you felt you had to grow up really fast?**

Well, I don't whether I had to grow up really fast. I don't know that I was really conscious of my degree

of growing, or anything like that. I just followed my nose, so to speak. I was young. I hadn't been very well educated,

21:30 and I guess I didn't think very clearly about what I should or shouldn't do. Being sent to sea, at Port Hardy. I was there for, I guess from memory, for abut three months. And the things that I did on board ship are the things that I learnt to do there. That is, painting, cleaning up, boxing the compass.

22:00 Things of that sort that a seaman has to do, but very, very little beyond that. I always thought it would be wonderful to be an officer, but of course, I never had the education to be an officer anyway, and I don't think I minded the years that I was at sea quite so much, because it was a good life. An easy life.

22:30 I didn't have to think too clearly about anything, because everything was done for me. You were in the control of the bosun who ran the crew on the ship, and I did what I was told to do, and if I didn't do it, I got a kick in the tail and that was about it. When I was at sea. But I was at sea from age fourteen until I came out here in 1941.

23:00 So I was what? Nineteen. So I was born in '22.

I'm wondering if you befriended any other teenagers who were in the same position as you?

Yes, well, I didn't, actually, he wasn't in the same position as me. I befriended him because he was one of the fellows who went out to Long Bay,

23:30 or Little Bay, or whatever it's called out there, and he was a fellow that I was sympathetic to. I suppose we became friends. And oh, I'm trying to think of his name. Ronnie Hutchison.

24:00 He and I were friends all the way through that period, and all the way through when we finally, mind you, we were out that at Little Bay, or Long Bay, whatever it's called, for about a month, doing virtually nothing, and when we did finally have to go to Dubbo, of course, the whole scene changed. We were in the army, and we became very much aware of the fact that we were in the army.

24:30 We did route marches, and training and rifle training and this sort of thing, preparing us for the infantry. But when we came back to Sydney, supposedly as I understand it, to go away to the Middle East, because the campaign was still on over there. Or the latter part of the campaign was still on over there.

25:00 I had a medical exam and was failed on my eyesight. So I was, somehow or other I decided I would like to be a driver, and they sent me out to Moorebank to a driving school. I became a driver. I passed the test and became a driver

25:30 and joined what they called a mobile meteorological unit, because obviously I was no use in the infantry with poor eyesight. So I became a driver in this mobile, as I understand it was the First Mobile Meteorological Unit, and we were attached to the artillery. And we used to follow the artillery around doing weather readings. We had a theodolite.

26:00 She used to send up balloons and this sort of thing, so the artillery could get a correct trajectory when they were firing. In those days of course, training, we were still in Australia. So I was with them for quite some years, and we finished up at a place called Charters Towers in Queensland, with an artillery unit, obviously.

26:30 This mobile meteorological unit only had a sergeant, and I think three of the fellows, and me, the driver. And anyway we finished up in Charters Towers, as I said before. And a show came into town. An army entertainment unit came into town and it just so happened that Jack Carpenter was in that band.

27:00 Playing the sax. Now, when he came out here to Australia, he came out as a cowboy singer, singing cowboy. He used to play the guitar and sing as a boy at school, but he also learned, he was also a saxophone player in the school band. Well, at that time, when he came here with the Ameri-Canadians, there was a fellow called Smiling Billy Blinkhorn,

27:30 who was the, if you like, Smokey Dawson of his day. And incidentally, I know Smokey quite well. But because he had all the action as far as that type of thing was concerned, he dropped back to his saxophone, and joined the band. And that's how I came to meet him, really, at the Cross in this band that Bobby Limb was leading.

28:00 And incidentally, Dawn Lake was their soubrette on stage. Well, I'm losing my track here. I'm getting lost a bit. Where was I?

Well, you're in Charters Towers.

Yes, right. I'm in Charters Towers, and Jack Carpenter said to me, and he was a sergeant and I'm a private.

28:30 And he said to me, "Where were you? Where did you get to?" And I said, "Well, I went to the showground like we arranged, and you weren't there, so I thought I better put myself forward, which I did, and I finished up in the army, but I finished up in the infantry." And he said, "Well, do you still

sing?”

29:00 And I said, “Yeah,” because I used to sing at school, and he said “Well, I’ll claim you.” And I didn’t quite know what this was, but apparently, if you were an officer of any kind, you could claim a lesser rank who you thought could be used in a better situation. Because he said, “I’ll claim you and you’ll get into the entertainment unit.” So he did. And the orders came through I suppose,

29:30 three or four weeks later, the orders came through for me to return to Sydney to join the First Aust Army Entertainment Unit. The show that I was allocated to was called the Thirty Club. And there were twenty of these individual shows at that time. Jim Davidson was now a colonel, I think, and he was our CO [commanding officer].

30:00 Well, they had been at the showground, based, but they moved out to Pagewood where the film studios were. And I quite liked that, because the show that I was supposed to join was away at the moment, the Thirty Club, doing shows somewhere, so I was doing kitchen fatigue,

30:30 and just filling in my time at Pagewood, and I met people like Peter Finch. Oh, Grant Taylor, who was another actor. I thought this was great. I was meeting up with fellows who had talent, and I respected them for that. And I was friendly with them, which made me feel good, because I was pretty much a nothing as far as I was concerned.

31:00 I never had a lot of self confidence in those days. Anyway, so I used to have quite a bit of fun with people like Peter Finch, and we were actually, the fellow who was looking after us was, well, he was an officer named Reg Kelly, who was under Jim Davidson, and Rex Dore, who became Rex Wackadore,

31:30 who was on the radio for years doing shows. So I found those days quite interesting. Anyway, because I was at a loose end, and because I joined as a singer and my show wasn’t there, they put me with what they called a Mobile Broadcasting Unit, which was a rather large truck, fitted out like a radio studio.

32:00 And we had a sergeant, sergeant major, a chap called Geoff de Fraga, who had been a radio person in Melbourne, and Jock Sparkes who was a Harry Lauder type entertainer. Scottish type entertainer. Played the accordion and sang Scottish songs, all in the key of C, I think.

32:30 Unfortunately, he had to accompany me, and I sang very few songs in the key of C, and those that I did, he didn’t know anyway. So there was a problem. But our job was to move around the camps, and we used to set up in a camp as a radio studio. We would broadcast over these loud speakers we had on the corners of the truck,

33:00 and we had a whole lot of records we would play all day, play music. I used to get stories from the various guys I met around the camp about their officers and sergeants, and things like that, that could be of interest, and might make people laugh, and then when the evening came we would put on a quiz show, which the people that would answer the quizzes, and they were very simple quizzes,

33:30 you know, “Where is Perth in relation to Australia?” And things like that. Very simple questions. I forget what they were, but they certainly weren’t difficult, and we used to give away cigarettes. They were the prizes. And then I had to sing. I asked some of the quiz questions, and Geoff De Fraga did some, and then I would sing, or attempt to sing,

34:00 accompanied by Jock Sparkes. I would have been much better off singing on my own, but nevertheless, that’s what we had to do. So that didn’t work out too well. We did those shows around the camps for about six or eight months. Something like that. And then back to Pagewood, and the Thirty Club were there by then. So I joined them,

34:30 we rehearsed a show, and we went from there all the way up the coast, east coast of Australia, to the Atherton Tablelands, where most of the divisions were, and we did shows around the camp. I have some details back there that could help with regard to the Thirty Club. The people that were in it, and what they did.

35:00 It was a good show. We had a blitz buggy which had a number of floors in it, which we would open out on a frame to form a stage on either side of the truck, and then there was a metal frame that went over the top and a canvas cover, and that was the stage. And we had lights. We used to carry an electrician with us, so we had lights.

35:30 And we used to do a show that lasted perhaps an hour or so. And we travelled all the way up to the Atherton Tablelands, as I said, which I found quite beautiful and really enjoyed it. And I enjoyed that period, very much. We came back to Sydney, eventually, and rehearsed again, and then we went by ship to Lae, in New Guinea.

36:00 This would have been late ’44, I guess, and we were doing the same sort of thing. We were doing shows. In Lae, there was a stage, so we used that. But we moved around with our stage, and we did shows in other places. Finschhafen, Nadzab, the Markham Valley. All these sort of places in New Guinea,

36:30 and the war had virtually passed New Guinea at that time. We were there for, I suppose, six months and then we went by ship. Oh, incidentally, when we went to Lae we were living in the hold of the ship. We were allocated space of the deck, in the hold, and that’s where you were,

37:00 where you kept your gear and everything. But when we went the second time, to Torokina, at Bougainville, we travelled as passengers, which was quite amazing. I mean, you know, we had a cabin, we were served in the dining room. So, I mean that was quite wonderful,

37:30 especially for me, having been at sea as a deck swab. Anyway, we got to Torokina and there it was quite different from Lae. I mean, there was jungle warfare going on in Torokina the whole time. You couldn't travel safely, but we had to travel, obviously, to do shows, and so we did this,

38:00 we did shows. Mainly troubadour type shows, not so much with a stage. We didn't use a stage so much. We used to set up in a clearing in the jungle, and I think I have a picture of that inside, and we would just perform. We had jugglers and a magician, and a ventriloquist, and me.

38:30 We had a couple of singers. Three singers actually. And, but they sang different type of songs to the ones I did. My songs were very much the popular songs of the period. Bing Crosby, Frank Sinatra, those sort of people. That kind of music. Whereas they sang musical comedy type things, you know.

39:00 We were in Torokina for quite a while, and then we went up, on one occasion, to a forward position, and I had been swimming in the rivers there, and I had developed what they called Singapore Ear. It was, I don't know what the correct name of it is, but that's what they used to call it. It was a though a red hot wire went through this ear,

39:30 through my head, and out the other ear. And I was performing on stage in this quite forward, basic forward area, to an artillery unit, incidentally, who were firing across a valley to a Japanese artillery outfit, and I collapsed on stage. So I was brought back to Torokina.

40:00 They had a hospital in Torokina, a main army hospital, tent hospital, like a large marquee. And while I was in the hospital, probably because they took me off Atebrin, which we used to take every day, to prevent malaria, I got malaria. So now I had malaria, pain in my head, sore ears, and a horrible discharge from my ears.

40:30 And so I was in the hospital for some weeks. I can't remember exactly how long. But I snuck out to do shows with the show, which I wasn't supposed to do. And after a while I was repatriated to Australia, and they had a hospital in the showground at that time, as well.

41:00 Everything was in the showground. And I was in the hospital, I guess awaiting discharge, and I had one or two further attacks of malaria. It doesn't leave you in a hurry. It's hangs in there for a while, and then

I might just stop you there, Martin.

Tape 2

00:30 Well, as I said, I had malaria, which was recurring, occasionally, and I finally was discharged from the army. Once again in Marrickville. So much happened at Marrickville. And at Addison Road Marrickville I received my demobilisation,

01:00 and I became a civilian, with very little training for anything other than what I learned at sea, which I suppose was how to use a paint brush, how to scrape paint off metal, how to box a compass, which was absolutely useless to me at that time, because I was no longer at sea, and I wasn't going anywhere particularly. During the war of course, I must add,

01:30 in between shows at Pagewood, we used to do charity performances, and on one occasion, because I had what at that time was known as URTI, which is Upper Respiratory Tract Inflammation, which is the common cold in fact, I was in the hospital out at Liverpool,

02:00 army hospital. And one of the sisters there, was Marjorie's cousin, and she introduced me to Marjorie, and we were doing a show, actually we were doing a show at the Tivoli, on a Sunday, for the Red Cross. Raising money for the Red Cross. And Minna, that sister, Minna Drynan I'm talking about,

02:30 she was in the army, had brought Marjorie along to this concert, and that's how we met. Some months later we got married, and so that's how I met my wife, which I should bring into it, because it's obviously quite important, seeing how we've lived together ever since, for sixty odd years. And anyway,

03:00 coming back to Addison Road, Marrickville, I was discharged, but I had nothing very much to offer, because work was concerned. I had no training, other than what I'd learned as a seaman, so I got a job as a salesman. I got a job through Ronnie Hutchison that I've mentioned previously.

03:30 I kept in close contact with the Hutchison family, who lived at Rockdale, and through his mother, Nancy, I got a job with a fellow called Jack, well I don't suppose it really matters. Jack Huxham. He was a manufacturer's representative, and he used to move around the state, selling odds and ends

04:00 to different shops, and so I saved him from doing that. I did it. I used to travel by train, around into the various cities, going into the shops, and selling these coat hangers and I forget the other things. They weren't things of great importance or value, but anyway, to general stores. It didn't last very long

04:30 because it wasn't going anywhere. Finally I bought a truck and I thought, "I'll go into the trucking business," and we got a bit of a contract with a company called Bennett and Barkell, and also Bennett and Wood, who used to supply motor parts to garages,

05:00 and basically that's what I did. I used to pick up these motor parts, and take them to various garages. That wasn't going anywhere either, really. I mean, there was very little money in it. I had got the truck through Marjorie's sister, who was married to a fellow who was a Holden, not Holden's, General Motor's agency,

05:30 in the town of Adelong in New South Wales. I got the truck through Ted, this fellow I'm talking about. He's gone now. But that didn't work, either. So I finally got a job with a firm called Roof and Building Service. And I think I found my niche there, because I had to go around to factories,

06:00 and this was quite shortly after the war. I had to go around to factories and talk them into having their building painted or their roof replaced. This was the Roof and Building Service did. I was reasonably successful. I was on a small salary. I can't remember exactly what it was. But it was something like six pounds a week, plus two and a half percent commission.

06:30 Now these people were Plymouth Brethren, the company I mean. Roof and Building Service. They were Plymouth Brethren and they used to have a prayer meeting, or whatever Plymouth Brethren call a prayer meeting, every lunch time, and as we weren't Plymouth Brethren, me and another fellow who worked with me, we were sort of kept out of that, that activity.

07:00 But the company was quite good. But what used to annoy me about them, was the fact that, because I was reasonably successful, they would cut the commission back. And as the basic salary was not really all that great, the commission dropped back to two percent, and then one and a half percent. This is over a period of time, of course.

07:30 And so I ultimately thought this was too good. I didn't think this was fair at all. And mind you, I was with them for a long time. I was with them for, all up, nineteen or twenty years, so I resigned, on the basis for this salary thing, and I joined

08:00 a company called Stramit Industries, selling roofing. I was always in the building industry, but now, in the meantime, through our band leader in the army show, who I'd got very friendly with, had become very friendly with, and through a friend of his,

08:30 I got a job with a band, singing with a band at night. The band was Cec Williams and his band, and the first job we had, the first job I had with them, was at the Cairo Drummoyne, which was a dance hall, which is now the Drummoyne RSL [Returned and Services League], I believe. Anyway I was with them for a while,

09:00 and then we went from that to other dance halls. That's basically what I was doing, was singing with the band in different dance halls. There was the Rivoli at Parramatta. There was the Rivoli at Hurstville. The occasional club job. I don't mean night club. I mean large club that had an auditorium for dancing.

09:30 That sort of thing. So I was working during the day, selling building materials. Or selling, getting factory work done, with the Roof and Building service. And selling building material as well. They had an office in King Street, and their factory was out at Ashfield. So I was, having left there, and gone to Stramit,

10:00 I was doing the same sort of thing with Stramit, except that it was primarily roofing, and I was only with Stramit for a couple of years, when I got a job. Actually my boss at Stramit asked me would I be interested in joining a Canadian aluminium company,

10:30 that sold roofing, and as there was a certain connection, I thought this sounded interesting, so I went to lunch with the sales manager of that company, and I got the job, anyway, with Alcan. And left Stramit

11:00 and I was with Alcan for about four, maybe five, years, when I decided it was time that I did something to, well, I wanted to travel. I wanted to go back to Canada. I wanted to go to England. You know, I wanted to move around a bit. So I had difficulty in doing this.

11:30 Because I didn't have passport. I didn't have a birth certificate. I didn't have anything. Because when you're on a ship, and you leave a ship, as I had done back in 1941, all you have is your seaman's pay book, and that is you. And when you join a ship you pass that in to the first officer, or on a larger ship, the purser, or whatever the case might be.

12:00 So I had no identification. So I had to do something about that. I wasn't a citizen. In fact, I had been an illegal immigrant, if you like, from 1941 until, and this was about 1969. Maybe '70. So I thought, "Well, I've got to do something about that."

12:30 Now at that time, they had an amnesty for illegal immigrants. This is long before all this business that's

going on at the present time. And so I came forward, and in a building that they used to call the Black Stump. It was the state office block, actually, in Chifley Square, in the cellar of that building, I joined a naturalisation group,

13:00 and I was naturalised, as an Australian citizen. I have a very attractive document to prove it, signed by Al Grasby, who was the Minister for Immigration at that time. And so we decided we would cash in, I'm talking about, when I say 'we', I'm talking about Marjorie and me, decided we would cash in all the money we had.

13:30 And my two children had grown to adulthood at this time. So we didn't have to worry too much about them. Neither one was married. But anyway, Roslyn, my daughter, had travelled extensively, and she was in London. My son, Gary, had become a ski instructor,

14:00 because we were always very keen on skiing, up in the snow, and so he had become a ski instructor, here in the Perisher Valley. Well, first of all at Smiggins Holes and then in Perisher Valley. And then he had moved through a friend, an Austrian friend of his, he'd gone to Austria in the Austrian winter, in the opposing winter.

14:30 I'm getting muddled here. Anyway, so we decided we would travel. So we cashed in all the money we had, which was probably about twelve thousand dollars, I suppose all up, and we left. We went from here to Singapore. From Singapore with Aeroflot, we had actually booked with Aeroflot,

15:00 which seems an odd thing to do. Because it's the Russian airline. And you don't book a seat. You just join the plane and get whatever seat you can get. And we went with them to London, and we met up with, we stayed with Roslyn, who was living at a place called Kilbourne in London, for some time, and then we decided we would all meet in this village in Austria,

15:30 where Gary was a ski instructor. He'd become a ski instructor. So we travelled across Europe. We had bought a van outside Australia House. Where there was a line of vans that used to run around, in a kind of a circle. They were up for sale. Mainly by people who had been there, used the van, wanted to sell the van so they could get back to Australia,

16:00 or Canada, or America. Wherever it was they came from. So we bought a van there. We found there was quite a lot of mechanical problems with the van. So we had to have those fixed, which cost us a lot of money which we could ill afford. Because we were on very much a budget. Anyway we had them fixed, and after some time in London with Roslyn at Kilbourne, and her friend,

16:30 she was living with other people in this large Victorian style house in Kilbourne, we had the van fixed, we pushed off down to Dover, got the ship across to France, with the van, living in the van. And we moved slowly through France, Belgium, Holland,

17:00 heading ultimately to Austria where Gary was, in this village, where he was teaching, because we were all going to have Christmas together. This is back in 1974. Well, we did just that. We met. We had Christmas in the village of Ramsau, which is on the Dachstein Mountain

17:30 in the province of Steiermark, or Styria, I think it's called in English. And we spent quite a long time living with a friend of Gary's who was also a ski instructor, with his family, the Pitzer family. Not Pizza. But Pitzer, P I T Z E R. Frau Maria Pitzer,

18:00 and Ziggy, or Siegfried Pitzer. It was a lovely time for me, because I was a skier. Marjorie never did learn to ski. She tried it but was never taken by it. So, and I loved skiing. So I was probably enjoying myself tremendously, day by day, and she wasn't. Because she was stuck with Frau Pitzer,

18:30 and there was a bit of a misunderstanding here. We, the friend of Gary was Heinz, Heinzy Pitzer. And he had told us that we would live with his family. And we understood that we would be there on a full board basis. Well, that was not what Frau Pitzer, Maria, understood. We were to be there on a bed and breakfast basis. She would serve us breakfast

19:00 and then we would get lost. And of course, I was out skiing but Marjorie, who was at a loose end, was stuck in the house. A lovely house, mind you, in a beautiful setting, about a mile from the village of Ramsau. But it really, while it was good for me, it wasn't too good for Marjorie. We did enjoy, while the family were there, it was good. But Roslyn and her friend had gone back.

19:30 She was working for the BBC [British Broadcasting Corporation] in London. She'd gone back to London, and Gary was busy ski instructing. But you know, we had a wonderful Christmas Eve which was a magical thing in that situation there, in this small village, something I would never have been accustomed to, previously. Certainly not out here.

20:00 **I'm just wonder, Martin. Going back to when you were a young boy, and when first arrived in Australia, what made you, what was it about Australia that made you think, 'Yes, I'll stay here'?**

Well, it wasn't really Australia, to be honest with you. I knew very little about Australia. Other than, I don't think I'd even learnt very much about Australia as a boy.

20:30 And it was just, I think I had been here once before when I was at sea, but that was in Fremantle. Or Fremantle, as they call it, I think. And that was my only experience with Australia. I knew nothing about Australia. I mean, it just happened that I had decided that, because I did not want to get into another fight,

21:00 I knew it would be on again, later in this voyage, that I was on, that when the ship left, I wouldn't, which meant I'd be jumping ship, which is exactly what I did. So yeah, I'm sort of losing my thread here. You'll have to ask me again.

I'm just wondering what it was about Australia that attracted you.

Well, right, right. As I said, I knew little about Australia.

21:30 I couldn't have told you that there were kangaroos here, or that there were wombats, or anything about Australia. Really. I mean my knowledge of Australia was nil. I knew quite a bit about England. I'd learnt that at school. I knew quite a bit about Europe. But Australia, I don't remember ever having any prior knowledge

22:00 of this country. It was purely coincidental, my jumping ship here, and it was purely coincidental, I would say, if I hadn't met Jack Carpenter, as I did, as I've mentioned previously, if I hadn't met Jack, I probably would have been picked up by the police, and got into trouble,

22:30 or maybe been deported back to England, where I had signed on as a seaman. I really don't know. Because it's pure surmise. I don't know whether I even learnt to love Australia, or even feel that I was an Australian for a long, long time.

23:00 But you know, you can't live in a country for too long without beginning to appreciate what that country has to offer. So ultimately I gained a little bit more intelligence than I had had at that time, and I think, began to appreciate what I could do, and how I could get by here.

23:30 **Well, I'm just wondering, how does a young boy who's just arrived, who's jumped ship, without any papers, without any idea, manage to be able to successfully sign up to an Australian army?**

When, it's a good question and I wish I could answer it with any degree of accuracy. I went to the showground, Jack said that's where you had to go if you wanted to join the army,

24:00 and this was wartime and they were looking for people, I suppose, to become soldiers, sailors or airmen, or whatever, and because that's what he did, that's what I did, which will give you some sort of an idea of how naïve I was. And how little knowledge I had of what you could or couldn't do, or what you could or couldn't get away with.

24:30 I went to the showground, and was interviewed by an officer, who passed me over to a sergeant, who asked me various questions, and I guess I signed on the dotted line. And that's about all I can really tell you. My memory's not good enough to know exactly, because I can appreciate what you're asking and I can appreciate your reason for asking it.

25:00 How can you possibly, without any identification, join the Australian army? Well, it happened. I don't know how. It happened. I mean, I've got documents to prove it so, and documentation there that says I was in the army, and that I was in the infantry, and then the Mobile Meteorological Unit, and then the Mobile Broadcasting Unit

25:30 and then finally in the First Aust Entertainment Unit, until I ultimately was, after what was it, five years, was discharged. So yeah, well, there's not really a lot more I can tell you about that. I mean, obviously, there were a lot of years there, and so a lot of things happened, but –

26:00 **Well, I'm just wondering, you've mentioned that you were influenced by your friend.**

He wasn't actually a friend, Jack Carpenter was a guy I knew as a kid at school, and in the situation I was in, to meet somebody like that, which has got to be a tremendous co-incidence, when I'm here and we both grew up in British Colombia,

26:30 about forty miles from Vancouver, you know. It's a tremendous co-incidence to meet up with somebody like that. Now, I'd never heard of Jim Bendroit and I didn't know anything abut the Ameri-Canadians, until you know, he told me, that that's what happened. And because he said they were joining the army, and I guess I was scared,

27:00 because having done what I had done, on the spur of the moment, quite spontaneous, I suppose I was thinking to myself, well, it was obvious that what I'd done was wrong, and I'd get into trouble for it. So I just went along with somebody who obviously knew what they were doing, and followed in that direction, hoping that it would work. And it actually did.

27:30 **Well, I'm wondering what you actually felt about the war at that time, and whether, what you felt about fighting a war on behalf of Australia.**

It wasn't through patriotism. It wasn't, I mean, I had nothing against the Japanese, or anybody for that

matter. I probably thought the Germans were bastards because Britain was at war with Germany,

28:00 and they seemed to give those poor devils who went to Norway a terrible time, and they were mostly Canadians, that I had some sympathy with. No, I can't honestly say that I was inspired by any specific reason for doing what I did. As I said before, I think I was just following my nose.

28:30 And when somebody could offer something that I could go along with, which would mean something, well, I did it. Does that make any sense?

I am curious, though, about whether you ever, when you first signed up, had to produce your birth certificate or –

No, well, obviously I didn't, because I didn't have one. Now, hang on.

29:00 When I went to the showground at first, we had to report. We were given a bunk. We were given a bunk in, where they used to keep the animals. And I had to go and report for something, probably to pick up my gear or something of that sort. I can't remember exactly. And my, I'd left my wallet,

29:30 or the possessions that I had, and I think they would have been in a wallet at that time, on my bed. Foolishly. And of course, that was stolen. Now I probably could very well have had a birth certificate at that time. It's difficult, as you say, how you can be inducted into an army without something to show how you came to be here,

30:00 and why you were here. Particularly when you come from another country. So I guess that's the answer to that one. So maybe I did have a document when I actually joined up. But it's all so very vague, and I know it sounds very vague, and it sounds a bit ridiculous, if anything, but I can't enlarge on it. I can't really give you any more on that.

30:30 **Well, I'm wondering, I've heard stories from others about what the army might have offered. I guess it offers a roof over your head and an income.**

Yeah.

Was that what you were looking for?

Probably. Probably. And somebody to tell me what to do and where to go. And how to do it. You know. I would think.

31:00 It's all so very vague and probably not very enlightening for your documentary, but unfortunately I can't enlarge on it very much other than that.

And I understand that, you've mentioned that you were more or less following your nose, I'm wondering in that following your nose, if you had ever thought about joining the navy?

31:30 No. It never occurred to me. It never occurred to me to join the navy. The only reason I joined the army is because Jack Carpenter was going to do that, and it sounded like something that maybe I should do. It was just, it was just there. I mean, at the time they were looking for people to join the army.

32:00 They were building the army up. And I was at a loose end. I had done something that was obviously illegal, in jumping ship, especially in war time. Which is a criminal offence. I've spoken to this about, I belong to a local Probus, and one of our people was very high in the police force. Chap called Bill Fleming,

32:30 he was a superintendent of police, or something. I've spoken to bill about this and all I get in return from Bill is, he just laughs. He thinks it's a big joke, and I suppose, really, in a way, when you look at it, it is a big joke. That you can get by with, you'd never do it today. You'd never get by today without the necessary documentation

33:00 to prove who you are and what you are, and where you come from, etc. So that's probably the reason Bill thought it was funny. But anyway, that's what happened. I just fronted up to the showground, spoke to the people I had to speak to, and before I knew it, I was a soldier. Not a very good one, but nevertheless a soldier. So, you know, I mean, I would have never been any use.

33:30 I remember when firing the .303, these rifles that were obviously World War I rifles, and all they did was play hell with my shoulder. I don't think I hit anything that was anywhere near a target. I'm quite certain I would have been totally useless as a fighting man which is what a soldier's supposed to be. And yet I was at that time, in the infantry,

34:00 and that's what you had to do, but I wouldn't have been any use in the infantry. I don't think I would have been any use. See, the only talents I had to offer were, a) that I could sing, not terribly well. I mean, I thought when I say, I thought I was pretty good, but in retrospect it was just a voice. And I'd never had any training. But then I don't think crooners,

34:30 and that's basically what I was at the time, what they called a crooner. I could paint. I could scrub a deck. I could clean out a toilet. You know, they were my talents. Certainly not much use as a fighting man. But nevertheless, that's how I finished up. As a fighting man, initially.

35:00 **Well, I was wondering, throughout your teenage hood in the merchant navy, if you had heard about war. Like, what did you know about war?**

Well, because I went to sea without the intention of going to sea.

35:30 Like, I had no personal reason to want to go to sea, as a boy. But I was obviously a nuisance at school, and I was probably a nuisance in the hostel that I was in, so to get rid of me, they sent me up to Port Hardy, which was a good way of getting rid of somebody who was a bloody nuisance. And when I was in Port Hardy,

36:00 I had a direction to follow. You know, finally somebody was telling me something that I had to do, and I did those things, and as a result, when I was fourteen, and they could get rid of me, I went to sea. So, it's very much a case of, I don't know if there's a better description of this, other than 'following your nose'.

36:30 But that primarily is what happened.

I'm just wondering, on your way out to Australia, during the first year of World War II, whether you heard any tall stories on ship about war and whether you had a sense –

No. Well, you see, I was very much aware, when I was on the Monarch of Bermuda, and we were doing the trips across the Atlantic,

37:00 that, I mean I heard, I could listen to the radio, and I knew that submarines were sinking ships left right and centre. In the Atlantic. Which is where the war at sea was, not the Pacific so much, Because American wasn't in the war, and Canada certainly was in the war, and Canada has a Pacific coast.

37:30 But nevertheless, the war was not in that part of the world. It was, basically, as far as shipping was concerned and the navy was concerned, in the Atlantic. So, the fact that we went, and I could never understand why were allowed to go from Halifax in Nova Scotia, which was crowded with ships at that time,

38:00 why we were able to travel all the way from the Canadian east coast to Britain, without an escort. But we did. We did two trips. Now, I was scared. Quite definitely, I was frightened at that time. So if you talk about 'were you conscious of the war', I'd say my consciousness of the war would have been that.

38:30 On the first trip that we made, in between that first trip and then going back again, there was the first major blitz by Germany on Britain, and that attack was in Liverpool, not London, but in Liverpool. And I was – we were in dock in Liverpool at that time.

39:00 I was in a movie theatre. A sign came up on the screen, "All service personnel, seamen, have to return to their base or their ship." Because this was this big air raid. So I left the theatre and made my way along Lime Street, which is the main street of Liverpool,

39:30 and the bombs were falling, and it was scary. I made my way back to the ship, so, I mean, I was very much aware of the war, in that sense, and as far as being a part, being somebody who felt he was at war, and he was doing something that you're contributing to the war effort, I was never conscious of that.

40:00 I was just conscious of me, being a very small person, in what was a very dangerous situation at that time, and wanting to stay as small as I possible could, so that I wasn't going to get hurt. When I got back to the, I finally made my way back to the docks. The docks we alight.

40:30 The whole of the docks seemed to be on fire. So there was a hotel at the dock gates. I went into the hotel and spent the night there. This attack went on practically all night long. In the morning I went back to my ship, the Monarch, which amazingly was untouched, it wasn't damaged at all.

41:00 Quite a number of the ships were capsized and were still on fire. Small fires. But at night, the whole, it looked as though the whole of the dockyard was on fire. So then, you know, we left and we went back and did the second trip to Canada, and brought the troops over. As I remember, the Seaforth Highland Regiment. I can remember that much.

41:30 Because, they were a Scottish regiment and they came from Vancouver.

Tape 3

00:30 **Martin, before the break you were mentioning that you were in**

00:35 **Liverpool during quite a large raid.**

Yes.

I was wondering if you could tell me just a little bit more about, I guess, the damage that you saw.

Well, actually, the King, it was King then, at the time. The King and Queen of England, and that was the Queen Mother, that died recently, had made this big announcement that the war might be on,

01:00 but they were still there and they weren't going anywhere and they'd be there for the people, and that sort of thing, and they had planned to visit Liverpool that day, and so the Germans decided that was the day to give it heaps, which they did. The attack came at night, I don't know very much about flying

01:30 and whether they could achieve more damage by night time bombing, other than day. I'm not sure. But anyway it was a night time raid, and I began while I was in the theatre. And when I came out of the theatre, it was a movie theatre, when I came out of the theatre in Lime Street, which was the main street of Liverpool. There were a lot of big shops in the street.

02:00 All the windows were broken. Bombs were falling. You could see flames coming up here and there, and I mean, it was scary, and they were yelling. These air raid wardens were yelling, "Get off the street," you know, "Get off the street." Two or three time I was told to get off the street, and I went into, into a cellar. Down some steps and into a cellar on one occasion,

02:30 into a doorway on another occasion, and gradually I worked my way back to the docks, which wasn't that far from the centre of the city. And when I got back to the docks, there was this hotel at the gate of the docks, and I could see it was lit. You know, there was a blackout, but I could see there was a light showing in this hotel,

03:00 and I could hear all these people singing, and the docks looked scary, because it was on fire, or at least, it appeared to be on fire. So, I went into the pub and, not that I was much of a drinker then, and not that I'm very much of a drinker now but, unless you discount red wine. So, I just spent the night in a pub with all these happy people having a ball

03:30 while all this was going on outside. I mean, they ripped the city apart. And certainly ripped the dockyards apart. But that was the first big air raid in England. And that would have been, well, it would have been in late '39 or early '40, I suppose. I'm not quite sure of the date, exactly. But as to damage,

04:00 all I can tell, I can't detail it, but all I can tell you is, that the city was very badly damaged. Certainly the main street was a ruin. Up and down Lime Street the buildings were being hit all over. And the dockyard certainly was knocked about. I was amazed to find that our ship wasn't touched, you know.

04:30 **I wonder, you mentioned that you were on the street, and there were the air raid wardens. How many other people were there on the street? What was the scene?**

Oh, there were people running hither and thither. Ducking in and out of buildings. Probably trapped the same way I was. Either they were shopping. I can't even remember what time of day it was. But it wouldn't have been too late. It was probably six or seven at night, something like that. But there were people on the streets, and we were all being told to get off the streets,

05:00 and to get into, under shelter, because of this raid. I mean, they probably weren't even used to major air attacks at that time.

And you mentioned that your ship was fine, and you –

Well, it was, I got to the ship and, I mean, apart from a certain amount of probably dirt or stuff that came off other ships,

05:30 it was in dock and it was OK, yeah. But some ships were completely capsized. There were one or two ships that were in dry dock and the supports had been knocked away, and they were lying on their side. So it wasn't a good scene.

Were the ships that were damaged, were they merchant ships? Were they –

All merchant ships. Yeah. It wasn't a naval dockyard.

06:00 It was a merchant navy dockyard. Commercial dockyard.

I wonder how you reacted, and I guess the men you were on ship with, at being the targets of war even though you weren't –

Well, it was scary. When we went up to Norway, when we were in the fjord in Narvik, which is probably one of the biggest fjords in Norway, we were attacked.

06:30 This was, well, it must have been summer, or somewhere near summer, because there was no darkness. It was light all the time. And we were attacked by planes that were obviously very, very high, because you could scarcely see them. And I guess all I had to do, the whole of the, we were in convoy then, when we went to Norway,

07:00 and that fjord was just chockablock with ships. Naval ships, you know, running all around, the merchant fleet that were carrying all these troops to Norway, and with bombs coming down, I mean it was nothing

like Liverpool, but at the same time, every so often a ship would explode.

07:30 And you'd have this tremendous explosion, here and maybe over there somewhere. And it was scary, because you were wondering if you were going to be next, you know. Obviously they were direct hits, but I don't think their aim could have been too accurate, because they were very, very high. And I think in those days, and this would have been, I suppose, 1940, some time in 1940, in those days,

08:00 there wasn't the degree of accuracy that they have in bombing nowadays.

I wonder, transporting troops, you really are a part of the war effort.

Yeah, well, that's, you've got to get the troops from point A to point B so they can be of use. Yeah.

I just wonder, on ship, how much they crew thought they were actually working for the allies, rather than just merchants.

08:30 Well, this was a British ship, remember. See, what happened, when I had that fall in New York, this ship used to go from New York to Bermuda, from Bermuda to New York, backwards and forwards all the time. That was all it did. But it was owned by a British company. We, in this Probus group, we have an English merchant navy skipper, and he explained to me that the Monarch line was a very old,

09:00 and quite large British shipping company. And they did not really own that many cruise ships. They were mostly cargo ships. But there was the Monarch of Bermuda, there was, he named two or three and I just can't think what they were. But they were ships that, wherever they were, there were about two or three cruise ships, I've got a picture of the Monarch in that book,

09:30 and that was roughly the size. They would be about twenty ton. About twice the size as a large cargo vessel, but nowhere near the Queen Mary or any of those. But still, nevertheless, it would hold four or five hundred passengers, I suppose.

I just wonder what you thought about the fact that you'd now gone from being a commercial ship, to being very much a part of the war?

Well, you know, I mean,

10:00 it was war time. Britain had declared war, well, specifically on Hitler, I suppose. Because of what he'd been doing in Europe, so anybody who was of Anglo-Saxon origin automatically hated Germany and hated Hitler, and everything about Germany at that time. So when you're attacked, when you're on a ship, you're very vulnerable in a big ocean,

10:30 and with submarines or somebody bombing you from above, you do feel extremely vulnerable and consequently, you feel very scared. And quite definitely, I was scared. And I think I was scared during the whole of that two or three years that I was at sea, before I came here. See, I was in the merchant marine. I've never actually claimed a merchant navy medal, because I've got a number of medals anyway,

11:00 and I don't think I could fit them on my chest. On Anzac Day you see some people with medals from here down to here, and across, but I've got a few, just the normal ones, so I wasn't particularly interested in the merchant navy medal. And anyway, for all those years that I was here, as an illegal immigrant, and that's what I was. I mean, you can make no bones about that,

11:30 and I was eligible for probably a reasonable criminal offence, having jumped ship in war time. Which is the same as being a deserter, and they did put people up against the wall and shoot them for that. You know.

I just wonder though, Martin. I mean, somebody who joins the Royal Navy or the Australian Navy, they choose to serve during war.

12:00 **I just wonder about your feelings about being dragged into the war effort with no conscious sense of enlistment.**

I'd have to say, once again, that all I did was, as I said before, 'follow my nose'. I had no specific direction in my life. I wasn't sufficiently well educated to have an objective. An ultimate objective, you know.

12:30 I wish I'd had, mind you. I'm sure I would have done something else, but I didn't mind the years that I was at sea. But I would say that the fellows on board ship were probably every bit as scared as I was. You know. It was obvious that we were a sitting duck, a sitting target. Moving target, certainly, but nevertheless, a pretty vulnerable one.

13:00 So I would say that I would be very, very surprised if the other crew members weren't as scared as I was.

I wonder, on the trip to Norway, and taking the troops, you were under attack. What –

We weren't actually attacked, as I remember, during the trip across, in the. See, the Germans had invaded Norway.

13:30 And in the fjord we were attacked. And my feelings at that time, I think, were more for the troops, even though I was scared, than for myself, because I realised that the only way they were going to get to do anything at all, was to get up those cliffs. Now, if you know Norway, you'll know that the cliffs of the fjords are quite substantial. They are quite high. So that would mean that they would to climb up those cliffs,

14:00 to be assembled and form an army, and they came off the ships down the rope ladders onto boats. So, I really felt, I think, more sorry for those people than, that would have tempered my own feelings a bit with regard to my own safety. The fact that I thought what a terrible thing to have to go and do what they had to do.

I wonder, given though the temperatures

14:30 **of the ocean, or the water in the fjord, what was the drill if you were hit and the ship was sinking?**

Well, I mean, as I remember it, during the war all we had was a life jacket. You had a life jacket to put on, which you kept with you, under your bed or bunk, and you had a station that you had to report to,

15:00 in the event of trouble, and that was all. I don't remember anything else. So I mean, and I have a feeling that it must have been either spring or autumn. You could check it out, sure, and you'd find the date, but it would have had to be spring or autumn or somewhere near summer, because there was no darkness. The, it was just like a cloud coming across the sun,

15:30 and it was light the whole time. So there was no darkness up there. We were, as I say, quite vulnerable to attack, but from the air.

I just wonder what the survival time in the water there would have been.

I don't know whether it would be, because Norway is a country which in winter is covered in snow, mostly.

16:00 They don't have any extremely high mountains like Austria and Switzerland do. But nevertheless, they're high enough and because of the latitude the country is virtually covered in snow during the winter. And a lot of that water that's in the fjords would be mountain water, so I would think it would be quite cold. But I don't think it would be freezing. I know that when we were up in Halifax, in Nova Scotia,

16:30 loaded with the troops, I thought at that time, that I would hate to jump ship, I mean get off the ship into the sea, because it looked as though it would be cold and the Atlantic is, apart from being a pretty wild ocean, it's a pretty cold ocean, I think, generally. But I don't know whether the water at that time, in the fjord, would have been all that bad.

17:00 **What kind of defence did you merchant ship have against –**

We had nothing. When we were carrying troops across the Atlantic. Later on they put, I think it was a naval gunner, with I don't know what it would have been, probably a five or a ten pound cannon, mounted on the poop deck. And that was the only weapon that most merchant ships had.

17:30 They had, generally, a gunner on the poop deck. And that wasn't initially. That was as the war went on and they got themselves organised a bit. But initially, they wouldn't have had any means of defence at all.

I wonder, I'd just like your thoughts, maybe, on whether you think during the war that merchant ships, commercial ships, were legitimate targets for enemy fire.

18:00 Well, I suppose they are in the sense that a merchant ship is either carrying soldiers to fight the enemy, or they're carrying food or product so that the war can be carried on. Food and weapons, probably.

18:30 I'm not even aware of what sort of material we had in our hold, but I'm quite sure there would have been weapons which Canada would have purchased from America perhaps, and sent across in the hold of the ship. We had a lot of the hold space was occupied by the troops anyway.

19:00 But then we had a lot of cabin space as well, being a cruise ship. Later on, on the Largs Bay, I can't remember. We had a heck of a lot of troops on board the Largs Bay that we dropped at Bombay. So whether they were in the hold or not, I can't remember. Probably they would have been in the hold, too. But initially from Sydney to Lae, we were in the hold. That was our situation.

19:30 **I wonder, having spoken to a few Australian navy men, they talk about how discipline is maintained on a ship. I wonder how discipline is maintained on a merchant navy vessel.**

Well, I don't know very much about the navy, although we've got a couple of guys in our Probus that were in the navy. You've got to, on an average merchant ship you've got a skipper,

20:00 and you've got generally three officers. First, second and third mates, and then you have a bosun, who's

like a foreman. And then you have a bosun's mate, who helps him, and from there you've got seamen, and ordinary seamen and deck boys. That's the crew of the ship. An average ship. When you get into larger ships like,

20:30 well, the Monarch, for instance. The Monarch of Bermuda, office staff. You would have a purser who would run the office and in that instance, he'd be the person that you'd give your pay book to. You know, not the first officer. The ship would be virtually, from an administration point of view, run by the office. But from a maritime point of view, run by the officers of the ship.

21:00 **I just wonder, on a commercial vessel, a merchant vessel like you were on, what does the captain or the executive crew, sort of maintain and make sure that people do their job?**

Well, like I said, you've got, that, the officers would be

21:30 responsible for navigating the ship, and looking after the ship's navigation. The crew, apart from a period on the bridge, where they would operate the, you know, they'd steer and whatnot, apart from that, they would maintain the ship. Which is mainly painting, cleaning, cleaning decks.

22:00 Some ships had wooden decks. Some of the later ships had metal decks. But anyway, the decks had to be kept clean. And primarily all that work would be controlled by either the bosun or the bosun's mate. That would be, the discipline would be maintained that way. If you got into any sort of trouble, or didn't carry out the work that you had to do, or got into a fight as we did,

22:30 well, the mate or pardon me, the bosun or the bosun's mate would take you up to the first officer, who in turn would hand you over to the skipper, and you would be admonished, and you would be logged. That is, your name and that incident would be entered into the log book of the ship. That is the daily diary of the ship, and you would be fined. Maybe a week's pay or whatever. That's what happened to us. We were fined a week's pay.

23:00 **What were the other penalties, or was money and payment, I guess, the –**

That's about all. There is no other discipline. I mean, If you had somebody who committed a crime, I mean a physical crime. Stabbed somebody or did something like that, some ships have a brig, you know, a little jail, a room which has a barred door.

23:30 But merchant ships as a rule don't. But certainly larger ships would have a brig. You're held in custody until you get back to port, and you're handed over to the police if you do something that's criminal. But if it's just a normal mischief. Something like not carrying out the work that you should do.

24:00 Being late at work frequently. Not just occasionally, but frequently. Because I know I was late many, many times in the morning. I hated getting out of bed. But those sort of things are just controlled by the Bosun primarily, not by the officers. I used to, as a young person on board ship,

24:30 I looked upon the skipper as some kind of god and the officers as his lieutenants, so to speak. You know, that was just a rather naïve view of my world, at that time.

Why was that? Why did you look upon him in that way?

Because they just seemed to be so much more important, and so much above my scale of life.

25:00 You know, to my mind, and as I said before, I never had a tremendous amount of self confidence. To my mind, it was a very insignificant individual as a youth. Am I answering all your questions reasonably well? I hope so.

I wonder, as a deck boy, you said that you do –

25:30 A deck boy, generally, gets the worst jobs. You get to clean the toilets. You scrub the deck. You get to wash down paintwork and you might even be allowed to hold a paint brush and actually paint. But you're probably just chipping off paint, off steel that needs painting. I don't think deck boys were allowed to be

26:00 sent over the side in a Bosun's chair, I think they called it, to paint the sides of the ship at sea. Which was what able bodied seamen did, frequently. Obviously not below the water line, but the upper deck structure of the ship.

I wonder, as a deck boy, do you hope one day to get off the ship, or to be the captain?

You'd never, as a deck boy you would never rise above a bosun,

26:30 unless you were in a situation where you could study, either by having the necessary books. You'd have to study. There's a lot of maths involved, and I was always hopeless at mathematics, and a lot of maritime information is wound up with mathematics.

27:00 Because it's navigational requirements are all figures, and I was never very good at that, so I don't think, I would have never made officer, or certainly never made skipper. I mean, after all, I thought they were gods, and I knew I wasn't in that class.

I just wonder, as a deck boy, what did you hope to do. What were your ambitions or your career plans, I guess.

27:30 In those days, I didn't have any. I mean in those days, I just did what I was told. I tried to do the work I had to do, you know, as well as I could possibly do it. But I was, I never had any real direction. I wasn't somebody with any real ambition at all. As a matter of fact, a cousin of mine, or a cousin in Marjorie's family,

28:00 said to me once, "You know, Marty, your trouble is you've got no ambition." And he was dead right. And I certainly didn't have at that time. A bit later on I might. I think if ever I had a definite ambition, it was to be a singer. But I was never really good enough to be a top singer. You know, I could sing in the clubs, and that sort of thing,

28:30 and sing with dance bands, and so on, and compèring was part of it was well. And I think my ambition lay in that direction, but I was never really quite good enough to make it.

I wonder, just going back to the work the ship was doing, how often would you be in convoy, and then how often would you be sailing alone?

After those first two trips, we were always in some sort of a convoy.

29:00 The Largs Bay, when we came out here, that was the ship, the Monarch, when we went to Norway, actually when we went to, well, there's something I didn't mention before. Oh, yes I did mention it. It was the trip we made to Lisbon with the embassy staffs.

29:30 Our ship was lit up, and they had some sort of a sign, not a Red Cross, but they had some kind of a sign on the ship to show that it was neutral. The enemy was supposed to observe the fact that we were carrying non-military personnel to and from England to Portugal and back again. So the ship was lit up. Because when I got to Lisbon,

30:00 the whole of Lisbon was like dreamland. The lights were on and after Britain, it was, you know you could sit outside a café at night with the lights on and enjoy a coffee or whatever. And so, I've lost your question I think.

Oh, no. I'll just ask a little bit about that trip. I wonder, was it more nerve wracking being so lit up?

There was always the thought that

30:30 the Germans wouldn't observe this, oh, what's the word, the fact that you weren't a combat vessel, or that you weren't a normal merchant vessel. That you were carrying non-military personnel. You were carrying people who were not directly involved in the war. And therefore it had to be left alone. There was always the fact that, there was always the worry that they would not observe this,

31:00 this requirement. And maybe would sink us or attack us, but they didn't, fortunately.

You mentioned that Portugal was like fairyland. I just wonder how different the ship felt sailing with light?

Well, it's actually, if anything it was scary because of that worry that they wouldn't observe this neutrality that the ship

31:30 was entitled to under these circumstances. There was always that worry, but I don't, I mean it was nice to be on a ship that was lit up and not in darkness all the time. But nevertheless, it was, in itself, scary because of the possibility of being attacked, even though you were covered by a certain degree, well, a degree of neutrality.

32:00 **And I just wonder, maybe, you've mentioned a little bit about the Norway trip, but I wonder what would be the most dangerous route the ship would take, would be, or the most dangerous convoy.**

Yeah. I'm not very well versed in navigation or maritime routes.

32:30 I'm not even quite sure what direction we would have taken to go to Norway. It didn't take that long, as I remember. It was only a couple of days to get there. We would have to certainly bypass areas where they thought submarine activity was involved. I mean, we were carrying troops on the Norwegian trip, so if they could sink us they would. And I mean, they attempted to in Narvik. And there were a number of ships that were sunk.

33:00 I don't know if they were navy ships or merchant ships, but some of them just exploded. Completely exploded. So there were obviously munitions involved in the ship that would have caused an explosion. I don't know whether I can answer that any better than that.

I wonder, yeah, I just wondered what the most dangerous trip that you'd been on.

33:30 That Norwegian trip, I think, probably would have been the one where I really felt we were under attack, and that you had occasion to be scared because your number could come up any moment. On

the other trips across the Atlantic, where we had no escort,

34:00 it was just the fact that we didn't have an escort, and that we knew that there was a large amount of submarine activity in the Atlantic, that we were just scared. But there was no actual pinpoint to our fear. But at Narvik, you had very definite reason to be scared, because of the fact that you were very close to ships that were being blown up.

34:30 And that would probably have been my worst. That would be my worst experience, I would think, through the entire war. And that includes my army service too, because it was a pretty hairy situation.

What could you do to combat that fear, on the ship?

There was nothing, other than your peers, telling you, "Stiff upper lip, lad."

35:00 You know, this sort of thing. The older seamen always tended to care for the younger seamen, I found. Sometimes to the point of excess. For instance, you might be taken ashore by older seamen. I remember going ashore one time, and I'm specifically thinking of one occasion,

35:30 when we went ashore in, it was in England. This was when I was on a merchant ship, and we'd come across, and we were in England on this occasion, and we went ashore and I went ashore with these fellows, and into a pub, and I had a large beer. Something which I'd never had before, and walked outside the pub and when the air hit me, I just collapsed.

36:00 Because I couldn't handle drink, you know, at all. But so, therefore, these fellows, and when I woke, I actually collapsed, and when I woke up I was in my bunk on board ship, so they'd carried me back to the ship. So, I mean, they looked after the younger seamen, and it seemed to be a fairly general thing, on the merchant ships that I was on, anyway.

36:30 You just felt that you were always in fairly safe hands as far as the crew were concerned.

Did you have a particular mentor, a particular person you looked up to in the crew?

I don't remember that when I was at sea. No, I can't remember, other than respecting my peers. Partly because they were, well, I realised they were looking after us younger seamen.

37:00 And partly because they were officers and you respected them anyway. But there was no personal, actual personal feelings, attached to it, I don't think.

I wonder, given the stress on the ship, and the fear of submarine attack, how often would people would jump ship at port, or –

Well, I don't honestly remember a lot of people jumping ship.

37:30 When, on ships that I was on. And yet, strangely enough, when I was working with Alcan, and my work involved being in touch with contractors who put the materials on buildings that we supplied, I found that a lot of these fellows working with roofing were ex-seamen.

38:00 And I struck a number of them that had jumped ship. Mainly English ships I'm talking about. So I'd say it wasn't uncommon, but I wasn't terribly much aware of it at the time. If anybody had done what I did, you know.

I wonder, did anybody on the ship you were on, crack up, not cope with the stress of the raids, and –

38:30 I can't remember that, no. I can't remember that. It was scary, and I think you just accepted the situation as it was. I mean, you were on a ship in wartime, and while you were scared and fearful, I don't know that I can remember actually anybody really cracking up and falling apart. Actually, I don't think you would have been game to do it, because you would be ashamed to do it, you know.

39:00 You'd be ashamed to, well everybody has a certain amount of cowardice inbuilt in them, but you'd be ashamed to show it, I think. I think. It's purely a summation on my part.

So, a boy pretty much going to sea, originally, in your time in the merchant navy, was there a favourite port that you visited, or a port that really shocked you?

39:30 Well, I remember being extremely enamoured with Lisbon, but that was because it was different from the war type ports that I had visited. I quite liked Southampton. Vancouver was a nice port. But I felt very much at home there. The eastern coast of Canada, which I travelled to a number of times, was a little bit different,

40:00 because when you went ashore there was a very strong French-Canadian element, and there was a certain animosity between French-Canadians to Anglo-Saxon Canadians, or English, or British Canadians. But, a favourite port?

40:30 I loved Quebec, I thought Quebec was wonderful, because I'm very much into antiquity. I love old places. Since leaving the sea and going – I'll have to stretch my leg a little bit – since leaving the sea and travelling to a number of ports,

41:00 I know I thought Crete was wonderful. I was never there as a seaman. I can't remember any actual port other than, perhaps, Southampton which I was quite taken with. Maybe it was the town. Liverpool I never liked. I thought it was horrible. Glasgow was quite a nice port.

41:30 As I said, Quebec. Quebec City was lovely, because it's old and it's where Canada began. Vancouver is a nice port, because it's an attractive place, and I can't think of any others, particularly.

That's great.

Tape 4

00:30 I wish I could put more detail into the years I was at sea. And yet not having a really good memory I find it difficult to recapture. I never had, the idea keeping a diary or anything like that, just never occurred to me, you know.

That's OK, Martin. I'll just start this tape with, just talking to you mainly about the trip that brought you to Australia in a bit more detail. You mentioned –

01:00 Well, I had, and this was in Southampton, probably the reason I liked Southampton, probably the reason I mentioned Southampton and Glasgow as being cities that I liked, is because I got to know people there. I stayed in a bed and breakfast situation in Southampton, and it was just a family home, and was looked after reasonably well for the couple of weeks I had in between trips.

01:30 You have to remember and keep in mind the fact that the merchant navy was no longer a company, or a lot of ships, run independently. They were controlled by the navy. Necessarily because of war, but I found, in Southampton, well, I knew and family there.

02:00 And in Glasgow. I got to know a family there. As a matter of fact I had a girl friend in a place called Partick, which is part of the older part of Glasgow. So I quite liked Glasgow because of that, and while we haven't actually been back to Southampton since, we did, on our trips, we've made a few trips overseas, we did go to Glasgow to try and recapture, you know, the years that I was there.

02:30 We did the same thing with Lisbon. But of course, they've all changed. I forget what your question was.

I was just wondering about your trip to Australia with the wounded. You mentioned that there were wounded.

Oh, yeah. The Largs Bay. Well, I was in Southampton. I had these two weeks there, and when I reported to the seamen's office I was put aboard this ship, the Largs Bay, which belonged to an Australian company.

03:00 And we had a gunner on the poop deck, and we were loaded with troops, British troops. There were some Aussies. I remember a couple of them telling me the only place in Australia that was even worth thinking about was Tasmania. The rest of Australia wasn't worth anything at all as far as they were concerned. That was the, you know, I didn't know Tasmania.

03:30 I'd never even heard of Tasmania to be honest with you. Anyway, you listen to what your told, and I was still very naïve at that time. Remember I was what, nineteen then. So we had all these troops who disembarked in Bombay, and having done that, I forget where we went from there. Well, we came here, obviously.

04:00 And I suppose these fellows went into hospital, and apart from having this altercation with this older seaman, I don't remember very much about the ship, other than the fact that I was reprimanded, in the form of being logged and losing a week's pay. Which was probably not a hell of a lot of money by today's standards, but it was a lot to me then.

04:30 But no, I can't remember much. We weren't attacked at sea. I don't remember, although I was probably scared of submarines, too, at the time. I was always conscious of submarines, mainly because they were very, very much in the news in the early war years. Very much in the news. And, but I don't remember us being attacked and I think the trip from Britain to here,

05:00 would have taken, what, a month, five weeks. Something like that, I guess.

Did you have a chance to talk to any of the troops that were the injured?

Oh, well, as I say, I spoke to the Australians. Didn't get to talk much with the English troops on war. Mostly with one or two of the Australians that were being repatriated.

05:30 They didn't talk about their experiences at all. They'd obviously been wounded in some form or were being repatriated because of sickness or whatever. But yes, I spoke to them, and as I say, a couple of them reckoned that Tassie was the place to be in Australia. They weren't very complimentary about the rest of the country.

06:00 **I wondered what you saw of their wounds, or what wounds they had.**

I didn't, I didn't. All I knew was that they had been wounded and were being repatriated because of that.

And you mentioned the altercation with the older soldier, I just wonder, what was that about?

I honestly don't remember. I think, in life,

06:30 there are occasions when somebody can take a dislike to you, for some reason or other, I don't know what. You know, people call each other names, and perhaps he might have called me, because I'm rather dark, he might have called me a black so and so, or something like that. I don't honestly know.

07:00 I can't remember what the fight was about, but whatever it was, and I'm quite sure I wouldn't have started it, but he did. Or at least I think he did. We fought to the point where we were scrambling on the deck, and we were pulled up, and as I say, taken before the skipper, which would be a red mark in my pay book, if my pay book were available today, which I'm sure it is, somewhere. I don't know where.

07:30 **I just wondered, you mentioned what a serious offence it was to jump ship.**

It was.

I just wonder, what it was about that incident that pushed you to take that –

Well, like I say, I was in this fight, and that's what prompted it. That's what caused it. Because I didn't want, I knew very well, that when we went back to sea again, it would be on again.

08:00 I'd be in another fight with this fellow, because he obviously had me set for some reason or other. But I was, really, at the time it was very spontaneous. I don't think I was fully aware of just the extent of the offence, but looking back on it, not right this minute, but I mean in recent years, looking back on it, I realise that what I did was quite a serious offence in war time,

08:30 to jump ship. To jump ship in peace time was bad enough, but to jump ship in war time is, well you know, like deserting. Desertion.

I wonder when you had made the decision to leave the ship, how frightened were you that someone might catch up with you?

I think I was frightened the whole time, that I was at a loose end in Sydney.

09:00 And it was only the fact that I had somebody. You see, being young, being naïve, I always needed somebody to give me direction. And the fact that I met this guy, and I wish I could remember his name. The fellow that was on duty at the bottom of the gangway, who virtually influenced me into coming to stay with him. He didn't influence me into jumping ship,

09:30 because I was going to do that anyway, but when I told him my story and he said, "Oh, you can come and stay with us," well, I took him up on that offer, and you know, but I'm quite sure that I was always aware of the fact that what I had done was wrong. I could be picked up probably at any time by the police, if they knew who I was, or what I was.

10:00 I didn't know if anybody was actually physically looking for me. Probably, not having a tremendous opinion of myself at the time, I don't think they would have worried too much, at least that's what I would have thought at the time. But no, I was frightened of the fact that I could get into trouble. And I didn't like being in trouble.

What was the moment that you made that decision and said, 'No, I'm not coming back on here'?

10:30 I made the decision the moment after we were officially logged, and I'm not quite sure when that was. It was towards the end of the trip. It was after the trip, because I know the ship was almost empty at the time. We only had maybe fifty or sixty of the, you know, Australians aboard,

11:00 and apart from that, there was just the crew. Our gunner, of course, and the officers. No, I know that I made the decision to jump ship immediately after being logged by the captain.

What possessions did you have with you on the ship, and what could you take with you when you jumped?

I had virtually nothing. I had some clothes, obviously,

11:30 and I don't know that I had, I wouldn't have owned a radio in those days. I wouldn't have owned a camera or radio, or anything of real value. Your pay was very small in those days, and I think having a sweet tooth, we used to have, I forget what they called it. I think they called it a glory box, that generally the first officer had, and it was like a little canteen,

12:00 that he would open every second or third day, and that had chocolate and cigarettes and tobacco. Actually, at sea you didn't get cigarettes quite so much. You'd get tobacco, pouch tobacco, and you rolled your own cigarettes. And I'd learnt to smoke when I was a kid at sea. Seemed to be a manly thing

to do. I didn't smoke in,

12:30 later years, back in 1976, I think I had a bypass down here, because the blood was not getting down to my legs. I've always had this problem with my legs, and as a result, finally it affected, well, I don't know whether it affected my knees, or if they were affected by skiing or not. I've always had circulation problems.

13:00 **You mentioned the smoking. I guess, what else did you learn about what it meant to be a man, or what men did, on the ship?**

Well, men don't cry. Certainly seamen don't cry. If you did, I'm quite sure you'd have been a laughing stock. You know, no one would have felt sorry for you.

13:30 You'd have just been a laughing stock. So you have that sort of inbuilt ethic that you've got to be as much of a man as you can be. Which at that time, wouldn't have been very much, but nevertheless, I tried to be as manly as I could be. If that answers your question.

I wonder, were there other,

14:00 **I guess rituals or rites of passage, that maybe initiated you as a man into the crew?**

I think I've always wanted to be accepted. I've always wanted people to like me, and I think I've been like that all my life. So probably I would have had that

14:30 inbuilt desire for the crew to like me, too. As a mate. You know. And I think, by and large, they did. But mind you, I think a lot of it was more the fact that I was, well, there were other boys on board ship. Not many, on board each ship, but there were other boys at sea, and I would say

15:00 that most young deck boys, or ordinary seamen, are looked after and cared for as much as I was. That's the sort of thing I wanted. I wanted to be a member of this gathering, this crew, so therefore I didn't want to be a kid, you know. I wanted to be a man.

When you had jumped ship in Sydney,

15:30 **what was it you missed about the ship and the crew?**

Company, probably, more than anything else, I would think. Because I didn't know anybody. That's why I place so much stock in meeting up with Jackie Carpenter, who was somebody from my previous life. Somebody that I could, in a way, relate to, and yeah, well, I think that was, certainly I missed company. Because I didn't know anybody.

16:00 It was nice to have this fellow and his family, and his sister who was very nice to me. You know, as friends. But I was always seeking friends, I think, and always seeking company.

I wonder, you've talked a little bit about joining the army.

16:30 **What was it that struck you first, I guess, as the hardest thing about the army life?**

Well, at first I thought it was a ball. Because, well, I joined the army, I don't know what the details of it were, other than I actually signed something. And when that was completed,

17:00 I think we were at the showground for a few days, waiting to go to Dubbo where the infantry training camp was. Actually I think it's where the zoo is now, was the 2/1st Infantry Training Battalion's training area. And so I was probably at the showground for about a week, when they decided that there were too many people at Dubbo at that time,

17:30 and so we finished up at Long Bay, Little Bay, whatever it's called, you know. Way out past Malabar, La Perouse, out there, on one of those golf courses. So I mean, for about a month, I did nothing. We used to come into town, there was a the canteen in Hyde Park, and I met these, along with Ronnie Hutchison that I got to know,

18:00 we met these girls who turned out to be nurses from the Manly Hospital, so we used to go across to Manly, almost every day, and meet these girls when they were off duty. We'd talk to them and so on, and we always missed the last ferry coming back to Sydney, so there was, actually it's a funny thing, I went to a funeral in that church the other day.

18:30 One of our guys that was in the entertainment unit, he used to allow us, the minister there, and I can't think of his name, Matt something, He used to allow us to, I think it was St Matthews. He used to allow us to sleep on the church floor in there. He had mattresses there. If you were a serviceman, and you'd missed the ferry, which we did every night, he'd let you sleep on the floor of the. And you see, we had nobody. When we were out there at

19:00 La Perouse or whatever, we had nobody controlling us. We didn't have a sergeant. Nobody was in charge of us. We were just a group, supposed to be doing a job that we couldn't do because we didn't have the materials to do it. So, we just had a good time, and with the money that, mind you, we were on five shillings a day, I think, at the time, of which I used to send, well,

19:30 no, I didn't have Marjorie then, but I know later on I gave he some of my pay. But with what money I had, we were having a good time. There was nobody telling us what to do. But when I got to Dubbo, then all of sudden, everything clicked into gear. All of a sudden you were in the army, you know. Up until then, we were just having a good time.

What was it that clicked into gear and –

20:00 Well the fact that there was a sergeant-major who would scream at you every five seconds. The fact that you had to be up at five or six o'clock in the morning, or that you would be wreaked out of bed at two or three o'clock in the morning, and told to put all your gear on and told to go for a route march for miles. And you'd come back in a truck and you'd have your breakfast.

20:30 I mean, suddenly, you were in the army and everything that the army represented as regards training. Whether I gained anything from it, I don't know. I don't suppose I did, really, because I never liked, I was never really keen on the idea of being a soldier. I think if my army years, looking back on them, the years that I was in the entertainment unit were probably the years that I enjoyed most.

21:00 **I wonder, you mentioned that you joined because you wanted to be in the entertainment unit.**

No, oh, well, yes. In that, only because Jacky Carpenter was an entertainer, and I understood that he was going into an entertainment unit. And I thought I would meet with him at the showground and would finish up in the same unit.

21:30 He would tell them I was a singer. I mean, I wasn't a singer. I sang as a kid at school. I used to sing. I always sang. I sang on board ship, people used to tell me to shut up. "For Christ's sake, shut up." This sort of thing. But I sang. I was fairly happy go lucky, and as long as nobody was pushing me around, I was happy. And when I got to Dubbo,

22:00 I found that there were lots of people to push you around. And lots of discipline and so on, and I don't think I cared for it very much.

What was it that appealed to you about, or that you did enjoy about the army life, to begin with?

I enjoyed Pagewood. Partly because I met people that I regarded as, well, I always had a thing about entertainers.

22:30 Anybody that could really entertain, especially if they had a name, to me, they were important. They were people that I, what's the word, would like to be like, because I always thought that if I did anything in life, I'd love to sing. I would love to have made that my career,

23:00 but you know, you've got to be a little bit better than I was to do that. Anyway, yeah, I think that I enjoyed my years, well, certainly in the entertainment unit, and I enjoyed the people that I met in the entertainment unit, I enjoyed the fact that they were doing, I loved being on stage. You know, I thought that was great. I just thought that was wonderful. I enjoyed entertaining the troops. Even in the rather primitive fashion that we did up in the Solomons.

23:30 And the fact that these guys seemed to appreciate what we were doing. You know, they'd been on patrol, been out in the jungle, and into just a jungle clearing, do your thing, and it would be so much appreciated by these fellows. I think that made me feel good. That made me, possibly, feel important for the first time in my life.

24:00 **It would have been a wonderful feeling, I'm sure.**

Well, it was a wonderful feeling. It was great, and I think I have actually reiterated this to people in the past. That it was just great to feel that you were really appreciated. Probably for the first time, in my life, I really felt that I was doing something for the war effort. Because you were entertaining people, you know, that needed to be entertained.

24:30 **I'd love to come back to a lot of the entertainment stuff in a minute, but I'd like to take you back to the meteorological unit and I guess, how you became involved in that.**

Well, how I became involved in that was, that when I failed my medical in the Infantry,

25:00 somehow or other, and I don't quite know how, I opted to be a driver. That seemed to me to be a good thing to do, so I was sent out to Moorebank where there was a driving school. And I was supposed to learn the mechanics of a car, as well as being able to drive a car, and having achieved that, not that I learned very much about the mechanics of a car,

25:30 but having become a driver, and then I was then allocated to a unit. I guess this met unit, or meteorological. Met unit, as they called it, I think they actually called it a met flight, but I was just allocated to that unit. I had nothing to do with it. That's just where I was sent.

I wonder, at that point, or at any point,

26:00 **were you hoping to be sent overseas, or to be involved in action.**

I don’t know that I really thought about it. Obviously, if I had succeeded in my medical, I would have gone overseas with the 2/1st Infantry Battalion. And probably would have stayed with the infantry. But I may have become better

26:30 at what you need to do in the infantry, you know. But no, I don’t. What was your question again, sorry?

Oh, no, I was wondering if you were keen to be heading overseas or getting into action.

Oh, I never really thought about it to be honest with you. I mean obviously, as I said before, had I got trough that medical, I would have gone overseas, and I don’t think they would have been overseas for very long,

27:00 because it wasn’t very much later than that, that Curtin, John Curtin, who was Prime Minister at the time, had a barney with Churchill about Australian troops coming back to Australia to protect Australia. Because he wanted the men that were in the Middle East to come back here. So, I would say the people that I would have gone with, to the Middle East, or to wherever overseas,

27:30 wouldn’t have been away all that long. They probably would have gone over, been there a few months, and then came straight back again.

I wonder, with the meteorological unit, how closely were you working with the artillery?

Well, I was a driver, so I never really got to understand the ins and outs of the meteorological requirements of the unit.

28:00 What we used to do was, we would probably with a walkie-talkie, we would be in touch with the artillery, and we would be telling them the wind. You know, what do you call it, you know, how the wind was blowing, and how it would affect their aim, and this sort of thing.

28:30 We were actually indirectly attached to different artillery units that were doing training around Australia. But as to the ins and outs of what this unit was supposed to do, I don’t think I really understood it at all. I was just a driver.

I wonder, having not had any plans initially to come to Australia

29:00 **other than when you jumped ship, and you’re seeing quite a bit of the Australian landscape, I wonder what impressions, or your thoughts on the country you were seeing.**

Well, initially, there was none. As a matter of fact, you know, I mentioned before that we were one time in Fremantle before, I don’t think I even connected that with Sydney in any way.

29:30 So my thoughts on Australia would have been minimal, because I knew nothing about the country. It was just the place that I landed at, because of the situation that had arisen on board that ship. And what had occurred. It was just pure coincidence.

I can imagine the landscape in Dubbo,

30:00 **or in Charters Towers, would have been very different to anything –**

I thought Charters Towers was horrible. This is much later in the war. Dubbo I thought was, well, it was hard, because we were being trained in a very hard fashion. We had to climb rather stony slopes in full kit. Get up and get down again, all this sort of thing.

30:30 I wasn’t all that enamoured with the landscape, although I have been to Dubbo since, and I think it’s quite an attractive area. But at that time I didn’t think very much of it. I can’t even remember whether it was, I think it was winter, because I know it was quite cold when we were dragged out in the mornings. But no, and Charters Towers I just thought was dreadful.

31:00 It was almost like, although there were thousands of troops there, because they were waiting to go to the islands, the actual town itself I thought was somewhat of a ghost town. It had about fifty five thousand pubs and most of them were derelict. They were closed. It used to be a mining town, and I think the mining had ceased, so there was not very much reason, as far as I could see, for the town to be there.

31:30 And it was very dusty, windy and dusty. It’s about two hundred miles inland from Townsville, and that area is pretty dusty and dirty, and that’s how I found it anyway. I didn’t care much for it.

I wonder what sense you had, being inland so much, of missing the ocean?

32:00 I don’t know whether that sort of thing really occurred to me. I don’t that I ever really had a great love of the ocean as such, as some people do. And maybe I appreciate it more now than I did then. What I appreciated, if anything, was the fact that we could go from port to port and I could go ashore and with the little money I had, I could buy milkshakes,

32:30 which was my drink at the time, or chocolates, or go to a movie. That was my horizon in those days. Not a very far one.

You mentioned that you didn't like Charters Towers.

Only because, well, it was hot and it was dry, and it was, I thought rather barren and unprepossessing.

33:00 I guess that's just the nature of that area around there. I haven't actually been there since. I've been up the coast a number of times, but I've never actually been inland into Queensland very much.

You mentioned that you did eventually did get the transfer to the Entertainers Unit, I just wonder at your reaction of that, when you heard that news and –

33:30 I thought I was great. Because of meeting up with Jack Carpenter again, and I think I was a bit sick and tried of doing what I had been doing with the met unit, it was pretty dull daily activity, so the chance of coming back to something that was going to be, obviously, to me, more interesting.

34:00 Because I'd always loved entertainment. I remember my idol when I was a kid was Dick Powell. You have probably never even heard of him. He was a singer. He was in a lot of early movies, and used to perform a lot with Ruby Keeler, who was quite a famous dancer, and they were my idols as a boy, you know,

34:30 and so being able to get involved with what I thought was going to be something interesting in the entertainment unit, I thought this would be great. So obviously I was very happy about that.

I wonder, I mean, something that I've wanted to ask, did you ever have any hassle from the Australians being a Canadian?

Yeah, I did. When I first came here,

35:00 people used to imitate me, and I hated that. People used to, well I had a much stronger accent then, and people used to copy it. Because I think, and they used to call me the Woolloomooloo Yank. And this was a common expression at the time, and I know I resented that. To start with I wasn't a Yank,

35:30 not that I had anything against Yanks, mind you, but I didn't like that at all. I resented that 'Woolloomooloo Yank' title, I used to get, merely, because Canadians happened to sound a lot like Americans, you know. The accent is really quite different, but there is a similarity. Does that answer your question?

Yeah. I just wonder,

36:00 **why was it offensive for you to be considered an American, I guess.**

Well, it wasn't really so much my being an American. I didn't like being, when I was a kid at school, I got the nickname of Seamus because of my name. And I hated that. I've never liked nicknames, so being called a Woolloomooloo Yank probably falls into that category. You know, to me, it was demeaning. I didn't like it.

36:30 Not that I had any aspirations to being any better than I was. It was a put down, as they say nowadays.

Were you ever given a nickname that you did like?

Well, you know, my name always was Martin, until I came out here and became Marty. I quite like that. That had a bit of a ring to it. Although I've reverted to Martin now.

37:00 And as I think I mentioned before, I have a sister living in London, and she hates Marty. As far as she's concerned it's Martin. But Marty I quite liked. I liked the whole idea of Marty O'Sullivan. It had a nice ring to it. Marty seemed to go with O'Sullivan better than Martin.

37:30 If that makes any sense.

I wonder, what would the Australians soldiers, or mates that you made, ask you about Canada?

Well, I don't know that, you see, I couldn't tell them very much. I mean, if you know, I doubt very much if you've been to Langley, or it's Aldergrove. You've probably been to Vancouver, but it's forty miles away,

38:00 roughly forty miles away, and it was very much a village at that time. Now it's a suburb. You know there's what they call a sky train goes all the way out to New Westminster, which is a hoot and a holler from Langley. You've got to get a bus from New Westminster to Langley. So really, apart from that rather confined area,

38:30 and then again, being sent up the top end, to Vancouver Island. I'd never been on Vancouver Island before, and this was pretty primitive, wild sort of country up there. There was an Indian reservation right alongside our school. Our merchant navy school, and some of those boys, from that reservation, were in that merchant navy school. Training to be seamen like me.

39:00 I don't know that I was able to impart very much information about Canada. I would not have been aware of what Canada represented as a nation, in those days, you know. Probably any more than a young kid would be aware of what Australia represents as a nation. Just a matter of being a kid, and not

being aware of anything more

39:30 than your personal comforts and those sort of things.

I just wonder how great the sense of, I mean, coming to Australia, another commonwealth or Empire nation.

Oh, I think it was the greatest thing to happen to me, coming here. It was a fluke, but as it turned out, I mean it's been my whole life. I've been here, golly, how long have I been here? I was nineteen when I came here. I'm eighty one next week,

40:00 so it's been my whole life, and it's been wonderful. I think it's a wonderful country. I've travelled the world, both Marjorie and I, have travelled quite a lot. I was discharged from Alcan in '86, I think, and we just kept on travelling until we used up all our money, and we've been to an awful lot of countries.

40:30 In that one year, we went north south, east and west, just about as far as you can go in Europe, I can't think of, and I've been back to Canada two or three times, and spent quite a bit of time in America, skiing in Colorado and so on. I know the east coast of America. I know a lot about Europe, but I couldn't think of a better place to live than Australia. And most Australians feel the same way. I'm sure they do.

That's excellent, Martin.

Tape 5

01:00 **Just to get started this afternoon, Martin, I'd like to ask you, you were just mentioning you were with the met unit for about two years, and during that time you got married. So can you tell me a bit about your war time wedding?**

Well, I had no family and Marjorie had family,

01:30 quite extensive family at that time, and so I married into a family group. And I came, in the time that I was not actually in the army, not in a unit somewhere, I came to live with Marjorie and her mother who lived in a block of units called Bundarra, which is on the corner here, in Prince Street, Randwick.

02:00 I've sort of lost it again.

I've just looked at a photograph of your wedding this morning.

Yes, the wedding. Well, I mean, there was Marjorie's sister, and her husband wasn't there. He was away in the air force. Somewhere. And she had cousins. There was a cousin that ran the Sydney Naval House,

02:30 down in Grosvenor Street, I think it is. He and his wife were there. You know, friends of the family. Minna and her husband, or, she didn't have a sister then. But her sister was there. I married into this family group, but I can't remember exactly who was there. But there were a number of people, certainly I was the only one from my family, such as it was, that was there.

03:00 **You hear a lot about war time weddings. Where did you find the ring? The wedding ring.**

You remember me mentioning Nancy Hutchison? I had no money. She bought the wedding ring for me. That was who supplied the wedding ring. It was Ron Hutchison's mother. I'd gotten quite close to them. If I had any family here, they would have been the nearest thing to family. And so she bought the wedding.

03:30 **And I'm wondering how you felt that day, getting married in your army uniform?**

I think I felt very proud. I was very much in love with Marjorie. I'd never been in that situation before. I, yeah, I think I felt proud

04:00 and almost found it difficult to believe that somebody would want to marry me, you know. Because she was a very pretty girl, and was well educated, or seemed to be, and, you know, I don't know if I can add very much to that. The wedding was very nice. We were married up here at St Jude's in Randwick,

04:30 and the wedding breakfast, if you like, was here, I'm sorry at the flat we were living at in Bundarra, or in Prince Street. No, we didn't buy this place until after the war. So, yeah. I don't know if I can add much to that.

Did you have a honeymoon?

Yes, we went,

05:00 not straight away, because I had to leave, not long after the wedding. We were going with the met flights somewhere, I just forget. To Queensland or somewhere. When I came back I had a week or so's leave, I can't remember exactly the full amount of time, but, so we went to, I looked on the map for somewhere that sounded nice and I saw Toronto. I thought, that's where we should go,

05:30 because it related to Canada. Not that I'd ever been to Toronto, mind you. And still haven't. Marjorie has, but I haven't. So we went to Toronto, and we had a honeymoon. We were in the hotel there, quite an old hotel, and it was a delightful week. Yeah. We've got pictures of that in the album, I think, from memory.

06:00 **Well, I'm wondering when you went back to your met unit, whether you got a bit or a ribbing or hard time from your fellow –**

No, no. No, I don't think so. We had a journalist was our sergeant, who ran our unit. I can't think, I remember his first name as being Frank. Anyway, he had been a journalist on the Sydney Morning Herald, and he was our sergeant in charge of our unit.

06:30 No, I don't think I got a ribbing. No, I don't think so. I think a couple of the fellows came to our flat to meet Marjorie. No, I wouldn't say I got a ribbing. No, I'm just trying to remember back to that time.

07:00 I know I was probably terribly home sick for the first time, being away from her, and being away from a place that had suddenly become home. But no, I wouldn't say. Nobody gave me a hard time. No.

Well, I'm wondering, after your honeymoon, what was your first task back at the met unit?

07:30 Well, as I said I was a driver, and primarily all I did was drive from place to place, and keep the vehicle in reasonable, not in repair, they were all relatively new units, vehicles. It was a small truck. A pickup. What they call today a pickup.

08:00 And that, primarily, was what I had to do. I had nothing to do with the actual meteorological work. And yes, that's just about it. But we moved around a lot, and we were attached to different units. Wherever we happened to be, we would be attached tho that artillery unit, or such and such a camp. Similar to, almost my entire army life was like that,

08:30 because I was with small units. Never with a large brigade, except when I began. Wherever we went we would be attached to somebody. Like a limpet, you know, attached to that group, or that camp, whatever. The same thing applied in the islands. We even got attached to the Americans up in the Solomons. Not in the Solomons so much. In Lae, and in the Solomons too. We were attached to a couple of American camps,

09:00 because we were doing shows for them as well. The unfortunate part of it was, we had a marvellous comedian, a guy who was a tumbler. He used to do about a thousand push ups and spins a day to keep fit. And he was a tiny little fellow, very funny, called Dixie Kid. But his humour meant nothing to the Americans. It was like a foreign language.

09:30 And he died. Wherever we went with the American camps, they didn't get it. It was local humour. It was oh, what was that guy at the Tivoli, Roy Rene, Mo. It was that type of humour. And I think that's where Dixie got. He reckons he, Mo, got a lot of his work off Dixie. Whether that's right or wrong. But the comedians apparently say that. I remember Billie Kerr,

10:00 who was in one of our units. You know, he went to England, and did very well over there in radio and TV, he used to swear that everybody stole his jokes. So that's how comedians are. I couldn't very well steal anybody else's songs because I was stealing them anyway, off Frank Sinatra, Bing Crosby and Perry Como, you name it.

Well, you've mentioned that you were a bit of a singer before you joined the concert party, and that you used to sing on board ship,

10:30 **but I'm wondering, how did it feel getting up on stage with the concert party for the first time?**

I don't think I was ever nervous. I had nerves. I think everybody who performs has nerves before a performance. Doesn't matter how long they've been doing it. It's just a natural reaction, but once you're doing what you're doing,

11:00 you lose the nerves. Prior to a performance, you're nervous. I can't honestly answer that question. The very first time I ever, I think I was always a bit of a performer, even before I was a performer, if you know what I mean. I used to perform at school, and I used to get into trouble for it, because I had no reason to do it.

11:30 But no, I don't think I ever had those sort of stage, I don't think I ever had stage fright as such, and the sort of work I did, was in such a variety of venues, that you know, I mean, you name it, dance halls, clubs, I did a bit of TV work in the early days,

12:00 wedding reception places, even churches, so.

Well, just going back to the first concert party, and how you were claimed, and quite successfully, and released from your met unit duties, I'm wondering how you put the show together.

12:30 Well, I was going to, and I didn't think to do it. I was going to bring in that little book because it tells you exactly who the people were in our concert party. We covered the, a number of types of performers, entertainers. We had a small band, with obviously, with which I sang, and a band leader, who was actually a brilliant piano accordion player,

13:00 and who also used to do arrangements. If I heard a song, that's the only thing that I was good at. I could memorise very quickly, the words and music of a song, if I liked it. And I would tell Lou, "I'd like to sing so and so," and he would do an arrangement for our orchestra, which was about, I suppose, an eight, nine, maybe ten piece orchestra. And the performance,

13:30 the way we put it together, at Pagewood we would rehearse. We'd run the shoe through. We'd each do our thing, and probably Reg Kelly or Rex Dour would look at it and say, "Yes, that sounds pretty good," each item, and then we would perform the whole thing for Jim Davidson.

14:00 If he thought it was a show he'd say, "Well, OK," and off we'd go. And I mean, we were like twelve months in the islands, but we travelled up and down the east coast of Australia, and to a certain extent we went south as well, and we covered a number of different camps inland, which, I can't remember them all. Wherever there were bases like Singleton and Tamworth, and so on, you know.

14:30 **And I'm wondering whether you were being paid for doing the concert parties.**

Oh, no, no. All you got was your six bob a day as it was called. We were just on army pay. The only time we got paid, was when we were in Sydney, in between shows, there was one of the guys at Pagewood, chap called Clive Collins, who was a pianist from Brisbane,

15:00 and he was one of the shows that actually originated in Brisbane. He had a good contact with the Americans and he would get us jobs singing or performing for the Americans. And it would a little package. Entertainment unit. There'd be me, and Jerry Keogh and Dixie Kid, they were the comedy team, and Clive playing the piano. And me singing and compèring,

15:30 because they could understand me. They couldn't understand Dixie because he had a very strong Australian accent. Which I didn't have. So we played the American camps and I think, we'd get five pounds, which was a fortune. I mean, we were on shillings a day, and we'd get paid five pounds for a couple of hours work, in one of these camps. Not with the Australians. Any Australian work we did was always charity work.

16:00 We did Red Cross shows, we did hospital. They were official performances through the auspices of the army unit, through Jim Davidson, the colonel in charge. So they weren't paid. But if you did any work for the Americans, you always got paid. And it was generally round about five pounds, which was a lot of money to us.

16:30 **Well, how did you find the songs to perform? How did you select them?**

From the radio, or from records. I remember, in Philip Street, there was an American, I forget what they called it. It was an American

17:00 relaxation sort of a place, where the American troops could go, and I remember McCarthy coming there one day. Macarthur, mean. Naturally everybody was out to see them. The great man. But they had a wonderful collection of all the latest records. And anyone could go, if you were a serviceman they didn't stop you from going there. You didn't have to be an American, but you had to be a serviceman. And I would listen to these records.

17:30 I got them off V-discs. You wouldn't remember V-discs. They were a wartime thing, stood for 'victory' obviously. I think I've still got a couple. But they had all the big bands, and singers, and people like Sinatra, who was then quite young and new. Crosby, who was well and truly into his career. And Perry Como and people like that. As I've said, my inspiration for doing what I love to do,

18:00 was Dick Powell. Who was a singer and a movie star of the period, back in the thirties. He became a producer later on and died of cancer, I think, in the fifties, or late fifties.

And what would you wear? What was your stage outfit?

Would depend on the show. If it was an army show, if we were performing to an army unit,

18:30 in an army camp, invariably it was, and it was one of these shows we did, we would just wear ordinary army drab khaki. A shirt and pants. If we were actually doing the show, our full show, we would have a costume. Probably just a civilian pair of pants, and a jacket, and maybe a tie,

19:00 Because that was different. In an army setting, that was different. So you were a performer so you dressed like a soldier would imagine a performer should look like, not just a soldier. But we didn't have elaborate costumes. We had a female impersonator who had what they used to call drag. He, or she,

19:30 Max Benson, tall, about six feet, and very thin, and very effeminate, but he was a good scout, and he, or she if you like, did his thing. He would come on and sing in a falsetto, and maybe, in what they used to call a cheyna, in a routine, and perhaps he'd be the girl in that routine.

20:00 When we went to the islands, there were no women in army shows up there. They weren't allowed up there. Later on they were, after the war. And even, I think, towards the latter part of the war. But I never saw a show with any women, only female impersonators.

It is interesting that female impersonators during war time were so acceptable. Why do you think that was?

20:30 Well, I don't know whether, as far as we were concerned they were just part of the show, they were part of the unit. They were a necessary part of the unit. We couldn't have women, so we had these people. I met two or three of them. They were not, I find the parade they have,

21:00 you know, I find that quite objectionable, not so much because of the parade, or because they're homosexual, but because of what they go on, how they perform in that parade. I don't like that. And yet these guys, that I'm talking about, well, they were just other fellows, you know. They were dressed as girls,

21:30 but as far as we were concerned, they were just members of our unit. We had nothing against them. Nothing particularly in favour of them. I don't know that the idea of homosexuality came into it. Obviously they were primarily homosexuals, but that didn't come into it. And as far as I'm aware, their conduct was exemplary, in our situation. There was nothing that you could criticise them for.

22:00 **And do you think, at the time, that you would have known that they were gay?**

I think we were aware of it. The word 'gay' never came into our vocabulary at that time. But I would say we were aware of it, but it didn't worry us. You know, those sort of people were like that, and I used to think they were born like it, and they couldn't help it, and that was that. We didn't object to them.

22:30 They weren't objectionable. They weren't made fun of. Certainly not at Pagewood, and certainly not when we were on the road. It was just a fact of life, that we needed, if we were going to do show, which constituted women, but we didn't have women, then we needed someone who represented women. So we had, and they were very talented. You know, they were a very strong adjunct to what we did.

23:00 **Yes, it is interesting. I was going to ask you if you were aware if any of them received a bit of a hard time.**

Never, as well as, I've heard people call them poofs, and sling off if you like in that regard. But there was never anything really downright nasty about their treatment,

23:30 as far as I was concerned. You know. It was just a fact of life that, at the time, that's the way it was. Obviously, you know, some of the fellows, as a matter of fact, I can remember a time we went to a party right after the war had ended, and I got, I think I could have still been in the army, or I was just discharged,

24:00 after being in hospital. Because I was in hospital for a number of times with malaria, and with the ear thing, and we went to a party. At Lou Campara's place. He was living with a family called Benson. No, I'm getting mixed up with Max Benson. Anyway, he was living with a family, Marjorie would remember his name, but it was up at the Cross, and we went to this party, and we'd been there for a while,

24:30 and I'd been there with Lou and a couple of the other sax players, and suddenly this tall girl came in. And Marjorie said, "Who's that tall girl?" and I said, "That's not a girl, that's Max Benson." That was our female impersonator. That's how good they were. She couldn't pick it. And in many cases, there were some you could tell, but there were others you couldn't. Because they used to make up so well.

25:00 Like a lot of people in that Les Girls performance at the Cross. Could double as women and you wouldn't know it. Other than the fact that perhaps their voice was a lower octave and you know, they didn't speak like that all the time (falsetto voice), because that would be ridiculous, and would sound ridiculous, you know. Lots of women have, Margaret Throsby for instance, has got a very low-pitched voice.

25:30 You know, she speaks in a low octave, for a woman.

Well, it's actually, what you're describing is quite a bohemian, sort of artistic environment. Particularly up in the Cross, during the forties.

Well, it was far more so then, than now. It was a type of bohemia up there,

26:00 and I think the people that lived up there in those days, were a very bohemian type of people. I think they loved that type of existence. Where anything goes. And yet, they lived within the letter of the law. There was nothing nasty about, well, there may have been but you weren't aware of it, if there was. Certainly I think, we respected the people that were female impersonators in the shows that we did,

26:30 because what they did, not everybody could do. Any more that everybody can get up and sing, or get up and make people laugh, you know. And it was a talent. It required a certain talent, and they had it, and some of them were very, very good at it. We had a fellow called Johnny Whislang. John Whislang, who was actually a tumbler, a circus performer, and he had a very, not an effeminate face,

27:00 but the sort of face that you could make up to look like a woman. And he, if there were two girls required, John would. But he was just as masculine as anybody you could wish for. I mean Max, Max wasn't. Max was quite definitely a homosexual. He may have even been, well, I'm not even sure if he's alive today. But he could have been, I didn't even know what a transvestite was, but he could be a transvestite.

27:30 **That sounds very interesting, and I'm also wondering, in the same way that sometimes, you know, straight men like to get dressed up in female clothes, for example, on The Footy Show now, and maybe some of that happened back then as well. What I'm saying is, maybe not all of them were homosexual.**

28:00 Well, yes. We had one performer who later on opened his own club in William Street. I don't know if you would ever remember him. It was a man named Frank Strain. Frank was a very clever, he wasn't a female impersonator. I can't remember exactly what his forte was. I think he was an actor, in fact. But he could dress, and he had a routine which a lot of people copied later on,

28:30 where he would dress in front as a woman, and in back as a man. He would do a double act with himself, which was very clever. And he had a club, which was on the corner of one of the streets, in William Street, and I can't think of the name of it now, cabaret show, I went there two or three times. But he was very clever, but he was certainly not homosexual.

29:00 But a lot of people would, well, as they do traditionally in England, at Christmas time they have the Christmas pantomime, and there's always a dame. But it's always a male, very mannish, it had to be, specifically, a mannish person. Because that was the type of character that was being played. They weren't supposed to be women. They were supposed to be dressed up as a woman.

29:30 And so they'd dress up in drag, but just for the laughs.

And how did you go? I'm interested to hear how you reacted at the time, to coming into contact with men who were homosexual.

Oh, I just thought they were clever. You know, I just thought they were, being able to do what they did, was very clever, and we needed it. It was very, you know, we had to have it for the show,

30:00 and I never gave a thought to the sexuality or otherwise of it. That didn't occur to me, it was just the fact that that was a woman's part, so this guy could do that.

I mean, I guess I'm interested because I know a story about someone who was kicked out of the army for putting on a girl's dress, and yet when they were on the stage

30:30 **they were accepted. So it's an interesting sort of contradiction.**

Well, I'd say you'd be looking at fault there of someone who was very narrow minded. Who was very short, minimal in their thinking. It would be one of the officers of that person's unit, who objected to that, and had a thing about it. You know, he would have to have a thing about it to object to it.

31:00 If that person could perform on stage as a woman and be accepted, and then dressed up in a woman's dress, and caused some concern to his superiors, then there was something wrong with those superiors, I would say. But once again, I mean, there are guidelines, and it's a very narrow line of delineation

31:30 between what is objectionable and what isn't. I think.

Well, the other interesting sort of, I guess, social issue of that time is, homosexuality was actually illegal.

Well, that's right. Yeah, I, well, this is a personal thing. I don't particularly care for homosexuals. I've got nothing against them, personally,

32:00 but I just don't like that whole idea of that. That's why I probably object to, not so much that they parade, but that they stick their tongues out, and do things that I think are quite obscene, in my mind, but then I'm probably narrow minded in that way, too. It's the way you're brought up I guess. I had a fairly strict Catholic upbringing and, I can't explain it. It's just something that's within you.

32:30 It's part of your makeup.

I'm wondering if that sort of atmosphere of bohemia that you were describing, and maybe there was something about the classiness of the female impersonator's act, that made it sort of OK at the time.

Well, I mean, there were people who dressed up in drag, as we used to call it.

33:00 For the laughs. They weren't trying to impersonate females. They dressed up purely for laughs. But a female impersonator, like a true professional female impersonator, dressed up to impersonate a woman, and they would have to have some talent, apart from just dressing up, you know. But primarily, that was their reason for being at that time.

33:30 We needed that sort of people to do that sort of job, and they did it very well, and if anything, I admired

them for what they did. I never gave it a thought. Never gave any other aspect of it a thought.

well, I'm wondering, you've mentioned that depending on which audience you were playing to, you'd either put on your army uniform, or put on your civvies,

34:00 **I'm wondering in the same way that a female impersonators were –**

Oh, the guys would whistle, and send them up just like they would a real woman that was on stage. You know, because they were, as far as the fellows were concerned, they were the real thing. That's what they seemed to be, anyway. We didn't have that to, really, in these troubadour performances that we did up in Bougainville, we didn't have that,

34:30 because the majority of the work we did was very much that, troubadour performances in the jungle, and I think we just wore jungle greens, or whatever. I don't think we had female impersonators come out with us. See, I can only talk about the one show, and remember, there were twenty of these units, in the First Australian Army Entertainment Unit. So I can, I mean I knew a few of the others,

35:00 just by being at Pagewood with them, and maybe going to parties that they were at in those days.

Well, I'm wondering, can you tell me about that sometimes you wore civvies. Did you used to put on makeup as well, or some kine of stage –

Yeah, I think we did, probably rosy our cheeks, not rosy them, but give them a bit of colour.

35:30 Maybe put lipstick on. I don't think we did that to any great extent, but it's just natural for performers to wear makeup. And not in those, once again, not in those troubadour shows. They were very basic and, if anything, quite primitive performances. But as far as the stage performance was concerned, because you had lights on you,

36:00 and we had lights something like that, you'd put makeup on.

And well, I'm wondering, did you have anybody, was there anybody doing the makeup or did you do it yourself?

Oh, no. you'd just do it yourself. Just what you thought made you look a little nicer looking, or more intense looking than what you did.

36:30 I don't quite know how to describe that.

Well, perhaps it's in a way, larger than life.

Yeah. Yeah. Yes, it's make believe, to a certain extent. Even though you're on stage, singing a song, it's sort of make believe. The whole thing is make believe. Performance generally, unless it's a serious stage play, is make believe.

37:00 Everything's based on fantasy, to a certain extent. Music Hall, Vaudeville, which is which is the same thing.

We've mentioned that the boys would wolf whistle the impersonators. I'm wondering how else, or how did they respond to your act?

Oh, I'd just, they'd listen. I mean, they knew a lot of the songs that I was doing because they'd hear them too, on the radio.

37:30 I would sing songs that were popular, naturally. You know, White Christmas was always a winner, because everybody knew it. I'll be Home for Christmas was another one. Oh, golly, I can't even think of the songs. But it was, they'd just listen, and I'd get applause at the end.

38:00 I generally got applause, which was you know, very nice, to be accepted for what you were doing. And even the shows, well, we did a lot of shows at Vic Barracks for instance. For the soldiers that were there, and sometimes they were public performances to raise money for charity. Yeah, I just sang and people liked it and applauded.

38:30 **Well, I'm wondering if it would be possible to hear a few bars of White Christmas.**

\n[Verse follows]\nI'm dreaming of a white Christmas,\n Just like the ones I used to know.\n Where the tree tops glisten,\n And children listen,\n To hear sleigh bells in the snow.\n

39:00 I'm dreaming of a white Christmas,\n With every Christmas card I write,\n May your days be merry and bright,\n And may all your Christmases be white.\n

For some reason, that's a very sad song.

Well, mainly, I think, because it was sung,

39:30 although in the movie, it wasn't meant that way, but it was sung in the context during the war, for people who were away from home.

I'll be home for Christmas,\n You can count on me.\n

That sort of thing. And songs had a melancholy aspect to them because people were away from the people that they loved and the things that they held dear. So those songs meant just that much to them, you know.

40:00 Yeah, it's, I suppose. I'm not a psychologist.

Well, thank you very much for that.

Tape 6

00:30 **You were just telling us how you loved to sing always.**

Well, I always did. It's just that, because I don't do a lot of it now, well, I haven't exactly lost it, but it's not there. I can't do what I would like to do. And used to be able to do. Mainly because I don't do it all the time.

01:00 It's like anything else. If you don't do it constantly, you know, you lose it.

What did you enjoy so much about singing?

It's a good question, but it's a very hard question to answer, because singing is many things to many people, depending on what sort of music you are singing and what the music means to you, and what it is.

01:30 I can listen to, now, I thought Sinatra was the greatest singer this century. Of course, he's gone now. But I could listen to Sinatra sing a song and it would bring tears to my eyes. You know. Not because the song was melancholy or sad, but just because it was so good, just because of the way he did it, and I'm talking about when he was good, when he was singing really well.

02:00 Same thing applies to Crosby, and pretty much the same thing applies to Perry Como. And possibly, as much as anybody, the same thing would apply, in spades, to a fellow called Dick Haymes, who is long gone. Did you ever hear of Dick Haymes? He had a fantastic voice. Very deep baritone, beautiful, beautiful, very deep resonant voice that was just lovely,

02:30 but he was a drunk. And he came out here to do a concert performance, fell off the stage in his first performance, and they shipped him back home. Another one, another performer who was –

I was just going to ask, how did you feel to be singing these songs of the people you admired so much?

03:00 Well, I would try to emulate Sinatra, Crosby, Perry Como, Dick Haymes, whoever sang that song, and whoever made it with that song, I would try to emulate that person's expertise, if you like, you know. Obviously I couldn't because I'm me,

03:30 and I'm not as good as those people, because if I was, I would have been a professional, I mean, a one hundred percent professional singer, I wouldn't have been selling building materials during the day. Because, as I said before, that was, if I ever had any ambition, that was it. I would have been a professional singer, but I realised, being a singer, that I just wasn't good enough. You know,

04:00 and you've got to cope with what you know you're good enough at. If I'm explaining myself very well here. Sounds a bit Irish to me.

I wonder, Martin, you were the singer in the Thirty Club show.

Mmm.

Who were the other people, and I guess –

Well, Ollie Goode was a wharf labourer, but had a fantastic light tenor voice

04:30 that was very, very suited to musical comedy type songs. He was as tough and as horrible and as objectionable as any one person could be. But he had this beautiful voice. I don't think even he was really aware of it, but he had found that he could get out of the army by getting into the concert parties.

05:00 Get out of the normal army routine, by getting in, so that's what he did, because he was a con artist as well. That was Ollie Goode. Norm Williams, on the other hand, had a very deep baritone voice, beautiful baritone, very resonant voice, and, but he was a very simple man. Just about so super conservative, ultra conservative,

05:30 and simple with it at the same time, but he had this beautiful resonant voice. We were the three main singers. I used to do the pop songs, the rubbish, and they used to do all the good stuff. My favourite singer, outside of people like I've just mentioned, would be Paul Robson. I worshipped that man. I worshipped his voice. I never knew him. I never met him.

06:00 I know he was out here once. But I thought he was just absolutely wonderful. But musical comedy, I can take it or leave it. I don't like opera much. I like the music, but not the singing so much, although I appreciate the singing, if you know what I mean. But we're sort of getting away from my life story, aren't we.

That's OK. You've told me about the three singers in the Thirty Club. Who else was in the Thirty Club?

06:30 There was Frank Scott was our pianist. Lou Campara, from Melbourne, he was our band leader, arranger and played the piano. But Frank Scott was our pianist. Bob Murphy was a comedian, but a different type of comedian to Dixie, the Dixie Kid. And Jerry Keogh. Dixie's name was actually Clyde Rose. He was only ever known as the Dixie Kid.

07:00 George Epple was our drummer. I've got a list of them out there, but, Pat Murphy was a type of contortionist type dancer. He used to dance on stage and twist himself into all unimaginable shapes. That was Pat Larsen.

07:30 What did I say, before? Can you remember what I said?

No.

I think I got the name wrong. Pat Larsen was that fellow. Bob Murphy was a comedian. Carl Williams was a magician and a ventriloquist. He had a couple of ventriloqual dolls. And he was also a magician. He used to do shooting. He'd shoot a bullet on stage. Of course, it wasn't a real bullet, but everybody thought it was,

08:00 and he'd shoot it at one of us. We'd be holding a pen or something, I just forget. The members of the band were, oh, golly. I should have thought of all this before. Well, George Epple, as I said, was our drummer. Teddy McMinn was a clarinet player. Reg Redgrave, well, clarinet and sax player, because they doubled. Reg Redgrave was a clarinet and sax player.

08:30 Incidentally, he's gone, Reg, was married to one of the best singers back in the forties. Olive Lester, and she was with a group called the Lester Sisters. They were girls that sing. We used to have the Parker Sisters down the street here. The three Parker Sisters. Betty Parker was another great singer, girl singer.

How well, you've mentioned all the different performers,

09:00 **how well did you get on as a unit?**

Oh, we got on very well. We got on very, very well. I think that we all complemented each other in what we did. If we had suggestions as to how you could improve your performance, we wouldn't hesitate to put if forward. No, there was never, obviously somewhere along the line there would be, I've mentioned Ollie Goode.

09:30 Now Ollie was a very difficult, rather, almost psychiatric type character. And being tough and strong you had to watch it with Ollie, because he'd punch you out without thinking twice about it. But we got on with him, because you had to. You know, we were a very close unit. We were travelling all over the place together. So you couldn't afford not to get along with each other.

10:00 But I think I was very fortunate in having known and worked with some quite marvellous performers. They never made world headlines or anything like that, but I known Lou went to England. And when Jim Davidson went to England, and he ran the BBC music division in England for a number of years. He got Lou to go over,

10:30 and Lou did very well on the BBC and around the theatres, performing around the theatres, but he was a wonderful performer, as well as being a brilliant arranger.

What was your favourite part of the act, the show, to watch? What did you like the most?

Well, I loved watching Dixie because he was so funny. I mean, he was, I appreciated his comedy, even if the Americans didn't.

11:00 Partly because, by then, I was indoctrinated into Australian humour. I thought Roy Rene was funny. I didn't like everything he did, but I thought he was funny. He was funny and he was a lovable little character as well. He was like a little fat leprechaun. Yeah, Jerry Keogh. Well, Jerry was a drunk and he finished up killing himself with alcohol anyway. But he was Dixie's straight man.

11:30 But he was funny too. He was a naturally funny guy. He finished up touring with these shows that go all around the different country towns and he'd have a side stall selling something or other, you know. He was a bit of a con man as well. But, yeah, no, it was a wonderful time, really, for me, because, and it brought me out of myself a lot, I think.

12:00 And, but the question you asked before, or was it Cathy [interviewer] that asked me. You're Cathy?

No, I'm Isabel [interviewer].

You're Isabel. Well, Cathy asked me before, now I've lost it. You see, this is what happens when you get to eighty one. Sorry.

That's OK. It will come back to you.

It'll come back, yeah.

What were some of the Dixie Kid's jokes that you loved the most?

Well, you know, they were ridiculous. The were the sort of jokes like, "Who was that woman I saw you with last night? That was no woman, that was my wife." Or, "Why did the dog cross the road? It wanted to get to the other side." Silly jokes like that, they weren't fantastic jokes by any means, but because he was funny,

13:00 anything he said was funny. It's a little bit like, if you remember that guy that used to wear a fez in the English music halls. I can't think of his name. Tommy something. He would just walk on stage and people would laugh. Because he just looked funny, and you knew that he was a funny man. He didn't have to say anything that was terribly funny, but they would laugh.

13:30 You know, if people had laughed at me while I was singing, I would have been hurt. But if I was a comic and they laughed at me just because I looked ridiculous, I'd think it was great. And that's about the size of it really, I guess. But Dixie was a naturally funny little guy. And he was always saying corny little things that were funny. Jokes. I can't remember jokes anyway.

14:00 I was the compère in clubs, for years, and I'd introduce the acts, I'd sing my songs, I'd talk about the song. You know, the way Sinatra used to. I was the poor man's Frank Sinatra, and I'd, I've lost it again. I'll have to think about that.

14:30 **I was wondering, you mentioned a little bit, while we were changing tapes, about the kind of environment you'd be performing in, in New Guinea.**

The environment, on stage? Well, it was a very happy environment, if that's what you mean. It was a good feeling. To get on stage and be doing something,

15:00 either, see we all had to play different parts, so I mean I would be mixed up in a comedy routine, without being funny, just part of the comedy routine. They might be poking fun at me, or I tripped over, or I'd stumble, all part of that routine, and it was just great. I loved being on stage, probably more in that environment

15:30 than I ever did when I worked the clubs, and I just used to get up and sing, although I enjoyed that too. But being involved in all these routines that we used to do was fascinating, for me, and I think if that is what you mean by environment, well then, it was a great, marvellous environment.

I wonder, what did you know about the war that had gone on in New Guinea,

16:00 **and what the troops you were performing to had been through?**

All I knew was that, well, look when we came to Lae any activity that was going on in New Guinea at that time was a long way away. A long way from Lae. Lae used to be the Japanese headquarters, but the allies took it over. And it became the Australian headquarters. That's why we went to Lae, and we were based in Lae,

16:30 But I'm losing this all the time. I keep forgetting what I'm about to say.

I just asked what you knew about the fighting.

Oh, yes. Yeah, well. So when we were in Lae, I wasn't, I mean the war had virtually passed it by. We used to go to the movies, sitting in the rain, watching movies. And go to two-up games.

17:00 There was a massive two-up game at the base, at the back of the theatre before our performance, but then when we got the Solomons, to Bougainville, it was a different kettle of fish entirely, because it was quite definitely on. But it was a, it was jungle warfare, and it wasn't warfare like they had in the Middle East,

17:30 or like they had in the First World War. It was warfare that was going on around you, and you could be unfortunate to be killed just walking along a bush track. You know, by a sniper or anything like that. It never happened to me. I was well aware of it though. I remember we were driving along a bush track, one time, in Bougainville, and we came across a jeep.

18:00 We didn't know why there was a jeep sitting in the middle of a jungle clearing. It was a brand new jeep, with American markings on it. No body near it. Nobody there. So we hung around, trying to see what had happened, which was scary, because you never knew if there were Japanese hiding. This jungle was dense. I mean, dense. You could not see from here to the door,

18:30 that's just how dense it was. When you got off the track. So we couldn't work out, so we actually took possession of that jeep. And then when we got to base, nobody claimed it. So we never did find out the story attached to that jeep. We were never able to trace it. I know this sounds ridiculous, but it's true.

So we had a jeep. An extra jeep, until we finished and came back to Australia.

19:00 But there were times when it was very frightening, but you never knew, well, you knew what you were scared of, but you never knew why you felt so scared. That was in Torokina. And strangely enough, you know, I've heard them talk about Bougainville and the Solomons, but I've never heard them mention Torokina. And yet when the war ended, thousands of Japanese came in. They'd been under the ground,

19:30 it seemed like thousands. Under the ground, in tunnels, and they were there, every night they were out rattling wires, attached to the perimeter wires of an encampment, making a noise so people couldn't sleep, and stuff like that. So, it was a, I mean it was scary, but at the same time, as I say, we were very glad to be able to do what we did for those troops.

20:00 Because if you ask was I aware of the war, as such, only in the sense that I knew people were being killed, and that we were at war with the Japanese, and I hated the Japanese for the things they were doing, and we weren't even aware of all the things they were doing till after the war. But we were aware of some things they were doing, and so, I think that's about as good an answer as I can give.

20:30 **I wonder how capable of defending yourself you felt.**

Not capable at all. Not capable at all. I think if I'd ever really been in a heavy action situation, I might have even run for cover. I don't know. I very likely could have, because I think I would have been really good at being a coward.

21:00 I don't think I would have ever been a good soldier as such. I was just lucky that my eyes stopped me from getting into a combat unit. I got into units where combat wasn't necessary.

I can imagine, for all the entertainers, from entertainers we've talked to, they hadn't received a lot of the training to be able to defend themselves, yet you're right at the front, and you don't know whether there are –

21:30 Well, that's true. I mean, we were up there to entertain, and I suppose we never had anybody in our unit that I could say was sufficiently, well, Frank Scott the pianist, was a frustrated soldier. He would have loved to have been a soldier. At the front line, doing whatever people do at the front line,

22:00 you know, but he was a bloody good pianist. So that's what he did best, and that's what he was doing. I'd say, if it came down to fisticuffs, he could very well have handled himself exceptionally well. But me, I can't fight for nuts. And I mean, if ever I got into a real stoush. I don't know. Look, it's hard to say how you would react if you really got caught up in an action,

22:30 a wartime type action. It's hard to say how you would react. For instance, I said before, that when I was a seaman, I think the worst thing that could have happened to me, would have been to appear, oh, effeminate or, not effeminate. That's a silly word. You know, not manly. And yet I was a kid.

23:00 But at the same time, I'm not an aggressive person, and I don't think I would have handled myself very well in, if even I had to be in action. The training I did receive, I received at Dubbo, was fairly tough, was fairly hard, I got through it. I don't know whether, if I was ever able to see a report on my conduct, at that time, if it would be a favourable one,

23:30 but I got through it anyway, and I came back to Sydney, with the brigade, with the regiment. Supposedly to go away, but got out of it because of poor eyesight.

How prepared were you and the other entertainers for the conditions that you were to face in the jungle, or in the tropics?

I don't think we were really prepared at all. I mean, I don't even remember us having, when we went from place to place, in Bougainville,

24:00 I don't remember us having weapons with us, and we travelled in a jeep or a little truck, and I don't remember having weapons with us. The only kind of weapon was at Dubbo, at the training camp at Dubbo. And I don't remember anybody being with us as a guard, or being able to look after us if we did get ambushed.

24:30 As I think we could have very easily done, but it didn't happen. Fortunately.

I wonder, you hear from others in New Guinea and Bougainville about, I guess, the weather and the climate, and disease. I just wonder how the entertainers fared against the elements.

25:00 Well, I had dysentery up there, which I was treated for. They used to give us something that handled that. Of course, the sanitary conditions were extremely primitive. So, I mean, it was very easy to get dysentery. And it was a very common complaint amongst. I never had any trench foot or anything like that. You know.

25:30 I got this Singapore ear like I said, but that was my own fault for swimming in the rivers. Because there are insects in the rivers that got into my ear. And malaria. Well, you know, that was a pretty common thing. We had Atebrin all the time, morning and night, when we were up there, and the only time I didn't take it was in the hospital, and that's where I got malaria. Yeah.

26:00 Was your question, how we looked after ourselves?

I just wonder, given the hardships, and the fact that you were quite close to fighting, how do you keep the morale of the unit up?

Oh, it's a comradeship, I guess. You know, being with a group that you know and trust. Whether you're going to be able to fight yourself out of any tight spot,

26:30 is something else again, but let's face it, not everybody is a fighting man. Lots of guys up there are supposed to be fighting men, and when all's said and done, when it comes right down to it, the actual combat troops, in a brigade, or in a division, are very few and far between. The people that actually go hand to hand, or lob a grenade,

27:00 or do whatever you have to do. They are few and far between. They're backed up by thousands of backup troops, all sorts of people, including cooks and entertainers.

Why are the entertainers important?

Well, because of morale. I'd say, that word really encapsulises the whole reason for us being there, to do what we did,

27:30 purely for morale, because like I said, when you come with your little truck to a jungle clearing, and you've got fifty, sixty guys who've just come off patrol, they're wet and they've got ground sheets wrapped around them, and they've got their rifle, or whatever, their Bren gun or whatever it is they're carrying. The Owen guns were very popular at that time, and Dixie tells his jokes

28:00 and tumbles and looks ridiculous, and I sing my song, even Ollie sings his songs, and it, and I was forgetting, we had a juggler. Keith Testro, came from an old music hall family. The Testros in Melbourne. Keith Testro was our juggler. Well, he juggled in the jungle, and he was very clever, you know,

28:30 and it was wonderful to see the reaction we got from these people, from these fellows. That would be more gratifying than a stage performance. Because in a stage performance, you can't really observe, other than applause and laughter, you can't really gauge their reaction. But in a jungle clearing you can see their eyes, and you can see the smile on their face.

29:00 You can see them laughing when there isn't anything really funny to laugh at. They're just smiling because they're enjoying it, you know.

Can you describe for me that scene in the jungle clearing? How you'd set up and –

Well, there wasn't a lot of setting up to do, because, I can't remember. We may have had a generator at times, a portable generator, which would have given us power to operate a microphone.

29:30 I can't remember. I've got a picture in there of one such performance, and I can't remember there being a microphone there. And actually, it's Norm Williams like that, but I don't see him standing in front of a microphone. And I'm standing behind him, probably waiting to do my bit, and we didn't always have a microphone, and I know I have always needed a microphone,

30:00 because my voice is not that big. Well, I was a crooner. A crooner, in my day, somebody that was a crooner, it was a bit of a put down in the music business. Silly, I don't know if I'm describing that very well, but it wasn't, I mean, a person that sang was a singer, a real singer, you know, that got up and really gave it heaps,

30:30 but a crooner, you know. Does that make any sense?

I just wonder, you mentioned that the troops would sit and watch, and you could see their reaction.

Oh, well, you could. I mean, that's why I said that that type of performance, to me, anyway, I used to find more gratifying than a major performance

31:00 in front of a large crowd of troops of the sort of work we did in the clubs. You could actually see they guys. You could see them coming alive almost, after being a fortnight on patrol, or a week on patrol, or whatever they did, in the rotten conditions. It would rain every day and at night, as well. They'd have to dig a fox hole to sleep in at night.

31:30 After a week of that, you know, getting some entertainment, having somebody turn themselves inside out to make you laugh, and sing songs that you relate to your home, or the people you love, I guess that's what it was all about. So, I'd say morale was our reason for being there.

How much would you get to talk to the soldiers, and what would they say to you after a show?

32:00 Oh, they used to come up and say, "Oh, that was good." I won't use the language they used to use, but they'd say that was very good. They obviously appreciated it. We got a lot of heartfelt appreciation. No doubt about that, and it made it all worthwhile. You know, I mean, when all's said and done, six bob a day is not very much. But that's not what it was all about, in those days.

32:30 And a performer, performs because they really enjoy performing. They don't really do it for the money, although obviously, money is necessary. They do it because they enjoy it.

I wonder, you mentioned the mobile broadcasting.

Yeah, well, that was a different kettle of fish entirely, really, because Geoff De Fraga was our commanding officer.

33:00 Well, he was a sergeant-major, actually, and then Jock was a sergeant, and I was a private, so we were a very small, tiny little group. And what we did we did because we had all these records to play, and then I'd go round and ask fellows if they had any jokes, or funny things that they could tell me about their officers and they'd tell you things and you'd put them over the microphone at night,

33:30 hoping you didn't upset anybody.

What things did they say about their officers?

Oh, well, you know, so and and so's an absolute drongo, or things like that. They might tell you some funny experience that they'd had, and I don't remember all that either. The trouble is that when I knew that I was doing this, I didn't know what to prepare for.

34:00 I knew that you were going to want my life story, but I didn't know, I couldn't sort of try to remember funny things, or actual incidents that I could relate. I really was not prepared for this.

You're doing a great job, Martin.

But they were good shows too, in that you could see the fellows.

34:30 They were just, either sitting in a hall, or sitting out in the open on benches, or just sitting on the ground. And you'd, we had loud speakers on each corner of the truck, so they could hear us very well, because we had a microphone. And we'd ask these silly, simple quiz questions. Not silly, but simple, quiz questions. "What's the capital of Western Australia?" and things like that. We'd give away our chocolates and cigarettes, which were important in those days.

35:00 For the fellows. And the only thing that bugged me, of course, was the fact that I wanted to do the best I could do, and it was very difficult with a Scottish entertainer who played the accordion in the key of C, and that was all. It was very difficult for me. And Jock and I never got on. I like Scots, but I didn't get on well with Jock,

35:30 mainly because I really couldn't perform with him, and he was very much aware of it, and he couldn't accompany me properly. And he, I was very much aware of that. So, you know, that was a problem. But we got by and we managed to entertain and apparently they liked what we did. And I must have sung White Christmas a million times.

36:00 Probably not as many times as Bing Crosby, but nevertheless, a million times.

Did you ever get to the point with certain songs where you just really didn't want to sing them a particular night?

No. I'd say the only reason for that is that I generally could choose my own songs, and anything I didn't like I just wouldn't sing. I was never made to sing. I was never in a performance where you were given a song

36:30 and that's the song you had to sing. I sang the song I wanted to sing, so therefore I was quite happy doing them, and it didn't matter how many times I had to do them, I could do them. And hopefully do them justice.

What songs would troops request?

Well, I think the songs of the period. You know, White Christmas was always a favourite. I'll be Home for Christmas.

37:00 Christmas songs always went down well, even if it wasn't Christmas time. I can't, people would sometimes ask for an Irish song, so I'd sing McNamara's Band, or something like that, you know. Something Irish.

What's, I haven't heard McNamara's Band.

37:30 McNamara's Band? You haven't heard of McNamara's Band? Oh, that's like saying you've been swearing in church.

\n[Verse follows]\n Oh, my name is McNamara,\n I'm the leader of the band,\n And though we're small in number,\n We're the finest in the land.\n I am the conductor,\n And we often have to play,\n With all the best musicianers\n You hear about today.\n

It's one of those sort of songs, you know, with a million choruses.

38:00 And

\n[Verse follows]\n Whenever there's a donny brook\n We cheer for either side.\n

That sort of a song. It's a comic song, or

\n[Verse follows]\n Mary Sunderson's a wonderful sight,\n With the people here working by day and by night.\n

You'd know that one.

Not digging for barley, for corn or for wheat,\n But there's gangs of them digging for gold in the street.\n At least when I asked them, that's what I was told,\n

38:30 So I just took a hand in the digging for gold.\n

But for all that I found there I might as well be\n Where the Mountains of Mourne sweep down to the sea.\n

Have you heard that song? Oh, come on. You must have heard that song. Everybody's heard that song.

I have now.

That's just one chorus. It goes on and on and on, as most Irish songs do. Yeah. But as I say,

39:00 I used to sing the songs I liked, so therefore I never really got tired. And if people requested a song that I didn't know or I didn't like, then I didn't sing it. But if they requested something that I liked, well, then I'd sing it. And answer their request. And mostly they were songs that they were as familiar with as I was. And whatnot, you know.

39:30 All the top singers of the period.

I wonder, would people make up their own songs, either in the Thirty Club or the Mobile Broadcasting?

Aah.

I just wonder about funny ditties, or –

Oh, I don't know. Dixie and Jerry used to have some funny little ditties that they used to sing, and I can't remember what they were,

40:00 and they were just songs they'd made up themselves. But they were primarily for their comedy value, not so much for their vocal value, if you like, or their musical value, but no, I don't make up songs. I'm not very good at that. I sing songs other people write, or make up.

40:30 **I just wonder how hard it was, continuing to perform in the broadcasting unit, when –**

Well, it was difficult, but that wasn't the only thing that we did. Fortunately, Jock had a fund of you know,

I belong to Glasgow, dear old Glasgow town.

That sort of thing. Those songs. So he would do most of the singing.

41:00 I would just do a couple of songs. I would do the compèring. I'd introduce Jock, as coming directly from Scotland, although he'd been in Australia for God knows how many years. That sort of thing. And I'd maybe sing a couple of songs, but Jock did most of the singing, and Geoff used to operate the controls, because he was good at that, coming from a radio background.

41:30 And that was it. So I mean, we got by, by the skin of our teeth, I must admit. But nevertheless, we got by for some months. I'd say at least six months. Maybe eight months. I can't remember exactly how long. But, yeah.

That's wonderful, Martin.

Tape 7

00:30 **Well, I'm wondering if we could perhaps keep the singing rolling and you could give us a few bars.**

Aah. Are we on? Oh, we are. I'm sorry. I didn't realise that.

\n[Verse follows]\n Couldn't sleep a week last night,\n Because we had that silly fight.\n I thought my heart would break the whole night through.\n

01:00 I knew that you'd be sorry, and I'm sorry too.\n

I couldn't have my favourite drink\n The one in which I hold you tight.\n I had to call you up this

morning\n To see if everything was still all right.\n Yes, I had to call you up this morning\n ‘Cause I couldn’t sleep a wink last night.\n

01:30 That’s that song. What was the other one?

How Deep Is The Ocean?

\n[Verse follows]\nHow much do I love you, I’ll tell you no lies.\n ...I’m in the wrong key....\n How deep is the ocean, how high is the sky.\n How many times a day do I think of you,\n How many roses are sprinkled with dew.\n How much –

02:00 How far would I travel.\n

No, I’ve lost it. It’s a long time since I’ve sung, even the songs I like. I remember them sometimes. You know how I go to sleep at night, and I don’t sleep well. I don’t sing myself to sleep. I go through the words of songs. Songs that I’ve forgotten, and if I want to remember the lyric, I’ll just keep at it, and keep at it, until I’ve got it

02:30 and about half way through, I’m asleep. It’s a good exercise. A great exercise. I suppose. It is for me, anyway.

\n[Verse follows]\n How far would I travel to be where you are\n How far is the journey from here to a star\n And if I ever lost you, how much would I cry\n How deep is the ocean, how high is the sky\n

03:00 Well there’s that one. That’s part of it anyway. I can’t think of any others. I only remember those because you mentioned them. No, no.

You were mentioning earlier on that you would get requests. I’m wondering if there was a song that was your most requested song.

03:30 I think it would have to be White Christmas, because it was so popular in the war years. I’m just trying to think of a couple of other Christmas, because there’s quite a number of very good Christmas songs, but I know I’ll be Home for Christmas, was a popular one in those days. But White Christmas just outclassed any of them. And it was just such a simple song.

04:00 An Irving Berlin song, and he was such a great song writer of popular songs. But I’d have to say White Christmas was the one I remember as being requested most. But then, I Couldn’t Sleep a Wink Last Night was quite popular at that time. That was requested as I remember. And How Deep is the Ocean I’m not sure.

04:30 I always liked it. But I’m not sure if it was one that was requested a lot. I can’t think. I’d have to have my little book and go through it.

It’s interesting that that White Christmas song was so popular with the Australian troops given that Australia doesn’t have a white Christmas.

True. True. Well, it’s, Christmas, if you think about it,

05:00 people simulate snow here. Even though they haven’t got it, they simulate it. They sprinkle white stuff on the tree. They have a pine tree, because that’s where Christmas is. When I was in Ramsau on Christmas Eve, with this family that we were with, the Pitzer family, we went to the church at midnight and they had this enormous tree,

05:30 and the priest and his assistant, lit this tree with actual candles off two ladders, on either side, and the bells tolled at midnight, and we had the service, and after the service we went all around the graveyard, and we lit a candle and left a little gift. Well, it might have been just simulated gifts, I don’t know. The villagers had them, at every grave.

06:00 There was a candle lit and a little gift. It was only a small churchyard. It was only a small village. It was a skiing area. The town of Schladming, which was the big town. Big skiing town. Gary used to take his advanced pupils. Because up in Ramsau, the hills were, even though it’s on the Dachstein,

06:30 you had to go up in a cable car to get up to the high slopes. So Gary used to take his people down to Schladming, because there were some good steep slopes without having to go all the way up the Dachstein. That was quite a big town.

I’m wondering if you can remember any Christmases in New Guinea, where you were singing White Christmas to the troops?

I sang White Christmas many, many times.

07:00 Not necessarily, I don’t even remember whether I actually spent a Christmas there. I haven’t got a Christmas memory of New Guinea, but I know I sang White Christmas many times. At the concert in the hospital, and I can remember White Christmas being requested, and then requested again. After it had been sung once. And when I first met Marjorie, and I’m not even sure if it was when I met Marjorie.

07:30 It might have been. I wouldn’t have come out to this part of Sydney, because I didn’t know where it was

unless I'd met Marjorie. And we used to go down to Stone's Cabaret, which was down at Coogee, It's not there anymore. Hasn't been for a long time, and I won the competition. They used to have a vocal competition, on Saturday nights I think it was, only, and I sang White Christmas and won the comp three times and then they barred me,

08:00 and so the next time I sang one of Tony Martin's and I'm just trying to remember what it was, and got no where. So White Christmas sold itself. I didn't have to sell it. The song was just so popular. It was incredibly popular during the war. And yet, in the movie,

08:30 it was incidental. It wasn't really a big thing in the movie. But somehow or other, Bing Crosby seemed to be synonymous with Christmas things. You know, he'd be, I don't know if you remember. Of course, not all his movies. He was in Road to Morocco with Bob Hope. Those sort of movies. But somehow or other, I don't know why it is, but Bing Crosby seemed to be synonymous with Christmas.

09:00 I can't work out why, but he did. And he lived in California where they don't have any Christmas. They do, but they don't have snow. At least, I don't think they do. They do in San Francisco. Occasionally, very occasionally. It can be cold there too, but not in LA, Los Angeles, so much. Yeah. What did you ask me? I've forgotten.

09:30 **Well, I'm wondering, given that you were away a bit during the war, how did you manage to stay in touch with Marjorie and people back in Sydney?**

Oh, well, letters. I don't think I phoned that much. I phoned occasionally. But primarily letters. I'd say that was about it.

10:00 I can't think of any other form of communication. You know, I mean, things are much more up-market nowadays, as far as technology and that is concerned. You keep in touch with people far more easily and in many more ways. I mean, mobile phones, of course, were a thing of the future then, as was TV. Although I believe it was actually developed before the war.

10:30 Yeah. But we kept in touch as best we could. I certainly didn't ring Marjorie from New Guinea, or from the Solomons, or from Bougainville.

I was just wondering if you felt a sense of protectiveness and, I mean, you hear stories of soldiers not really letting on how they were going,

11:00 **so that they wouldn't worry people at home.**

Well, I don't know. I mean Ted Young, who was my brother-in-law. He was Dorothy's, that's Marjorie's sister's husband, he was in the air force, and he gave Dorothy a revolver for when the Japanese, everybody was certain the Japanese were going to attack and be successful in attacking Australia,

11:30 at one time. And so he gave them a revolver to use. I don't know if they were supposed to us it on themselves, or whether they were supposed to use it on the Japanese. But that was Ted. Ted was a bit, I think, pedantic, in his own way. When you say being protective, I don't know –

Were you worried about Marjorie back at home?

Not really. I don't remember really being terribly worried. I mean,

12:00 the point is, the Japanese, when I went up to Lae, the Japanese were on the back foot. Very much so. I mean, they weren't winning the war. Not by a long shot. They were, they were losing everything. I mean, they virtually overran Asia, but bit by bit they were losing it. When I got to Lae. See, this was late '44, and I was up there through '44,

12:30 I must have been up there for one Christmas, into '45. and came back in late '45, and was discharged in early '46. so I don't know. I don't know that I ever had a feeling that Marjorie was in danger. Had I had, well, then I'm quite sure I would have been worried, but I wasn't. And yeah, well,

13:00 when I first came here, and when the war, in the first year of the war, it did look very much like we were going to be overtaken. We were going to be overrun. I mean they just swept through Asia, and yet surprisingly, when they took Singapore, for instance, it wasn't a massive force that they took Singapore with. There weren't really that many troops.

13:30 When you count the number of troops that were based in the Singapore area, the British troops as well as Australians, and then count the number of Japanese that came through the jungle, and that's, of course, how they took Malaysia and Singapore. The force wasn't that great. So, of course, there was quite a lot of air activity that would have helped. So, no. but by the time I got away to the islands,

14:00 with my show, I don't think I had, I wasn't worried about Marjorie. There was no need to worry about Marjorie.

It's interesting that you felt that way, because we have heard different stories about people panicking a bit, and wanting to leave Sydney.

That was early. That would have been early. See, that Japanese sub

14:30 came into the harbour in, what, ’42. I think. 1942. I think it was. I mean, we went to war with the Japanese in ’41. Late ‘41. And that’s when I joined the army, and the Japanese actual attack on Sydney was in ’42,

15:00 through the harbour, which wasn’t successful. There was an attack, we’ve since heard up north, that nobody was told about. The army kept it quiet. Till, well, quite recently actually, when they actually came ashore, but that was only a small force, too. No, but, the only time, well, the only time I would have been concerned.

15:30 See, I didn’t meet Marjorie until ’43. so, really, well, the Japanese, the war was still very much on, at that time, but I don’t know whether there was any real threat here, at that time, and, the only time, well, I wasn’t worried about Marjorie, but the only time I really felt I was in a war zone,

16:00 where I could get killed, and I was conscious of that possibility, was when we were in Bougainville, and the only time in my life when I could say I was ever absolutely terrified, was that day in Narvik, when we were bombed in convoy. Far more so than any of my wartime experience. Well, that was a wartime experience,

16:30 but of a different sort, you know. And, I mean, the worry of crossing the Atlantic, without an escort, was a worry, but I wouldn’t say I was terrified all the time.

I’m wonder then, when you were doing your concert parties, in what way did you feel like you were contributing to the war effort?

As I said to Isobel,

17:00 because morale was terribly important. Particularly in the circumstances that some of these fellows were living, and existing, in the jungle areas, maintaining the war effort against the Japanese as best they could. Back in Lae it was a bit different, because as I said before, the war had really passed it by. And it was a base area, and it was just a matter of entertaining the troops

17:30 that happened to be there, and there were a lot there, of course, and the same thing applied up on the Atherton Tablelands. We were entertaining the troops up there, the same way. But in that jungle setting, surrounded by dense jungle and having to move from place to place, to perform to various units and various guys that were out on patrol, that was a frightening, in a way, a frightening time.

18:00 But you didn’t let it, I mean, you had all your mates around you. You had your friends around you, and somehow or other, well, you knew it was there, you thought about it, but it wasn’t something that you actually, it wasn’t a terrifying situation, day by day. So to speak, you know. So I’d have to say that on that particular day,

18:30 up there in Narvik, I was terrified. If I was terrified, but that’s how I would describe my feelings at that time. But I don’t think I was ever quite that frightened even though there were situations that you could say could be frightening. And you could be in danger.

19:00 But as far as entertaining the troops is concerned, I think that’s possibly the only think I ever did in the army that was really worthwhile. Because I felt that we were really giving something. We weren’t fighting, but we were helping the guys carry on to do their fighting, you know.

19:30 **Well, you’ve mentioned that you were in New Guinea towards the end of the war.**

Actually, it was in the Solomons, on Torokina in Bougainville when the war ended. We were, about a week beforehand, an army officer came to us, and asked us to parade along with the unit we were entertaining at that time, which we did, and he explained the atom bomb.

20:00 And I can remember my eyes crossed, because I didn’t understand a word he was talking about, and I still don’t today to be honest with you. But because of that, just a matter of two or three days later, the war was over. And then these fellows began, these Japanese, began to pour in. and we had, one, I think he was a sergeant, and probably a private, if that’s what they have in the Japanese army.

20:30 I’m not sure. But he’d been a school teacher on Okinawa and had understood a bit of English. We could communicate, that’s all. We couldn’t converse, but we could communicate. The other fellow, they were, we had two guys working with us. They had, they weren’t prepared, for all these men that were pouring in, surrendering. They must have had radios and they must have been told to lay down their arms and surrender.

21:00 They must have been in touch with Japanese mainland, because they just came in in droves and they weren’t prepared for them, so they had them building compounds, because they had nowhere to put them, you know. Torokina’s not a very big place, but there were a hell of a lot of people on it. I think the largest establishment of any sort on Torokina at that time

21:30 would have been the hospital, and that was just a great big marquee, you know. I can’t tell you very much more about that, than that.

Well, I’m wondering if your concert party, or your unit, engaged in any kind of celebrations to mark war’s end?

Not really. At the time,

22:00 you know, it was around about the time I had this ear thing. I find it difficult to get things in their right perspective, but at the time, I know I had this ear thing, and then I was in hospital with malaria. I don't know that I ever really celebrated the war's end at all. Not by cheering and singing patriotic songs, or anything like that.

22:30 I don't remember that. No, I can't actually remember a celebration to celebrate the war being at an end. Just that we were told that it looked as though the war would be over very soon. They were dropping this atom bomb, which was explained to us, and it did. A day or so later it was all over. And the Japanese were surrendering.

23:00 I believe there were some problems. You know, some of them were in the jungle and refused to surrender and had individual skirmishes with some of the patrols. But of course, we weren't involved in that.

And how did you, and your mates, get back to Australia?

Well, as I say, I was really invalided out of the army, in a way.

23:30 I was brought back by ambulance from this show that I did, where I had my fall, to Torokina, to the hospital, and then I developed malaria, so I got even sicker. And so, after a while, I was, can I move? I was brought back on that ship, the last ship, the Burdekin, was it?

24:00 Yeah. Yes. The Burdekin. The last one. And I came back to Australia and was put in the hospital back here, and after I was discharged as being reasonably well, I had a couple of attacks following my discharge. Malarial attacks. And this ear thing, I had that for, oh,

24:30 a couple of years at least, and I still have problems with my ear. I get tinnitus on a fairly regular basis, although it's not all the time. I'm not sure how it's pronounced. And I think that could very well be as the result of this, my ears, I used to get a discharge from my ear. It used to come all the way down my shoulders. I used to wreck all my singlets and shirts.

25:00 And that was from this insect that had burrowed in. Apparently the thing burrows into your ear, dies, and leaves another insect behind, and it's continuous for a while. I don't know how long it lasts. But with me, all they gave me was a horrible, grey, thick, smelly paste which I had to put on my shoulders.

25:30 All up around here. Am I interfering with the mike? I had to put that all over me, because this discharge used to drive me nuts. I used to get terribly, terribly itchy with it. And I've had upset skin ever since. I have had skin that's very, very easily irritated ever since. And you know, I get some compensation for that.

26:00 I'm on a sort of a pension for that, so. You know.

Well, when you were discharged from the army, I'm wondering what you missed.

Well, if I missed anything, you know, I started life with Marjorie, and her mother was alive, and so we set up house together,

26:30 and things were quite good. I missed the comradeship if you like, that I had. And we were only a small, we were never a big group, but there was enough of us to be, so that you had friends around, and we were all doing similar sorts of things. The work we did was similar,

27:00 and I think I missed that. I made a lot of friends, during that time, at Pagewood, which was our base, finally, and still have many friends, and George Pomeroy has kept the group together, but, as I say, we're dying off rather frighteningly rapidly. And of course, I'm one of the younger ones, and I'm eighty one,

27:30 or will be next week, so obviously they're, that was a funeral I went to just recently. For Reg Miller, who was a drummer, and he had a band at the Kogarah RSL for years, but he was a drummer at Pagewood. He was a drummer in the shows, I forget which, and Reg would have been a few years older than me. But I was one of the younger ones so I'm still alive.

28:00 Well, some have died that were younger than me, but I'll keep going for a while longer yet, I hope.

Well, I'm wondering, after the army, you've mentioned that you were able to continue singing here and there.

Well, what happened, initially I didn't. When I came out I had very little idea of what I should do. Or what I could do.

28:30 And so I was doing a selling job for a little while for Sam Huxham, and then a friend of mine, that I'd got to know around here, Bert Baddam, gave me a job part time, driving a cab, so I did that part time. And at this party we had one night, with Lou and his friends and some of the guys from the show,

29:00 there was a lass there, Leslie Gannon, who was a wonderful pianist and organist, and she said she knew a band leader who was looking for a singer. He had had a singer who was just about to leave him. Have

you ever heard of Edwin Duff? Well, he's a local singer, and a very good one too. Well, Edwin was leaving the Cec Williams band,

29:30 and so she said that, oh, this guy was looking for a replacement singer. Would I be interested? Well, of course, would I? Of course. It was great. So I started with them, and as I said, my first job was at the Cairo Drummoyne. I think the pay was about two pounds ten a night, or something like that. But that's how I began.

30:00 So really, through Leslie, and through Lou, I went from job, to job, to job, to job. I never had an agent or anything like that. And well, in between singing jobs and skiing whenever I could, life was pretty good in the post-war era.

Well, I'm wondering,

30:30 **in that post-war era, if you could describe or tell me a little bit about the Trocadero Club?**

It wasn't a club. It was a dance hall. It was a big dance hall. And it was a very big band. Frank Coughlan, or Coggie as we knew him, he had the band, and it was a big band. I mean, they had a big sax section, a big brass section. They would have had,

31:00 they would have had a couple of altos, a couple of tenors. Maybe even a couple of baritones in saxophones. They would have had at least three trumpets, and at least a couple of trombones, and Frank played trombone himself, but he was also a trumpet player. And I forget who was on piano. Bobby Bell was the bass player, I remember. I can't remember the pianist.

31:30 But it was a big band and it was chockablock with people, dancing. Mostly on the weekends. I don't know if it was open every night, but it was certainly open in the latter part of the week, and Friday and Saturday nights were always big nights. And it was chockablock with people. Yeah, well, like I say, the Trocadero was the place to dance in Sydney. Unless you had lots of money

32:00 and you went to some of the night clubs. I can't even remember the names of them. But there were two or three exclusive night clubs. There was one in Martin Place I remember. Another one in Pitt Street. I had sung in one or two of those places. I never ever sang in the one in Martin Place. That was really up-market. But I sung around, in lots of them, and when I sang at the Troc, as we used called it, it was only as a fill-in.

32:30 For somebody that was off, for some reason. There was no TV in those days, of course, and I never actually had a job full time singing at the Trocadero.

Still, looking at the pictures of the Troc, it looks quite magnificent. I'm wondering, how much of a thrill that would have been, to sing –

33:00 It was. It was a thrill. But it was, in a way, it was no more than singing at the Rivoli. We would have had a thousand people singing at the Rivoli. On the floor. At Parramatta. The Rivoli in Hurstville was not quite so big. The Cairo was quite a big, No, the Cairo wasn't very big. The Albert Palais was a big hall, a very big hall. I sang there with a couple of different bands.

33:30 But I sang with a number of different big bands, and more recently with the Johnny Webb Big Band. They were the last jobs I did, before I retired in '74, when we went overseas for such a long time. And we were at the Newtown RSL. We were at South Sydney, the big club at South Sydney, at Redfern. Not South Sydney Juniors,

34:00 and that was quite a big band, too.

Well, I'm just wondering at the time, what you felt that the atmosphere was like, post war, in Sydney.

Do you mean as regards the lifestyle of people?

What was the mood?

Of the people?

34:30 I think people were pretty happy. It was, well, we used to use the word 'happy and gay," but of course, that doesn't really go so well these days, but I felt the people were quite happy. I was pretty busy, you know. I was singing at night, and working during the day. And also, I was away from Sydney a lot, with the job I had.

35:00 It took me away from Sydney quite a lot, and so I missed out on a lot of my singing work that way. And also, because I loved skiing, I almost had to get a deputy to do my singing job when I did have a band job. On the weekend, when I went skiing.

I was just kind of wondering, in what way you might have felt, at the time, music played such an important role in the post-war reconstruction.

35:30 Yeah. Well, the clubs were very much in their infancy as far as we know them today. Or we knew them

ten, fifteen years ago. Because, well, TV kind of took over for a while, and they've gradually come back again. Into the entertainment arena.

36:00 But I think that the clubs that we know here, in Sydney, were very popular, and I think people used them and used to enjoy the entertainment that they offered. I remember going to England, and seeing clubs over there, and they were nothing at all like the clubs we have out here.

36:30 And they didn't provide the entertainment. The entertainment there was provided in theatres. And in music halls. And they were the people that used to come out here and work in the clubs here. You know, you didn't see them in that situation in England. So I think the clubs played a big part in keeping Sydney happy and gay and alive.

37:00 And people enjoyed them.

Well, given that, I'm wonder if you could tell, or if the requests for music changed. You know, the type of songs that you've mentioned you were singing were, particularly to the troops, were melancholic. I wondering, did the music change?

Well, they weren't all melancholic. Unfortunately, because I'm not all that,

37:30 It Had to be You, things like that were popular. And see, that's not exactly melancholic. And things like Red Sails in the Sunset, South of the Border, those kind of songs are, well, I think Red Sails in the Sunset's a bit melancholic, but yes, South of the Border is too, because he leaves his girlfriend.

38:00 He's got to leave his girlfriend. And then he arrives back one day and she's off with somebody else. Songs tell a story, you know, or songs did tell a story, before rock and roll I think. And they, yeah, I think people, I think popular music had a lot to do with the atmosphere that was relatively happy,

38:30 in Sydney, in the post-war era. And I think popular music had a lot to do with it. So, therefore, I guess in our small way, we were instrumental in that too. You know. I can't think there's very much more to offer about that. I enjoyed it.

39:00 I mean, I always enjoyed singing. Actually, when we went away, in '74, we were away for so long that I really lost a lot of the contacts I had. Now, I didn't have an agent, as I said, except for Wally Norman. I worked through Wal. But then he was not, he didn't really employ me as an agent. I didn't pay him a commission. He just used to give me jobs, because I'd worked with him in bands,

39:30 and I never ever paid him any money at all. There was no ten percent, or anything like that. He'd say, "The Rex Hotel is looking for a singer on Friday, Saturday afternoon, from three to five in the afternoon. Would you like to do it?" And so I did, and of course, that was how, through them, we got to meet all the fabulous people that came out here, like Artie Shaw and Jerry Colona

40:00 and people like that, that came out for Lee Gordon, because he was providing the music for Lee Gordon, and he'd provide the back up for Sinatra and all those people. I mean, they had their own, generally their own pianist, and quite often they might have a lead sectional player, as well, that they'd bring with them. I mean, Sinatra travelled with a whole bunch of people, as did most of those people when they came out here.

40:30 But they only had two or three the actual musicians, and Wally would just build the band around these two or three people that knew his work, and they would work with the band. Of course, that was a bit later on, too. I mean, that was in the mid sixties, or even into the early seventies I think.

Well, back during the war years, and also the Troc and other dance halls,

41:00 **as you've mentioned, dancing was really quite popular and important.**

Very, very populist. It was a big night. Saturday night was, what's the song?

Saturday Night is the – something or other [Loneliest] – Night of the Week. It's a song that goes like that. Because that's exactly what it was. I think it was like that here. I think it was like that in America and England. All these sort of countries, Saturday night was the big night to go dancing.

41:30 The girls would get dressed up beautifully, and the boys would smarten themselves up a bit. And out they'd go and dance. And I don't think there was a lot of, drink wasn't a strong influence in that era, either. Those dance halls, generally you could buy, well, in the clubs of course, you could get beer or whatever. In the dance halls, it was mostly just lemonade. I know, I worked in the Petersham Town Hall, Marrickville Town Hall.

Tape 8

00:30 **Martin, before we finished the last tape, you were telling Cathy, I guess, about the music scene after the war, that you were participating in. I just wonder, was there a song that really summed up that post-war celebration and mood?**

I think probably one does, but it is quite melancholy in its way. It's The Last Time I Saw Paris.

01:00 Because it's the verse of the song kind of describes how somebody feels about Paris, before the Germans came.

\n[Verse follows]\n A lady known as Paris, romantic and charming,\n Has left her old companions and faded from view,\n Lonely men with lonely eyes are seeking her in vain,\n Her streets are where they were, but there's no sign of her.\n She has left the Seine.\n

01:30 And then the last –

The last time I saw Paris –

You know you go on with that. To my mind, that song, right after the war, was very, very popular. I don't know where it came from originally. I can't remember exactly whether it was in a stage show, or a movie, or whatever. But I know it was written by a very well-known song writer, whose name escapes me.

02:00 But that song, and well then of course, as I said before, White Christmas. But you're asking is there a song that personified the era. Well, it's hard to say. I'd have to say a lot of songs personified the era, because there were a lot of songs that were popular at that time and that people used to sing.

\n[Verse follows]\n When you're smiling, when you're smiling,\n The whole world smiles at you.\n

02:30 And –

Smile though your heart is aching –

All those sort of songs that are not necessarily sad songs, and people used to sing them because they're fairly simple songs. And whistle them too, I suppose. And then, of course, along came all the great Broadway productions which had all these wonderful songs,

03:00 like South Pacific and Oklahoma!, and these sort of shows. They all had wonderful songs in them. They all had stacks of songs in them. Much better I think, than the later shows, which concentrated more on, what's the word, the overall colour of the scene on the stage.

03:30 That Evita, for instance would be a perfect although there was a great song came out of that. But I don't think the good songs came out of the later shows as did in those pre-war and war time shows and movies.

Which song, for you, really summed up where you were and what you were feeling at that time, in those couple of years after the war?

04:00 Well, I don't know. I mean, there are just so many songs, I liked the couple I mentioned there. Smile, and When You're Smiling, and I Want to be Happy. You know, those kind of things. I liked, but I do like a song that has a good lyric. A sensible lyric. Not a silly song. Some songs are just quite stupid, but nevertheless you can have a good melody, but a ridiculous lyric.

04:30 But some of the songs, well, that Sinatra used to sing and do so well, and I find them very difficult to bring to mind. Once upon a time, I could, just because it was something that seemed to come naturally to me, I could think of any number of songs, and I immediately knew the lyric and could sing the song,

05:00 but now, I haven't lost it completely, but I have lost it to a certain extent. And I think as long as I can hang on to that thing, I'll never have Alzheimer's, because I'll be thinking all the time of songs, and that'll stop me from getting Alzheimer's, I think. But they're great, it's a great tonic, singing. And not only just singing, but listening to singing, is a great tonic.

05:30 And it's most enjoyable and I think it can be helpful, healthful. Yeah.

I wonder how often did Marjorie have a chance to come and see you perform?

Oh, she used to come to quite a lot of the dances and the clubs. We were never great dancers. Ever. Either Marjorie or me, we were never great dancers,

06:00 but I've got rhythm. I've always had a natural rhythm. So I suppose I can stop falling over my own feet, so to speak, and stop treading on Marjorie's feet, but I never was a dancer, I would never make a dancer. But then again, good dancers don't really make great singers. I don't think.

06:30 I mean, take for instance, Gene Kelly. Wonderful dancer, but he had just a voice. But it worked, just the same. But no, I quite enjoyed going to dances, not that I went very often, because I was always working. New Year's Eve, always working. Christmas Eve, always working. You know, because that's where the money was, not that it was a tremendous amount of money, but it was good money as far as I was concerned. Built this house.

07:00 Well, it didn't build it, but it bought it. You know. This house was built in 1917, 18. Oh, I told you about it before, didn't I. Yes. That was most unfortunate. But, yeah, we've lived here for a long time, and been very happy here, too.

I wonder, you mentioned post war. But I wondered, during the war, when you were an entertainer.

07:30 **What do entertainers do for entertainment, and relaxation?**

Generally, entertainers, for relaxation, I think, entertain themselves. Now, there is an exception. Most comics, and I know quite a lot of comics I've met, because I used to introduce people in the clubs you see, so I got to know quite a lot of acts, and most comics, off stage, are extremely uncomical.

08:00 They're, I wouldn't say they're sedate, but they're almost morose. The opposite to what they are on stage. Even the really good ones. There are exceptions, such as the Dixie Kid for instance, who was always joking. But, some clever comics, that you would see on stage and think are very, very funny indeed, you'd have to think, oh, they've got to be like that off stage.

08:30 But they're not. They're quite often, almost to the point of being morose and sad.

Was did the Thirty Club in Bougainville and New Guinea do to relax?

Well, looking back on it, I think we didn't, we were pretty active up there. We had something to do almost every day,

09:00 and quite often at night. We would go to the movies, if there was a movie on. But you used to have to sit out in the rain with a ground sheet around you. Or we'd read. I was always a great reader. And really, when you think about it up there, there was not a lot to do. You know, you couldn't communicate with the New Guineans.

09:30 The Fuzzy Wuzzies, as we used to call them then. Although they do speak a sort of English. But, no, I don't know that we did anything specially. We probably had radio. I can't remember, to be honest about that. I can't remember a specific thing that we used to do to amuse ourselves, outside of probably wash our clothes,

10:00 and wash ourselves. When we got the chance.

I wonder, just to, you've told Cathy about hearing about the end of the war, and about coming home. I wonder, you'd been at sea for a long time, and then in the army for a few years. How hard was it to settle into civilian life on land?

10:30 Well, I think my biggest problem was, not so much settling into civilian life as such, but it was getting work, because I had no training of any sort. Going straight from school to sea, and doing the things that a seaman does don't sort of, well, maybe I could have gone into painting,

11:00 because you do an awful lot of painting on a ship. You do seem to do that all the time. And but, I had really no training, and that's really how I came to drop into sales. Because I've always had the gift of the gab, I suppose you could say. And that's why I was able to compère shows and introduce people and so on. But, well, that would be the main difficulty

11:30 and getting a worthwhile occupation would be my main difficulty. But as far as settling back here into life. We never had any children until after the war. And so, I mean, by the time we bought this house and moved in here, and Rozzie had come along, and I think, just keeping the place going was enough to keep us both busy.

12:00 We had Marjorie's mother staying with us. Who was older. She was a big help, but she was also an older woman, who needed a certain amount of care and attention.

I wonder, how much did you talk about your war and experiences, either in the merchant navy, or in the army?

Not a lot. I've probably spoken more about them in recent years, than I did immediately after the war. I mean, let's face it.

12:30 It was not a shattering, my war was not a shattering experience as it was with lots of people. First of all, I survived it without any real damage. I don't think it affected me mentality. In the early days, I didn't really understand what the hell was going on anyway. So I don't think it really got to me in that sense as it might have done an older person

13:00 a more worldly a person. And then after the war, I was just so busy, well, trying to get decent sort of work. And it took me, it took me really about, I'd say, I guess about two or three years to really find my niche. And then I got that job with Roof and building Services,

13:30 and I found that I could do that. I could go around from factory to factory and talk people, because during the war, there was no maintenance done on large factory buildings, so I could talk people into getting their roof replaced. Although that was difficult, because you could only get Japanese iron, which was very poor quality. And but, get the building painted and that sort of thing.

14:00 So I did all right there, and it just sort of grew from there. I got, I actually got into a fair knowledge of

the building industry, one way or another, and that's what I carried on doing.

How important were the friends that you'd made during the war?

Extremely important to me, because I didn't have a lot of friends. I wouldn't say I was exactly a loner, but I certainly didn't have a lot of friends.

14:30 I mean, going from ship to ship, as I did, and it was only when the navy took over the merchant navy, and I was put on a ship, on the Monarch of Bermuda in New York, because of the fact they had too many Americans on board, and they had to replace them.

15:00 It was only then that I began to gather friends around me, you know, and that extended from there, to getting in the army, getting to know a few guys in the army, and later on, in getting the friends around me in the entertainment shows. In the Thirty Club, Not only in the Thirty Club, but at Pagewood. You got to know all these other people from other shows.

15:30 Because you'd be there for quite a while.

(Interruption)

Just before we stopped you were just telling me about the friends you made at Pagewood.

Well, I mean if you were responsible for a misdemeanour of any sort. I don't know if you had restrictions on time, there, like you do in most places in the army. I think we could get back in camp whenever we liked.

16:00 It was a fairly loose arrangement. Because they were entertainers, you can imagine trying to control entertainers and turn them into soldiers. It would be very difficult, with all the different types of entertainers. That are used to living the sort of easy going life. When I say easy going,

16:30 I mean easy going from a discipline point of view, that entertainers tend to live. So it would be really difficult to turn them into soldiers, and have them behave like soldiers. So I don't know if there was very much restrictions on us at Pagewood, with regards to coming and going. But I mean, we did have things to do. And if you did something wrong, you'd finish up doing kitchen fatigue. Peeling potatoes. This sort of thing, which I did many times. You know,

17:00 you'd be doing it with another guy, who was also in trouble, and you've got a lifelong friend. There was one fellow. He and I were always on KP ['kitchen patrol', a punishment]. That was Alan Nash. He was a trumpet player. He's not long gone up to Queensland to live. But Alan and I would sit there, peeling potatoes and telling each other how good we were, or whatever. But he was a really good trumpet player I might add. Good Jazz trumpet player.

17:30 And we'd have a great big forty-four gallon drum, full of, well, with boiling water in the top, and with a fire in the bottom, and once, I just forget what he did. He threw petrol or something like that into the flames, and as a result I don't have hairy legs. But I have had an operation on this one. They took that out to put it somewhere else. But no.

18:00 You make, I mean, the friends we made, I wouldn't say in every case, lifelong friends, but they were good solid relationships. And the fact that we were always in show business. And of course, another thing is, you kept meeting them after the war in the clubs, in dance bands, or they came on as an act. So they just kept on going. So it was a good thing.

18:30 I guess, the fact that I, and I never learnt to sing. It was just something that I always liked doing. And the fact that that guy upstairs, or downstairs, gave me that talent, and it has been very useful to me, in many ways.

I wonder, when you look back over your service career, what was maybe the proudest moment?

19:00 It's hard for me to actually put pride into it. I'm not much of a soldier. I don't go in much for soldiering. Although I am very involved in our local RSL, mainly because of my life before I retired made it difficult for me to become an active member. But I became a very active member, subsequent to my retirement.

19:30 And but, as a, so I've become very interested in things military. Not so much the actual warfare, but in the life story of soldiers, and the life style of, not soldiers, but service people, but as far as what would be my proudest moment. Oh, it would have to be. And I'm probably saying the right thing,

20:00 but it would have to be when I was married to Marjorie, because quite frankly, I never expected it to happen.

Is there a time that stands out as the most satisfying to you, I guess, in contributing to the war?

Look, well, when you perform on stage, and I can only talk as a singer, you get carried away.

20:30 You know, you really get carried away with the song, and that, that can be quite thrilling, even though it may be just a very ordinary song that you're singing, if you like it, and you enjoy it, and you feel that

your voice is good, and you're doing it well on that occasion, that can be extremely satisfying and thrilling. To me, it's as good as one a snow-covered mountain,

21:00 when the sky is blue and the snow is good, and you feel like John Claude Kille. You feel like you're skiing up a storm, you know. The same feeling. It really grabs you. And singing can do that to you. So this is what motivates so many performers in almost any sphere of entertainment. Opera, music hall, you name it.

21:30 You know. Musical comedy, that type of thing.

Is there a show or a concert that stands out for you, as I guess, maybe your favourite, or ones that you enjoyed most during the war?

Ones that I was involved in? Well, I've done so many. I did so many that it's pretty hard for me, even if I could remember them all. But you know, like I say, the response helps.

22:00 You know, if you get good response, and if you're doing a bracket of songs. And the first one goes over big. Generally you try to make your first song one that you know is going to be well received, and if it is well received, well then, you're lifted and you go on from strength to strength. By the time you're finished, you feel like Frank Sinatra or Bing Crosby,

22:30 until you look at your bank balance and realise you're not.

I wonder, looking back over your service as an entertainer, do you feel that the entertainers, as a unit, have received, the kind of –

I think there are very few people who even realise there was such a unit as the First Aust Army Entertainment Unit. Which was, and are actual army units.

23:00 We were all soldiers. You know, we were getting the same amount of money as combat soldiers, and no more no less, unless you were a sergeant or, whatever the rate of pay was. That's what you got. But I would imagine that you would be surprised how few people are aware, even in that period, that there were actually army concert parties, run entirely by the army,

23:30 and were performed in by soldiers. Or, I don't know if the air force had a similar thing. I know they did in the New Zealand Army. They had a, there was a show after the war. So they must have had it in the American army, because there was a show right after the war, called The 50/50 Show. Now, that was fifty percent American army entertainers. Not professional entertainers

24:00 who entertained the troops, but actual soldiers who were in the army like we were, and fifty percent other people. The 50/50 Show it was called, and that ran for quite a long time, and they actually toured. They toured Australian, New Zealand, and I think they went to England, even. One of the people that was in that show, one of the stars of that show, a comedian, has just recently passed away. A fellow called Red Moore, who was very well known to us,

24:30 anyway. And he was a Kiwi. He was a New Zealander. And there, I think the New Zealand army had a similar set-up to what we did.

I wonder how that makes you, and the mates that you are still so close to, feel, not having the recognition?

Well, I don't know that it really worries us all that much. I think it's only right

25:00 that the people who were responsible for a major victory, or who did something that really was very courageous and won medals for it, I think these are the people that stand out in war time, and only rightly so. We were very much in the background.

25:30 I mean, we were like the, oh, like the, can't think of the word. The backup units. I just can't think of the name of any at the moment. But you know, there had to be many people supporting front line soldiers, and I think we come into that category. Really, it's, I don't know that we were ever looking for any particular grand ceremony

26:00 after the war. I imagine lots of people, who see our banner, First Aust Army Entertainment Unit, as we march in the Anzac parade, are surprised that there ever was even such a unit. That's what I think anyway. I could be wrong. See, if we didn't have Smokey Dawson with us. Now see, Smokey's well known. If we didn't have him with us, nobody would even notice us.

26:30 But he's there, and everybody's knows Smokey. You march along, "Smokey. Hey, Smokey." And they love it, and they love him, and rightly so, because he's been a grand old entertainer for years. Right from the time he was a kid. And they just love him. And I imagine a similar thing would have happened with Max Reddy if he'd lived.

27:00 The Reddy sisters have, you know, Helen Reddy and the other one. The woman whose name I can't remember that you see on TV quite a lot. They were a performing family. But these entertainers, as with the people I've just spoken about, with lots of courage, and that did some wonderful, amazing feat and as a result are well-known to the public, and are rewarded subsequently.

27:30 They're just, the entertainers that become stars and are just as well known as those people become, and vice versa. Whereas there's always got to be people in the chorus and people in the background, to fill the stage. There's not a lot of entertainers can just stand on a stage, on their own on the stage, for an hour's on end, and do nothing else but whatever it is they do, like Bob Hope and look at the writers he had.

28:00 Like twenty five writers or something writing his jokes. There's very few people can command. Look what they do now on rock and roll shows. It's all show, because otherwise the guy just standing there with a guitar wouldn't mean a thing. Half the time he can't sing anyway, and he can play a few chords and that's all.

28:30 But anyway, I'm maybe getting away from the point.

I wonder, you mentioned the entertainers march on Anzac Day. What does Anzac Day mean to you as a returned serviceman?

Actually, it means to me that I'm very proud to have served in the Australian army,

29:00 and I think I'm aware that what I did was worthwhile, you know, and I think that sums it up really. Because as we said before, morale was extremely important to the troops, and I mean, that's what we were doing. We were supplying morale, and therefore we were worthwhile. And I feel quite proud when I march on Anzac Day.

29:30 I don't march very well, because I've got lousy knees and crook feet. But I do as well as I can, and I still feel proud when I go. People are cheering and waving their flags. You know, it's great. Especially when you see all the kids waving their little flags, yeah.

What are the stories the entertainers share with one another when they get together nowadays?

Oh, mostly about, "Do you remember when – ?"

30:00 And "Do you remember so and so." And "What about the day he did this." And "Remember how he got into trouble with Davo." And these are the sort of thing, you know. Old Pagewood days, and things when you're on the road. I mean, there was a funny experience, talking about Frank Coughlan. Coggie at one time was a drunk. I mean, he really was a drunk, and he was working at it,

30:30 and he disappeared. This is up in the islands. He disappeared, and nobody knew where he was. And of course, he was on a drunken spree. I don't know where he got all the grog. But he showed up, as a member of the audience, in front of his own show, one day, sitting in front of his own show, saying, you know, saying what a great show it was to somebody next to him, and somebody said, "Hey, that's Frank Coughlan. And so there you go.

31:00 Stories like that. There the sort of things that people tend to remember, not necessarily jokes, when they're talking to each other. I mean they tell funny stories I suppose, too, but primarily it's things that happened. Along the way.

How did you time in the service, as an entertainer, I guess, change you or affect you?

31:30 Well, I think it matured me. I went from boy to man, during the war period, I went from boy to man. I mean, when I was a kid at sea I was very much a kid at sea. When I first joined the army, I was very much a kid, a naïve kid who'd joined the army. And I think as the went by, and I got into different activities

32:00 that I did, I became more mature, more tolerant of other people. When you're young, you tend to be a little more intolerant. And I began to appreciate friends more. I'd say that my war time experiences were very necessary to my character, anyway. I think they, well, they matured me from boy to man.

32:30 **I wonder, oh, I've just lost my train of thought. Sorry.**

You're as bad as me.

Looking back over that time, is there a moment that stands out as the hardest?

33:00 Well, I mean, you can get right down to basics here. Sitting on a wooden bench with holes in it, with diarrhoea, was difficult. Out in the jungle, when it's pouring with rain. That didn't help much. What else. Well, of course, when I had this Singapore ear thing.

33:30 That really knocked me about a bit. And then getting this wretched, now I've lost that. You know, the disease you get in the islands. I can't think of the word. That I got in hospital. Malaria. Getting that. That didn't help. No, you're actual questions says,

34:00 what was the most wretched time, the most difficult time. What was it again?

Just the hardest time.

Yeah, well, it's pretty hard to pinpoint. I mean, there are things that happened along the way. You know, we had trouble, I remember once, in a similar situation to when we found that jeep.

34:30 We had a similar problem when we lost a wheel, or something went wrong. Because on Bougainville, and Torokina, the roads were just slats, logs laid into a track, and because it rained so much, quite often the logs would float. And they'd get caught under your wheels, and so you'd have to stop, in the middle of the jungle, and get rid of this damned log,

35:00 wondering what was going to happen, were you going to be attacked, or whatever. So while we weren't actually soldiers, and I guess, shouldn't have actually been in that situation, we were. That, I can remember that happening on two or three occasions, and they were hard times. They were scary times. Hard times being scary times. What else.

35:30 I didn't mind the hospital so much, because it was a release from the daily grind, so to speak, even though, the daily grind, for me, wasn't so bad, because I was doing something I liked doing. Singing.

How do you, I mean you've mentioned the dysentery and the fear, and the problems, and the jungle. How do you, I guess, that night give a really great singing performance. How do you get yourself to that point?

36:00 Well, that's hard to answer. I suppose, if you put a person like me in front of people that are expecting you to perform, then you perform. You forget whatever problems you had, and you get up there and you do what you had to do. And as I said before, if it works, then it gets better as you go along.

36:30 And in the shows that we did, well, in the shows we did here in Australia, before we left, when we were doing full shows on our stage, and in the shows in Lae, and those sort of shows, you could be out of sorts, or you could have some sort of health problem, that wasn't a hospitalisation type problem,

37:00 and still get on stage and. I mean, there were days when I was singing after the war, like the last thing in the world I wanted to do was get up and get in my car and go and go and drive to whoop whoop, Parramatta or somewhere to sing, but you do it because you know you've got to do it, and when you got there, well, you enjoy it. That was something that you enjoyed doing.

37:30 So I guess that is much the same as what we were talking about during the war. I think that answers your question.

Well now, Martin. Our tape is about to come to an end, and before we end today's session, I wonder if there's anything you'd like to cover that we haven't talked about, or if you had any final words?

Well, no. I don't know. Not really. I'd just like to stay reasonably well,

38:00 keep happy, have a lot of friends. You know, I want to be happy, you know. That sort of thing. I don't know that I can expect very much more from life. The army look after us. We're on an army pension, and so I think we're fairly well cared for. So life is pretty good,

38:30 and it would be nice to be maybe twenty years younger, but Marjorie says she wouldn't go back a day. No, I'm quite, I'm reasonably happy with my life and the way it's been. And I don't look back on those war time years with any regret, or wanting not to remember them. I'm quite happy to bring them back and try to remember them.

39:00 Actually, it was quite a good time. It was an interesting time.

Why is it important that we remember the entertainers from the army?

Well, I think it's important, because as we said before, they were important and I don't necessarily speak exclusively for myself. I think they were important, because they were important for the morale of the troops.

39:30 To keep the troops happy. Not necessarily laughing out loud type happy, but nevertheless, happy to keep going in what was quite often a very difficult situation. No, I think what we did was worthwhile, and I think, that, in itself, makes us important, even if we aren't terribly well known by every Tom, Dick and Harry.

40:00 **That's wonderful, Martin. Now, just before we finish, I was wondering if you'd like to give us a few bars of another song. We were talking about It Had to be You over afternoon tea, so I was wondering if that might be one you'd like to –**

\n[Verse follows]\nYou're nobody till somebody loves you,\n You're nobody till somebody cares.\n You may be king and you may possess\n The world and all of its gold,\n But gold won't bring you happiness\n When you're growing old.\n Oh, the world will be the same,\n You'll never change it.\n As long as the sky's up above,\n You're nobody till somebody loves you,\n So find yourself somebody to love.\n

41:00 **That's lovely. Thank you very much.**

Was that any good?

That was wonderful. Thank you, Martin.

OK. It’s been a pleasure. Sorry I couldn’t do better for you.