

Australians at War Film Archive

Albert McElhinney (Tanglefoot) - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:30 **Jeff, perhaps we could start off by you giving us a brief summary of your life from your birth to the present day?**

I was born in 1922 in Melbourne. I went to school in Melbourne and left at fifteen and went to work, came to Sydney at the age of sixteen.

01:00 I went back to tech and became a draftsman, went into a few industries and then went into the air force in 1942. Before that I played in bands as a teenager. I went in as a mechanic into the air force and while I was in there I found myself playing in concert parties and finished up in charge of a concert party.

01:30 I came out of the air force in 1946 expecting to go back to engineering but I had a good offer to go away on tour, a touring show. I thought that this would be nice for a year or so but I'm still doing it. I went in as a mechanic and came out as an entertainer in the RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force].

02:00 **Perhaps we could go right back to the beginning and if you can, tell us when and where you were born?**

I was born in Surrey Hills in Melbourne, and on my birth certificate it says 'father - draper',

02:30 that's a word that you don't hear anymore. I left school when I was fifteen and went into a bicycle factory as a wheel lacer, putting spokes in wheels and went into a firm of steam engineering as a junior fitter and turner. It was then that my father got a job in Sydney and we came up to Sydney and I thought,

03:00 "This would be nice for a year or so," and that was 1939 and I'm still here.

You mentioned that on your birth certificate that your father was a draper, was that his occupation?

Yes, my father's occupation was a draper.

What was a draper?

Materials, haberdashery, all those words have gone. That was what he was when I was born and then he was an overseas buyer

03:30 for a big firm in Melbourne. He used to go up to the East, to Japan and China and bought silks and all sorts of things. That got me interested in travel I suppose.

What was your father like as a personality?

He was a businessman and he never understood me, ever,

04:00 even until the day he died he could never understand why people enjoyed what I did. I didn't get any encouragement in the business, mother was a bit more encouraging but my father was always a bit disappointed that I never went into business. When I came back from England with my wife in 1955 he had jobs already for us,

04:30 for both of us in his firm, in clothing manufacturing, but I would be hopeless. I've got no idea for business. I was doing deliveries for him and I was playing music at night, deliveries of garments all over the place. But no we didn't have much in common my father, I loved my father,

05:00 but we had very little in common.

Was he a strict father?

Yes and I'm glad too. Not that strict, he didn't belt me much, but when he did I deserved because I was a bit of a rebel, and I was no good at school.

What sort of things would you get a belting for when you did deserve it?

05:30 I can remember when I was very young he took us into a restaurant and I didn't like the restaurant so I just disappeared, I went out for a walk at Sorrento in Victoria. When he got me home he belted me for doing that, because they didn't know where I was. I wanted to have a look around Sorrento and I didn't tell him,

06:00 I was only about eight or something.

Sounds like even at the age of eight you were always looking around for travel opportunities?

I was no good at school and my reports were always, 'you should try harder', but I was a thinker and I started to write songs at about eight or ten. I can remember the first parity that I wrote at Sunday school.

06:30 \n[Verse follows]\n“All things black and ugly\n

All slimy things that crawl;\n Whooping cough and chicken pox;\n The Lord God made them all.”\n

They were the worst things that I could think of.

07:00 I was creative and I used to make a lot of things, I was always making model aircraft. That's another question that I asked at Sunday school I said to the teacher, “Why do the angels needs wings, there's no air up there is there?” It always made sense to me but they always thought that I was a smart Alec, but I wasn't I was serious.

07:30 **What was that song?**

The first parity

All Things Bright And Beautiful, and I wrote

\n[Verse follows]\n“All things black and ugly;\n All slimy things that crawl;\n Whooping cough and chicken pox;\n The Lord God made them all.”\n

I couldn't think of anything worse than whooping cough and chicken pox at the age of ten, I must have been a thinker, I use to think.

08:00 **Did you sing that for the Sunday school teacher?**

No and I don't think I ever sang it for the kids at school, I probably did.

Probably just as well, you might have got into a bit of trouble?

Oh yes.

You've mentioned briefly your mother, now tell me what kind of a character she was?

My mother

08:30 lost her mother at the age of six and her father's sister came out from England to look after her. She was born in England and had her first birthday in Melbourne. There was my great aunt who came out, mother was a very busy type of person. She was a stenographer

09:00 and was very good at figures, I didn't inherit anything like that from her. She was an athlete and I've still got medals somewhere that she won for hockey, she was a gymnast. There was a big gym thing in Melbourne at the time - George Lynch - and she was one of his girls.

09:30 She was engaged to a soldier in the First World War and he put his head over a trench and got it blown off by a sniper, so if it wasn't for that sniper I wouldn't be here. She met my father who

10:00 was medically unfit for World War I, he had all sorts of operations on his legs and he had a hole in his neck. When we got married her aunt lived with us, my great aunt brought my brother and I up, more than Mum did

10:30 because she was always busy doing things. Both Mum and Dad put our welfare first, so they were good parents.

What was your mother always busy doing?

11:00 From 1936 she kept a diary right up until she died in 1979. She used to write down all the things that had happened in the world. I look up the diaries and it would say, 'so and so Mussolini got bumped off today', and things like that.

11:30 She was always involved in the school, parent things, but she was always busy.

Tell me about your brothers and sisters?

I have one brother who is younger, whom I use to fight with all the time.

12:00 We became good friends after the war, he was in the navy and I was in the air force. My father, who was a businessman, had four brothers and they were all engineers. I'm sure I took after the four brothers because I had no interest in business or anything either Mum or Dad did. I was very interested in manufacturing

12:30 things and that's why I went and did it. My father went into hospital in 1938 so I had to leave school and that was great. I went and worked in a factory putting spokes in wheels, a bicycle factory first and then into a firm of steam engineers as a junior fitter and turner, I loved that and that was great. Then my father came out of hospital and got fit and then he got a job in Sydney.

13:00 We came to Sydney and I thought, "This would be nice for a year or so, it won't be as good as Melbourne." I was only here for about six weeks and I didn't want to go back. Watson's Bay, that was heaven to me, all this water. I was in the scouts, some of the kids had VJ sailing boats and I thought that was great, I was right, I was set.

13:30 **Tell me a bit more about your school life, you mentioned you weren't very good at school, what sort of subjects were you doing at school?**

It was a grammar school so I did French and Latin. I wasn't bad at languages and I didn't mind them, I enjoyed them. Since then I've been very interested in languages.

14:00 I wasn't very good in maths and that was a bit of a handicap when I was a draftsman, and we didn't have calculators then; the slide rule is a bit of a mystery to me, I've still got my drawing instruments and slide rules and things. I enjoyed history, but when

14:30 it came to the exams I'd forget it all, I never got good marks in anything.

What was the name of the school that you went to?

Camberwell Grammar School, where I still go to reunions. I went down only in April, the last one I went down to.

You mentioned that your father got ill, what was wrong with him?

Gastric ulcers

15:00 is all I know, but he was in for a few months, he was out of work for a few months so that's why I had to leave school, which was good.

How old were you when you had to leave school?

Fifteen. I loved work, I loved every job that I've had I've liked.

That must have financial pressure on the family, with your father in hospital?

15:30 Yes. We drove up to Sydney in an old 1927 Buick in 1939, and he did alright in Sydney, and he was soon a managing director of a clothing factory. I went to tech. The war started

16:00 and draftsman were very badly needed and I didn't even finish my diploma. I went into fire protection first, with fire sprinklers and fire extinguishers and all that. I went into a rubber factory doing tyres for military vehicles, then I went into aircraft, which I loved. As a matter of fact they put

16:30 me on as a radio electrical worker and I was doing something called radio location and we had to sign a thing to say that we wouldn't disclose anything about what we were doing. Radiolocation became radar. I had no idea what I was drawing, and I had measurements and parts. From there I went into the air force as a trainee mechanic.

17:00 **Of course around this time the Depression was on, what memories do you have of the depression?**

It didn't seem to worry us as kids, we just thought that that was normal, you've got to go short of everything. Mum used to go

17:30 a long way to do her shopping because she could get it cheaper than the local shops in Camberwell rather than Surrey Hills. My father was working all through the Depression and a news agency offered me a job selling papers down at the station. I thought that was great and

18:00 it was a little bit of experience. My mother said, "No, you won't. You will leave that for boys who's fathers aren't working," which was good, so I never was a paper seller.

What did you see around in the local community, how was the local community being affected by the depression?

A lot of

- 18:30 my friend's fathers were out of work. When you are a kid you think that was normal, things were short. It never seemed to worry us as kids and we seemed to have a good time, there was always so much to do. I use to ride my bike down to Mentone.
- 19:00 that was the nearest beach from Port Phillip Bay and there'd be hundreds of us skinny kids climbing up and down the cliffs, sliding down the cliffs, climbing trees, buzzing around. Years later I went back to see where I was playing and there were no skinny kids running around there were a lot of fat kids sitting on the beach with cans of soft drink, I thought, "They're not having as much fun as what we did."
- 19:30 There was always so much to do, collecting birds eggs, tadpoles. We had a fish pond, it wasn't really a fish pond it was like a concrete coffin in the background; it was only six by four and eighteen inches deep and we had fish in it. On a hot day we'd catch the fish and put them in a bucket of water and use it as a swimming pool.
- 20:00 There was a little gang of us, there were four boys and one girl who lived in the area and there was a girl and she was the eldest of us. One day we were all in the fishpond splashing about on a real hot day, and we were in our swimming costumes and all the boys pulled their straps down because
- 20:30 there were no trunks in those days, they were all one piece swim suits. A voice from over the back fence, "Joyce, come inside immediately!" It was her mother. We didn't think anything and then said, "Where's Joyce gone?" Joyce said, "I can't come out until you pull your togs up." Isn't that amazing? So we thought "Right!" so we pulled our
- 21:00 togs up and here came Joyce, so we all went into the pool.

Sounds like you were a bit of a gang?

Yes. Amazingly I'm still friendly with one of the boys. I was with him in April and he's a year younger than I am and we are still good mates, two of the others have passed on, including my brother.

- 21:30 That was the Depression days and we had a lot of fun and we were always doing things. I used to collect mosquito wrigglers [larvae] and put them in a jar and watch them turn into mozzies [mosquitoes] and then say "Ah, now you can starve and die!" because I didn't like mozzies.
- 22:00 I loved model aircraft, I was always making airplanes. I was always making things, and of course there were no fancy toys in those days, no electric toys. We had a hell of a lot of fun out of cotton reels and clothes pegs, and we used to make things out of things like that. Little tractors that worked by rubber bands
- 22:30 and cotton reels for the wheels. I'm glad I wasn't brought up in the computer age, sitting watching a computer screen all day like they do now. We were so much healthier.

Sounds idealistic, sounds like a lovely way to grow up. What at that point

in your life what did you know about World War I?

Everyone was still talking about it, all my uncles, two of my uncles brought back English wives and I brought back an English wife later on too. They wouldn't talk about it much,

- 23:30 they never talked about the horrific things,
- 24:00 like we don't. Every time we get together, us oldies, we talk about the funny things that happened, forget about all the bad things and just don't talk about it. That's how it was so we didn't, we only knew about what everybody else knew.

Were you curious about World War I and France?

Yes, and I was in the school cadets,

- 24:30 we had to learn how to shoot and march, I didn't like that very much. I didn't mind shooting that was good fun. We used to bring our .303s [military rifles] home with us in cadets, not with ammunition, but we had to keep them clean. In a way you were expected to go, you were prepared at a very early age for
- 25:00 another war, which eventually came.

You mentioned that you were also involved in the Boy Scouts as well?

Yes, that was great.

- 25:30 I came to Sydney at sixteen and joined up with the Rover Scouts and when war broke out most of the older scouts joined up and went away, I was only seventeen when I was acting scout master because all of the others had gone. I wasn't a really good scout master
- 26:00 as far as teaching and that goes, I didn't have many badges. The most interesting job as a scout master was attending the Mittagong Boys' Home, which was for delinquent boys and we use to go up there on the weekends and teach the kids

26:30 scouting. I used to love that because they were kids who had suffered, they were unwanted some of them, delinquents, and I really enjoyed being involved with them.

What sort of things would you teach them?

The usual scout things like tying knots and making things, cooking. In my case I used to teach them songs, I always took my guitar up there.

27:00 I was playing guitar and my parents reluctantly gave me a guitar when I turned seventeen. All they thought of was violins and pianos when I was young. Being a bit of a rebel I didn't want them because they wanted them, which I was a bit naughty I suppose. I always

27:30 wanted to play the guitar so I used to take that up to Mittagong and teach the kids. Then I got into trouble with the district commissioner because I taught them The Ballad Of Ned Kelly, which makes him a hero. According to the commissioner, he wasn't a hero, he was a villain, he was a criminal and, "How dare you make a hero out of him."

28:00 I got into trouble for that.

What happened when you got into trouble?

The kids loved seeing that, that was their favorite song. Nothing really. I just said, "OK we won't do that anymore." There were plenty of other songs to teach them.

How does that one go, I've heard of it, but I've never heard of it sung?

Do you mean the tune?

The tune, yes?

\n[Verse follows]\n"Ned Kelly was born in a ramshackle hut;\n

28:30 He battled since he was a kid;\n

He grew up with bad men and thieves;\n And learnt all the things that they did - "\n

And so on and so on, but it's not accurate. Later on, funny enough, an American colonel, I was singing it for the Americans, and this was years later in Brisbane. The second verse went:

\n[Verse follows]\n"At sixteen Ned was a wild reckless lad;\n

29:00 Robbed coaches and trains without fear;\n

Until one day they caught him red handed;\n And sent him to jail for a year."\n

This colonel came up to me and said, "Are you aware that Ned Kelly never held up a coach or a train?" I said, "Oh, didn't he? And he didn't, he never held up a coach but he did pull the railway lines up, but the train never got that far, to Glenrowan.

29:30 So I got stuck into the history of it and I rewrote it. Instead I wrote:

\n[Verse follows]\n"At sixteen Ned first brushed with the law;\n Served three months at Beechworth."\n

Which was what did happen. Tex Morton wrapped me over the knuckles for that. He said, "You are out there to entertain them not educate them."

30:00 **It's interesting that an American knew the history of Ned Kelly?**

That was the story later on. He actually rung up the adjutant of my unit and said "Have you got any entertainers there that know any Australian songs? All the entertainers that come out here are singing American songs," which is the same today practically.

30:30 At that time I knew a lot of Australian songs because I was interested in them.

How musical was your upbringing up until that point?

They both played piano, Mum and Dad, and Dad was a singer in the George English choir at St Paul's Cathedral

31:00 in Melbourne, and they were married in St Paul's because he was a choir boy there. They had a posh wedding and I don't know how they afforded that. They were very down on the stuff that I enjoyed, I was into the Mills Brothers, Fats Warren and Tex Morton. They

31:30 didn't approve of my musical taste at all.

How much of a part did radio play in your life?

Quite a bit. I had very good memory. That's funny, because I had a terrible memory at school, but not for lyrics. I'd listen to a song on the radio and I'd

- 32:00 get most of the words down and what I didn't get down I'd make them up and put them in, so I knew quite a lot of the modern songs that I liked. There were a lot of novelty songs in those days too, the sillier the better and I loved comedy stuff. We didn't have a record player
- 32:30 or a 'gramophone' we use to call them. We did have one at one stage but we gave it away to someone who needed it more than we did, so I didn't have any records. I never learnt anything from records and then eventually when I got the guitar I learnt everything from sheet music and then I went away in the air force and Mum used to send me copies. They had a very good friend in Melbourne

- 33:00 who worked at Allen's Music Store and she used to send me all the latest songs, so I had a pretty big repertoire when I was very young.

In terms of learning to play the guitar was this all self taught or did you go to a teacher?

When I got my first guitar

- 33:30 there were two free lessons, it was an Italian guitar it was an Italian Colacci convertible. With a convertible you could convert it from a Spanish guitar into a steel guitar. So the first two lessons were at the Sydney Hawaiian club. I went to the first lesson very excited and he taught me two chords,
- 34:00 two chords for the lesson; and I practiced and practiced and practiced. He gave me a little tune, which went:

\n[Verse follows]\n"Lying on the sand, sleep in the sun;\nAt the beach at Coco." \n

It was a little Hawaiian song and it was so simple and there were only two chords and I could just about could change the two chords quick enough in one week. Later on it became:

\n[Verse follows]\n"Don't tell my heart, my achy breaky heart." \n

I could understand note

- 34:30 for note.

The tune Achy Breaky Heart?

It was the simplest thing that they could give you and the second week I learnt Song of the Islands.

- 35:00 That was only five chords in the two lessons. But from those five chords I could work out all the rest by myself. I had a lot of my mates in Sydney, some of my mates played keyboard, piano and I learnt how to build chords on the piano and transferred them to the guitar. Then came Johnny Tozer. He was
- 35:30 at tech with me and he came from a wealthy family and he had his own band, he had a big band about ten. He said, "You can sit in the band when you know one hundred and forty four chords," which wasn't very difficult because there's only twelve chords in each key. I learnt them in a couple of months. I got the 144 down and I was playing with him in his band
- 36:00 at the age of eighteen, and I did quite a bit of band work then. That's how I got into music, playing in a band.

I'm interested to know more about your drafting and what sort of things you were drafting at this point?

- 37:00 The first job, as I said, was fire protection engineering and we had to draw up the whole plan of the floor where you had a certain number of sprinklers. The last two sprinklers would be on a one inch pipe, and the next two would be on a inch and a half pipe, the pipes got smaller as you went down to the end and you'd have
- 37:30 the big four inch pipe. You had to pump pressure by hand into the sprinkler system. The sprinklers today are little glass things, but they used to be two plates soldered and the solder would melt at 1700F or something and they'd spring apart and the water
- 38:00 would pour out. You had to pump pressure into it, so there was high pressure in there all the time, if they ever went off the water would come out. One of my jobs was to go around to different factories once a fortnight and ring up the fire brigade, because the fire brigade got a signal. As soon as the pressure dropped it sent signals to
- 38:30 the fire brigade and so I'd say, "Testing from Fox Stores." That was one place, then you'd let the pressure off and the water would squirt out somewhere and all the alarms would go off, and you'd wind it up again and you'd ring up and say, "Tested ok." Then you'd have to pump the pressure by hand back into the system. That was my fire
- 39:00 protection days - and that firm went broke.

Tape 2

00:30 **After the fire sprinkler company, where did you go to from there?**

I went to a rubber factory, Adbanks Rubber and Tyre Company in Rushcutters Bay, and I was chief draftsman there because I was the only one. That was good because it gave me the opportunity to be a creative draftsman. They gave me

01:00 jobs that when I look back they were pretty responsible things. For instance, they had big things that heated and melted things. They were putting sand shoes on racks but they could only fit a certain number in and they

01:30 said, "Can you figure out a trolley to fit more sand shoes in?" and that appealed to me. So I made a round thing that fitted exactly into the thing and measured up shoes, the different sizes, and put in glass rods and it fitted hundreds of pairs of shoes and they were thrilled with that. It was great

02:00 when they asked you, "Can you do this, can you do that?" and I liked that. Instead of being told exactly what to do. I didn't enjoy drawing in the air force much because you didn't have to design anything, you didn't have to plan anything at all, they had it all set out for you. That was in the rubber factory and I enjoyed that. Then

02:30 I had a love for aircraft and when this job came in for the aircraft production commission I applied for that. I used to watch ads [advertisements] every day and there were always draftsmen wanted. I went into that factory out at Tempe.

What did that job involve?

I had to design

03:00 certain things - their tools, clamps and things for making parts. We got the parts out from America and they were made under licence with Bedecks Eclipse and Scintilla, and I had to print that on all the drawings and it drove me mad, it's a mouthful. I was very busy there and, being

03:30 all different, I came to life later on in the day. I'm not much good in the mornings and I'm terrific at night. I had music and I played. I'd get in the office at eight o'clock in the morning and do practically nothing until twelve, I didn't get any inspiration. I deliberately worked until eight o'clock at night, and I'd stay on an extra three

04:00 hours and I could do more, twice as much as I would from eight o'clock until twelve. Later on, when I was in Munich I met an American doctor who studied bio-climatics and he could explain all that to me. It's the ozone content of the air, some people get the maximum amount of energy when it's low and some people get its

04:30 maximum when it's high.

So it's environmental?

There was a scale, there was a C type and a W type, and that was me - on the W type up this end, and an M type in the middle where some people are not affected at all. C types -they were all leaders and organizers;

05:00 church were all the C type, and could get up at five in the morning and work their socks off. People like that could get up in the morning and work their socks off, and people like leaders, are all C types; musicians and artists are all W types.

Hence the late night gigs?

Yes.

I've never heard that before. I will have to look that up?

Dr Curry was his name,

05:30 in Munich.

During this time war had already broken out?

It broke out when I was at tech, and I can remember when it broke out. I was going up in the lift, and they were the old lifts, where you had to have a licence to drive it and you used to pull a rope with a glove on. There was a women lift driver. She said, "Do you think war will start?" And someone said,

06:00 "No, it's only a rumour," and this was just before August 1939. Someone said, "I don't know. It won't last until Christmas because Germany doesn't have the money." I was listening to all this, and it did start of course the following September. I stayed at tech

06:30 for about fifteen months and there was such a demand for draftsmen and that's when I went out and got the job at the fire sprinkler place.

What do you actually recall of that day when war was announced?

I can remember Menzies' [Prime Minister] speech which you often hear now on certain programs,

- 07:00 I can remember that very well. We were living at that time at Watson's Bay right on the edge of the cliff, just up the road from The Gap, and everybody started to move but we stayed there. The guns on South Head used to go off and knock the decorations off the wall, but
- 07:30 we stayed there on South Head when the Jap subs [Japanese midget submarines] came in and the shells went over the top of us. That's when I went into the air force, June 1942.
- 08:00 Like most of us young fellows, we were pretty patriotic and everybody wanted to join up, because it was the fashion, it was the thing to do. I went in and joined at 177 but I was too young. I said I was in the Rover Scouts, we lost about four of them early in the war,
- 08:30 and that made you really mad and you couldn't wait to get in and get back at them.

They actually died, the four?

Yes.

Once war had been declared and people were being injured and dying, what kind of impact did that news have on you?

- 09:00 I wanted to join up and get back at them. I couldn't get into the Army, I didn't want to I wanted to get into the air force because of my feet, I've got peculiar feet and I still have, so I got into the air force. I couldn't get into aircrew because of my eyesight, I have non stereoscopic vision.
- 09:30 So a flight mechanic was the next thing. At the age of nineteen I had achieved all of life's ambitions, I was playing in a band, I was working on aircraft at Cootamundra - so what else was there in life? I was very happy. I wasn't an ambitious person.

10:00 How important was the Empire?

Very important, I was brought up in the Empire days, May 24th was a big day every year and we used to have big bonfires and decorate our bikes and things like that. At school I learnt so much British history

- 10:30 and I still know my British history pretty well, but no Australian history. They pretended there was no such thing as aborigines at school and that was bad. Later on when I was in Japan I learnt more about Australian history
- 11:00 in Japan than I ever learnt in Australia. We were well aware of the Empire and the Empire was the thing, and we were British.

Were you British as opposed to being Australian?

Yes I think so, because right up until the 1950s we had British passports.

- 11:30 Ben Chifley [Prime Minister] brought the Australian passport in, which was a big disadvantage when I was over there in Germany at the time. Half the people didn't know where Australia was, and it was a British passport that you got anyway.

Just going back to your work at the aircraft company, what kind of work were you doing there?

- 12:00 We were doing carburettors, magnetos, and a lot of electrical stuff for Pratt and Whitney engines that they were building. At the time Beauforts [bombers] were being built out here,
- 12:30 Beaufighters, Wirraways we had stopped building them, but mostly the Beauforts. Later on I went into the air force and I was trained on Merlin engines. Then I was posted out to radials [aeroplane engines]
- 13:00 which I had to learn all over again, I started from scratch on radials.

Was that the radar that you were talking about before?

No, radial engines.

Was it at this first aircraft factory that you did the radio location?

Yes.

Can you describe what that was?

No, because I didn't understand

- 13:30 it, they would give you the parts and you had to measure them up and draw them, it was very simple. What was interesting in those days - there were no copying machines. We had to draw them on paper and then trace them, on wax linen. I've still got some of my tracings out in the shed. Then you'd put

them in the frame with blue print paper and wheel them out into the sun.

14:00 Leave them for about one minute in the bright sun, five minutes in a dull sun, and if it was really dull you'd leave them out there for half an hour. Then take them out and put them in a trough of water and the blue print would come out. When you think of the way that they do it now!

My goodness.

Of course we didn't have any calculators then,

14:30 we had to work everything out.

Where were you drafting parts for the radio location?

They were being made at Tempe.

I believe this was an early form of radar?

Yes, it was radar before they called it radar.

15:00 **How secretive was this designing that you had to do?**

Very secretive, we couldn't tell anybody about it, it was top secret and I didn't understand it anyhow and still don't, or not very well. I've got a rough idea. I didn't disclose anything,

15:30 You had to keep your mouth shut with everything during the war, there were big signs up, 'The enemy is listening'. We had all our windows taped with netting glued all over them for the air raids. We had to do first aid classes once a week that was

16:00 important and that was all part of the war effort.

You mentioned the Japanese submarine raid on Sydney, can you talk us through step by step on what happened on that particular day as you remember it?

The first thing that I heard was the depth charges going off and everything shaking and I had no idea until the next day

16:30 and they said, "One of the submarines had come underneath the Manly ferry," through the gate. The one that was aimed at was the Chicago [US warship]. They aimed their torpedoes and missed and hit the ferry and killed a lot of our young sailors. Of course there were a lot of dead fish floating around, being

17:00 killed by the depth charges, that's about all I remember.

What impact did that have on Sydney?

It shook them up a bit. We had a black-out; we were blacked out but not enough. Sydney was blacked out completely after that because

17:30 one of the submarines had an aircraft and flew over the city and got all the details. He just flew around and nobody was worrying about it, nobody dreamed that it was the Japanese. He landed back off the heads and they sunk the plane, because they couldn't get it back and

18:00 it's still on the bottom there somewhere. Then a couple of days later I was up at Evans Head, in the air force.

That was a real inspiration for you to join up?

I was waiting for a call up for a couple of months. I couldn't wait to get up there,

18:30 I couldn't wait to get into the service.

I just want to go back to the bands you were playing in at that time. Can you describe some of the venues that you were playing at?

My favorite one at that time was at Anzac House, which was built in Hyde Park for troops and of course by this time the Americans

19:00 were out here. Bob Hudson was playing and the song was That's a-plenty, and we used to invite servicemen up who were musicians and there was a Negro pianist

19:30 who got up and he was terrific and I got friendly with him and this was a Saturday night. I said "That was great, what are you doing tomorrow?" And he said "Nothing," and I said "Do you want to come out to Watson's Bay and have afternoon tea?" He said, "Yes, thank you."

20:00 He was a big coloured bloke and he was as black as the ace of spades. Namen Cole was his name and he was no relation to Nat King Cole. I don't think he could have been. He came out by tram to Watson's Bay the next day and he got lost and I found him wandering around The Gap. I took him home and I told

Mum and Dad that I met this American and I was bringing him home for afternoon tea. But I didn't tell them

20:30 he was a Negro, it was a funny thing I didn't think of him as a Negro, and he was a musician and a lovely bloke. They got a bit of a shock when I came home with this big coloured bloke. He came in and sat down and he played the piano and we had a beaut afternoon and Mum brought in afternoon tea. I didn't know what they were thinking, Mum and Dad out there, and I didn't care much because I was enjoying myself.

21:00 Mum came in and said, "You will stay for tea won't you?" so that was nice. He was a great guy but I never saw him again before he was posted away. Talking about venues, that was my favorite venue.

That was a lovely story that you told because when we have spoken

21:30 **to other people about the black African Americans who were in Sydney at the time it's often very much at a distance. I don't think I've actually heard anyone from Sydney actually make a gesture of friendship to one of them?**

As a matter of fact there were

22:00 a lot of Americans that came in and said, "We can't let a black in," and an Australian said "Why not, it's Anzac House, an Australian place?" They'd say, "No, no coloured personnel." The girls came to the hostess and they said, "We will go on strike; we won't do anything,"

22:30 So the white Americans let them in.

So even though the Americans weren't in their own country, they were trying to establish segregation?

Complete segregation in the service, yes. I was watching a video on Sammy Davis Jnr

23:00 and he said when he was in the services he was completely segregated. They had white units and coloured units even after the war when I was in Germany and playing the clubs there, they had the white clubs and the coloured clubs.

I'm getting a sense of what you felt, and the musicians and artists felt about it. What was the

23:30 **general view of this segregation between the American soldiers in Sydney?**

I think they felt mostly like we did, they were out there to fight for us. I don't think there was any animosity towards them at all,

24:00 certainly I didn't know of any.

What was the view of the Americans in general?

As far as civilians were concerned they were very welcome with all the businesses and of course the girls were flattered

24:30 with all the attention they got. It wasn't until I was in the service and I was stationed where the Americans were there was a terrific resentment with the Australian Army blokes and some of the air force blokes. They had so much more than we had, they had better uniforms, more money, better canteens, there was a

25:00 resentment there. There was a lot of resentment in Brisbane but this is getting ahead a bit. When I was playing every weekend at this American officers club up in Brisbane in 1943 I turned

25:30 21 and the Americans put on a party for me. They said, "Bring your mates." I went back to camp and said, "The septic tanks [Yanks] are bunging on a birthday party for me," and not one of them would come because they resented the Americans

26:00 and they didn't want to know. There was only my father who flew up from Sydney.

But you went of course?

Yes and they were so good to me because I used to entertain them all the time. They loved the Australian songs, but that was sad.

26:30 They had different training than what we had, and we were scared of them, but that's getting a long way ahead.

The place where you were doing the drafting for the aircraft, engines and the radio location

27:00 **things, was that a reserved industry?**

Yes - and I had a job of getting out. I had a good boss who let me off. He gave me a letter of release, but he didn't think it was a good idea of me going into it, but he was a very nice man

27:30 and he gave me a letter of release.

A lot of young men didn't have nice bosses and were actually chained to their jobs during the entire war?

Yes, they were 'screened' we used to call it.

Can you give us a

28:00 **definition of what you understand a reserved occupation to be?**

Anybody working in ammunitions, any of the factories, I don't know about the police or ambulance drivers and things like that, I'm not sure.

28:30 I had one pal who was reserved because he worked on elevators and escalators, Otis, because that was considered an essential industry to keep the lifts going,

29:00 an essential industry.

I'm intrigued that a lift driver would be considered a reserved industry?

He was a lift engineer, he was responsible for repairing lifts. I suppose if there was an air raid in Sydney and they had damaged lifts they would need somebody there.

29:30 **Tell me about your enlistment, what happened, where did you go and what took place?**

It was down at Woolloomooloo where the RAAF recruitment was and I just went down there and signed up. I was

30:00 18 and I had to wait quite a few months before I went in and suddenly I was called up in June 1942. I went down and lined up with all these other fellows, the DI [drill instructor] came out and started to shout at us straight away and we wondered what had hit us. We were doing

30:30 the right thing, you'd think they'd be nice to us, but no - the discipline started right away while we were still in civilian clothes. They shipped us up to Evans Head, they bunged us onto some trains and went right up to Evans Head. It's strange, they gave you a big hessian bag and told you go to and fill it up with straw

31:00 and that was your bed on the floor; and fit you out with your uniform straight away. I often think now what a good idea and what a cheap idea that would be today to make prisons. If you just have a barbed wire enclosure and

31:30 give the prisoners a sack and some straw and go to the tent. It would be so cheap, we had to do it for years instead of giving them bunks with TVs.

What training did you do at Evans Head?

Evans Head was for rookies [new recruits], just discipline, drill -

32:00 that's where I got my name Tangle Foot, I was clumsy, and I'm naturally awkward. It's eyesight, my non stereoscopic vision, I walk up stairs before I get to them and things like that. Close up I'm a very bad judge of distance, I put my glass of water on the table and the table would be over there and drop it.

32:30 Then all of a sudden they would say just out of the blue, "The following personnel will assemble at six o'clock at night," and they bused us over to Lismore and put us on troop trains and

33:00 we came down to Sydney and, would you believe, I was based at the Coogee Bay Hotel and the Oceanic. They were both taken over by the air force. We used to get special trams everyday full of air force personnel all in overalls, and we used to go into Ultimo tech and do our basic training for mechanics.

33:30 We had to learn how to use tools and make things and it was a very good course. We finished there and then went down to Melbourne. From there they put us into sections, I requested mechanics and I got it. There were mechanics, riggers who worked on the rest of the aircraft, not the engines. There were

34:00 electricians, armourers, instrument makers and photographers. The riggers and mechanics went straight down to Melbourne and trained down there. As soon I passed my exams they posted me to Cootamundra.

34:30 **Can you describe to me what Coogee was like back then?**

Coogee was great, it's always been great, we loved it there. At the hotel there were five of us in the room with two single beds, two of us would get a bed and the rest were on the floor.

35:00 We had to parade out front before we went on the tram. Coogee has a beautiful beach, after the pier had been washed away- there used to be a Coogee pier once but that had gone. We didn't see much of it because you left early in the morning and came back after dark at night.

35:30 It didn't look much different to what it does now, I don't think. The Oceanic or the Holiday Inn is there now. We had a reunion there a couple of years ago at the Holiday Inn.

Could you

36:00 **define for me what the responsibilities of a flight mechanic were?**

A flight mechanic. In my case I was with the squadron of Avro Ansons, old bombers designed in 1934 that were already obsolete but

36:30 they were good trainers for air observers - three hour flights with three training observers onboard and the pilot. We were responsible for one engine. You rotated duties if you did 40 hourly inspections; you were in a forty hour hanger; you

37:00 pulled an engine down a certain amount and put it back again. They used to hand grease the rocker arms in those days, you had to put the grease in by hand. That was after they had flown for two forty hours; that was the inspection and then there was a complete overhaul where you pulled everything

37:30 down, you had to sign the ERS.

What's an ERS?

Engine repair schedule or something, I've forgotten what the S is, but you'd tick off everything - fuel lines, rocker arms, one by one, and then you had to sign it and you were responsible for that engine, it was to say they were all the things that you had done.

38:00 If anything went wrong then you were then in the poo. They were good engines and we had a few mishaps, a propeller came off once over Hay.

Just a slight mishap?

I knew the fellow who was responsible.

What happened?

He put the locking nut on and he wired it up the wrong way.

38:30 With locking nuts, so that a nut wouldn't come undone, there were little holes in the top of the nut and you'd put a bit of copper wire through it and wire it to somewhere else so there was no way the nut would come undone, but he wired it the wrong way. Instead of pulling it closed, it was pulling it open, and it vibrated off.

39:00 **What happened to the plane, what happened to the people who were flying the plane?**

There are two engines, but it flew back on one engine.

I gather he got into a bit of trouble?

Yes. Then you went on tarmac duty, you rotated on tarmac duty, it was doing DRI, Daily Routine Inspections where you just checked

39:30 the engines everyday, checked to make sure there was no water in the fuel line and things like that. Then you'd have to prepare them. Would you believe you had to start them by hand? You started them with a starter; and you got this big fly wheel going and you stuck your finger up at the pilot and he'd put it

40:00 in gear and the propeller would turn. They were all hand started, so that's how old they were.

Tape 3

00:30 **What was your opinion of the Avro Anson?**

I loved it, but it was pretty useless. After that I was posted to the 73rd Squadron which was Avro Ansons and we were loading them up with two depth charges and flying them up and down the coast from the

01:00 New South Wales Queensland border right down to the Victorian border, and we had flights at Coffs Harbour, Camden and Moruya. I was stationed at Camden for a while and that was good. We used to load the depth charges on in the morning in the freezing cold and then wind them up and when the propeller started it nearly blew you out with the icy wind. One day

01:30 one of them came back with no depth charges on, word got around quick that they must have dropped. The pilot got out and said, "Where did you drop it?" The armourer said, "Drop what?" He looked underneath and said, "I must have forgotten to put them on." The armourer had been asleep and he

hadn't loaded up the depth charges and they went up and down the coast looking for subs with no depth charges.

Very useful, at least he didn't drop

02:00 **them on the cheese factory?**

No.

You said you loved the Avro Anson, why did you love that plane?

I suppose I loved all aircraft. I still love the old 'Aggie' [Avro Anson]. We've got one at Tamworth in a glass case because it was the first East West [Airline] plane I think. It was

02:30 a tubular aluminum frame with a fabric fuselage, the main spar was wooden. It was just a real old plane, the top speed was about one hundred and fifty miles an hour or something.

You said a moment ago 'I love all planes' why?

03:00 Ever since I was a kid I loved building aircraft and I've always been interested in every aircraft.

What is the essence of that appeal do you think?

I've always been interested in air, air to me is a soup that we live in the bottom of.

03:30 When you think that everything comes out of the air, the trees the leaves get everything out of the air, when you put sugar in your coffee the sugar actually comes out of the air; you couldn't get all that out of the ground. I've always been fascinated, even when I went for a drive in the old Buick when I was a child and I use to put my hand out the window

04:00 and use it as an aileron. You put it up like that, and the air would make it go up and down, I was just interested.

I imagine a part of this would be the wonder and the appeal of flight itself?

Yes.

At Cootamundra I believe that Gough Whitlam [Prime Minister 1972-75] was a trainee?

He was the tallest bloke in the squadron

04:30 And he was UAP then. United Australia Party. I didn't know him, but knew of him. And, yeah, how did you know that?

I believe that came out of the research conversation the other day. You mentioned that. That's interesting, I didn't know that he was United Australia Party that early. That was the conservative side of politics, wasn't it?

Yeah.

05:00 **You didn't hear any particular stories about him there at that time?**

No, he was flying the Maryland bombers, a very uncomfortable American bomber, on reconnaissance

05:30 He never talked about his air force career.

That's strange, you would image it would have been a significant part of his life?

Yes.

What happened to you after Cootamundra?

I went to 73rd Squadron at Camden who were looking for Japanese subs, flying up and down the coast. I wasn't flying, I was just a mechanic, then I was posted to Nowra.

Can we just stay with

06:00 **Camden for a moment. What specifically was the purpose for 73rd Squadron?**

Looking for submarines, anti submarines. I was there with the same chap who hadn't screwed the air screw up properly, he was there with me and two other characters. We brought a

06:30 1927 Essex, an old car that we used to drive down to Sydney and of course you couldn't get petrol then, so we had a wicked mixture.

What was the wicked mixture?

Avro Anson's flew on 90 octane, which was dyed blue so that if you ever got caught with blue petrol you were in trouble.

07:00 It was too powerful for a car because you could damage it, so we used to put a bit of power kerosene in with a bit of 90 octane and a bit of rosewood stain so that it didn't look blue.

I bet it didn't, how did it run?

It ran pretty good, it was a six cylinder and the first week we

07:30 did a big end, so we pulled the piston and con rod out and the rest of the time we ran it on five cylinders.

Who came up with that extraordinary mixture?

It was pretty well known, all mechanics were awake up [aware of] to that.

You went to Nowra, what happened when you got to Nowra?

At Nowra I was put in the ERS

08:00 [Engine Repair Section], and that was a horrible job, you'd pull the cylinders off the Avro Ansons. In those days the cylinder head was part of the barrel, it isn't like today because when you pulled the head off, the only way you could get to the valve seats was up the cylinder. And to do a valve grind you had to put a chuck on the top

08:30 and pull it instead of pushing, like you did with a ordinary valve. To get rid of the carbon out of those was a filthy job, you left the cylinder all night in a drum of aero carbsole which was the stuff to soften it, and then you had chip all the carbon off with a copper gadget. I used to get filthy, your hands used to get

09:00 black. I was doing cylinder after cylinder after cylinder and I thought, "I'm stuck here for the rest of the war," That's what it looked like. Every day on the notice board you'd get 'Motorboat Crew Wanted', so I put an application in for motorboat crew, which I didn't have a hope for. I hadn't been in a motorboat, I'd do anything to get out of ERS.

09:30 Suddenly up came "Draftsmen Wanted." I put in an application and flew to Camden for a trade test and passed with 99% on the trade test and went back to Nowra. Not all that long time later I was posted up to Amberley as a draftsman.

10:00 Amberley was a aircraft depot, 3AD [Aircraft Depot] where they assembled planes, the ones that came across the Pacific on boats and that was quite a busy unit and I was a draftsman there.

Just before a deal with Amberley, did you have any test flights

10:30 **when you were there at Nowra?**

I had a lot of test flights at Cootamundra and Camden.

What did a test flight consist of and what was its purpose?

After a complete overhaul you had to take it up and take it through all the motions. I'd go up in the co pilot's seat

11:00 if I had been working on it. I think it was 220 turns of the handle that brought the wheels [landing gear] up.

That was your duty?

Manual retractable undercarriage.

How hard was that to do?

Not very hard, it was good because I loved being up there, then you just banked it and dipped it and all that.

11:30 **How long would they stay up for a test flight?**

Only about half an hour, I suppose.

Would they do what they called circuits and bumps?

No, not in a test flight, I suppose you could if you let the wheels go, that would be a bit of an effort. Never seen an Anson do circuits and bumps.

Would you fly over a fair amount of territory

12:00 **and put it through it's paces?**

Yes and it was great and I use to love that.

You were posted to Amberley base as a draftsman, can you describe what your draftsman activities involved?

Very little because there were too many draftsmen at Amberley in the drawing office; but I got stuck into music there and I was

12:30 writing music in the drawing office.

Even though you did very little, what were you supposed to be doing as a draftsman? And what were the other draftsmen who did have work, what sort of things were they drafting?

We were doing mostly copying from overseas,

13:00 making blue prints out of the prints that we get. Suppose it was a Kittyhawk [fighter] and all its millions of parts and things. We had to copy those and get them printed so that if something went wrong or if we had to make parts.

13:30 One day I was reading a paper in the drawing office and the engineering officer came in and said, "What are you doing, haven't you got anything to do?" and I said, "No sir." He said, "Clean the windows." So I had to get a bucket and clean the windows and I thought "That won't happen again."

14:00 I should never get caught doing nothing. I got a clip board and put a pencil behind my ear and I'd walk around the hanger chatting to all the mechanics and no one would take any notice of me. If you had a pencil behind your ear you were right, you were doing something or that's what they thought.

Didn't you have anyone breathing down your neck and supervising what you were doing?

No because the

14:30 sergeant draftsman knew that he had too many on the staff. An engineering officer, if he was say the Squadron Leader and he wanted to become a wing commander he needed a large number of people under him to become a wing commander. He would apply for x number of mechanics,

15:00 and x number of draftsmen. There were five of us there but only work for about two when I first went there. When he had his full number of personnel he got promoted to a wing commander.

A kind of a empire building approach to things?

Exactly,

15:30 I didn't think kindly towards some of those greedy ambitious officers.

Was Amberley a large base at that time?

Yes, with eleven hundred personnel.

Eleven hundred personnel, how many planes were stationed there?

They weren't stationed there, they were passing through. First of all the trans-Pacific planes - what became DC4s,

16:00 DC6s then C54 [transport planes] - and they would fly all the way out. The Lightnings [Lockheed fighters] and Kittyhawks they came out in parts and we had to assemble them, and then they'd got off to their squadrons,

16:30 to New Guinea or wherever they went to. It was a busy depot but not enough for five draftsmen at the time.

The purpose of it was as a transit place as well as an assembly place?

Yes, it was the terminal for MATs [military air transport] for the Americans, that was their terminal from

17:00 Los Angeles or wherever they came from, so there were a lot of Americans there.

So there were quite a few Americans stationed there?

Yes.

Approximately how many?

I'm trying to think if the eleven hundred included the Americans, they had a different canteen and a PX [American field canteen], they were separate but there would have

17:30 been about a thousand I suppose.

Would they fraternize with the Australians at all?

Yes, with me they did.

Do you have any particular memories of that fraternization?

I used to talk as much as I could to the pilots, and we had a lot of mishaps there.

What sort of mishaps?

Prangs, crashes.

18:00 On one day a Lightning came in and hit the ground tail first and bounced across and crashed down. It lifted it's belly tank where it first hit. I remember it caught fire and the flames went right along the trail of petrol to the belly tank and exploded. The pilot

18:30 came tearing out and ran along the wing and fell off in a heap. The ambulance tore out and got him up and he survived.

Did he get badly burnt?

Yes and he survived. That was the only one that I actually saw but there were other prangs [crashes] too.

What impact did that have on you seeing that event?

19:00 It was scary but of course when anybody pranged they'd take the pilot out straight away and put him into another aircraft so they didn't have time to think. They would get him to bring that plane in, but he would have somebody with him.

Sounds like very sensible confidence boosting?

Yes.

Under what sort of circumstances would you be mixing with the Americans?

19:30 I use to go into the PX canteen. We couldn't afford any of their stuff, it was too dear, but just talk to them. I mixed with a lot of them in Brisbane, I use to go down to Brisbane nearly every night.

You said that you couldn't afford any of their things, how inflated were their prices

20:00 **compared to Australian prices?**

I don't remember but we had hardly anything. By the time I was a draftsman I was on twelve shillings a day because when I went in I was on six shillings a day for a trainee, but that was Group One. We had groups in the air force, Group One was fitters, instrument makers and draftsmen, specialised tradesmen.

20:30 Group Two were flight mechanics and riggers and Group Three, Four and Five. Five went down to cooks and guards, and I think cooks were far more important than Group Five. I was lucky because I was Group One.

Were you able to save much every week?

21:00 You could only draw out a certain amount on certain days and I had enough to get down to Brisbane and back regularly.

From Amberley?

Yes. I used to get a bus into Ipswich and a train down Brisbane.

Was it at that point that you were

21:30 **meeting up with the Americans in Brisbane?**

Yes.

This was obviously during weekends and other leave times. How long would you spend in Brisbane at any one time?

I use to go down every Tuesday night and every Wednesday night I'd play at the Coconut Grove in a band there; but didn't get paid for it. On Friday nights

22:00 I got fifteen shillings for playing on the Showboat, and I did three songs up the river and three songs down again. The Showboat was a lot of servicemen and their girlfriends and they weren't interested in entertainment; but some of them without girlfriends were. I used to play guitar

22:30 and one of the crew used to hold the microphone up to my mouth because there was no microphone stand and the roof was right on my head. I couldn't stand on my tip toes without bumping my head on the top deck. It was fifteen shillings and I was proud of it.

Did things get fairly wild aboard the Showboat?

No.

You gave a bit of a chuckle a moment ago and I just wondered?

I was thinking of all the cuddling going on

23:00 on the top deck, so that's why I chuckled.

The Coconut Grove what sort of a venue was that?

A big dance hall in Brisbane, it was probably the biggest one at the time.

Was it well patronized?

Yes, everywhere, Brisbane was jumping in those days. I worked at the American Red Cross and there were the first poker machines

23:30 in Australia at the American Red Cross in Brisbane. They were imported from Singapore by Jack Rooklyn, who I worked for years later, it was a real live place. My main spot was Taringa, which was sort of an unofficial officers club.

24:00 Colonel Francis H Wilson who discovered me, rang the adjutant at Amberley asking did he had any entertainers who knew any Australian songs?. The adjutant called me in and said, "Do you want to go out to this place?" and I said, "Yes." So I was out there regularly on

24:30 Friday nights I think it was. They were all American officers and they treated me great.

Once again was there segregation here?

Yes.

So it was whites only?

Yes. I was very embarrassed years later in Tokyo I met Colonel Wilson

25:00 and we are getting ahead to much.

We will try and remember to come back to that a little later.

I sat down in the snack bar with the colonel and he went up to get something and a Negro came and sat at the same table. The colonel called and said, "Over this way," he called me over. I felt embarrassed; he said something about

25:30 "Goddamn Niggers," or something.

That was in Tokyo years later?

Yes.

Can you chart for us the progress of how you became more involved in the music scene once you were at Amberley?

26:00 First I joined a band there and then I formed a double act with a fellow called Lou who was a lot older than I was. He had a steel mandolin, pure stainless steel, and we did a double act called the 'Tingle and Tangle Duet'. I was Tangle.

26:30 The first live concert I ever did was with Lou and then I sat in the band. One day the comic Jimmy O'Connor was up on stage. He was only a little fellow Jimmy, and said to us while we were down in the pit with the band, "Stand up you blokes." So we all stood up and he pointed and said, "I want you to help

27:00 me in a sketch." I was the tallest in the band and I could stand over him. He gave me some lines and we did them in a show and suddenly I thought, "Blind me, I belong here." I was getting laughs, I had a natural sense of timing. He used me then in all of his sketches.

27:30 What was your role in those sketches, apart from being tall?

I remember the biggest laugh I got was we had a wardrobe on the stage and it was a domestic scene and

28:00 Jimmy was the husband and one of the WAAAFs [Women's Auxiliary Australian Air Force] was the wife. He came back on leave or something, I can't remember all his dialogue, but he said, "You've got somebody here, you have been seeing somebody else, there is somebody in that wardrobe,

28:30 come out of that wardrobe," and he went and whipped open the door and I was dressed as the catering officer who was a notorious womanizer. Well, the place went into an uproar. I didn't have to say anything, that was one of the earlier ones.

I can image there were a few double entendres over the word catering?

Yes,

29:00 everybody knew the catering officer.

Your role was as the straight man?

Yes.

What was the function of the straight man?

In those days before mini skirts I'd go out and start to introduce

29:30 the next performer and a girl would come out in a short skirt and I'd say, "That's rather short isn't it?" and she would say, "Well haven't you heard, the shorter the dress you go out in the better the car you come home in." Then I'd start talking again and then another girl would come along and the dress would be a bit short I'd say, "What sort of car did you come home in?" and she would say "I came home in a

30:00 brand new Oldsmobile." The next girl would come on and her skirt would be a bit shorter and I'd say, "Oh that's rather short isn't it?" and she'd say, "Haven't you heard, the shorter the dress you go out in the better the car you come home in." I said, "Well what sort of car did you come home in?" She'd say, "I came home in a Jaguar."

30:30 Then the comic would come on in drag in a mini skirt and people would be laughing I said, "Don't tell me, I suppose you came home in a Rolls Royce?" and he'd say, "No I came home in a police patrol," that was my part as a straight man.

A straight man where you were feeding lines?

Yes.

Quite often reacting?

Yes.

You mentioned the 'Tingle and Tangle

31:00 **Duet', what did that act consist of?**

Just a guitar and mandolin. He was a very good player and I just played the accompanying things like La Paloma, and all those things that sounded good on a mandolin.

It was purely instrumental?

Yes and I was terrified.

Why?

I hadn't been on stage before, it was my first appearance on a stage and

31:30 in the picture theatre in Ipswich.

How were you received?

Not very well, a lot of the shows were terrible, a lot of civilians would ask us to come and perform, I was reading that in a letter, it was terrible but after that we did pretty well.

You obviously learnt from whatever mistakes you made?

Yes.

I image you would be

32:00 **getting some sort of a feel of what was going over the audience?**

Yes, and that takes a while to get a feel.

How long would it take?

I always tell the young performers now you go through a stage of amateurism, people like amateurs and they say, "He's trying hard, he will do well," and they clap hard.

32:30 Then when you start to get a bit of polish and a bit of experience you don't goes as well, and then it's only experience that allows you to improve, it is only through experience. I teamed up with another fellow

33:00 called Ron Badger who lives up at Toronto and I went and saw him the other day and we were called the 'Nitwits and the Network' and we used to make up phony radio programs, Station ROT. We had all sorts of stupid commercials that we use to make up,

33:30 with silly things. I was on the guitar and I'd say, "We have in the studio from stage and screen, Mr Hanks and Fartra, 'Won't you tell me when?' Thank you very much Mr Fartra, this program is brought to you by Madam Morgan's Corker Cut Canvas Corsets. Madam Morgan Corker Cut Canvas Corsets causes comfort to any curved figure,

34:00 owing to the war time conditions the rubber in corsets has been replaced by stainless steel tension springs making it possible to convert the course of the spring loaded habit immediately after removal. We are now crossing over to the Rushcutters Bay stadium with the middleweight fight between Aqua and Via there goes the round for the first gong. Aqua steps into the ring Via comes in and Via swings and Aqua ducks,

34:30 Via ducks and Via swings Aqua forgets to duck and the fight is over, now back to the studio – " and all that sort of rubbish.

That's not rubbish to me that's great, that's fantastic?

We used to write that ourselves.

Not only that but you remember it so well?

Isn't that amazing? We were trying to remember some of it the other day, "There is a way to start the day feeling fresh and swell, here's information – kill that perspiration. I shall face it every place and have

35:00 a lovely smell, use Shipwreck Soap," Lifebuoy was the big soap in the day.

My goodness that's superb

We use to do about a quarter of an hour of that stuff and it was very fast, everything that I ever did was fast.

What was your inspiration for things like this, was it acts that you had seen on stage or heard on radio?

35:30 No, I hadn't seen many shows at all, I don't know where it all came from. As far as my radio thing, I loved the Mills Brothers and I copied a lot of their stuff and their tricks and Spike Jones, we did all his stuff.

I think there was a particularly memorable song involving Hitler?

36:00 Yes, and that came after our bombing. This was all with 'Ron Badger and the Nitwits and the Network'. Then we used to sing a bit of harmony together.

How often were you going to Brisbane to appear in these concerts?

I was down there nearly every night and I used to

36:30 get home, sometimes I'd miss the last train home and get home on the milk train in the morning. I knew all the guards on duty. Whenever I went to a new unit the first people I got friendly with was the cooks and the guards, I could sneak in and out and I always got a bit extra tucker because I knew the cook. I was a draftsman

37:00 and I could forge leave passes no trouble, I used to sign the leave pass, Flight Lieutenant Mullet, and nobody every questioned it.

Doesn't sound like the sort of spit and polish sergeant major screaming sort of air force that one has heard about else where?

I would get home in the early hours of the morning and go straight

37:30 into parade.

Did you every find yourself a bit dozy over the draft board?

Yes and I could find somewhere in the hanger and have a snooze.

You'd do a working day and then at night perform in a concert, how was the air force reacting to all of this?

38:00 They were pretty good, the ones that knew that I was doing it, some of the officers. In fact I got promoted to corporal while I was there and another draftsman said, "It has nothing to do with his drawing only because of his guitar," which probably was.

Did they explain to you why you were promoted to corporal?

No. Then

38:30 they posted me down to Melbourne to do an NCOs [non commissioned officer] course and that was the last I saw of Amberley, I was there for about eleven months I think. It was a real tough course down there.

What did the course involve?

It was actually a commando's course, it was in the middle of winter up at Warrandyte up the Yarra.

39:00 I didn't enjoy it at all and we were issued with Tommy guns [Thompson sub machine gun] because the Americans had a few thousand Tommy guns that they didn't want so they decided to give them to the NCOs and the RAAF. They were terrible guns and they used to jam and they were awkward to carry and had the drum on the top.

Tape 4

00:30 **You have a cigarette commercial for us?**

While you were in the barbers, "The man miracle cigarette - they are so mild they blush when you try to take the wrapper off them. One, see what you think, try two and see if you can think" Remember, if Hitler offered you a cigarette it would be a miracle, of course" Fancy that Hitler that was in the script.

That's a good one, did you write that?

01:00 I think Ron did that one.

From the time that you started to appear on stage, you were writing a percentage of your own material?

Yes.

How much of your own material would you be writing?

A lot of it was rewriting parities and things which was

01:30 much easier to sell as a tune that they know with a few funny lyrics in it. For instance I was staged at Townsville for a while, "If you ever cross the sea to Magnetic Island," which was where we used to all go over there, "Maybe at the closing of the day; Suddenly you see - " I can't think.

That's alright I'm sure?

"Hails ferry, as it pulls away from the wharf in Picnic Bay,"

02:00 Hails means that you are stranded on the island. He's asleep on the beach, "In the distance you can see the lights of Townsville, and you dream about the comfort of a bed. Suddenly a million stars surround you and a coconut has hit you on the head."

02:30 **That's pretty good.**

That was the stuff I used to write about where I was and about the characters in the camps.

Topical sketches?

Topical parities.

We were beginning to tell the story of America's interest in your knowledge of your Australian songs. Could you continue that story?

At this officers' club - but it wasn't an officers' club -

03:00 it was only a house that they used to rent, but a lot of them used to go there and there was only a big lounge like this, with a grand piano in it. I would just sit down with my guitar, I've still got it - and sit it on the lap and play songs that they would ask for. They were particularly interested

03:30 in Australian songs. I told you the story before about the ballad of Ned Kelly and the colonel correcting me "He wasn't," one of the verses said, " - twelve times he was wounded before he fell down" and the colonel said "No, five times, five bullets in the legs he got." They had studied,

04:00 they knew more about our history than I did.

Where and when had they studied this?

They had brought books I suppose and this colonel was an authority on Jesse James and American criminals.

Are you still able to play the guitar and strum up a tune?

04:30 **When Mick Jagger came out here in 1970 and appeared in that feature film?**

Yes he did and he did Ned Kelly, the last verse was: \n[Verse follows]\n"Now they have made a film of this tale;\n and Ned's path to glory they had paved;\n He could only see who is playing his part;\n Ned Kelly would turn in his grave." \n

05:00 Do you want me to stop and explain and talk about it?

Sure, do whatever feels most instinctive and natural?

I can't go all through it.

If you can recreate what you did before but with the guitar, which I think, was half a verse or something like that?

05:30 \n[Verse follows]\n“Ned Kelly was born in a ram shackled hut;\n He battled since he was a kid;\n He grew up with bad men and died with bad thieves;\n And learnt all the things that they did.”\n The original verse went: \n[Verse follows]\n“At sixteen young Ned was a wild reckless lad;\n

06:00 Robbed coaches and trains without fear;\n Till one day they caught him red handed and then;\n Send him to jail for a year.”\n

That was all wrong because he never held up a train or a coach so I rewrote it:

\n[Verse follows]\n“At sixteen young Ned first brushed with the law;\n And spent three months at Beechworth and then;\n They found him riding someone else’s horse;\n

06:30 So they bunged him in jail once again.”\n

Those were the actual facts, there are a lot of verses to it.

How long did the song go on for?

About three or four minutes.

You performed both the original and then the revised version for the Americans?

No I didn't do the revised version, yes I did do the revised version

07:00 in Brisbane for the Americans when they corrected me. The last version I wrote was when Mick Jagger was out here.

With the plectrum now do you want to sing or recreate the version that was inspired by the Mick Jagger film?

07:30 Let me think of some of the verses, I can't remember them.

I'm quite happy with what we got before.

08:00 It's all completely gone.

Not to worry if you want to put the guitar aside.

08:30 **I just wanted to ask a little bit more about the audience that you actually performed The Ballad Of Ned Kelly for in Brisbane. This was at a private house was it?**

At a private house with a number of American officers

09:00 and their Australian girlfriends.

How many people would have been there altogether?

Only twenty or thirty.

Did you go back there?

Regularly, I use to stay there some nights, they had a bed for me down stairs in the house.

Were you the only performer on those nights?

Occasionally some of the American

09:30 officers themselves would do an item. We had a fellow called Sid who played the piano, he was a Brisbane bloke, a rather delicate little chap.

Delicate in what respect?

He would never have been fit enough for the service I don't think, he was a very little chappie.

10:00 **I believe the Americans put on a twenty first birthday party for you?**

That was great or in some ways it was, it was very

10:30 kind of them. The 20th of December 1943, I turned twenty one and they said, “Bring some of your buddies along from the camp,” and unfortunately none of my buddies would come, because they didn't like Americans. They had resentment because the Americans had so much and we had nothing. That was sad but my father

11:00 flew up from Sydney in a flying boat to be there.

Did the Americans arrange that?

No.

I was going to say flying in a flying boat was not an inexpensive enterprise?

No it wasn't. The Empire flying boats use to fly from here to Brisbane and landed at Grafton on the Clarence River and then landed at Hamilton

11:30 in Brisbane. From Rose Bay [Sydney], they used to take off from Rose Bay.

You father flew up for the party?

Yes.

How many people were actually at the party?

About forty I suppose.

Did you perform at the party?

Yes.

What did you sing?

I can't remember that. I used to do a lot in those days.

12:00 **Did you perform any of your comic ditties for the Americans?**

Yes.

What sort of things did they like best?

Suggestive ones, some of them went way back to Bobby Burns, Ode To The Four Letter Words.

12:30 **Could you recite that one for us?**

I never said the words, ever. The first one:

\n[Verse follows]\n "Banish the use of the weaseling phrase;\n Which never quite says what you mean;\n You better be known

13:00 for your hypocrite ways;\n That are vulgar and pure obscene;\n When nature is calling, plain speaking is out;\n If ladies, God bless them, are milling about;\n We make wee wee, we make water;\n Or empty a glass or powder your nose;\n Even Johnny may pass;\n Shake the dew off the lily;\n See a man about a dog;\n Or when we are all salsed it's condensing the fog;\n But friend hear this warning;\n If you would now bliss;\n Now only in Shakespeare - "\n

13:30 Now that was when you say the words.

You never actually said the word, that's very good?

I think that goes back to Robby Burns.

Was that something that Robby Burns wrote?

I didn't know at the time but I got it from the Americans that one,

14:00 all those suggestive things.

Sounds like you're a very quick study?

I could memorise very quickly.

With this gathering of Americans were there any relatively well known Americans among them, people that would have been known to the general public?

Colonel Wilson was aide to General MacArthur who was in Brisbane at the time.

What sort of a person was Wilson?

14:30 I thought he was a great fellow and very good to me. But unfortunately when I met him later in Tokyo he was a real bigot when it came to coloured personnel, and that was sad. He said, "I was brought up in Georgia." You are supposed to understand that they don't like coloured people in Georgia.

15:00 **Did he impart any information or express any opinions about MacArthur?**

No.

What was your view of General MacArthur?

In the islands later on in the Pacific I didn't know anything about the general then, I thought it was very strange

15:30 that when the 8th Div was captured in Singapore and General Bennett escaped to Australia, they made him out as some sort of a traitor or something, for deserting the 8th Div. I thought that was silly because he must have had a lot of knowledge that they could have used,

16:00 but they just wiped [dismissed] him. General MacArthur does exactly the same thing [retreats] and he's a hero, he left all his men in the Philippines and escaped and got down here and then he's a hero. He was a good leader and he did inspire us in the islands, even looking back now he probably had a photographer. He had a flying boat and they would

16:30 go out and get him and bring him in the boat and he'd always jump overboard and wade ashore, he looked good, he looked the part and he was inspiring, he inspired us, he inspired me.

What sort of things did he inspire?

He was there, he was there right up on the front line he'd say, "Where were our generals?" General Northcott used to - I better not say anything.

17:00 **Why not, these people are long since dead?**

He had a boat and he used to go out to sea every night for air raids and you never saw him.

That was the Governor of New South Wales?

No.

That was General Northcott?

Yes.

John Northcott, who was later a governor general I think?

We never saw him, Rommel

17:30 we never saw him.

MacArthur was certainly very visible in the newsreels?

Yes he was and that was good for the troops, he knew what he was doing.

You are talking about being up in the islands. Did you directly see MacArthur or are you talking about what you saw on screen?

We did see him, he waded ashore and then he jumped

18:00 into a jeep which is the smallest vehicle, where as our blokes used to go and get into command cars and wouldn't be seen in a jeep, our officers.

Where did you see MacArthur doing this?

In Borneo.

At Labuan?

Yes, I don't remember which day it was.

Just moved back to your twenty first birthday party,

18:30 **you were fairly disappointed weren't you?**

I was disappointed that I didn't have any of my mates, where I wouldn't have had a party otherwise, because there was no other way of having one.

I imagine you felt a sense of underlining sadness that your mates didn't come?

Yes and a bit of resentment towards me too that I was popular with the Yanks.

19:00 **Did that resentment show itself on a day to day basis?**

No not really, but they didn't hesitate to say what they thought of the Americans, but they were only jealous and mostly because they were doing so well with our women folk and they sure did.

19:30 **Did you hear evidence of that yourself?**

Yes.

What sort of things would you hear about Americans and Australian women?

A lot of Australian soldiers complained that their wives had been out with Americans while they were

away. There were a lot of genuine

20:00 romances, like one of my best mates in Los Angeles married a Brisbane girl and his granddaughter has just been out here staying with us. She is still an Aussie, she is still broad Australian, and we stayed with her in 2001,

20:30 and he is a great song writer, Nat Kipner.

What's his name?

Nat Kipner and his son is Steve Kipner who had the biggest hit in 2000 and it sold more copies than anything else. I don't know it, but the young people know it when you mention it.

Just getting back to Brisbane and the Americans, I believe you

21:00 **were in that region when the Battle of Brisbane [riot] occurred?**

I don't remember it and I don't think I was there, I wasn't there when it occurred.

Did you hear anything about it?

No not until after the war.

So it wasn't something that was big and momentous and was being talked about at the time?

No it was probably after I left there, I left there in early 1944 I think.

21:30 **To return to Victoria, how was it that you find yourself on a commando course?**

They promoted me to corporal and I had to go down to an NCOs course, which was how to handle men, and I was hopeless.

What did they emphasise in the course, how

22:00 **did they teach you how to handle men?**

They teach you how to put people on charges, I can't remember because I wasn't very interested. It was a tough course though, hand grenades were the things that used to scare the daylights out of me. With a hand grenade you pull the pin out and you have got the lever on

22:30 and as you throw it, the lever bounces off. It was ten seconds before it went off and the instructor would pull the pin out and let the lever fly off and you still have got ten seconds and he'd count to about five and then throw it, and we were supposed to do the same; but no, not me. I would pull the pin out and get rid of it as quick as I could.

Sounds pretty sensible actually. You said you were learning how to handle men and you were no

23:00 **good at it, why weren't you any good at it?**

I just didn't like giving orders.

There are some people who can kind of psyche there way straight into it and be very convincing, what happened to you in this respect?

I don't know, I didn't like discipline in the service much, there was no way I could

23:30 take command, I had to actually in some cases. I was taking a platoon out in the bush and we would sit down and have a chat when we were supposed to be doing something else. I was supposed to be giving them orders to do this and to do that. I wasn't

24:00 that way inclined.

You said that you didn't like army discipline, what was it that you objected to about army discipline?

The stupidity of some of the orders. When you get up in the morning and you have to fold your blankets a certain way

24:30 and then the inspector would come and if they weren't folded right. Even when you were on parade and they would come around and say you hadn't shaved this morning, "Yes, I did. I didn't stand close enough to a razor," or something silly like that. One of the funniest experiences I remember a fellow on parade one morning, you get up and you'd put your overalls on and

25:00 race out on parade. I would be in bed at twenty five past seven and be on parade at half past sometimes and I'd have a shave the night before. This horrible DI said, "You've got your pyjamas on, Lewis," he said. "It's a shirt." He whipped it up and said, "That is a pyjama jacket," he said. "It's a shirt." And he said, "It's not a shirt, it's your pyjamas." Lewis said, "Listen, this is a shirt." Because he didn't get away with it, he got fourteen days CB [confined to barracks], that was the sort of discipline that used to bug

me and things like that.

Sounds pretty farcical to me actually. You were starting to talk about Tommy guns before?

The Americans must've unloaded a few thousand Tommy guns and we didn't know what to do with them

26:00 so they gave them to the NCOs in the air force for only a short time because they weren't successful. Most of the NCO fellows that I had been doing the course with were tradesmen and weren't fighting men really, we were all tradesmen. They made five queues of us and put five cans up and gave us a

26:30 gun each and you'd come up and aim it at one of the cans and you'd do a couple of single shots and then a couple of short bursts. Then on the third command you'd empty the drum, you'd pull the trigger and the drum would go around and the rest of the bullets would go off. After five blokes had fired all these rounds the cans were still there,

27:00 they just use to spray everywhere the bullets and never hit anything, not like the Owen gun it was fantastic. They were a dreadful gun, the Tommy gun. You could only spray with them. They dropped them after that and we went back to .303s [rifles].

I'm not surprised. You were doing a commando course -was it ever intended for you to be any kind of commando?

27:30 No it was just to toughen us up that was all, it wasn't called a commando course it was just called NCO advanced training course or something. Everything was really tough there accept it was freezing cold. we slept on duckboards, they were three planks one in the middle and one each side slightly bent up.

28:00 We had to sleep on the ground with a hard board to toughen us up, and it was wet, but it didn't do us any harm. Bayonet drill, I use to hate that, I hated bayonet drill.

Why?

The thought of it for a start, you were racing at a sack and a Jap

28:30 head stuck on the top of it. I'm left handed but I shoot right handed because my right eye was better than my left eye. I was just clumsy and awkward, but I just hated it.

What happened after that course?

I got posted to Oakey in Queensland.

29:00 The ridiculous part of that was I had been taught how to put people on charge if you were caught doing AWL [absent without leave]; and I went AWL on my way to Amberley. I made some excuse about breaking my glasses and having to have a couple of extra days in Sydney. When I got there I was put on a charge.

29:30 **They didn't believe the bit about the glasses?**

If they did, they still charged me. Oakey was a different place to Amberley because it was so isolated, everybody wanted to go home, went AWL there, at least at Amberley you could get out to Ipswich and Brisbane but at Oakey there was nothing.

What was there, are you saying nothing was there?

Only the town.

30:00 **What was there in the way of air base facilities?**

At the air base we were assembling Kittyhawks and there were quite a large amount of personnel but we had a band. The first night I got there

30:30 I heard the music in the distance and I thought, "I'll go and join the band." I heard the band playing over at the hall. It was pitch black and I put that guitar out there on my shoulder and I carried it like a rifle. I was walking in there with my eyes on the lights and suddenly I stepped into space

31:00 and fell down about six feet and I couldn't see anything and I didn't know where I was, I didn't have the faintest idea. So I inched my way forward and bumped into a wall and turned left and bumped into a wall; I inched my way this way and I started to go up hill. I walked into a swimming pool with no water in it with a guitar on my shoulder, they were digging it and they hadn't tiled

31:30 it or anything. I eventually got there and I sat in with the band and I had quite a colorful career at Oakey.

Were you severely injured after this plunge into the pool?

No.

You weren't?

No I landed on both feet with my guitar still on my shoulder, a bit of a jar I suppose.

32:00 **I'm not surprised.**

About six foot I dropped, I suppose

You just referred to a colorful career, what was this colorful career?

They put me in charge of the 'Oakey Dokes', a concert party which went to Toowoomba and Albury and that was quite a laugh, I found the program last night and I hadn't seen it for fifty or sixty years and

32:30 I saw it last night.

What did the 'Oakey Dokes' concert consist of?

It was a variety show, we had a ballet, musical acts, sketches and from what I learnt in Amberley I knew how to put a show together, how to balance and speed. I was a fanatic on continuity never

33:00 a dull second.

You believed in a fairly fast pace?

Yes.

How had you learnt that?

I don't know, I was always too fast actually. I read another thing, I only read about myself and I was working with a Canadian in the show and this

33:30 American officer went up to the Canadian and said, "Tell that tall guy not to go so fast." He said "It might be alright in the northern states where he comes from." He thought I was American. "I'm from the south and we like it a bit slow."

I've spoken to a women who worked as an actress in Hollywood and she said she had to do diction classes to slow herself down, so the average audience could understand what she was saying.

34:00 Yes.

You were the producer of the 'Oakey Dokes' show?

Yes.

How did you get involved in that?

I only found this out last night as well, when I was reading those letters. A fellow called Pete Stringer was in charge of the concert party

34:30 and when I got there he was posted and he was looking for someone to take over. And what I think is, looking back, he didn't want to give it to anybody because it would have made them jealous of each other. So when a stranger comes in with a bit of knowledge and a bit of ability "Beauty! We can put him in charge and they can hate him," so I think that's how it happened.

Was there any ill feeling from those other people?

35:00 No I got on pretty well with everybody straight away because I knew what I was doing, I shorten them all up and cut them all down, and my own musical scenas .

Musical scenas, what do you mean by that?

You pick a song and

35:30 let's say you are doing Red Sails in the Sunset, they have got red boats going past while there is ballet and they are all in naval outfits and it builds up the song. I did some blues, one of the girls was singing it and I blacked up my face and I was leaning against a barrel or something

36:00 playing on it on the guitar, and there were others singing harmony with black faces, that's a scena, make it look like a wharf on the showboat, and it went real good. She'd sing, "I Hate to See - " "- What do you hate to see, baby?" And answer all the lines and that's a scena

36:30 it builds up the song, and there I was in charge of a concert party.

How many people were in the concert party?

About thirty I think.

Were they all personnel from the base?

Yes because unusual acts like

- 37:00 a bloke who was a wizard on spoons – ‘cutlery clatter’ – he’d only do one number and then off he’d go and then the next one was on.
- I believe there is quite a long tradition of spoon performers?**
- Yes and he was good too, but as long as you kept them all short
- 37:30 nobody got bored.
- What sort of audiences were you playing to?**
- Civilian audiences at Toowoomba at the Town Hall, I can’t remember.
- Was this a fundraising enterprise for anything?**
- Yes
- 38:00 probably war bonds, but I can’t remember what it was called. While I was at Amberley I did a lot of war bond shows on backs of trucks in the main streets at Ipswich and suburbs of Brisbane.
- When you were touring out at Oakey what was an average size of an audience?**
- 38:30 Three or four hundred, the halls were full and of course I’d write the stupid commercials about the different firms and well known firms in that town that always went well.
- Can you give us an example?**
- I can remember Maggie Morgan and she had a
- 39:00 beauty salon and everybody knew this woman and I think her name was Maggie Morgan and that’s when I said, “Girls when you sit on a high stool, are you suffering from a hang over then see Madam Morgan’s Corker Canvas Corset?” And I went into it, but I can’t think of any others.
- 39:30 **Ok and I image they went down very well with the locals?**
- Yes and they’d always get a scream.

Tape 5

- 00:30 **Just before lunch break we were talking about the ‘Oakey Dokes’ and you mentioned it was quite a large company?**
- Yes about forty all together, I’ve got the names over there and they were all from the unit and they had all been in
- 01:00 show business and that’s what made it a bit funny to be put in charge of them. Technically I was a raw amateur.
- How did you take to the role of being the producer of the ‘Oakey Dokes’?**
- Naturally, every thing was common sense to me, later on when I
- 01:30 did turn professional , when you first come out and present yourself and you look good, and the second was to be heard and understood; that was obvious it to me, to be heard and understood, work to the back row, it was obvious that you ignore the front row and work the back, these things were obvious you didn’t have to be taught. It’s like some things that you don’t have to be taught, I didn’t have to be taught flying because I was
- 02:00 a natural straight away.
- What happened after the ‘Oakey Dokes’?**
- I got posted to Townsville.
- What happened there?**
- Quite a lot of things,
- 02:30 there again I got mixed up in local civilian shows. I was waiting to go overseas and it had nothing to do with the drawing office. The band leader was a sergeant Sloan from Melbourne and he was a sergeant cook. So that I wouldn’t have to go on parade
- 03:00 he made me a mess steward, which was easy. I had to just serve breakfast and serve lunch and the rest of the time I had to myself, so I wrote music. I can’t remember how long I was there but then suddenly we got bunged on a troop ship and away we went north.

What was your destination?

03:30 We didn't know, it was New Guinea, to Biak, and Biak was where I was unloaded and that was in the Dutch East Indies and from there I went to Morotai.

How did you feel about leaving Australia for the first time?

04:00 I had been wanting to get away ever since I joined up, so it was very exciting and I was twenty one then.

You mentioned all the places that you visited, were they stop overs to get to Labuan or did you spend time in New Guinea

04:30 **and along the way?**

Stop overs.

Tell me about your arrival in Labuan?

The funniest story there was when they unloaded us and when I say us, there was only five of us at Biak, and there was no port so they lowered you down on a barge and of course you can imagine

05:00 thousands of troops onboard and I had entertained them all and they all knew me. Still I got down on the barge with the guitar and they said, "Give us the Fuehrer!" Can you image singing on a barge with thousands of troops, they couldn't hear me but they were all laughing.

What were they yelling?

"Give us the Fuehrer!"

05:30 By that time that was my Hitler character that I used to do with the hair down and a black mustache and a Swastika. That became my sort of signature tune for the rest of the war and I learnt that at Oakey.

06:00 The only thing that you could hear from there was my 'raspberries' [flatulence sound], which were very loud I could do a very loud raspberry, I won't do it now because I would blast the microphone.

Maybe if Graham is prepared, could you give us some of it?

"When the Fuehrer says 'it is the master race';
We had (raspberry) a (raspberry) in the Fuehrer's face;
"

06:30 So that was why.

I was wondering if you could do the whole song or is that or part of it anyway?

I can do part of it.

That's very funny.

Golly gosh there is a lot of it.

Even just like a couple of verses?

07:00 \n[Verse follows]\n"Goering says 'they will never bomb this place;

We have (raspberry) a (raspberry);
In the Goering's face;
And the Goebbels says, something or other;
we have (raspberry)
Is this Nazi land is good
Yah this Nazi land is good;
Would you leave it if you could;
"

07:30 Yah, we would if we could;
"

We bring to the world new order;
Hail Hitler's world new order;
Everyone of the foreign race;
Will love the Fuehrer's face;
When we bring to the world this order;
And the fuehrer said 'this is the master race';
We have (raspberry) a (raspberry);
In the Fuehrer's face;
Not to laugh that the fuehrer is a great disgrace;
So we hail (raspberry) a (raspberry);
In the Fuehrer's face;"
"

08:00 And there are a whole heap of new verses.

I didn't splash you did I, I hope I didn't splash the lens.

That was fantastic, how long did it take for you to perfect the raspberry?

I had no trouble, it must've come naturally, straight away.

You were performing this after you had been dropped over the

08:30 **side of the boat into the barge?**

Yes and they all knew me for doing that because I had done it on the ship, I use to do it on every deck in little spaces, wherever you could fit and I used to entertain here there and everywhere and we were on the ship for a couple of weeks. Then the craziest thing happened, the barge pulled in and we got picked

up in a jeep and they took us up to the orderly room at

- 09:00 62 Wing which was my unit and there was nobody there, there was nothing there it was deserted. Nobody knew that they had all gone so they sent signals and made phone calls and they said "62 Wing has gone to Morotai," and the ship that I just got off was on its way to Morotai. They said, "We will fly you up tomorrow morning, we have a C47
- 09:30 flying up tomorrow morning," and we were all stinking because we had been on the ship for two weeks and you can't do any washing and our clothes are all nasty and smelly. The next morning we got up and they flew us up to the strip and we go up to the plane and the pilot says, "What are you blokes doing?" and we said, "We are going to Morotai," and the pilot says, "Not on this flight you're not." He said, "No.
- 10:00 This plane is full so you will have to wait until tomorrow morning." We go back and we slept on the floor of the orderly room the night before. We went back and we got a big half forty four gallon drum of water and lit a fire under it and boiled the water and threw all our clothes in it, so we were standing around the wharf with sticks washing our clothes. Up comes a jeep,
- 10:30 and someone said, "You're on the flight after all." We had nothing on and all our clothes were sopping wet. We had to get them out and wring them out and put on wet clothes, we only wore two garments a pair of trousers and shirt and go back soaking wet back to the plane and the rest of our gear was soaking wet in the kit bag.
- 11:00 They put us on the plane and we flew to Morotai and we got to Morotai before the ship. The ship didn't get in until the next day so when the ship came in I was down on the wharf with the guitar, they couldn't believe it. There were a lot of crazy things that happened.
- 11:30 Then I went down to 62 Wing Unit and they had never heard of us, never heard of us and didn't know anything about us. They said, "We will give you a tent down the end there in the mud," so they gave us a tent to sleep in and we reported to the orderly room a couple of times a day to see if anybody had heard of us, nothing.
- 12:00 One day we were walking along the beach at Morotai and the LST - that's the landing ship tanks - use to come in and open the doors and drop the bow and get off the Yankee sailors and they could get stuck into the drink, they had drinks onboard. They weren't allowed to drink onboard in the American navy, the ordinary ranks are not allowed to drink onboard the ship. So they would drop
- 12:30 the bow and go ashore and drink as much as they liked and then get back on the ship again. We were walking along and we came across these fellows who were drinking on the beach. "Hey the guy there with the guitar, give us a tune, mate," so we sat around and they gave us drinks and I was playing away there on the guitar. They happened to say to us
- 13:00 "What outfit are you with?" and we said "Well we are not with any outfit at the moment they don't know us," We went to the mess to get something to eat and we said, "We are lost." "You mean you don't have a unit not an outfit?" W said "No." "Well come on board and we will see the skipper." Would you believe, we were on that ship for five weeks and I
- 13:30 had to do was play the guitar every night. We went ashore each day and went to the orderly room. I enjoyed that and incidentally they had a library on the ship and there was a great big thick book on American folk songs so I got that out and I learnt one hundred and fifty four verses of Frankie and Johnny
- 14:00 I read them I didn't learnt them all, but I memorized quite a few of them. I thoroughly enjoyed myself and so I was back with the Americans again.

What was the name of that ship?

LST 936 and there were quite a few LSTs. It was waiting for

- 14:30 4ACS and 5ACS that's 5 Airfield Construction Squadron for building airfields. They had bulldozers, graders, tractors all this heavy machinery and came the order that they had to load up and 5ACS loaded up on the LST 936 and 5ACS was part of 62 Wing.
- 15:00 Suddenly they found out who we were and where we were supposed to be. We were on the right ship just by accident. Then came the time when we sailed around by the Philippines and down south to Labuan and landed there on the June 10th 1945.
- 15:30 It wasn't as much fun with all the other fellows on board, we had had a great time. We had to sleep on the deck, we had bunks when the other boys weren't on board. The bunks were reserved for the officers in the squadron so we were stuck up on the deck and slept out in the rain every night. Then we landed at Labuan on the Buin Peninsula, which was what we called it then.
- 16:00 I went ashore with a rifle over one shoulder and a guitar over the other and hanging onto a kit bag wading waist deep to shore. It took us a week before we had a camp settled and during which time we slept wherever we could, under trucks and under any bits of shelter that we could find.

16:30 **You mentioned coming into shore with the rifle and guitar on your back, what else do you recall about the landing at Labuan?**

The noise, we were with the American Navy, but the Australian Navy was actually the Royal Navy but it was full of Australians and it was known as the Australian Navy at the time,

17:00 with the dirty big heavy guns firing over the top of us. The noise, the noise from the ships themselves anyhow we staggered ashore and the Salvation Army was there with their urns, they were marvellous. They were always in the front line, or close to the front line,

17:30 they always had cups of tea and biscuits for us. I can remember climbing up the cliffs and getting on the top near the airstrip which we had to rebuild, there were five hundred bomb craters on the airstrip, it had been a Japanese airstrip and we bombed it so they couldn't land and there were lots of Japanese wrecks there,

18:00 and lots of Japanese personnel. Fortunately the bullets we could hear were spent, when a bullet reaches the end of its force it topples and all you could hear were the bullets fizzing out but they were flying past you but they were from so far away,

18:30 mind you they would have hurt if they hit you. Then the guns from the shore - and by this time the twenty pounders [artillery] were firing from the army and then you'd hear the bombs going off and then whiz whiz and then you'd hear them explode, and the further we went in the closer the sounds got together, it use to be boom! Whiz! Then boom

19:00 whiz boom! You then got closer to that sound until you got more than half way and you heard the shell before you heard the gun go off and that was fascinating. We did what we had to do for about a week and then we finally got settled into a tent.

Just going back a bit, was this your first experience

19:30 **at being under fire?**

Yes.

What was going through your mind at that time?

I was excited, I thought it was great.

What about fear?

You see fear works in different directions, I mentioned fear before, and with the first show I did I was scared,

20:00 I was terrified of needles, inoculations I use to hate especially, the way they did them in the service, because they'd give you four at once and then they'd bung [shove] the needle in and then squirt and then screw the syringe off and put another syringe and put another needle in while the needle was still in there. That use to scare me and I was scared of a lot of things, I don't know I wasn't really scared

20:30 then, sometimes I was. It's like as I said before memories work, I can remember lyrics, I only had to hear them once and they'd stay there. But other things I would forget and I still do. I go across the road for a bottle of milk and I come back with a packet of margarine or something.

21:00 I picked up the language pretty quickly, languages to me were similar to lyrics. Before I left the island I was singing in Malayan of course; that was the 10th June and we had quite a few weeks to go before the war finished.

You mentioned that there were some

21:30 **Japanese plane wrecks and also some Japanese personnel, I gather they were live Japanese?**

Yes, but I didn't know how many. I know we bumped off a hell of a lot and I didn't know until I went back in 1995 and there is a memorial to them, but in this pocket there are four hundred and fifty

22:00 buried there, I didn't know we bumped off that many, I didn't think we did. They had no fear, the Japs.

Did you fire your weapon at the enemy?

No I had it cocked a couple of times, I was terrified of booby traps, now that's one thing that I was scared of because they were very good at booby traps, the Japs.

22:30 The placing of wires where you couldn't see them, simple ones and they'd have a grenade jammed in the fork of a tree, low down with a trip wire, and if you pulled it out it would go off. I was scared of that because I'm so clumsy I fall over everything and I did trip over a wire there and I fell flat on my face and just waited

23:00 for over ten seconds and nothing happened so I was right, it was only a telephone wire that was down.

What was your impression of the Japanese?

They were the enemy, you are taught that you can't win the war without hate so you are taught that they were the enemy,

- 23:30 it's a terrible thing. I had no love for them at all, I had no compassion for them until at the end we did take a couple of prisoners. Not me, but one of the band boys who was in the band at that time,
- 24:00 he got two prisoners under his care Sammy and Mooch he called them. When I first saw them and met them, "These blokes are human." It was a surprise to me that they had emotions and all that the same as us, so I just changed just like that
- 24:30 my attitude towards them. He said that he had woken one up that morning and the bloke was sound asleep in a cage and he went in with his rifle and he put his big boot over his head and the Jap woke up and he said, "Suddenly I realised that they are human too." He felt so sorry for them that he went and got him
- 25:00 a tin of sardines out of the mess and gave it to him, that was funny but war is crazy.

You mentioned that there was about a week before you set up camp, what were you doing during that week?

In seven days we had the airstrip done,

- 25:30 it wasn't finished, on the 17th and we landed on the 10th but on the 17th there were two C47 transport planes and a couple of Kittyhawks, it was still only dirt, but they were able to land. During that week we were filling in the bomb holes, down at the south end there was 4ACS and I was
- 26:00 with 5ACS and the north end and they both had rather different systems. We had pumps for pumping out the water and 4ACS were pumping out water and we were just filling them in, the water there was so hot in the daytime that it evaporated. Then we joined in the center
- 26:30 and I was on the southern end so I was just helping. When a raid came, and this is what the Americans weren't taught, the Americans would dive underneath their vehicles to stop the bullets but that was the silliest thing to do because they were aiming at the vehicles
- 27:00 with their bombs they were trying to blow up the vehicles. So when a raid came you shot through to the jungle as quick as you could and disappeared, it was too risky to stay with your vehicles.

Just getting back to the Japanese and the landing there were four hundred and fifty Japanese that were killed. Did you see

- 27:30 **many of the Japanese people dead?**

Yes. I was with a Flight Lieutenant Savor, and Smithy would have been about forty and he was an old man to me because I was twenty one or twenty two. I had so much admiration for him and I'm sorry that I never met him after the war

- 28:00 because he though I was an idiot, and what does a twenty two year old know about anything. I use to hold the staff and knock pegs in the ground and he had the light and we'd come to a swamp or something. "Oh, you're not going to go through that?" and I'd stay on the side of the swamp and he'd come along and he was only a short stocky man
- 28:30 and he'd come to the edge and he'd go splash splash and he never missed a beat and I'd have to carry him. Then we came across a dead Jap and he said "We should bury him you know?" and I said "What, go to all the trouble of burying him," he said
- 29:00 "He might have a wife and kids back in Japan?" I said, "So what, we should bump them off too this is war," that's what you think when you are brain washed. Actually we didn't have a shovel, but if we did have a shovel he probably would have made me bury him but we didn't. There was a terrible terrible smell with dead bodies. After a few days
- 29:30 they were crawling with wildlife and all that, they had some ants and maggots and things. Not so long ago we had a reunion on Anzac Day with the gang and we were all laughing about things and a fellow said "Do you remember this?" and he pulled out a photo of about fourteen dead Japanese right outside our camp and I thought
- 30:00 'Gees, did that really happen?' and of course it did. Those are the sorts of things that you'd like to forget, you never talk about that but they were brave blokes.

There were fourteen dead bodies right in your camp?

Yes. They had no hope we out numbered them.

- 30:30 **What kind of an impression did that leave with you?**

Somehow or other there is some part of your brain that is numb at that time because talking about fear

again I'm still a coward when it comes to hospital things and broken bones I can't stand the sight of blood and I

31:00 thought to myself 'at least I've cured myself of the fear of blood and broken bones' but I had only been home a couple of weeks and I was back to my own self, I went back to being scared of all things. You are sort of numb and it's terrible when you wrap your mates in a blanket and put them in the ground.

31:30 When I went back in 1995 there were eleven hundred and forty graves. They were not only of Australians but of Indians and British. I feel more now than I did then, over in war you expect to get killed, but

32:00 it does change you the horror.

How did it change you?

It changed me into sort of a machine during the war when you are there because it's a matter of survival. If you see a Jap and you don't shoot him first he will shoot you and so I often had the rifle cocked when I was

32:30 in the jungle. We had been well trained down at Victoria and you eat in the jungle you keep your ears open you weren't even allowed to

33:00 use scented soap or smoke strong cigarettes, or anything like that because that gives you away. But nobody told the Americans about that, they were smoking Camels and things and you could smell them fifty yards away. When they had something to eat they'd sit around in a circle looking at each other, so you dodged them or avoided them because they just weren't trained

33:30 in jungle warfare.

You mentioned that in the jungle you often had your gun cocked ready to fire?

Yes.

Did you ever come across any Japanese?

Not a live one no, fortunately, he probably would of shot me first. That was my

34:00 experience but nothing like some of the army blokes. We were all technicians and the funny part of our unit, 62 ACS Wing, that our job was to build things and repair

34:30 things, if we built the airstrip we had to repair the town for the locals and repair all the roads and all the damage. We were the opposite to most services, we had to repair and build things and not destroy them which was rather good. Our motto was 'Always First', because without the airfields,

35:00 you couldn't land any aircraft.

Just getting back to the airfield construction again was that with the sixty two wing?

Yes the 62 Wing. A wing consists of a number of squadrons and the wing was 4ACS that's Airfield Construction Squadron, 5ACS,

35:30 22MCS which is a medical things like a hospital with a big marquee, a refrigerating squadron and that was all I think in 62 Wing

What was the role of your section?

There was another stupid thing, I was in a mechanical draftsman, and I was trained as a mechanical draftsman.

36:00 They sent me to a 62 wing which was a survey squad, we built the drawing office and it was built in a couple of weeks and I was hopeless. There again the reconnaissance aircraft would come back with aerial photographs of where they had to bomb because we were going to bomb Indochina which is now Vietnam, which wasn't far away.

36:30 They'd bring back these stereoscopic photographs, the two photographs and the frame with the two lenses and I'd look through them and they'd say, "See that crater there?" And I'd say "No, where?" "There!" It didn't work with me, my eyes are totally different, I have six different lenses in there.

Six, oh my goodness, yes you do too.

They are all different, I

37:00 see two of everything when I haven't got my glasses on. The camera on my left I see in my right eye and the camera on the right I see with my left eye; and that's why I was so clumsy and falling over things, that was when I found out I wasn't so miserable about myself. I couldn't see those and they thought that I was useless, and I was.

37:30 But I loved the field work and everybody else hated it. The draftsmen hated going out in the sticks and

knocking pegs out in the jungle and I loved that, so I took everybody's shift to do survey. Of course I thought the world of Smithy.

You must have gotten to really appreciate the landscape?

Yes.

Can you describe it for us?

38:00 It wasn't all that pleasant, the beaches they looked nice, but there were nasties in the water. We had a few deaths with

38:30 box jelly fish and sea snakes and they can be deadly so you had

39:00 to be very careful. We used to go in the water with our long trousers and boots.

And there were some deaths?

Yes, we lost a few.

What did they die of?

Sea snake bites or the jelly fish.

Tape 6

00:30 **You were describing the landscape?**

Nothing to rave about in the way of beauty but it was very interesting; some of the villages were great. After the war had finished then we were able to visit a lot of villages and places and got to know the natives very well.

01:00 But while the war was still on we had to keep on guard. I was on guard one night and I used to take my tin hat off and you weren't suppose to, and sit on it. You are supposed to stand for two hours by a tree looking around, but I'd put my tin hat at the base of the tree and lean against the tree and look around.

01:30 This Japanese bomber came over with it's lights on. I thought, "What the heck?" And of course all of a sudden there was a red alert, a red alert was when they fired red flares up in the air and everybody dived into the trenches. When we got that way that we didn't dive into the trenches after a while because they

02:00 would run out of bombs I think. Why they still flew over I don't know and I don't know why anybody would fly over with his lights on because they shot him down. I thought "What peculiar people, why would they do that, the Japs?" I said "I'm going to find out, I will go to Japan and learn the language and talk to them

02:30 and find out what sort of people they are." which eventually I did and I sure learnt a lot about them. But I still didn't learn why they flew over with their lights on.

You mentioned briefly the locals, what were the locals like?

The locals

03:00 had been previous to the Japanese invasion of Labuan. It as part of British North Borneo and there were about eight thousand people on the island and about forty British empire builders, for people who looked down their noses on the natives. When the Japanese came it only took

03:30 eight Japanese to occupy the islands, with the forty British there. They came in a big launch and declared it Japanese, they bumped off a lot of the Chinese there, they hated the Chinese and the Chinese were their main enemy. The Asians and the other Malaysians in a way, they thought

04:00 "Instead of being occupied by the stuffy old British you'd be occupied by other Asians who probably understand it," That wasn't how it worked, they were really strict and ruled the islands with an iron rod and they weren't very popular at all. They use to bully them and be cruel and so on. When

04:30 we came back, when they heard the British were coming back, they were happy about it because the Japanese had been cruel, so they weren't looking all that forward to it because they thought they'd be just as stuffy as the old mob. When the Australians were there they couldn't make us out at all. I've got a book there by one of the Malaysian politicians and he said,

05:00 "When the Australians landed it would appear that rules were only made to be broken." They didn't give a stuff about anything else, they used to take the kids for rides in the trucks and gave them food and clothing. You'd see some of them getting around in shorts eight times too big for them. So we were pretty

05:30 popular and we liked them.

Did you befriend any of them?

Yes. A Chinese doctor who had an English wife, Dr Lim, he had been a prisoner all the time and he was going back to his village

06:00 and it was about a four mile hike and we were invited out, myself and a few others and with a couple of officers. We went out to the village and we got a great welcome and they had a thirteen course Chinese meal and I've never had that before. I couldn't believe this English woman,

06:30 a lovely lady, how she was living out there in the jungle in this completely socialistic village, what I mean by that I mean everybody shared everything. They'd go out and catch all these fish and bring them in and dry them on racks. They had big stores in the middle where they put the rice and everybody shared everything. She was a doctor too

07:00 and she was a well educated English woman living out there and seem very, very happy with her Chinese husband. One of the idiot officers that I had gone out there with, it wasn't long after the atomic bomb, they were talking about it and this idiot officer said, "I'm glad they stopped at Nagasaki; they should have wiped them all out, they could if they had enough bombs. Who wants the Japanese race? They are no good to anybody; wipe them all out." The look on this English woman's face - she sort of pitied him, anybody could be so stupid to talk like that. They were

08:00 very, very nice people and I liked them very much. Another time another mate of mine, Frankie Oaks, he spoke fluent Malayan; he learnt it very well and it was much better than mine. In those days we use to call them Mohammedans; it wasn't Muslim or Islam it was Malaysian. It was Mohammedan Year and they were having a big do [function] out in this jungle

08:30 which was seven miles. I wasn't able to get away until about five o'clock and Frankie and I hiked this seven miles into the jungle with torches and arrived there. They had had guitars but they had broken strings, so I had a lot of make-shift strings, I made strings out of signal wire and all sorts of things, so I

09:00 fixed up two of their guitars. But they hadn't played them for years probably. I tuned them up and got them going and they sang Terang Bulan which is one of the prettiest melodies and now it's the Malaysian national anthem and they play it at a march,

09:30 Terang Bulan means 'the light of the moon', and it's a real pretty tune. When I went back in 1995 they were doing it, it's a good anthem it's a good tune, it's like Waltzing Matilda, you can do anything with it, but this

10:00 night, they sang it in harmony. God I nearly cried, it was beautiful.

Was it the beauty of the music that moved you so much?

Yes. Then I had to go on and do my silly stuff of course.

10:30 Largo, I've forgotten it now but it was the song of a WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK [chicken] and they thought that that was hilarious and then I did Ya Sa Tidak Ada Pisang. I remember that, which means, 'yes, we haven't had bananas'.

11:00 [? 'singing in Malaysian' - [Ya sa tidak ada pisang, ini hari] And they thought that that was hilarious too.

You followed this very beautiful song?

Yes, that was one. Another song that moved me, you had to be there to hear it, it was when we pulled the prisoners out

11:30 of Kuching, this was after the bomb had gone off toward the finish. We went down to Kuching and pulled these prisoners out and some of the British Tommies [soldiers] had been there for some three and a half years. They had written a song When We Sailed Down The River To The Sea, their prison camp was on the Kuching River.

12:00 Somebody had written this song and they sang it with such gusto and feeling, it was only a simple song
\\n[Verse follows]\\n "When we sail down the river to the sea;\\n And this jail is just another memory and we will be free;\\n As we were in days of yore, and we will see;\\n Life as we've never seen before;\\n Let the

12:30 Dayaks and the Dutchman and the Chinese fight about it;\\n

They can have their Borneo and we will get by without it;\\n And we sailed down the river to the sea;\\n There will be happy, happy days for you and me."\\n

The Dayaks were actually the aborigines of Borneo.

It's amazing that

13:00 **something so simple as a song can move you so much to this day?**

Yes.

Thank you so much for sharing that with us?

Pleasure.

It's really lovely that you can still sing them as well I'm getting a real sense of what it was like.

13:30 **I know the war had obviously finished by this point but I'm hoping that you could describe to me where you were when the war had finished?**

We heard in the mess one night, it must have been about

14:00 August 7th, we heard about this bomb, we had no idea it was a big bomb, we thought it was just a big blockbuster or something, and the Japanese had given in. We couldn't believe it and of course the Japanese who were still on the island, they didn't know, so the war wasn't over for us.

14:30 There was a British ship that came in to Brunei Bay and hit a mine and five young fellows were killed in front of it. This ship carried a lot of 'pen pushers' as we called them, they were army blokes and they were coming in to retake the island for England,

15:00 to re-British it. They didn't have a ship when they were brought ashore and we put them up in the camp near us, so they were stuck there. One of the fellows said to me, "Hey there is a piano

15:30 accordion player in that bunch of Pommies." I said, "Oh beauty, send him over, if he wants to come around to the mess tonight." This chap came around that night with his piano accordion in good nick because it was hard to keep things in good nick up in the tropics. We played and had a jam and he was great, he

16:00 was younger than I, naturally, and he was very good and I said, "What's your hours?" and he said, "I haven't got any, we are just here, we have nothing." I said, "You're in the concert party" because by this time I had the 'Tangle Foot Show'. There was myself, Sammy Joe and Brian McGuinness, with Air Force Bluey on the drums, so there were four air force. There was

16:30 Harrison from Newcastle, and Johnny Hendricks from Adelaide, that was two sax players they were and myself, and Harold was the piano accordion player. He was tall with glasses similar to me and the two army blokes were both blonde fellows and the drummer was a red head.

17:00 So it looked rather good, the band. There was Harold the tall dark, then a blonde, a red head a blonde then myself tall dark, it was a real good line and it looked good. We practised like hell and we did so many shows and we were busy all the time after that, that concert party. Sammy was a tenor from Melbourne

17:30 and Brian McGuinness who only passed away last year who had been living up here at the coast, he was compere and straight man to me by this time. I was the comic and he was the straight man.

Did you play at a celebration for when the war ended?

No, because we didn't feel that it had ended,

18:00 it didn't sink in and nothing had changed. We still had to keep our eyes and ears open, it didn't matter how many Japs were still hanging out in the jungle.

What sort of performances would the 'Tangle Toes' do?

18:30 'Tangle Foot Show'.

Sorry, 'Tangle Foot'.

We started off with an overture, I've forgotten, isn't it funny. Then Brian and I would go on and do a bit of comedy and we'd put Sammy on

19:00 and Harold would do a solo on the accordion, and then I'd do another cacophonous thing and so on, and they were great days. Then of course when my unit, 62 Wing, was disbanded so I was with 5ACS and 5ACS was

19:30 put into 81 Wing which was a fighter squadron. I was all looking forward to going to Japan. The officer that I told you that I admired so much, the surveyor, he was the welfare officer.

That was Smith wasn't it?

Yes Arthur Smith,

20:00 Flight Lieutenant Arthur Smith, and he was responsible for keeping all the troops occupied, he'd run the library and organised listening, he got a gramophone from somewhere and some records and he'd

have you listening to classical music. He always had something on, and he had me busy all the time which was good.

20:30 He had me taken out of 5ACS and put into RAAF Welfare which I was horrified, terribly disappointed. I had to spend a lot of time with the prisoners that we were pulling out from Singapore and we

21:00 had big camps there and they were just marquees and there were hospitals marquees where these poor skinny bony characters -

Where was this?

Labuan. My job was to go around to the different beds and talk to them and some of them remembered a lot of music. They were giving me prewar

21:30 songs, "Do you know so and so?" or "Do you know this?" "Do you know George Formby [comedian]?"

They wouldn't have heard any of the recent music because they'd been in prison?

No, so I was able to do all that.

What kind of impact did that have on you, seeing the POWs?

The first thing

22:00 was the different attitudes. Some of them had no hatred at all of their captives. In fact when I went to Kuching the Japanese colonel in charge, who committed hara kiri [suicide] with barbed wire, he killed himself by running his throat up a barb wire, I don't know how he did it. That was the way that they

22:30 were trained. The Japanese had contempt for our prisoners because they were taught to commit hara kiri rather than be captured. When our fellows wanted to let their folks at home know they were still alive that was the lowest thing to a Japanese, you'd never let people know you were taken. How low can these

23:00 people go? They had contempt for us because of different cultures. Poor old Sugar committed suicide, and a lot of them did. But as I was saying the different attitudes, some fellows said nice things about Sugar,

23:30 and there were a lot of kids at the camp at Kuching and every Christmas they would get parcels from Japan from Sugar's wife for each kid at the camp. They were allowed to put on a Christmas pantomime and concerts, but they wouldn't let them put on Humpty Dumpty because they

24:00 must have got a big egg thing and painted it and they thought that they were taking the mickey out [making fun] of them, because it must have looked like a Japanese sitting on a wall and falling and breaking, and it looked as though they were taking the mickey out of the Japanese. But they barred Humpty Dumpty and I thought that was strange. Some of them were so bitter you couldn't get any sense out of them.

24:30 Then the post master's wife at Kuching, Billy Tate, who I became very friendly with, he was a lovely man and he was married to a missionary. He was so reasonable and broad and Mrs Tate was so narrow and so bitter,

25:00 nothing like him. She just hated anything to do with Japanese, which is rather strange because you're not suppose to be like that in a missionary, are you? I don't think. There were lots of different attitudes. Some of the stories didn't mesh sometimes, the imagination got the better of some of them I think, and they might have

25:30 forgotten things. But, like I said before, unless you write something down when it happens you forget.

Why were you so horrified to be transferred to the welfare?

I wanted to go to Japan, I was dying to go to Japan; it would have been really exciting. Now, looking back that was the most useful thing I did during the war.

26:00 **How much of a help did you feel for these guys?**

I never really thought I was good enough for anything. I didn't think I was good enough to be living in this business, even then I just knew how to make servicemen happy, I knew what they wanted. I never dreamt that I would go into this business

26:30 when I got home. I thought that I would go back to engineering. That was useful and I didn't realise how important entertainment was until later on, years later I worked for the British Army in the Middle East, the American army in Germany, it's pretty

27:00 important to keep morale high.

What made you realise that it was important?

It was a long time after the war, I think it was after I became a professional civilian entertainer. People took you so seriously, they really

27:30 thought you were good but I never thought I was good. I still get a shock when I listen to some of my old tapes I think, "Gee, did I do that?" From there that was the end of

28:00 December 1945.

I'd like to know more about Smith and what kind of a man he was because you obviously admired him a lot?

He always treated me as an idiot because he knew that I was. Another thing that I remember was

28:30 when we were surveying the airstrip and there were some tombstones, a cemetery that had been there for hundreds of years with British names on the tombstones, and he said, "What are we going to do with this?" I said, "Those tombstones would make good gravel, grind them up and run the strip over that." He said, "What about the sacredness of it?"

29:00 and I said, "They have been dead about one hundred years and nobody knows they are there now, and just build a strip over the top," which we eventually did do. There are still bodies underneath the end of that strip somewhere. We did use the grave stones for rubble in the end, the war was still on and you don't stop to think of things like that.

29:30 He was so humane that he didn't want to do it. He said, "What about the sacredness of it?" Ignorance of a twenty two year old, but later on looking back I admired him.

What was he like as a person?

Real down to earth and he was built like a tank, nothing slowed him down

30:00 or stopped him. I remember he had bad teeth, there were a lot of other people that did dentist work. I use to disappoint him in a lot

30:30 of things because I wasn't quite enthusiastic enough. He organised a night of jazz and classics, "You're on the jazz side, you have to put some of the jazz with so and so and so and so," he wanted to make it sort of a bit of a battle, and he wanted me to

31:00 make out that jazz was a lot better than the classics, but it wasn't to me. I enjoyed classics too, I wasn't going to put them down, it was a classic that was putting down jazz all the time. I remember saying, "One's for your feet and one's for your brain,"

31:30 or, "My feet are bigger than my brain," something silly like that, too flippant. I disappointed him with some things.

How long did you work with the welfare section?

Up until the December, the war finished in August, on

32:00 August 24th Gracie Fields came up, that's when I really started I think, up until then I was still working on more things. There were eighteen thousand in the audience, there were twenty thousand on the island, and eighteen thousand came to this concert. We built a stage

32:30 and we had cone speakers hanging on palm trees way back and this was what I often think of, I went to Dee Why RSL [Returned and Services League] last Sunday week because Tubby was judging the dancing the girls, she was a judge. I played there myself many times in pantomime and I used my own sound in there and as I said

33:00 the second commandment in show business is to be heard and understood. They had all this equipment and speakers as big as wardrobes and you couldn't understand what they were saying. It was a horrible sound, they had this great big desk with forty million slides and things. In that concert there were eighteen thousand in the audience and we had a big amplifier built in a cage,

33:30 with dirty big valves, two knobs, volume and tone. One microphone insert and there was one microphone in the center of the stage that picked up the whole band, when groups were singing and everybody and everything you said and every word could be heard right out to those eighteen thousand people,

34:00 Why cant they do that today, with two knobs?

It's too complicated, there's too many things, with graphic equalizers, it was good enough and you could hear every word that Gracie Fields said. The biggest laugh that I have ever heard anywhere

34:30 in show business was on that night. Remember I said before that we didn't have much respect for some of our officers and that day there were fellows sitting out there on four forty gallon drums since ten o'clock in the morning, so they could get a good spot. There was the bull ring reserved for officers with stringed rope around it and all these drums for them to sit on

- 35:00 and they'd come in at the last minute. Around about ten to, or quarter to eight, all the officers started to come in and you heard all the troops mumbling, saying rude things. There were all the officers, in the front in the bull ring. The comic at that time was Jack Hoskins and I've never heard of him since.
- 35:30 He was a comedian from Perth, a very funny comedian. Rodney Jacobson who was on radio from Sydney, he was the compere. He raced out and introduced the show and Jack Hoskins raced out and whatever they had rehearsed, they didn't do it. Jack came out to Rodney in the middle of the line and said "Gee, Rodney, it's easy
- 36:00 to see that the war is over." It had only just finished, and Rodney said, "What do you mean, Jack?" "Look at all the officers in the front line." Well you should have heard the eighteen thousand, there were hats and ground sheets going up into the air and it went on for a good thirty seconds and they were all sitting there looking silly, they were right in front. I have never heard a bigger reaction to the one line than that.
- 36:30 I was on the first half of the show and as far as I'm concerned that was the
- 37:00 start of my career because it was great, fantastic, it's the biggest audience and I've never had an audience that big since that show and I've never gone better than that show.
- What did you do at that performance?**
- Hitler, and that brained them and that was good. Then the end came and the rain came and poor old Gracie,
- 37:30 she had to sing in the rain, but she was great. In her entourage there was a fellow from 2SM the radio station, and when I got posted back home down on the wharf,
- 38:00 you do some stupid things sometimes, I said to some perfect stranger, "Do you want a guitar, I don't need this anymore?" and I gave them the guitar. I got tired of it, I had done so much of it. Then when I got home, Mum said, "2SM has been ringing up for you." I said, "Really, what for?." I rang them up, I had the number and it was John Bunt and
- 38:30 he said, "Can you come in and see us and bring your guitar?" and I said, "What for?" and he said, "They tell me you were very good when Gracie Fields was up there." I said "Yes, but I'm not interested in doing anything now, I'm going back to engineering." That was what I thought I was going to do. He said, "Come down and have a talk and bring your guitar." So I went in and talked and I did a bit of what I did and I said, "No I don't want to do anything, I'm only good for a service audiences,"
- 39:00 He said, "Will you do a show in the British centre?" which was in Hyde Park near Anzac House, but both buildings have gone now and I said, "Alright." I went into the British center to do the show and it was broadcast and I was so terrified then, that was fear, I was sick out in the garden,
- 39:30 that's how scared I was, broadcast on the radio. I did the Hitler thing, they were all British soldiers and it all went terrific and I did something else I can't remember, and I came off and there was a phone message from Charlie Sleet who was the musical director of Barton Follies, the touring road show. He said, "Do you want to come away with Barnes for a year?"
- 40:00 He said, "Can you drive and do maintenance on a truck?" and I said, "Yes," but I couldn't because I hadn't done it before, but I would soon learn. He said, "Come away with us for a year," and it was January and he said, "But you won't be able to start until next December" and that was 1945.
- 40:30 End of tape

Tape 7

- 00:30 **Just for the record, the Army Amenities Unit was a fairly big deal, did the RAAF have any equivalent to that organisation?**

Not as big, because there were so many army concert parties, I can only remember three official RAAF concert parties, Harry Ditt had one, Billy Bennett had one and Jim

- 01:00 Davidson, I think a band leader from Melbourne.

Presumably they toured around Australia?

The one from Melbourne had just performed in one of their first spots in Townsville. That's where I saw them, I presume from Townsville, they went straight up to the islands.

The activity

- 01:30 **that you were involved with the concert parties that you were involved in were purely unofficial and voluntary?**

yes

That's quite a wonderful thing to have done.

Yes.

I wanted to clarify what you meant by the fact that when you appeared with Gracie Fields that was your first show. What do you mean by that, because you have done dozens of shows up until then?

That was the first big show,

02:00 there were a lot in that show and there was a big band on stage. The first of any importance, Gracie Field was the biggest name in the world at that time as far as the female entertainers went, so it was pretty good to be on the same bill as her.

Quite a privilege and yet despite the great success you had in that show

02:30 **you couldn't at that time see yourself developing a show business career?**

No, funny I didn't feel that I was good enough. Even at night I didn't even know how well I had gone, it was just another show. I had gone off the stage and I was down under the stage and there was

03:00 cheering out front and someone said, "Get back up there," so I had to go back on again.

So you had an encore?

Yes.

How many encores did you do?

I did two numbers and then went off. I remember I was putting the guitar away and they said, "Get back on there, listen to that," it didn't register. I didn't know what stopping the show meant in those days.

03:30 **You appeared on radio in Sydney and after that you were approached to appear in a touring show?**

Yes but this was January 1945 and they were already booked up for that year

04:00 and they booked me for the following year which opened in December.

What did you do in the meantime?

I was still in the air force then and you were entitled to take rehabilitation courses and I had being trying to decide which one to take engineering and I would have liked to have done aeronautical engineering, but I don't think there was a course.

04:30 I thought if I was going to earn a living at music I'd learn something about it. I went to the Con [Conservatorium of Music] that year and did theory and history and music and did learn something about it, so I did know what I was doing then, I had just worked out everything for myself up until then.

Up until then everything had been instinctive basically?

Yes

05:00 and from books, I had a lot of books.

Let's deal with your discharge first, when were you actually discharged from the RAAF?

January 1946.

What did you do after that before you went on the road with this show?

There was an RSL talent bureau and there were all sorts of entertainers who got out

05:30 of the army concert party and there was a lot of work around Sydney, like the sonic ladies nights and all sorts of reunions and things so there was quite a bit of work. Apart from stage work there was what we use to call parlour entertaining and you got booked for private parties and you worked in a lounge like this

06:00 with no sound or anything, and I did quite a lot of that. For twenty firsts and weddings and all sorts of functions.

That must have been quite a good testing ground for you though?

Yes it was and it was that period where I was starting to get a bit of polish and become more professional and then you don't go as good.

06:30 Because you haven't achieved your polish and then you go on confident. When you are a bit shy you go better, they think, "Yeah he's trying hard." So I developed that and when I eventually went away with

the tent show and it was a lot of experienced entertainers they groomed me.

Tell me about the tent show

07:00 and who was actually running the tent show?

Barton's Follies was a big tent show and there were sixty five people involved. The tent held twelve hundred and we used to put the tent up for a week in the towns where the agricultural shows were performing. I learnt everything I could in that show, how to put up tents, how to drive a maintenance truck,

07:30 how to rig stages, put the curtain rigs up and I was selling programs out front. I was playing in the pit, doing a spot on the stage and working on the sketches, you couldn't get that experienced now anywhere. Sniping, do you know what sniping is?

I've got one idea but I don't think it was what was happening at Barton's Follies?

Sniping is sticking up bills where you're not suppose too.

08:00 We use to post up bills on telegraph poles and things. Sniping in those days you use to even chalk on the footpath, 'Don't forget Barton Follies in town', and do a couple of foot steps and say 'All steps lead to Barton's', and this was all sniping.

08:30 Who ran Barton's Follies?

A family, originally they ran a circus. Granny Barton was still alive and was in her seventies and Roy Barton was the boss of the show, but granny did all the work and she was marvelous. I was on eight pound a week

09:00 at the time and Roy Barton would think nothing about losing a hundred pound on a horse on a Saturday and he expected too much from everybody. After I had done three months with him I was in Sydney in 1947,

09:30 I went down for the Easter break, I had joined him in December 1946, and at the Easter break I had to drive a tractor chair truck from Muswellbrook to Bathurst, drove it around the back road through Sofala and up that way. It was a terrible road and we had nothing but trouble with the trucks,

10:00 I had tyre trouble, I had the great big balloon tyres on the Ford truck I was driving. Keith Testro the juggler he had burnt out a clutch and we had to tow him, it was a terrible trip and it took us three days, and we weren't getting paid for this. He said, "Take the trucks to Bathurst and then you can get the train home" we had to

10:30 pay our own fare home. He expected a bit too much of us so we got to Bathurst on the Easter Sunday and we had left on the Good Friday. On the Easter Monday I got down to Sydney on the train

11:00 I rang up Roy Barton and said, "We got the trucks alright but we had a hell of a lot of trouble." He said, "Yeah, but as long as you got them through?" and I got mad, I had something in my eye which was irritating me for a couple of days so I was real cranky. I thought, "How about him he couldn't care less." I went into

11:30 Will Andrates Theatrical Agency, and I said, "Have you got anything for the next few days, I'm in town for a week?" and he said "No, but the only thing I've got is a trip to Japan if you want it?," I said "Really?" and he said, "Jack Mortimer refuses to be inoculated and he won't go" He was a comedy violinist, and they wanted another comedy musical act,

12:00 I said, "Right I'll go." I rang up Roy Barton and said, "Roy I'm not coming back. "He said, "You can't do that, you can't walk out of a show." I said, "Well I've just done it," and he said, "You will never work again in Australia," and he said, "I will see that you never get another job in Australia." I wasn't on contract and he wouldn't sign any contracts, he would break them himself.

12:30 The show was the 'Amazing Mr Rooklyn' and he was a musician so we went around his place and rehearsed, there were eight of us in his show, including his brother Jack Rooklyn. The world's greatest manipulator,

13:00 he produced nine billiard balls from nowhere and all the time you were talking to him, and he was ambidextrous. He had a penny and from either hand the penny would go from there to there to there, up and down the fingers and back again on both hands, while he was talking to you, he was practicing all day, amazing his hands.

13:30 I toured with Murray up until November and Jack Rooklyn Murray's brother brought over a show from American and he put me in it so I worked at Tivoli at the end of 1947 and then I went back to Japan.

You went to Japan for the first time in 1947 was it?

14:00 After Easter 1947.

Easter 1947 you went to Japan for the first time?

Yes.

The Rooklyn experience preceded or followed that?

No I went with Rooklyn.

You went with Rooklyn to Japan. Where does the British Commonwealth Occupational Forces come into this?

That was it, we were working for the British Commonwealth Occupational Forces. I went up and again

14:30 with another show called 'Going Great Guns' and then they went back home and I stayed on and worked with another show called 'Miles of Smiles' and after that they went home and I stayed up there. Then I was with WKLS, the radio station, for a very short time and during that time I tried to get a job with the Americans.

15:00 I went to see the General up at Yokohama in charge of special services entertainment and I got ushered in and I said "I'm Jeff Mac and I'm an act from Australia and I've been working up here for blah blah blah." He said, "Now hold on there boy, hold on, I'm from Georgia,

15:30 and I haven't heard one word you've said, slow down." So I slowed down and went through it all again, but I didn't get a job.

So you were still with BCOF [British Commonwealth Occupation Force] at that point?

Yes.

Can we look in a little bit more detail with BCOF because it's an area that we are certainly interested in for this project. I think the concert party that you were

16:00 **involved in was part of Army Amenities wasn't it?**

Yes.

What was the name of that particular party?

'The Amazing Mr Rooklyn'.

'The Amazing Mr Rooklyn', was the headline act?

Yes.

In the Army Amenities number ten concert party, was this Australian Army Amenities?

Yes.

This was a continuation of the organisation that Jim Davidson had run?

Yes, and the man in charge was Ernie Dunn up there

16:30 and he was good to me and that was why I was able to stay on because we worked the Australians, the British, the Indians and then with the 'Miles Smiles' we went and did the Americans too. I was with the Indian Air Force entertaining the day that India got its independence in 1947 from England. They had

17:00 RIAF [Royal Indian Air Force] on their uniforms, and the next day they came back with IAF [Indian Air Force], they had all changed it.

They had only taken the R away?

Yes, they had changed their wings.

It must have been pretty extraordinary for you to go to Japan and had probably given up on the idea suddenly to be there?

Yes and

17:30 everywhere I had ever been I always go native, I disappear into the homes. I had an international head, I must have, because I've always been mistaken for a local in places like Malta and Italy and Germany, they think I'm a local.

How did the Japanese think you were a local?

Only at night when I use to sneak into the night clubs

18:00 and sit down and shrink down to their size and the MPs would come around because there was a curfew on and they didn't even notice me. I had black hair and glasses, so I got away with it. I became very friendly in Kure with a Japanese photographer

18:30 and this is how my interest in photography came out. I use to stay with him, sneak out of course and get

back in time for breakfast in the morning at Kure and he showed me all the dark room techniques and they were well ahead of us and the British because when I went to England and went into a dark room I had

19:00 more modern ideas.

We are talking about still photography?

Yes and I've got a darkroom down in the shed still.

What specifically got you interested in still photography?

If I take up something I want to do it properly, when I took up music I wanted to do it properly so that's why I went into engineering, I don't just dabble in it

19:30 I want to know everything about it. I'm always curious and that's why I didn't get on with my father in some ways because I was always asking him questions and he never knew, he wasn't in manufacturing and he never knew nothing about

20:00 mechanical. As soon as I got a car I had to know everything about it, I was driving at twelve, so I wanted to know everything about the camera. I had the whole kit with filters and God knows what, and I've still got it down in the shed.

The same kit?

Yes and I've still got a lot of the same filters

20:30 and self timers and all that for the cameras, clock work cameras.

What sort of subjects were you photographing in Japan?

Everything but mostly people, I've got lots on people and people that I've met. I learnt the techniques from my friend.

What interested you or motivated

21:00 **you to want to photograph people?**

I don't know I like people and I was very interested in them and I wanted to remember them, as I do I've got thousands of photos of people that I met in Japan and I made a lot of friends.

How did you become involved in cinema photography?

I brought

21:30 a box camera, box movie Kodak movie boxed camera and it was a sixteen millimeter and I didn't know I was going to get a interested as I did and took a black and white film and sent it home to be processed in Melbourne and they sent it to me father and I sent a projector home.

22:00 As a matter of fact I've still got the projector our there a 1927 model, except you can't get a lab for it but it still works perfectly. He was rapt in the film that I sent back so I was thrilled, so I started to take more then.

You had sent it back to him for processing?

You couldn't process it up there.

How much did you pay

22:30 **for the camera?**

Twelve thousand saccharine tablets.

Pardon me?

That was very good, there was no sugar in Japan and saccharine was so needed and of course it was quite illegal.

23:00 **Where were you buying the film stock?**

In Japanese camera shops they still had some, actually in 1947 I only sent home in black and white and about a couple of hundred feet that was all. But in 1948 I got a whole heap of Kodachrome which was eight

23:30 years out of date but the films are still good.

The films are still good to this day?

Yes, they held their colour.

You described to me concentrating on people as far photography was concerned, what did you

focus on with your movies?

Where we were up to in the show, mostly things like aquaplaning on the Inland Sea, there were no water skis then

- 24:00 we had to aquaplane and because I was a genius at falling, I was hopeless I used to fall off every time. I got lots of school sports and things that I photographed, hot springs down at Begot
- 24:30 the usual things, things that you wouldn't see back at home and a lot of people on the movie screen too.

Once again you focused on a lot of individuals?

Yes.

Were these people that you were photographing in both still form and movie form, people that you knew?

Yes and a lot of them were and a lot of them weren't.

- 25:00 When I got to Tokyo I met up with Colonel Wilson again that I met in Brisbane and I photographed a lot of his things. He took me to garden parties and I got them all stilled.

Sounds a really unique and inventible record actually?

Yes.

- 25:30 **You mentioned going native into whatever country you went into, you mentioned about going into Buzz in Japan, did this include meeting and befriending Japanese people?**

Yes a lot of them. I made up my mind earlier that I was going to understand these people and I think I mentioned it earlier on that I learnt more about Australian history in Japan than I ever knew

- 26:00 in Australia. They had been taught, like we had been taught all the terrible things about them, propaganda wise, they had been taught a lot of things about us. While we were popular in Japan they were taught that we were great big hairy animals, that were going to rape the women and do all that and of course, when we befriended them they were
- 26:30 pretty happy about it. I met a lot of people but first of all I met a lot of house girls and took them out to different places and a lot of people like that and they took me on picnics.
- 27:00 Which many of the other people in our show weren't interested in so I eventually bought a push bike and I use to ride out to little villages way out of town and started talking to people, they were very puzzled to see this long skinny Australian riding on a bike.
- 27:30 They would invite you in for tea and I just loved meeting the people and they were very very gentle. Getting back to the history I met a bunch of school girls from a Catholic convent, they hadn't been disturbed in any way during the war, they kept to themselves
- 28:00 and they spoke English these girls. I was talking to them one day and we were talking about cruelty, about how different people and the terrible cruelty during the world and I happen to say, "The worst was the concentration camps in Germany because those people were only ill treated because they were only Jewish, homosexuals, gypsies
- 28:30 or mentally retarded people." Whereas our prisoners, we were servicemen and we expected to be treated badly. I said, "I think the concentration camps were the worst in the world" and one of the girls said "Sydney started off as a concentration camp didn't it?" I said "What?" She said "People where taken there by people who didn't want to go there,
- 29:00 people were taken against their will." The cruelty was terrible in those concentration - and all those triangles [whipping posts]." She was telling me all about our early history, they had been taught all that I wasn't taught all that at school. She said "Australia was still importing slaves up
- 29:30 until 1904." I shot back to the library in Kure and checked up this and that was right, we were still 'black birding' [forcibly recruiting Pacific Islanders] in 1904, bringing the Kanakas [Pacific Islanders] into working in the sugar cane without paying them. There were these kids and they knew all about this, I got quite a shock. Japan was so clean, they are so
- 30:00 spotless because you don't wear shoes in the house. When they drink, they never put their lips on the side of the glass, they put the glass underneath and suck from the top and that's why they make a noise when they drink, because it's bad to put saliva and lip marks on the cups. Things like a bowl
- 30:30 of nuts or cookies or anything you never put your hand in it, you tip a couple out in your hand like that. If you put your hand in it, you've got saliva on your fingers. I think of this every time I see doing this at parties when they dive into a thing of nuts. When you go to a Japanese restaurant
- 31:00 the chop sticks are in one piece, and you snap them apart so that you know that they have never been used. Someone asked me, "How do you feel about putting a spoon in your mouth when it has been in

thousands of other mouths?" I never thought of it, but they do, they think of it. Kissing was a no no in Japan, because it involves saliva, because they had a thing about saliva. They were horrified when they saw American films and people kissing on the lips.

31:30 **What sort of things were you discussing with the Japanese when you went to visit them in the towns and the villages?**

They would ask me questions because there again it was such a culture shock and one of the first questions they ask you, "How old are you?" Because that's a very polite question, because the older you are, the more respect they have got for you, not like out here when people try and hide their age.

32:00 They say, "How much money do you earn?" It's quite a polite question to ask in Japan, so they are the type of questions that they would ask me. They were completely honest, so I'd be honest too. Where they weren't honest is in one of their customs, "Never burden anybody with your problems," if you have got a headache you don't tell anybody

32:30 because it is your problem. That's why you think they are a bit deceitful but it's their manners, you're not allowed to burden people with your problems.

Sounds like you got to know them fairly well?

I did.

I believe you had a Japanese girlfriend?

Yes want to see a picture?

We will have a look at the picture later. How did this come about and what can you tell us about it?

33:00 I met her through the photographer actually, but it was a very strange thing, something that will never happen again. I was brought up in the first half of the century, my parents were Victorian in their ideas and I was taught to always stand up when a lady enters the room, and pull the seats out, open doors for them.

33:30 The Japanese are the opposite the Japanese girls are taught to do it for the men, so here we were trying to pull out each others seat, it was funny. In Japan the man walks ahead in the street, things have changed now I'm sure and of course I didn't know where I was going. So I said, "No you walk in front," and she said "I couldn't do that, that's not done," and I said

34:00 "I don't know where I'm going," and we use to go sight-seeing and things like that.

Did this turn into a deeper kind of friendship?

I was very upset and sad when I left. I thought "I'll never see you again," or see a lot of them again.

Did you wish that you could see her, if you were saying that you were very upset?

There was no point, because there was no way that she would have ever left Japan,

34:30 not many Japanese did ever leave Japan, they do now I suppose. My intention was to see as much of the world as I could which I did.

You say that you were very upset?

I was sad.

That implies that there was a fairly close relationship between you?

It was a mutual exploitation,

35:00 that's what I mean, I was able to give her things that I could get in the canteen. I don't think she would have been too proud to tell anybody that she was knocking around with me being Australian, that's what I think, so I never went to her home, we always went to other places.

Did you discuss with this women or with any of the Japanese that you met and talked with did you discuss the war

35:30 **with them at all?**

Yes, like I said, I was talking cruelty with those kids, in their propaganda we were very cruel to our Aborigines.

So what sort of cruelty were you emphasizing to them?

Torture, they did some dreadful things, the Japanese, let's face it. Mostly to Chinese

36:00 but there are people in every race that are capable of cruelty, including Australians.

The conversations embraced the fact that yes, the Japanese had been cruel to people including our POWs?

Yes, and they said, "The Japanese hadn't done anything that the British hadn't done,"

36:30 the British were terribly cruel, the Dutch in the Dutch East Indies were very cruel.

Did you ever see or hear about any of the brothels in Japan?

Yes but I didn't go into any but I knew where they were. There's another thing that I'm very scared of. I

37:00 would be terribly scared to get involved in that way because I'm scared of hospital and medical things.

Obviously you had heard some cautionary tales about sexually transmitted diseases?

There was so much amongst our troops, yes.

Had you heard any stories that particularly put you off?

I had friends who were

37:30 getting treated for those things, that put me off very much.

I believe while you were touring you even did an act in Japanese?

Yes first of all the Army Amenities decided

38:00 that musical and side acts, that's musicians and jugglers, and I came under the heading of a musical act not a singer. Comedians and singers they didn't want, they put us into schools, some of the schools were missions but mainly just to show the kids what nice fellows that their father had been fighting against, I think that was the idea.

38:30 I could do noises and sound effects like tiger, "Where's that tiger?" (Japanese), things with few words in I just translated it into Japanese. One of the things I did was along the Navaho Trail

39:00 (Japanese) but it was terribly hard to rhyme in Japanese, every sentence finishes in a verb, so I would sing without rhyming some of them. I thought, "What would I do for these kids?" and I said, "what do I do for Australians kids?" Things like Green Grass, Old MacDonald had a Farm,

39:30 that's a good idea I will put that in Japanese and that became (Japanese) which is literally Old Macdonald Had a Farm.

How did the kids respond?

They loved it with the help

40:00 of the house girls, all I had to do was get the animals names and the sound effects.

Tape 8

00:30 **We had just covered the fact that you performed a special version of 'Old Macdonald Had a Farm' to children, what happened then?**

Later on I did it for the adults but with the kids I did cow (Japanese) but when I did it for the adults I did cow (raspberry).

01:00 (Japanese) It used to go down well with the adults.

You were determined to keep practicing those raspberries?

It's a funny thing with humour, because the Germans used to love the raspberries, but the sober people they didn't think it was very funny. But they would laugh at other things that the other people didn't laugh at.

Did you do any of the raspberries

01:30 **for the children?**

No.

Why not?

I didn't think it was nice.

Could you sing the version of 'Old Macdonald Had a Farm' in Japanese?

(Japanese)

So you work your way through all the key animals in the barn yard?

All the key animals on the farm, yes.

02:00 That must have had them in hysterics?

Yes.

Were you aware of any black market activities at that time?

Yes, I was very much involved actually, I ran everything. I knew black marketeers, you could trust them all. Later on when I went to Europe they were all

02:30 crooks, but in Japan they seemed like nice people. One of the high ranking officers said, "You know where to get the best prices for these?" and I said, "Yes," things from the canteen, chocolate, soap, cigarettes, saccharine, if

03:00 you could get raw sugar, that was good too.

What would you actually do?

When I was working at the radio station I'd go in in the morning, I wasn't allowed to be funny they were very serious those radio programs. They'd say, "The time is nine o'clock,

03:30 you are listen to WLKS, the voice of the British Commonwealth Occupational Forces, and the time is nine o'clock, and we present strictly instrumental and to kick off the program this morning, Nat Canella." It was the one program, that was all that I did at nine until eleven in the morning.

04:00 Then I used to go into the colonel's office and he had a bag behind the door and I'd pick up the bag and go out and I'd see what it was, chocolates, cigarettes, get good prices. Put the bundles of yen back in and take it back and put the bag behind the door. Some mornings I'd go in and there would be a bag there, but nearly every morning there was

04:30 because he used to do other people's black marketing too. At that time it was about one thousand yen to an Australian pound on the black market, where as you got forty nine yen if you did it legally.

Were you getting a commission out of it?

No.

You were doing it as a favour, were you?

They were doing me a favour by letting me stay

05:00 on as a radio announcer because I wasn't really qualified for that. Then one day I went in and the colonel said, "I'm sorry they have woken up to you at headquarters in Melbourne." Somebody had dobbed me in and he said, "You have forty eight hours to get out of the country," actually I was deported from Japan. I thought,

05:30 "Now I will try and get a ship to Canada if I can," because a British passport was good in Canada and we had British passports. If I can't get to Canada I will see if I can get to England, if I can get to England, I'm not going back to Australia. I wasn't going back I was determined, I would sooner go somewhere else. If there are no ships going I would disappear for a while until

06:00 a ship comes in, to go to Canada. There was a boat going from Yokohama to London, a cargo ship, and for three hundred and thirty pounds. It was eight weeks and that covered the trip to London from Yokohama. It was a fantastic trip I went from Yokohama,

06:30 around to Nikon then across to Kobe and then across to Tinsin in China and I spent a couple of days there and then from Tinsin we went down to Hong Kong and spent another eight days there. From Hong Kong to Singapore, I spent about over a week in every place. From Singapore to Port Swettenham,

07:00 it's the port of Kuala Lumpur, actually, and from Kuala Lumpur to Ceylon, from Colombo to Portside, Portside around to Tangiers and from Tangiers to London it was a fantastic trip.

Sounds a great trip, were you using your 16mm camera on this trip?

Yes but

07:30 you listen to the advice of experts and you shouldn't because I had a Japanese Arrow and by this time a Japanese Arrow movie camera was perfect and it was a great little camera. They said, "Don't take it out of the country, you will never get any parts, you will never get any film, take an American camera." So I swapped it for an American Victor, I had trouble with that Victor camera all the way, I had jumpy film, even that film you saw

08:00 of Shanghai there is jumpy bits in that. It didn't go too well but I wish I had kept the Arrow. I got rid of

the Victor as soon as I got to London.

Just to back track a little bit, this was after your second tour of Japan?

Yes.

You had been there in 1947, how did you come to go on the

08:30 **second tour of Japan?**

The Amenities called me back and I was very, very happy about that, they requested me back again. I had only just got home and worked the Tivoli, apart from that couple of months in Australia. I was a year and ten months in Japan, minus the trip back.

What was the mood of the Japanese, post war?

09:00 It was good, MacArthur did a good job. They thought he was a great guy and of course they thought he was going to be the big conqueror. He did the right thing, he let them keep their religion. He helped them to rebuild Japan because it was in a terrible, terrible state, apart from the atomic bombs

09:30 they burnt the other cities because there were so many wooden houses, it was terrible.

There was a lot of bomb damage in the other cities?

Yes, Kure where my photograph friend was, he was just in the middle of a whole heap of rubble on all sides in his little photography shop.

10:00 You couldn't help, you couldn't hate them when they come out of these bombed buildings; this was eighteen months after 1947 and I spent quite a bit of time in Hiroshima as it was being rebuilt.

That must have been quite

10:30 **extraordinary following, where entire neighborhoods were flattened. What specifically did you see of the nuclear devastation in Hiroshima in terms of after- effect?**

There was still a lot of flattened buildings, they were still building it when I was there.

11:00 There were a lot of people who had been burnt, but most of the victims had moved away from Hiroshima. They wanted to forget all about it, but some of them had come back and they were scared and burnt and all that, it was a terrible thing.

What was your view when you heard that Hiroshima and Nagasaki had been bombed?

I thought that was great. I think

11:30 if we would have had to vote on it at the time, in 1945 before it happened, if somebody had said to us, "We are going to bomb here and it's going to wipe out a whole city," and we would have said "Yes go ahead and use it," and most of us would of said yes, because we were going to lose so many more thousands of lives, we lost thousands in Okinawa,

12:00 to invade Japan we would have lost, because they are pretty fanatical.

I imagine this view of the atomic bomb bombing of Japan had changed once you saw Hiroshima and Nagasaki, did it change at that time?

My view?

Yes and initially you said it was great, but when you got to Japan what was your view?

I thought it was horrible, but I sort of understood it.

12:30 Actually the bomb changed a lot, remember me talking about Harold the accordion player from London, he was Jewish but we had the same ideas. I've always had a doubting nature even at school. I doubted a lot of things in history. They said that the moon pulled the water up at high tide, I doubted it.

13:00 Then I used to get a popular magazine and they spoke about the atom bomb. I thought "How are they going to do that?" The theory was how they were going to split the atom. You look at the atom as a little solar system with electrons, neutrons and protons buzzing around and the theory was if you got all the planets and put them in a gun and fired them at the sun it would split the sun,

13:30 what a load of codswallop! [nonsense]. Well they did it, didn't they? And that's how they did it. I thought, "Well, science is right." It altered a whole lot of my thinking in life.

When you got to Hiroshima and Nagasaki, what was your response

14:00 **to what the nuclear devastation had done?**

I was there during an earthquake in Japan, on the other side of the country, and there were more people killed in the earthquake then there was in Hiroshima, there were over one hundred and eight thousand

killed in the earthquake.

Has your view of the

14:30 **advisability of the atomic bombing of Japan changed over the years, or did it change at that time?**

Yes because it made me think about it, but first of all I thought "Yes, it's a weapon, it does more damage than any other weapon," but any weapon is a terrible thing, even guns

15:00 I hate them. I still feel that it saved a lot of lives, a lot of our lives.

I believe at one point you were asked to perform for General Blamey? [Australian Commander in Chief during World War II]

Yes and that was up at Tokyo. I was up there with Colonel Wilson and I was his guest at the time and he put on a special

15:30 party for General Blamey and invited me to come along and entertain him. But I don't think the General was very impressed with me.

What did you perform?

A lot of American jazz things, I used a vocal of Twelfth Street Rag

16:00 which nobody else did.

What was the reaction on Blamey's face?

None, he wasn't impressed. A lot of people are like that, and they don't like

16:30 anybody to get the attention, I've met a lot of people like that.

What was your view of Blamey, anyway?

I didn't have much of a view or opinion of him all through the war, because he didn't seem to be a good leader to me.

17:00 **As you were saying earlier he wasn't that visible?**

No, all he did was talk.

Just dealing a moment longer with your touring of Japan with BCOF - what sort of venues were you performing in?

Theatres, they all had their movie theatres and they all had stages. Sometimes in messes. but not very often,

17:30 the Indians didn't have a theatre so we performed in their mess. They were a good audience, the Indians, we were there for about a week in Miho and I became very friendly with a Sikh engineering officer, Singh, a lovely man and he was wise and I loved talking to him at nights.

18:00 When they got their independence that week he said, "We learnt a lot from the British, but the British learnt some things from us too."

I bet they did over all that time?

Yes.

You have dealt with having to leave Japan how did you feel about this, what was your reaction?

18:30 I was pretty sad at first, but then there was another adventure, eight weeks on a cargo ship which was good fun.

It must have been quite a shock actually to have to leave Japan under those circumstances?

Yes, but I wasn't really all that surprised, I was lucky to be getting away with it - what I was getting away with - I wasn't all that upset once I got on my way.

19:00 **How long had you been involved in the black market activities?**

Since the day we got there I think.

You mean through both tours?

Through both tours, but I will tell you we had theatrical baskets full of props and some of them were never opened in the theatre because

19:30 Jack Rooklyn was with us and Jack was a very shrewd businessman and he had all sorts of things that he

heard. Someone told him that they were short of knitting needles. They didn't knit so that was a bomber you didn't get anything for them.

How many knitting needles?

He had thousands.

He had taken thousands of knitting needles to Japan?

Yes.

20:00 **Can you describe Jack Rooklyn as a personality?**

You have heard of him?

Absolutely, he's quite well known.

He was a character with his yacht. He used to be in the Hobart Yacht Race and that sort of thing.

Are you saying that he was involved in the black market activities as well?

Yes and that was why he went. He was

20:30 just a good businessman, as I told you he was the first man in Brisbane to bring poker machines into the Red Cross Club, the American Red Cross.

Apart from being a good businessman and I had never met him and he's somebody that has now passed on, but can you describe him as an individual, as a personality?

He was always good to me and for some reason he always like me and that's why he got me the job in the Tivoli.

21:00 I got on great with him and Murray, they were both friends right up until they died, Murray was like a father to me in some ways. He use to nag me and look after me, and as a matter of fact in November I've got to do a thing up for the Magic Circle and give a twenty minute talk on

21:30 the 'Amazing Mr Rooklyn'.

This is Murray?

Yes.

Because of his dexterity?

Yes and the things I got up to with him.

You mentioned a military colonel, you didn't mention what nationality he was. Are we talking about Australian - American - the colonel that was involved in the black market activities?

Australian.

He was an Australian colonel?

One bloke sold a command car,

22:00 Red Robby we use to call him, an officer.

'Red Robby' was involved in the black marketing?

Yes.

He was a legendary figure?

Yes, everybody was.

Everyone was involved?

Yes.

In black marketing?

I think so yes, you didn't think of it as a black marketing business. I never had any conscience about it because

22:30 we were making a lot of people happy. I don't mind breaking laws if you are going to make a lot of people happy, and nobody was suffering and nobody was being unhappy about it, everybody was agreeable, so I don't see anything wrong with that.

So in a sense you saw that as a victimless crime?

Yes that's right. There were no victims, everybody was happy, everybody.

23:00 **What sort of profits were people making?**

I can't remember, but I got up to it again in Germany later on. A carton of cigarettes was

23:30 so many dollars, we used to get thirty marks for a carton of cigarettes so that was roughly ninety shillings I think, because there were three shillings to a mark, when I first went there.

24:00 **I just wanted to get a summary of your life after the trip on the cargo, your final destination was England wasn't it?**

London.

Can you summarize for us what happened to you in the years that followed?

I starved for quite a while in London, I used to live on five pounds a week because I only had forty pound when I got there and it lasted me

24:30 for eight weeks. Luckily I got work in the photography business as a photographer because, as I said, I knew so much, I couldn't believe how much. They were behind the times, they were. I had an Australian friend there who was doing night club photography

25:00 'Back in Half an Hour' prints. When I first went I couldn't believe it. He had to plug into a wall and carry a handle around with a 500 watt bulb in it and a switch on it. To take a picture he'd switch the switch on. Take the picture and then switch it off. It was almost a flash. The only flash light then was only the magnesium tray

25:30 which you couldn't work around a thing, or these enormous flash bulbs - they were big light bulbs. He couldn't carry enough because of the number of photos that he took in the night club. You'd carry a box as big as a car battery and it weighed a ton over your shoulder

26:00 and that was the first flash lights. You needed all that power to get enough light to take pictures.

The photographic technology that you had brought from Japan was actually superior I gather to what you found in England?

Yes, when I went into the dark room, they were so slow because the temperatures were low and I had a box as big as that and put two 100 watt bulbs,

26:30 closed the lid and put the developing trays on top of the thing and it warmed it up until 70 degrees and it did the films much quicker.

Who were you actually taking these photographs for?

I had three clubs.

You were photographing in night clubs were you?

Nightclubs yes.

Of clientele?

The Leg Row

27:00 was a posh club, all guards officers and people like that. I had to do an audition, I had to go down in what I wore, in a smart tux. So I wore a stage tux and all I was allowed to say was, "Would you care for a souvenir photograph, sir," because the boss thought that I might have

27:30 been too Aussie, "Do you care for a photograph, mate?" So I had to put on a posh voice and that was all that I was allowed to say. I was allowed to answer any questions if they involved me in conversation, but you didn't make a nuisance of yourself, that was one club. Then the Stork Club that was different again. Jack Spot came in there one night and he was the number one criminal in

28:00 London and I had to take his photo but the boss said, "Don't take him, don't take him." He sent one of his henchmen over and said "Hey, come over mate," and I wasn't going to argue with them, so I took his photo and I had it back within half an hour.

At what stage did you get involved again in show business?

28:30 I worked with Mark the photographer, and he had the 500 watt lamp and he got the mini flash, that was a mini flash with that great big battery.

In terms of returning to performance?

I saw one hundred and nine agents in London before

29:00 I got a job at the London

Palladium.

No, this was a dump, but it wasn't a bad theatre

The Windmill?

29:30 I didn't audition at the Windmill, they used to have Sunday concerts there and I met a lot of people including Harry Secombe and people like that.

Approximately how long after you arrived in England did you re-enter a performance?

I landed in England on the 8th December 1948 and my first

30:00 performance was about March and I was on the 'Cheerful Charlie Chester' show.

After that for some time you performed in army camps?

Yes I went to Germany after that, because that show for me was very successful, I learnt

30:30 that you don't go better than the star.

Who was the star?

Cheerful Charlie Chester, he was quite a big name.

Were you better than him?

I was great, I got a big write up in the paper and he got a little write up on the bottom, so he hated me.

31:00 He told the agent never to book me again, and his agent was the only one that knew me. Australia House, that was our address, all the out of work Australian acts in London used to go in there and in the morning we would starve together and I met David Williams,

31:30 who was a baritone, and he was married to Barbara Lee and he managed to get a good job in London working with Jack Buchanan and poor old Dave felt a bit out of it. He took me around and introduced me to this Scottish agent who was booking Germany, so I went to Germany.

32:00 That Scottish agent was a bit of a crook and he still owes me eight hundred pounds sterling. He left me stranded for five weeks with a Canadian tap dancer who wasn't really Canadian.

There is obviously a lot of detail that we could go into here but in terms of

32:30 **performance, did you continue on as a performer for so many years after that?**

Yes, and in Germany, I was always performing for the Americans.

When did you actually retire as a performer?

I haven't retired yet.

You are still going out and doing shows?

I haven't done many this year, but my next one I've got is December.

I believe one of your

33:00 **better known exploits and this was the 1960s was the writing of "I've Been Everywhere, Man," can you tell me what led to the writing of it?**

I had been a couple of years up at the Hotel Coolangatta in 1958 and 1959 and I was coming back and the club scene was booming at that particular time.

33:30 I thought, "What am I going to open my act with?" Early one morning I got up irritable thinking, "What the heck and I'm I going to do. I have to write something?" At that particular time there were a lot of corny twelve bar rock things like, See you later, Alligator, and

34:00 Rock Around the Clock was a twelve bar, Giddy Up a Ding Dong, all these stupid things that annoyed me. I was listen to them and there was hardly any tune in any of them and I thought, "A bloke should write one with no tune in them at twelve bar." As I said that I was looking at some road maps and I said, "I wonder if any of these towns rhyme?" And that's what I wrote, there's no tune

34:30 it was a chant, it's a chant not even a tune. I thought, "That will do."

\n[Verse follows]\n "It's nice to be back in Sydney and ask me what I've seen;\n If you settle back and listen I will tell you exactly where I have been - "\n

I just wrote it as

35:00 a throw away, something to get on with. Then Johnny Deland with Nat Kipner, that American, started a publishing company and rang me up and said, "Give me some songs, we need some songs," so I took five songs in that I thought were a bit alright and he said "What about the one with the towns?" I said, "That's only my opener. Nobody will want that."

- 35:30 I said, "I haven't even got it written out," he said, "Sit down and write it out," and I said "I haven't even got a verse for it." He said "Well sit down and write one," so I sat down and was mumbling away. In those days you had to have the lyrics and melody line, there were no tapes or cassettes in those days in 1959.
- 36:00 I said, "How am I going to write this? Every town has a different number of syllables. Wollongong is three, Geelong is two, Kurrajong is three, there is two, three and four syllables in all of the towns, I can't sit down and write that." Graeme Bell the band leader,
- 36:30 the jazz man, I played with Graeme's band in 1957. I said, "How am I going to write this Graeme?" and he said, "Nobody will do it anyway, just make it a chant, put a semi abbreviate and type and mark like that." And that's what I did, so I forgot about it, nobody will want it. It was the only one out of the six that took off.
- That's fantastic, it's become a legendary Australian song now.**
- 37:00 I was talking to Canada the other day and she's actually an English dancer married to a Canadian bass player that I use to play with in a band in the Middle East. She said they were having a Hank Snow festival
- 37:30 in Halifax in Nova Scotia and she said, "They said on the radio that one of Hank's most popular songs, that he wrote, was a song called I've Been Everywhere, and here he is," she got on the phone and said, "Hank Snow didn't write that."
- You wrote an American version did you?**
- Yes, as a matter of fact, and it would have been a couple of years ago, before Hank Snow died, a Canadian radio station rang me up.
- 38:00 They had asked Hank Snow where he got the Indian names from in the song. Hank said "I didn't write it it was written by a guy in Sydney, Jeff Mac," and apparently they got my name off the internet or something and rang me up and said, "Where did you get the Indian names from?" I said, "What Indian names?," and they rattled them off and I said "I didn't know they were Indian names."
- 38:30 **The names of cars?**
- No they were names of towns.
- The town names just happen to be Indian names?**
- Yes, I got them out of the atlas with a magnifying glass.
- In the years since World War II, have you maintained contact with the friends that you had made during that war?**
- Yes and my closest
- 39:00 friend is up in Brisbane. Grant was a chief marine biologist for the Queensland government and he even went to Japan for an audience with [Emperor] Hirohito because Hirohito was a fish fanatic, did you know that? Well he was, and he has written a fantastic
- 39:30 book on fish and I've got it out there, a real big thick one.
- Grant was somebody that you had known in Japan?**
- No this was when I worked with him in Borneo and he was known as Fight Trap Ernie and I use to help him build fish traps.
- Have you belonged to any associations?**
- Yes.
- What sort of commemoration do you do every year?**
- The week before last I was at a meeting with the Flying Shovels and
- 40:00 we are having a memorial luncheon at the Combined Services Club I think in October.

Tape 9

- 00:30 **Jeff how important is Anzac Day to you?**
- It's very important now.
- Could you say why?**

Memories, I guess, and it's a funny day. We are celebrating a defeat which is very strange.

01:00 It's just important that we get together, those that have served. I get together with the Flying Shovels and we have a big meal, and we have our reunions at different times of the year.

Who are the Flying Shovels?

The 5ACS, Number 5 Airfield Construction Squadron which I mentioned

01:30 was part of the 62 Wing and I got put into 5ACS when 62 Wing broke up. We had a wonderful reunion in 2002 over at Mandurah in Western Australia and of course we have it in a different state every year, next year it's back in Melbourne again.

Has there been a part of you that wishes that you had of continued with the draftsmen and engineering side?

What I intended to do in life was to be a professional engineer and an amateur musician; but it's turned the other way around and I'm a professional musician entertainer and an amateur engineer.

How has

02:30 **that amateur engineering side manifested itself, what are some examples of the way that that has continued on?**

I'm always making things and designing guitars and I will show you my latest design. My guitars have got a built-in microphones and I don't know why everybody doesn't use them,

03:00 because you can wander around.

Sounds a great idea?

Yes.

Instant amplification basically?

Here's a funny thing. I used a short radio microphone system and I used a guitar and the voice went through the same signal, no problem. Then suddenly I started to get crackles and funny noises

03:30 and I thought, "That was digital TV that was causing that, could it be?"

I don't know I'm not enough a technician to know that?

Because it works alright out of town.

At heart you still have this interest in engineering?

Yes.

That's quite a unique combination actually, do you think it's that unique?

04:00 Yes I suppose it is. I studied sound from right back to Pythagoras you know, when he put a string between two pegs and discovered harmonics. He discovered the scale and how we worked it out mathematically. Music is mathematics.

04:30 The balance of the major chord you have your third, fifth and your tonic and they sound correct together if you put a third and a sixth and tonic it's a discord, it doesn't blend.

On the personal side you met and married Tabby?

Yes.

When did that take place?

In 1953 we got married and in December we have our fiftieth wedding anniversary

05:00 coming up, which we will have here.

Did you have any children?

No, but we have got four fostered kids and you can see some of them up there on the sideboard. The youngest one, Warren, will be 42 on September 1st, so I have a few de facto grandchildren there too.

That's quite a tribe?

Who I love very much, all of them.

05:30 **Starting out as a draftsmen and moving into engineering type pursuits and then moving into show business, how do you think that shaped and changed you as an individual?**

I'm pretty sure I would never have been in music if it hadn't of been for the war.

- 06:00 Everywhere I went, somebody would be carrying my guitar for me, "You have got to take your guitar," "No leave it there," so somebody would take it for me and they'd open it up and give it to me to play wherever we went.
- 06:30 I used to play in the meal queue if it was slow, somebody would bring out the guitar.
- So someone would produce your guitar and somehow persuade you to play it?**
- Yes, talk me into it. I had to be talked into everything in the first place because I wasn't game to do anything myself. I suppose because I had been discouraged family-wise, they weren't very happy with me going
- 07:00 into music.
- But ultimately it seems to have become quite a spontaneous part of your life?**
- Yes. The main thing was it enabled me to travel which of course was what I wanted to do more than anything else. Then a strange thing happened last April when I was down in Melbourne and I went to visit one of the kids that I had grown up with.
- 07:30 He said, "When you were on the Tivoli [theatre] in 1947," he said, "my parents went to see you." They knew me as a child and they said, "We almost knew he'd end up on the stage," I wondered why that was because I never thought of that myself.
- Obviously a lot of people saw a lot of potential in you as an entertainer?**
- Yes,
- 08:00 but I was always a bit of a clown.
- That never goes astray?**
- No, and I married a clown.
- It's been a very interesting journey that you've taken us on today.**
- 08:30 **I'm just wondering if there are any other aspects that we haven't covered that you would like to mention as part of this interview?**
- I did some wonderful tours with the Canadian band that I mentioned through the Middle East, North Africa and Morocco.
- 09:00 I had a wonderful tour through the Middle East with Kitty Bluett, I did another marvellous tour with Buster Fiddes, do you remember him?
- A great comedian, a great comedian working with Bobby Limb.**
- Yes. We toured with him and Tabby was his straight woman for Buster, they were fantastic tours and unusual ones.
- 09:30 That was Saudi Arabia we did with Buster and a bit dangerous at times, but it was great. Our trip home by motorbike was fantastic, it was the best thirteen weeks that I had ever spent.
- What era was this?**
- In 1954, we left London on the bike and rode out to India and got the ferry across
- 10:00 to Colombo, and got the boat from Colombo to Fremantle and then rode across the Nullarbor on the bike and that great. All the people we met on that trip, that was great because everybody felt sorry for us a bit, because everywhere we went we must have looked so disheveled.
- 10:30 **You probably got a lot of special attention?**
- Yes we did.
- Jeff, on behalf of Rebecca and myself and indeed the entire Australians at War Film Archive, I just wanted to thank you very much again for an excellent interview**
- Thanks Graeme and Rebecca.
- Thank you it was fun.**