Australians at War Film Archive

Alexander McNab (Sandy) - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:33 **Fantastic Sandy. Could I get you to start with a brief outline of your life story? Starting from where you were born.**

Yep. Alright. Well, the name is Alexander Smith McNab, mainly known as Sandy McNab. I was born in Scotland in 1920 and in 1921 I was brought out by Australia by an uncle

01:00 and aunty. Shortly after that the aunty died and the uncle went back to Scotland and I was left with a young baby cousin for a couple of years while he went back and got another wife. He came back to Australia and at that time we were living in Brunswick. Shifted to Coburg, where I started school. I went to a West Coburg State School and the North West

01:30 Brunswick Moreland State School and then the Brunswick Technical School. After school I left and got a job in a bike shop for about 12 months. My guardians or uncle and aunty, they had started a cake, baker's shop in Brunswick and so after a while I went back and worked for them. Then I went to Moonee Ponds to be apprenticed to a baker over there.

02:00 Half way through my apprenticeship my uncle died so I had to go back to the family business and help out there. Then the next year the aunty died, so I was in charge of the business then. That was about 1937. 1938 I joined the militia in the Victorian Scottish Regiment. The next year war started and they called

02:30 us up immediately. Went to camp in Portsea for a month guarding something or other. I don't know what it was. We didn't see anything anyhow. That was in October/November 1939. We came home for Christmas. Went back to camp in January at Mount Martha for three months. That finished in April. In May I joined the AIF [Australian Imperial Forces]

03:00 and for the next six years I was in the army. Left the army in 1945. Worked for the State Electricity Commission for about five years, '45, about eight years, and then I left that and went share farming up at a place called Athlone near Drewen. That took us through to 1963/4.

03:30 After we our children were starting to grow up. There was nothing up in the country for them so we moved down here. I worked at General Motors for about 12 months then in a local timber yard for 11 years. Left there. Went to a plastic factory in Seaford for about another 10 or 11 years and then I retired.

04:00 **Fantastic.**

That was in, retired in 1984.

Okay.

That enough?

Yeah, that sounds brilliant.

It doesn't sound much when you say it quick.

We're recording now Sandy.

Yeah.

Can I also ask you just very briefly which theatres you served in and which units in the AIF you served with?

Which unit I served with? Right from the start, well, first of all in the AIF I was

04:30 in the 2/7th Battalion Reinforcements and then they formed the…

Sorry, sorry, I missed you there. Which battalion again?

2/7th.

2/7th Battalion?

Reinforcements, yeah, at Darley near Bacchus Marsh. Then the 8th Division were formed and they took us to form the 2/29th Battalion. That was November 1940 and we

05:00 were there for ages and not getting anywhere. So couple of people come around calling for volunteers for a special unit and I volunteered for that and that turned out to be Number 1 Independent Company and I was in that till the end of 1943, and then from then on till the end of the war I was in a bakery unit.

Which

05:30 **theatres did you serve in?**

Southwest Pacific mainly. You know, New Ireland and Buka and Bougainville.

Right, okay. Thank you for that. What I will start now is ask you some questions about your pre-war life

Yep.

Yeah, being born in Scotland…

Yep.

you came to Australia after about 12 months was it?

Yeah. My mother died giving birth to me and my

06:00 father couldn't look after me, you know, properly in those days. So he had a sister who was married. Been married for 15, 16 years with no children and they were my uncle and aunty and they decided that they would look after me. Now the uncle was fairly wealthy. He had a big bakery in the little town where I was born, which

06:30 was Dunoon in Scotland. It's in Argyle on the River Clyde and he had a big bakery there with about five shops and a fair bit of money and so he employed a nanny to look after me and after about 12 months for some reason then he decided to come to Australia. So he came out 1922, I think. I'm not, you know, really sure. He

07:00 came out and was ready to settle in Australia and no sooner he got here than his wife got pregnant after about five years, ah, 15 years. Unfortunately she died giving birth. So gave birth to a little girl and she passed away. So the uncle left us with some people in Brunswick, some Scotch people that he knew, and he came back to Scotland and got another

07:30 wife. Then he came out. I've no idea how long he was away but I imagine 12, 18 months. He came out and then he started to catch up on his baking and it was a thing that was so different to Scotland, the hot weather out here and the cold weather in Scotland, that he had to learn to be a baker again. So he was baking up at Mildura and he was baking at

08:00 Yarra Junction. He learnt the trade again and he opened a shop in 1929 in Sydney Road, Brunswick, and almost immediately he opened the shop the Depression started. So he was broke within a couple of years, anyhow, but in the meantime I'd been to school, started school at the West Coburg State School.

08:30 Then they opened a school at Northwest Brunswick. I went there. Then I went to Moreland State School, which was near the bakery, till I was about 13 ah 12. Went to the Brunswick Technical School for a couple of years and I left when I was 13. I got a job at the Lincoln Mills but they found out I was only 13 so I had to go back

09:00 to school again, which wasn't very, but I was there, I only had to go back for a couple of months and then I left school but by that time the Depression was right into the depth. There was no jobs about and you had to go to an employment agency and pay them to find you a job, which they did. They found me a job with a bike shop in Fitzroy.

09:30 It was I was paid 10 shillings a week and I used to have to catch a tram from Coburg to the city and another tram from the city to Fitzroy, which cost me sixpence each way. It was a shilling a day. So I was getting 10 shillings and paying six shillings a week in fares. Not long after that I bought a bike from the place where I was working and that was five pound for a bike.

10:00 So that saved that. I was at the bike shop for about 12 months and then they took me back to the bakehouse so they reckoned I'd learn the trade. I stayed with the uncle for about 12, oh, six months and he got me an apprenticeship over in Moonee Ponds as, in Holmes Road, as an apprentice to a fella called Alf Duncan. He

10:30 was a good teacher. I was there for about two years then the old uncle he died and so sent, I had to go

back to the family business and help there. Twelve months later my aunty died and so that left me with my young cousin, the girl, their daughter. She was about 15. I was

11:00 about 17 and we had a business to run. So it was we got a bit of help from people and there was lots of debts left from the Depression. So we struggled along there til about well 1938, I joined the Victorian Scottish Regiment and we used to night parades, that's all. It didn't interfere with the business and then in September 1939 the war

11:30 broke out and the Victorian Scottish Regiment was called up straightaway. So I had to leave the bakehouse and they got someone to take my place for a while.

Sandy before we go on to the war, there are a number of questions I'd like to ask you…

Yep.

about the years before the war, for instance, your family background. I'm interested to know

12:00 **if you had, were your uncle or father or anyone, their brothers or what have you…**

Yeah.

in the First World War? Was there any connection there to the First [World] War?

The First War?

Yes.

Yeah. My father was in the Argyle and Sutherland Highlanders in the First War and he was a POW [Prisoner Of War] I think. That was a strange thing. I never knew my mother's family. They were from the other end of Scotland and I have only

12:30 just found them a couple of year ago but my father, after I left Scotland with the uncle he married again and he had three children but there was some mystery about it because from the time I got out here I never heard from my father again and it didn't worry me you know,

13:00 a kid didn't worry then, but immediately my uncle and aunty died I got a letter from me father. So obviously he had someone in Australia keeping an eye on me and he wanted me to go back to Scotland but no, I was too well settled in Australia then to do that but he married and he had, as I said, he had three other children. I never met him

13:30 again, actually. He died I went been back to Scotland twice to meet the other parts of the family. I had a sister. She's the only one left. There were two brothers or half brothers. One worked in Malaya for about 40 years on the tin dredges and the other one worked around Dunoon, but I've been back and met them but me father and step-mother had both

14:00 died.

So you really didn't know much about your dad's service record at all?

No, no. I don't really know anything about I mean I know that he was a baker too. Or on my marriage certificate he's a truck driver but I know he worked in the bakehouses and they had cafes. He had a fish and chip shop in Dunoon, but

14:30 he was a bit of a gambler and he saved money up to come out and see us I believe several times but then he got down to the race track and did the lot, but he died, he was 83 when he died, and up til I was about, til he made contact with me when I was 17, I thought he wanted no part of me but I've found out afterwards that he did but there was something

15:00 went on between the uncle and him that they just didn't keep in contact; what it was I don't know.

How did the Depression affect your life?

Hey?

How did the Depression affect your life?

Oh.

In your youth?

Depression, you mean in, as a young bloke?

Yeah.

Or, or…

The Depression?

Oh, Depression? Didn't mean much to me. I had a

15:30 job and we used to play football and cricket. I went to church and there was a group of us I suppose we went to the church, not because we were deeply religious or anything, because they had a cricket team and a football team and you had to go to church to get a game but we knocked about as a group

16:00 right up till the war started. I mean in the whole football team there was no one had a car, so everywhere we went we used to have to go by public transport. I mean in the wintertime, Saturday night was a dance and in the summer time we used to go to the pictures up in West Brunswick. There'd always be a group of 20 or 30 of us, nearly fill a tram.

16:30 I was a little bit separate from them because working in the bakehouses we worked all night or early morning and I'd be going home from work and they'd be going to work and so I never saw much of them through the week, just the weekends. I suppose the Depression meant that we didn't have a lot of money but I don't

17:00 really remember missing anything. I went to school you know and I used to always, we couldn't afford to have the school jumper, so that was a bit of a let down. The old uncle and the aunty they really looked after me well. I never had any money to spend. There was never such a thing as pocket money and that but after I started

17:30 work I used to have the money to go to the pictures, money to play cricket, football. That's all we needed. We always had plenty to eat. We owned our own house, so we always had accommodation. No worries about that way. I don't think the old people missed much

18:00 because he used to drink a bit so, he used to drink a lot, so he probably could afford that. The aunty, I don't remember really, you know it's strange, I can't remember ever sitting down to a meal with them but I must have because they'd be up the shop, I'd be at school. I'd come home and maybe have to light the fire or something

18:30 like that. Then they'd get home about seven o'clock and we'd go to bed. At the weekend the uncle'd be off playing bowls. The aunty, I don't know what she did. We'd be out playing. So it wasn't really a lot of family life. I couldn't say that. We didn't go anywhere together because, as I said, the old uncle was you know he was away, I was somewhere else.

19:00 The cousin, the daughter, she lives up the country now, she was with her aunt with her mother or step mother a lot and they used to go to dances together when she was old enough but I don't remember ever any family outings. Like going to the beach or anything like that when I was growing up. Couldn't…

What about…

So it wasn't,

19:30 you know, wasn't really a family atmosphere and yet they loved me I suppose you could say but it just didn't work out that way that we could go places together.

Because you had a bakery, you were, is it because you had a bakery…?

Oh well, yes.

you weren't short of food? Is that one of the reasons?

It was a big tie. I mean the bakery was seven days a week

20:00 because, you know the shop was open six days a week and on a Sunday you had to go down and clean the ovens out and make the dough for the next day. So it was a seven day week job and the old fella, he in the finish he hit the bottle a lot and I always had to take over at you know before I was ready to take over really. We had to get blokes in to help us bake the dough. So he finished up,

20:30 he drank himself to death in the finish. He couldn't have been very, I think he was only about 57 when he died but as you say, the bakery did you know, it was he'd be working there all night. The aunty'd get to the shop about eight o'clock in the morning and she wouldn't get home till seven o'clock at night. So they were never ever together really.

21:00 **Tell us about your school?**

Schools? I can remember the West Coburg School was an old established place and I think I went there till about the fourth grade. It would be from about 1925 to about 1927/8

21:30 and then it was just a, that part of the area was open paddocks then. I don't know whether you know it now but from West Coburg to Essendon Aerodrome was just paddocks but it was starting to get settled. So after a few years at West Coburg they opened a new school in North West Brunswick, which was closer to us apparently, and so we all transferred or a lot of us

22:00 transferred from West Coburg to the North West Brunswick School and I was there for a couple of years and we were living in Saunders Street, West Coburg, and then the uncle decided that he'd like to live near the bakery up in Sydney Road. So he must rented the house out and rented one near the bakery up in Sydney Road and so then I had to transfer from the North West

22:30 Brunswick School to the Moreland School and I was there for, oh, fifth and sixth grades I would say there, then we sat for our qualifying certificate and in 1931 I must have went down, 1932 I went to the Brunswick Technical School, which was I suppose three, four

23:00 Ks [kilometres] away. Used to have to walk there and back. Couldn't afford the trams then. That was one thing the Depression did do. I wasn't very good at woodwork, sheet metal or anything like that so I didn't do anything startling at that technical school, but we played football, we played cricket. It was right near the Brunswick

23:30 Baths, swimming baths, so we used to get a bit of swimming in. I didn't make a great lot of friends at school. I had two friends that I particularly made and they both joined the army with me. So we stuck together for a long, long while. I was as I left about 13, went to the Lincoln Mills

24:00 and they found out I was only 13 so they sent me back to school for a couple of months and I had a job in the science department. One subject I was good was science and physics, so they put me in there labelling bottles or something like that for about two months and then I was 14. So I finished school then. Never had any more education.

You were 14 when…?

Yeah,

24:30 14 when I left.

So tell us what life was like after your uncle and aunty had passed away in 1936/37?

Ah well, there was a couple of friends of my uncle and they took the daughter to live with them down East Brunswick. I should tell you, by this time we were back living in Saunders Street so when they both died

25:00 and they got someone to come and live rent free and look after me at the house. Some, oh, there was a series of people came in and out. I don't remember some of them to but they didn't look after me very well, but, you know, I was 15. I could look after meself. After a while these

25:30 people that were looking after my cousin, they got their son-in-law and daughter-in-law to come along and live in the house and look after me but it was pretty lonely I'd say because I had no one of any relative with me but I had a lot of good mates and we used to, you know, I was by that time working back in our own bakehouse. So

26:00 I'd be out all night working and I'd come home, I'd go to bed and the people that lived in the house, they'd be away working all day. So I wasn't getting a great deal of contact with them either. We used to vary it; for a while there I was starting work at two o'clock in the morning and I found out I was going to bed about 11 and

26:30 sleeping in. So we switched it around and I started 11 o'clock at night, which meant if there was a, at the church where we are they had a gymnasium, they had badminton clubs, they had boys clubs. So I used to go on to those events of an evening and then go straight to work after the finish of them and then I'd work all night and I'd meet all me mates when I'm walking

27:00 home, they were walking to work but it was a pretty uneventful sort of a life. A pleasant enough life I suppose because we used to go to the pictures, we used to go to dances. I played cricket and football and badminton. There was plenty to do. As I said, there were no cars in the group at all. Every time we went anywhere we either walked or got on

27:30 the tram. We used to go to a dance up near Pentridge every Saturday night at the Holy Trinity Church up there and we used to walk up Bulla Road to Sydney Road. Catch the tram up to the dance. Catch a tram back. Go to an Italian restaurant in Sydney Road there, the Rialto. Have steak and eggs and something like that on Sunday night. So

28:00 I was pretty tired by Sunday because I used to start work in the bakehouse at two o'clock or 11 o'clock on Thursday night or two o'clock Friday morning and I'd work right through Friday till the dough was made at Friday afternoon and I'd have a sleep for a couple of hours on the flour bag and get up again, work all night Friday night. Saturday morning me mate'd come around before I had time to sleep

28:30 and we'd go to Melbourne. We'd have a morning in town. We'd come out, back from there and play football or cricket. Then we'd come home and I'd go to a dance that night. So it'd finish up, I was up at two o'clock Friday morning and I wouldn't get to bed till two o'clock Sunday morning. So and then I would sleep through till Sunday afternoon. Had to get up and go make the dough again. It was a pretty busy weekend I can tell you, and I'd

29:00 be tired but got used to it after a while.

Did you have a sister or anything like that?

Hey?

Did you have any siblings? A sister or a brother?

I had a cousin like, the girl cousin. Well, I called her my sister then because we were brought up together, but she seemed to have her own life. She was living down with these

29:30 people in Brunswick that sort of kept an eye on us and kept us, you know, so we weren't exploited too much but she had friends outside of our circle and when I joined the army after a while she joined the army too and she got married and she's moved, lives up in New South Wales now. I see her occasionally.

She was in the AWAS [Australian Women's Army Service]?

30:00 Yeah she, well yeah, my wife was in the AWAS and she was, Jean was too. She worked up at oh they had a sort of a soldiers' club in Elizabeth Street. She worked there for a while in the canteen and then she moved up to Albury that there but we've always been close, you know, like a brother and sister, and but

30:30 during our school time, look I couldn't even tell you what school she went to after she left State. I think she finished up just doing eighth grade in the State joint but I couldn't; after that she worked in the bakehouse, not in the bakehouse but in the shop. I don't think she ever had any other job and I can always remember

31:00 I'd been talking to me aunty this day and she was talking about various things and she said to me, "I haven't made a will. I'll have to make one out and leave you something," you know. I said, well it didn't worry me, but that was about breakfast time. I went to bed and she used to wake me to get up and go and make the dough about three o'clock in the afternoon. I woke up. It was four o'clock. I thought, "This is funny," and she had

31:30 diabetes and she'd had a little operation on her an infected finger, but anyhow I got up and went into the bedroom and she was dead in bed. So that, you know, I didn't know what the hell to do but I got it sorted out. Called her doctor and then I had to go and meet her daughter. Jean was shut the shop up and she was coming home and I met her on the way but luckily she

32:00 was with one of the neighbouring girls, neighbours across the road, and I told the girl and she said, "Oh." You know, she took Jean, my cousin, back to their place for the night. It was a bit of a drama. So from then on, we never lived together again after that. She lived with these, well, she called her uncle and aunty but they

32:30 weren't and as I said, when I went into the army, they kept the baker's going for a while but they couldn't manage without me and I wanted to be a soldier more than a baker. So they had to sell the business.

Can you tell us what Coburg and Brunswick was like during those years?

33:00 **At the time?**

Yeah, well Brunswick was a more lively place I'd say than Coburg. It seemed to be there was more factories and that down there. Sydney Road, well it was cable trams up and down Sydney Road. There were three theatres in Sydney Road. There was the old Alhambra, was up near Moreland Road, and there was

33:30 the Empire Theatre was down the other end of Sydney Road near Brunswick Road and when we were youths, I suppose, they built another they built a new theatre called The Padua and it's gone now, that's how long ago, but it was fancy. You had heated pads to put your feet on and you could smoke and the smoke used to go right up and

34:00 it was a real, you'd go half time they'd have singers and actors on the stage. The old Alhambra up the other end, you could sit in there you could see the sky through the roof, the holes in the roof. If it rained you couldn't hear what was going on. The Empire Theatre, I never went there. There was another one down in West Brunswick called The Western Theatre and we

34:30 used to be able to catch a tram along Melville Road and go to The Western, so The Western was the one we mostly went to. There was next to the, a terrible lot of factories in Brunswick then. Millers Ropework was the big one. Prestige Hosiery, oh there was several hosiery factories down in Brunswick,

35:00 but Coburg, it had the Lincoln Mills, the woollen mill, and I don't think they had it was just residential.

Hang on, you said the Lincoln Mill?

Lincoln Mill.

That's that huge chimney.

Is it still there?

It's still there.

Yeah, well, it was the only big employer I think. West Coburg more or less stopped; I don't know whether you know Melville Road,

35:30 and from there on it was just paddocks to the Essendon Aerodrome. I remember it was as children we used to…[Sir Charles] Kingsford-Smith would fly in or [Bert] Hinkler or someone and we'd walk right across and oh, there was maybe half a dozen houses, but you go there now, there's not a spare block but in the summer we used to, you used to have to pay

36:00 to go to the Brunswick Baths so we used to go up to the Coburg Lake and swim. It was quite good then. It was they had a big diving tower and that. You'd get up on the diving tower and you look over the wall at Pentridge and see all the convicts working in their garden. That was a bit of entertainment.

This was the Coburg pool?

Yeah, in the lake. Is the lake still there?

Yeah, the lake's still there.

Yeah, well that's where we used to swim, in that.

Oh right.

They had, you know, they had

36:30 one end of it they had all concrete steps and it was…

Yeah, they're still there.

They're still there?

Yeah, but they've got cracks and things.

And they had a big diving tower there.

I didn't know that.

Yeah, and you used to get up there and you could see over the fence or if you walk, we used to walk home sometimes we and the convicts'd be out working in the front of the prison and we were fascinated with these blokes, you know, they were criminals but I had a very

37:00 bad mate sometimes. We'd be walking home from the lake. You know it was, oh, I suppose three or four Ks and you'd come to the dispensary and he'd pinch a bike from out the dispensary and dink me [ride double] home and leave the bike down there somewhere else but we got chased a couple of times so we stopped that but it was, what I can remember seemed to be a long

37:30 hot summer cause we used to walk every day to the lake. There was I don't think there was any kiosk there then but it was muddy water, but we didn't mind. It was

So it was clean enough to swim in?

Oh yeah, well, I mean there were a lot of people swimming there. It was just, you know, it was there was, no, I don't know whether there's any baths in Coburg now or not, any swimming pool.

Yeah, it's right next to the lake.

Yeah, well, there was no, there's

38:00 nothing there then. The Brunswick pool had an Olympic-sized outdoor pool with cold water and then right next door they had an enclosed, what they called the ladies' bath, and it was about 25 metres and warm. We used to swim there till, oh, nine o'clock at night or something. You'd go down and they'd be opened up late at night and I can always remember going down and they'd

38:30 always have the fights on the radio, and we used to swim and listen to fights because at that time there was a fella called Jack Carroll who was a top boxer and they used to bring people out from America to fight him and that. So that was our entertainment. It used to cost us threepence to go into the baths and you could stay there as long as you liked and once you went out you had pay to get in

39:00 again, but I can remember we used to, after work, this is when we were youths, go down for a swim sometimes in the summer before I went to work in the bakehouse.

Being in Coburg Lake, did you notice there are elm trees that were planted there for soldiers during the First World War? Did you know about that?

No.

Those big elm trees. The Avenue of Honour?

No, I didn't know. No. Where was that?

39:30 At the lake, was it?

Yeah.

No, I don't remember that.

There was those pathway of trees?

Oh. Yeah that'd be over the other side of the lake I suppose. We come from the south. We only got the one side.

Ah it's near the hill.

Is it? No I well, I probably know but I don't remember them, no.

Oh I'm surprised. Okay.

The only soldiers' things I can remember is over between Coburg and the

40:00 Essendon Aerodrome there was one little patch of houses, which were war service homes I think. We you know we heard, "That's the soldiers' houses," but I don't remember anything much about soldiers when I was a kid. I think when we were at school they were taking up collections, pennies to build this shrine. I can remember that, ah,

40:30 but I don't remember ever going to an Anzac Day march or anything like that when I was a kid.

We'll have to hang in there and just change the tape.

Tape 2

00:31 **We were talking about Coburg.**

Oh about Coburg and Brunswick.

Is it very much a working class area I understand?

Oh it was very much a working class, Brunswick more than, Coburg was a little bit classier than Brunswick, let's put it that way, because Brunswick had all the factories. I mean, I can remember,

01:00 you know Murray's Choc, wasn't chocolate creamy caramels, all this sort of, they had a confectionary business. The tramways had a big depot there, the cable trams in Sydney Road, Brunswick. I don't know whether that's still there. It was, you know, and then down at Carlton that was all sort of commercialised. The knitting mills and the

01:30 hosiery factories, the rope works. Whereas Coburg, as I said, I can only remember Lincoln Mills, main you know a lot of small businesses up around Sydney Road and probably engineering works but nothing big at all.

I had no idea that the Lincoln Mill chimney had been around for that long.

Oh it was.

Extraordinary.

It was an old established place since 19…

02:00 it'd be 19…early 1934, I went there and it was well established then. I mean they used to make blankets and all this sort a stuff. Is it still working, or is it just the chimney there?

I'm not sure.

I think it's shut down.

Yeah. The chimney's still there.

Yeah, but oh, it was a landmark. Cause even up that way, Baker's Road and up there was very sparsely

02:30 settled then. There wasn't a great deal of the trams used to run, I think they still run to Baker's Road but that was the electric trams used to come up Moreland Road and just turn around and go up Sydney Road whereas the cable trams used to come from the city to Moreland Road. That was the terminus. Anyhow I mean and they had the conductors and drivers. I don't know when they stopped. They were still going,

03:00 the cable trams, during the war I think, and a big pub on the corner, Moreland Hotel. Oh, there was lots of little gangsters about that area at the time.

Tell us about those gangsters?

Oh well, I used to sell papers on the corner or help a fella, kid sell papers on the corner of Sydney Road and Moreland Road

03:30 and on that corner was the Moreland Hotel owned by Hughie Mc-, ah, Hughie Mulcahy, and there was a

fella with a club foot and I just can't remember his name now but he was the gangster boss around there. Used to always come out with a couple a girls on his arm out of the pub. The pubs shut at six o'clock and they threw them out. He'd always give us two shillings for a paper, which was

04:00 a penny, ha'penny [halfpenny] I think then, tuppence. He'd throw you two bob give you the, and the rest is yours but I don't know what, I think he was an SP [Starting Price] bookie if the truth is known, a starting price bookmaker, which you know they weren't licensed or anything. They just worked on their own but we thought he was a gangster cause he had this club foot and he looked evil,

04:30 but I mean there were gangs about then but they were pretty harmless you know. They only fought between themselves. I mean in my young days at round that way I can only remember one murder. Well, I mean now you get one a day. There was a bank manager shot out at Balwyn and oh that was a terrible thing,

05:00 but we never, never had a great deal of vandalism or you know really bad gangs around the place. They were gangs of youths used to get and have a fight and then the policeman'd ride up on his bike and give them a boot in the bum and away they'd go and get home.

Did you ever hear of a gang

05:30 **called 'The Crutches'?**

Can't remember them, no. The Crunchers?

No, The Crutches.

No, no. No. No I can't. There was down round Carlton is where most of the gangs were. The bad gangs, razor gangs they had down there. We kept clear of them. They were the Bouvery Street boys they called them near the Carlton breweries. Ah, oh, I've forgotten him,

06:00 'Squizzy' Taylor [Melbourne gangster of the 1930s] he was about at the time. Squizzy Taylor.

Yeah I've heard about Squizzy Taylor. He was a quite a bad…

Oh he was.

He was a murderer wasn't he?

He was, ah, he was well known down here too cause I think he had a holiday home down near the beach but he and, oh I can't remember the name of the fella, they shot each other in the finish anyhow.

06:30 Squizzy broke into this fella's room, oh, gettin' a bit too old. I can't remember and the fella was expecting him, you know, and they both shot each other anyhow. There was bullets flying everywhere but he was only a little squirt of a fella but apparently you know he ran all the criminal activity in Melbourne at the time. He was a, you know,

07:00 I was only a kid at the time but Squizzy Taylor was all the talk you know, "Get Squizzy Taylor." No, I can't remember the fella he shot. It was in Fitzroy because the bike shop I worked at was in Fitzroy and it was a tough place in those days.

Fitzroy was a tough place?

Oh yes. I mean there was a fella called Red Maloney. He was a boxer but also, you know,

07:30 they were into all sorts a crook things there and you couldn't walk up the street there after dark on your own. So we used to ride our bike home from in the finish from Smith Street Collingwood to West Coburg and we never came to any harm but there was, like everything else, there was tales. People

08:00 told you about all the terrible things that happened but I never actually saw them there.

What about gangs in Coburg and Brunswick? Can you tell us about them?

Not really. I mean I can't remember any big gangs there. I mean we, as I said, we went to this church and they would have called us a gang but I mean we never got up to any bad things at all. We it was just a

08:30 case of it was a bunch of boys and a bunch of girls and they went everywhere together. We played cricket together. We played football together and all the girls and boys played tennis on a Sunday. They went to church, as I said, mainly because of the social activities and I suppose looking back on it, it did keep us out of trouble because the old minister, he was a nice old bloke and he, you know,

09:00 they used to look after us and we had enough to do not to get bored. I mean, one of me mates, he had a pianola and I don't know whether you know what a pianola is. It's a piano with a pump and you'd pump that and it had a roll of that used to play music. You didn't have to be able to play it. You pumped the thing, the roll went round and then somehow or other the mechanism

09:30 played the music but we used to go there and have sing-songs. Another mate had a billiard table, so we'd go from town and have a game of billiards with him. By that time it was eight o'clock and we'd go

to the dance and there was never any, oh occasionally you'd get blokes throwing stones at the electric light globes and breakin' them. That would be about the worst thing that would happen.

10:00 Or if they were extra in a lively mood they might throw stones on the roofs of houses and you'd run like mad down the road. You'd be just out of breath and they'd throw another start on another roof so you had to keep running, but graffiti was, no, I don't remember any of that sort of stuff or well, the thing nowadays is that they can

10:30 get into trouble, jump into a car and they're gone. We couldn't do that. We'd still be in the area and if we'd have got into any trouble they would have found us.

Did you get into trouble much?

Ah no, not really. No. That you know there was never any policeman coming knocking in the door, as I said. Outside of someone might break at a streetlight, ah, and throw a brick on a roof. That's all about all we did.

11:00 Sometime on a Saturday night I remember when the cricket season was on, they'd have to take the scores for the day down to the secretary of the association, who lived down Brunswick. We'd walk all the way down there and come back and the big part of the evening was just stopping and buying an ice block. That was it. That's about all you could afford. You'd about that time too where another fad come out was what they'd call miniature golf

11:30 and we used to, oh here and there they'd have these little golf you know, I don't know what you'd call them now but they were just putting greens you know at various places. You'd pay threepence or something for a round. That was another entertainment we had, but that was it. Dances, pictures.

Tell us about the dances?

They were good.

12:00 There were many, many, like each group, you know like, the state school might have a dance. We'd go to West Coburg State School and they'd have, each one had a live band you know. There'd be someone playing a saxophone, someone playing the piano and someone playing the drums. That'd be about the most. They'd supply you with supper and then

12:30 we used to catch the tram up to the Holy Trinity Hall up near Bell Street somewhere and it was a big turn out. You know it was a big hall. They'd had a big orchestra there. They might have seven or eight in it and I think we used to pay a shilling to go into it. It was eight o'clock, finish at 11 and then you'd go home to bed. I mean

13:00 there would be, if you went round the streets after midnight, you wouldn't find anybody. Nothing'd be open and everyone'd be gone home to bed. Course the pubs used to shut at six o'clock so all the drunks'd be home in bed by eight or nine. Then there was, generally speaking you were, there would be an Italian restaurant. They'd be open till 10 or 11 o'clock after the dance and you'd go and have a bit of supper

13:30 but night life was pretty scarce. I mean, Sundays there was nothing. We used to go to Melbourne sometimes you know. Well, it was pretty lively but nothing on a Sunday. Nothing. There was no hotels open. No wine bars. There was no dances. You could go to the zoo. That's about all but we used to go in for a haircut sometimes

14:00 on a Saturday morning at, the place is not there anymore, London Stores. They had a big department store up top. Underneath was the barber shop and there'd be about 10 chairs there going flat out and we'd have a hair cut and then we'd go to on the corner of Elizabeth Street and Collins Street was the London Hotel. We'd have lunch there. Three shillings for a three-course meal.

14:30 Then we'd head home to play football or play cricket or whatever but it was that was about the extent of the social life. There was course Saturday night was good in Melbourne. I mean you had The Tivoli, which was a variety show. Further up the street was another variety show called The Bijou. They had the Capitol Theatre

15:00 and they, about 1933 they built the State Theatre and I think it's called The Forum now. It was great. You could sit there and you could see the sky but come half past 11 the pictures were over and everyone headed home. There was no hanging around the streets. The cops'd move you on if they saw any groups forming after about 11 o'clock.

15:30 **What would the cops do?**

Oh just tell you to get home. I mean they'd never ever arrest you. They, you know, if they, blokes, well they might get someone kickin' a fuss. They'd ride up on their bike and the old copper only had a bike. Oh, they had a flying squad then but they weren't interested in young people. These blokes, the coppers'd just tell you to get home and if you didn't get home they'd give you a boot and off you'd go, but

16:00 I don't remember anyone ever being hauled up or you didn't need to. They saw the copper come and

you went home. That was it. Didn't argue with them. They generally were big rough, tough sort a blokes but fair you know. If you weren't doing anything, they wouldn't worry you but if they thought you were looking a bit suspicious they'd break it up and send you home and there was no aftermath at all.

16:30 Then Melbourne did come alive there at one 1934 was the centenary of Melbourne and oh they had carnivals and had like the Moomba [annual festival] now. Right along the riverbank they had carnivals every night. We used to go to that and New Year's

17:00 Eve used to be down through Luna Park, was a big night. You couldn't move in St Kilda on New Year's Eve with, and I got an idea, well, we never drank, which was strange enough. I mean we never thought of goin' to a pub. Not because we were too good. I suppose we couldn't afford it but I've got an idea that on New Year's Eve the pubs in St Kilda stayed open and Luna Park was really crowded

17:30 in those days. You couldn't walk up the street and I imagine there's not too many go to Luna Park now. We, yeah, oh now I come to think of it, you know there was no one, we might have a beer occasionally. We'd go to a dance and sometimes they'd have beer on the table but we, I can't remember ever going to a pub with these blokes,

18:00 you know. They it just wasn't considered even. We, we'd go to a dance. Wouldn't think of havin' a drink you know. Didn't need to. I don't know why. I mean they couldn't go to a dance nowadays without havin' a drink and we wouldn't either but beer was a shilling a bottle, which is you know a lotta money in those days. I think

18:30 Richmond beer was nine pence a bottle. That's nine cents. I know it was nine shillings a dozen of the Richmond beer.

Were you an avid reader?

Yes.

Tell us what you would generally read?

Well, I'd read the labels off jam tins if I couldn't find anything else, but in those days there was no public libraries.

19:00 People used to set up a library in their shop and you used to have to go and pay threepence for a book and take it home.

Sorry, people used to set up libraries in a shop?

Yeah, you know, it was a private enterprise really. You know a person, oh, even right up till after the war in Dandenong there was a lady used to have a library, as they call it, and they were a shop with books all round the place. You'd join them. I think, I don't know, I think you

19:30 might have had to pay a shilling to join and threepence a book and I just don't remember when the council started having libraries. Maybe they had 'em all along, I don't know, but I know we used to always go, I used to always read cowboy books. You know, murder yarns, but I've always had books

20:00 to read and made up for the lack of education I suppose with what I've read, you know. Like I mean as I got older I read other books but as a kid I'd read well we used to have comics, those days. They used to come out once a week. Lot of comics came from England. There wasn't many Australian; I think all came from England. Tiger Tim and The Startler and

20:30 Film Fun but they were all English publications. I'm pretty sure there wasn't any Australian ones.

What about newspapers? Did you read newspapers?

Yes, yes.

Which ones?

Mostly The Sporting Globe. It used to come out Saturday night and Wednesday. Saturday night you'd go to the pictures and by the time you got to the pictures

21:00 The Sporting Globe'd be on the ground with all the day's results and Wednesday was more or less a, you know, a fill in. They'd have all the stories about different people but it wasn't like now. Every day there's races or you know different things on. There were only races on Saturday then mostly. So I used to read that.

21:30 I used to get the daily papers, yes, but I don't remember reading them a great lot until I got to the 20, 21 stage. I was in the army by then. We used to read the paper but there was in those days it used to be The Sun in the, and The Age in the morning,

22:00 The Herald at night and for a short period they had a paper called The Star. Came out at night but it fell by the wayside. I just don't know what I was interested now come to think about reading the paper but I read 'em all but it…

What sort of topics interested you?

Whether…

Can you tell us what type of topics interested you? Like say for instance

Well…

Were you interested

22:30 **in what was happening overseas? The wars?**

Military? I'd be interested in armies and wars in those days. Sporting things. Oh, general, I was interested in general subjects. I mean I used to read all about the islands, the explorers. You know like the Australian explorers

23:00 but well, like, you know I got books over there. My old uncle, he was a great reader. The Scotsman, you know. He, I've got books there I've been tryin' to read 'em for about 30 years and he bloody got a history of Australia in three volumes and it's terribly hard to plough through, but he and

23:30 he also bought what they call The Herald Sun Book. It was the works of Henry Lawson and I read those through and that was all about the gold fields and mateship and drovers and I read was very interested in that. Wasn't so interested in poetry but

24:00 the you know the exploring of Australia was always of great interest to me. The history of any country really. I used to read a lot of British history because my old uncle, he had a pretty fair sort of a library. Yeah.

Did you know about what was taking place overseas?

24:30 Not…

Can you tell us what you knew?

Not when I was very young. When it got up to round about the 18, I went, oh well, we knew the test cricket you know that sort a thing. That was the only thing that interested us. We used to listen on the radio. Used to listen all night in those days to the cricket in England. They used to, people used to gather in a house and have an all night party while the cricket was on but until

25:00 they started you know like the war in Spain and the civil war in Spain, I remember reading about that. The Italian invasion of Ethiopia. That sort of hit home, but oh, you'd get like when Lindberg [American pioneer aviator] flew from America to Ireland in the plane that attracted a fair

25:30 bit of attention but today you know you get all their local news more or less from England. That never came into it as far as I was concerned. Maybe you'd get the big horse races. I don't know. I wasn't very interested in horses. So I don't remember, ah, you wouldn't I don't think there was a great lot in our papers about 'em. I mean

26:00 I'm just trying to think who was the prime minister. Well I couldn't tell ya who was the Prime Minister of England until just before the war when Chamberlain was, but I can't remember, you know, it was of no consequence I suppose to us who was prime minister and nowadays I suppose, like, I mean I've got a letter there you know from my young nephew in Scotland and that sort a thing. They keep you up

26:30 to date with those things, but not the everyday events in England, London and Scotland.

Can you tell us what you knew about the Spanish Civil War?

About?

The Spanish Civil War?

Not a lot. I knew that Franco [General Francisco Franco] was and the government were at it. I knew that it was something to do with the

27:00 communists and the communists were enlisting to go and fight there. They were not all communists but the socialists, which reminds me of you're talking about during the Depression. The communists in Sydney Road Brunswick they used to always be kicking up a hell of a fuss. They used to, I remember one Friday night they had a

27:30 cage on wheels. Like they had a cage from the zoo and these communists'd get inside the cage. They'd tow the cage down the street and leave it there and he'd be ranting and raving and the police couldn't get at him because he was in this cage and they couldn't stop it and that went on, oh, for many months, or years I suppose. Well, during the Depression the communists were very vocal

28:00 around Brunswick.

Yes, you were speaking about the communists

Well they…

who'd jump in a cage.

Well, they didn't mean much to me because you know we were 15 to 18 but we knew, oh, they were bad men and they were causing troubles and they really you know it was a breeding ground for them during the Depression. I mean, there was so many people out of work and they had nothing

28:30 and then a few had the lot. I mean we were, oh, as far as our family goes we weren't badly off because we had the bakehouse. We always had enough to eat. Didn't have a lotta money apparently but a lotta the people down Brunswick and that, you know, they were desperate. There was no such thing as the dole. They had

29:00 some sort of, I think it was called 'the sustenance', see, and they used to have to go and work and they'd give 'em tickets for food you know and this sort a thing. Well, that was just a breeding ground for communism.

Was there a lot of communists in Brunswick? In Coburg area?

I think so. I think I mean they seemed to be, but I wasn't really involved with them. They didn't worry me but I can always remember these were getting into the cage and they were they

29:30 would roar and rant and go crook at the government.

What would they say?

I can't remember now, you know. Half of it I didn't see a lot of it. Half of it was hearsay, so it may not a went on at all, but I know that they had they towed these big iron bar cages and the police were desperate. They couldn't get in to stop him but they finished up, I

30:00 think they towed the thing away again with the bloke still inside. Took 'em away outta the way, but that was right down the other end of Brunswick near the town hall and places down Dawson Street way, but Friday nights mostly I was working in the bakehouse so I wasn't in any of that sort of stuff.

Did you, so we were talking about the

30:30 **Spanish Civil War.**

Yep.

You said that you knew that some communists from Australia had gone…

I don't know whether it was Australia. I knew they went across, socialists from Britain. Now I couldn't say about communists from Australia but because that was just prior to the Second World War started and sort of, we lost contact with them once

31:00 Australia declared war. It was the end of our youth really because you know we had this gang of fellas. Well they went this way and that way and I haven't seen some of 'em since. Some of 'em, not many of 'em alive now but we kept in touch but some joined the army, some joined the navy, some joined the air force and some joined nothing and

31:30 so we, I didn't know a lot about the Spanish [Civil] War but we knew there was one on you know. We knew that Mussolini [Benito Mussolini], the Italian dictator, he'd invaded Ethiopia. Well that was all just prior to the Second World War.

Now tell us what you thought about Mussolini and Franco?

They were bad men. That's about all we knew. We really,

32:00 I couldn't have told you their history at any stage. I mean we knew that Franco was, I'm not too sure what side he was on in the Spanish War but he was then and we knew that Mussolini was leading the black shirts in Italy and I don't remember a great lot about Hitler to be perfectly honest up

32:30 til the war started. We knew more about Mussolini and I can't remember much about Hitler even though he must a been in the paper because from 1933 on he was 'Reichmeister' [Chancellor] whatever they call it. He was in charge of Germany but I can remember that Chamberlain

33:00 going across to have a conference with him and coming back and saying, "It's peace in our time," you know, and Hitler was just waiting his chance and I can remember the night that they declared war and Menzies [Prime Minister Robert Menzies], I was making the dough in the bakehouse and we had a radio in there and Menzies come on

33:30 to say that we were at war and I had a friend who was in the militia and oh, he used to dress up and loved the uniform and he come in and he was cryin' and he said, "I don't wanna go to war." I said, "Well, what are you doin' in the militia?" You know. Anyhow, eventually he went to war and he got used to it.

Before we go towards the Second World War, can you tell us how you saw the Spanish Civil War? Was it

34:00 **something like democracy versus fascism?**

I don't remember whether we worried about what it was about. There was a war on and we were interested that way but I don't remember ever analysing, you know, what they were fighting about. I probably did know, but I can't remember.

Was there a lot of information in the newspapers about the Spanish Civil War?

Hey?

Was there a lot of information in the newspapers?

Oh, I imagine in the papers but

34:30 I can't really say that I knew what they were fighting about. I knew they were fighting and that interested me and, as I say, we knew the Italians were being subduing the Ethiopians, these poor black fellas that had nothing, but I can't recall having knowledge of why they were fighting in

35:00 Spain and half of the time we weren't too concerned about why we were fightin' Hitler either. We just, he was there but it must a been in the papers and I probably read about it, but it's gone. He…

You had also

35:30 **said that you joined the militia in 1938? Was it 1938?**

Yes.

Is that what you said?

There was, well the militia was always there and it was almost the tradition in those days. You joined the militia. There was the artillery, the infantry and I had a mate, Jack Peters, and I don't know how he got onto it but he joined, he said to me, "Come on. We'll go and join

36:00 the Scotties." Well, I being Scotch, I thought that was a good idea and so in those days the Victorian Scottish were at in Sturt Road at South Melbourne and we went down. We joined up and it took a while because they wouldn't just take anybody in those days. They were a little bit fussy. So we went down and we joined up and it must a been fairly late in 1938

36:30 and then they gave you a rifle and a bayonet and kilts and oh all sorts of equipment. We used to go once a week through (UNCLEAR) and once a year there was about a fortnight's camp. They'd go up to Seymour and have a camp and that,

37:00 but generally speaking it was just the one couple of hours every week. Ah, you were well trained. I mean it was mostly weapon training. They'd have had old Lewis [light] machine guns and 303 [Lee Enfield 0.303 inch calibre] rifles and then when war was declared there was a great hive of activity. They called us up and we had to parade.

37:30 Oh, for some reason or other it was just before that they shifted from South Melbourne over to Richmond for their drill hall, I don't know why, and we used to have to go a bit further. You've lost him. He's over readin' me books. And you were well trained in the militia. There was no doubt about that. We were ready

38:00 when the war was declared. You know the militia were ready to go but course you weren't allowed to go out of Australia in militia. I know that we, oh I've forgotten now, old colonel's name, but when the war started and we went in for a month at Portsea to guard the heads I think, and

38:30 there was a big gun down at Port Nepean. I know they used to fire that in there and they used to sit us underneath it and fire it. "Get used to the noise," they said and then the officers were mostly old blokes, you know, old First War fellas and they were too old to go to the Second World War,

39:00 and we had an old colonel, and the only way he worked out he could get there was to take the whole regiment with him. If they all volunteered to go, he would a been able to go to the war, and so he put it to them but a lot of 'em didn't want to go to war at all. They only wanted to be pretty soldiers. So they wouldn't join up and the poor old colonel, I think his name was Cook, he never got

39:30 to the war, but pre-war like it was very thorough training. There's no doubt that when the war started, as I said, we were ready to go.

Was it, can I interrupt you and ask you, the Victorian Scottish Regiment, generally were most people in there actually from a Scottish background? Is that…?

I think so. I mean it's, they were all Australians

40:00 but we were affiliated with the Gordon Highlanders in Scotland. They used the Gordon Highland tartan and the sporran and what not, but oh, there was I would say 90 percent of them had some background to Scotland, yes. They had the pipe bands and everything else

40:30 but…

Is it was this your first contact with World War I veterans?

No. I'll tell you we used to go Sunday school and one of the Sunday school teachers, a fella called Norm Calder, and he was a First World War veteran you know and he used to desperately try us, "Don't go to war," you know. I mean he had, he was in France and he

41:00 was desperate for us not to go to war. Of course it didn't make any difference to us.

When you say 'desperate', can you tell us what you mean exactly? What did he do?

Just tried to convince us that war was futile. It was horrible. As far as he was concerned, it didn't solve anything but he had such a time in the trenches in France

41:30 that it just, you know, and I mean a lot of 'em did come back broken men and he was the only First World War digger that I've met before I went to the militia.

What was his name?

Norman Calder. He lived across the road from us where we lived and a lovely fella. You know I mean he was so

42:00 sincere that we shouldn't go to…

Tape 3

00:31 **We're recording now. Yeah so what should I start with? Okay, we left off with not with the war beginning. With you joining the Victorian Scottish Regiment.**

Yeah, well, as I said…

Telling us about that.

You know we were well fitted out, well trained. Once a week with a yearly, fortnightly camp, which I think I only went

01:00 to about one before the war started. Then when war's declared within, oh, two or three weeks we were called up and we were sent to Portsea. We camped on the Portsea golf course, which didn't please many of the residents. We were great boots over all their greens and that, but that training was the most of

01:30 our officers were old First World War blokes and most of the training was First World War stuff. We dug trenches and all over the place and it was all static warfare. Nothing to what we really struck, so.

What did they teach you in terms of infantry tactics at the time?

It was if I remember rightly they were still

02:00 operating in the old fours. Used to four columns instead of three later on. We, well, one exercise I remember the battalion was split in half. One half defended the town of Portsea while the other half attacked it. My job was in the Portsea pub, which was very handy but

02:30 and then you got a lot of trench warfare. Our machine guns were old Lewis guns, which were First World War weapons. It was just not much open warfare. I can always remember they sent us to the pictures one night to watch a film called Gunga Din, [British in India, based on Rudyard Kipling] simply because

03:00 it had a an example of a battalion going along and all of a sudden splitting up into sections in arrowhead formation and they did it well on the film and they sent us to see that to see what's to be done. But we were only there a month and it was more or less a lot of recruits getting 'em kitted out and getting a little bit of coordination I suppose between the different

03:30 sections, platoons and companies. Then we come home towards the end of November or maybe early December, I just don't remember, but we were home for Christmas and towards in January we were sent again to camp at Mount Martha and Mount Martha camp was

04:00 the start of really intense training as far as the infantry went. We did marching, drill, rifle work and at one stage there and I remember it was March, the first week in March, and every day was 100 [degrees - temperature] and they started us off on a big manoeuvre, battalion manoeuvres they called it, right around

04:30 the peninsula we walked. Marched to Rosebud. From Rosebud across to Flinders and Flinders up and it took us a week and they finished up with doing a forced night march of about 20-odd mile over the last night. That really topped off our training and by the time that three months was up

05:00 I feel there wasn't much more we could learn as far as military tactics, weapons, ah, and well we were really fit too, but as I said, the old colonel tried to get us to join the AIF as a battalion but half of them wouldn't go, so that

05:30 foiled that. Then it was in April that three months finished. We only used to get, I think, a day off every couple a weeks, you know, there was no home leave. So we were working there seven days a week. A lot of the time was spent with pulling

06:00 machine guns to pieces and learning working with the artillery. Working with the mortar section. Marching. So after three months we came home again and it followed the old routine of parade once a month. We got back in April and then I joined the AIF in May,

06:30 you know. So do you want me to go on with that? From there or you've got any questions about…

I'm interested to know about the mates you had formed mate you know the mateship you had formed with the people from the Victorian Scottish Regiment?

Ah yeah, well…

If you could tell us more about…

Yeah, I had, I had one particular mate, a fella called Bill Fraser and the fella that I joined up with, Jacky Peters. Now he

07:00 was at Portsea with us but somehow or other he dropped out of it after then. I don't think he ever had any more to do with the military after that but Bill Fraser and I, he's the only one I really got close to, and when I joined the AIF he joined, but he went to West Australia and as far as I know he's still over there.

07:30 I saw him once after the war. He came over but he started a business over there and I think he's, if he's still alive, he's over there. I lost contact with him. Yes, one the one our corporal in the Scottish was a very keen and a very clever man. He got a corporal and when I joined

08:00 the commandos there he was, he was a lieutenant in our company, a bloke called Don Russell. He eventually got a captain and he got killed in New Guinea. So he'd only be about 23 when he got killed but he was a product of the Scottish. A real, I could you know he was keen. He was always the first one to start diggin' a trench and that, but I

08:30 never kept any contact with any after that. When I went to the AIF, it was sort of the end of that era as far as I was concerned. I don't think even Bill Fraser, I don't think I heard from him while the war was on. I can't remember. I don't think I heard from him. Just after the war I had a brief reunion

09:00 with him but no, unfortunately to say, I didn't make any real friends in the Scottish.

I'm also interested to know the friendships, well I mean the acquaintances you could say you'd struck up with the First World War officers.

Yeah well they

09:30 never mingled with the men at all. I mean you know later on in the Indy [Independent (company)], commandos, the officers and men were just one, they had to be, but these the officers in the militia were a different class you know. They sort of were a bit above the privates and I don't remember ever any of them coming having a drink,

10:00 having a talk. I mean they were there during parade, on parade. After that there was no contact with them at all.

Did you dislike that class distinction?

No, I didn't. I mean, I suppose in, as I say, most of these militia ones were old First World War men. Well, they were mature. So we didn't really look to join with them. I mean our NCOs [Non Commissioned Officers]

10:30 were of our ilk, were our generation, but there were a few young officers but they didn't want to mix with us and I don't recall being sorry that they didn't mix with us because we got on alright with the other ranks.

11:00 In the militia of course there wasn't a great deal, you know, there was no such thing as a wet canteen [bar]. The officers' mess, they had beer. The sergeants' mess, they had beer, and they stuck together, but the privates they never had anything at all that way, so that cut down the socialising a bit I suppose. I just can't remember what we did. Our spare, only

11:30 diversion I can remember was one Sunday I was supposed to be on kitchen duties and I knew a couple of fellas in the, what, the transport section. Well, it was all horses. There was no motors [cars] and they used to take the officers, when we walked the officers used to ride horses and these transport blokes used to take the officers' horses for an exercise on Sunday

12:00 and they said to me, “Oh come on. We’ll go for a ride.” Well, I’d never been on a horse in me life but I got on one and we rode nearly into Mornington and we rode back and when I got back the sergeant major’s waitin’ for me there, wanted to know why I wasn’t workin’ in the kitchen, and so I was workin’ in the kitchen for a long while after that, but I can remember

12:30 we used to get Saturday afternoon off I think and we used to sometimes come into Mornington or even into Frankston, but that was as far as we went. And Sundays, Sunday was visitors’ day but I never had any visitors. I was so we used to just muck around in the tents but no great recollection of any

13:00 sort of you know sports or anything we played on in our time off. I don’t know what we did.

Before we move on to anything else, I’d like to ask you how you ended up joining the AIF from the Victorian Scottish?

Well…

Can you walk us through that please?

I have to say that the touch of life I had with the militia suited me

13:30 and at the time you know everyone was, well not everybody but a great lotta people were joining the army, AIF. I finished training at Mount Martha and by that time the business, bakery business had been sold. So I had nothing to go back to there and I was moping about for about three weeks and

14:00 suddenly I just up, and you used to go to the Flinders Street Station. They had a ticket box there and there was a sergeant in there and you could enlist there. I mean, cause inside they had a little graph five foot, five foot six you know, to measure you as you’re standing up, and I must a been crouchin’ down ‘cause I think he had me in about five foot nine, but I committed myself to the

14:30 army then. I went in there and they took your particulars, I’ll tell you, and then they used to send you to the Sturt Street drill hall and there was a doctor there, and examine you, see. So the first time I tried, that’s why I just remember why I didn’t the first time I tried to join, I went down. I turned up at Friday night. In

15:00 the bakehouse I’d developed varicose veins and so I got down to the medical officer at Sturt Street and he knocked me back. He said, “You can’t go in the army with those legs,” and one of my mates of the Victorian Scottish was an orderly at the Sturt Street and I said to him, “Oh, they’ve put me out.” He said, “Well, I’ll tell you what,” he said, “wait till it’s a cold, dark day,” he said, “and I’ll put

15:30 you into a doctor that can’t see too well.” Anyhow, I had to go to the hospital. I had a couple of injections, which didn’t do much, and I turned up and I saw me mate and he said, “Alright,” and he put me and I got through there no worries at all and so then we had to go out to Caulfield and have another examination but they never looked at me legs, so I was in.

16:00 I told you about that chap that came into the bakehouse when the war rose. He was in the militia and he was crying. He didn’t want to go. Well, he had joined the ASC [Australian Service Corps] and he was a driver and he said to me, “Get into the ASC” he said, “That’ll be alright.” So they asked us where we wanted to go and I said, “The ASC.” So they sent me up to Puckapunyal and we got there and then they said, “Well what can you do?”

16:30 I said, “Well nothing.” He said, “Can you drive a car?” I said, “No. Can’t drive a truck.” I said, “I can shoot a gun.” He said, “We don’t want that. We want drivers.” So I was there for about three weeks and it was a cold wet muddy hole. It was a terrible place. So they sent me, they said, “Well, you’re useless”, sent me back to Caulfield and from there they sent us to a camp at Dandenong.

17:00 Well, that was the worst camp you’d ever see. In those days, they used to have pig pens all out in the open with bluestone floors and that’s where we slept, in the pig pens on this bluestone and there was people that had dying of coughs and colds and we were there. We had no rifles. No equipment. All we had was basketballs and footballs and so

17:30 I was there for, that’s where I met Lucette, there. It was quite a good camp but no useless as far as training went. All you did was we used to had some militia, mostly militia instructors, and they were pretty easy going. I remember we used to march from Dandenong to Hallam and then we’d spend the rest of the day in the pub and then march back again and that was

18:00 and then we’d go down to the park. They’d play a game of basketball or tunnel ball and marching round, drill. I can always remember once they were looking for corporals. So they took us to the park and they spread ‘em about 200 yards apart each and they had to roar out orders that the bloke at the next one could

18:30 hear it, “You’re a corporal”, and I didn’t have a very loud voice so I stayed a private. But the people at Dandenong were marvellous to us. They used to, you’d be out on guard and they’d bring you a cup a coffee at 10 o’clock at night and some of the old farmers’d slip 10 bob in your pocket. Ah, they were very sensible.

19:00 They left the pubs open till nine o'clock at night and so instead of havin' a lotta blokes gettin' turfed out at six o'clock. There was never any trouble anyhow and there was a permanent military police sergeant there and he'd have a picket of, you know, the ordinary people. He'd take them around. Well he'd start at the bottom pub. He'd empty that out and then the picket'd have a couple of

19:30 beers there and then he'd go to the next pub, empty that out, and the picket, and up to the three pubs. They'd do that and there was a Greek café called 'Steve Degeorges' and he'd give 'em supper. Everyone wanted to be on the picket. They, oh, they took us down to Melbourne for a march

20:00 and that photo up there's they give you a bandolier, you know, it come out of the First World War, and a rifle and we marched through the city and as soon as we marched they took all the rifles off us again and back to Dandenong. I was with a bunch of about six blokes and every night we'd go over to the Albion Hotel and it was alright up till a couple a days after payday we'd be

20:30 broke, and there was a fella, the publican was a fella called Jimmy McQuade, and he'd let us put it on the slate. So we'd have a couple of pints and get a half a dozen bottles of beer between us every night and then payday, we'd come down and give him all our money and we'd start again, but suddenly mid week, oh, it must a been in July, August, they said, "Right, pack your bags. You're off," and so we packed our bags and we're marchin' down the main street and

21:00 all the people are out waving goodbye to us and Jimmy McQuade's up on his balcony of his pub and someone said, "Look who's goin', Jimmy," and here's all us blokes goin' owin' him a fortnight's wages. So we went down from Dandenong to Balcombe [Mornington Peninsula]. Balcombe was a just a new being built. I mean it was open drains everywhere and

21:30 I can remember there was, you know, of a night we used to go to the Salvation Army hut but I can't remember doing any training at Balcombe. We must have done some. We weren't there a great length of time. We used to get leave from there, I know, because I used to come back to Dandenong by bus, but I think we must have done a little

22:00 bit of training. We used to go down for a swim down the beach I remember. It was we weren't actually in any unit as far as I know then. We were just a floating sort of a bunch. We never knew where we were going. Never had any battalion allocated to us or anything like that.

22:30 Anyhow we were there for about three months and I got a bit jack of it [sick and tired of it]. I got sick of this internal just, you know, doing drills and that and I got meself in the cookhouse for a while and that was good. I used to get plenty of good tucker and we didn't have to go on parades but they suddenly missed me on the parades

23:00 and so I was back on parade and they shifted us again and this time it was to Darley, outside Bacchus Marsh, and that was another new camp. We got there and all the drains were open and they had roofs on the huts but oh, it was cold, it was wet. There was mud, and so there I can remember

23:30 we did a lot of training. We did a lot of physical training and at that time Bren guns [Bren light machine guns] were just starting to come into the army and we did a lot of work with the Bren guns and Lewis guns and rifle training and route marches and that, and that was in November 1940. I know we got off for the Melbourne Cup but we used to

24:00 get night leave and the milk carriers used to go from Bacchus Marsh to town and they'd give us a ride into town and we'd ride back. So we used to get to Melbourne quite often. I remember once the first week or so we were there we went to Bacchus Marsh and had an afternoon and we were coming back and someone found a full barrel of beer outside

24:30 the pub. So we rolled it all the way back to the camp and they said, "Well how are we gonna open this?" And we didn't have any bungs or anything. So someone knocked the top off it and they were dippin' buckets into the top of the thing and cartin' 'em around the huts. We never heard any more about that but it was a good camp. A lot of a lot of good training and

25:00 then we used to get nightly there was a skate roller, skating rink down at Melton, which wasn't far and we'd go there. There was dances in the woolshed. We went to that and about that time our little group, we had a little Scotchman called Scotty M(UNCLEAR), he was Irish or Scotch, I'm not sure, but he was a great singer and dancer. We had a fella that could play the piano

25:30 and the rest of us mucked about. So we formed a concert party and we put a concert on for the troops, which was very successful because this little Scotch bloke, oh he could dance, he could sing, he could do anything. He did most of the entertaining and that concert party stayed with us from we were at Darley to,

26:00 oh, in December some time. So we put a couple of concerts on there and I think they thought we were too close to Melbourne. We were gettin' away too often. So the 8th Division was forming and we were allocated to the 2/29th Battalion and they were

26:30 shifted to Bonegilla and that was it must a been in late November or early December in 1940. An entirely different atmosphere up there. It was hot. It was dry. It was dusty and we were camped on the

banks of the Hume Weir but they really whipped us into a good shape there. We did a lot of

27:00 route marching, a lot of physical training, a lot of weaponry you know with the new machine gun, the Bren. Vickers guns. Grenade throwing. All aspects of infantry training and then we used to go swimming in the dam. It was

27:30 cold but it was good. There wasn't much, occasionally you'd get into Albury. There wasn't much weekend leave and that and then it came up to Christmas in 1940 and we got, I think it was six days, seven days leave. So the whole camp shut down and we all headed

28:00 off for six or seven days. I went with a couple of mates of one bloke lives up the country and he lived up at a place called Leitchville, which is up near Cohuna. So I went with him because Lucette, I'd met her and we were more or less engaged I suppose and her brother-in-law was a stationmaster in this police force. So she was up there and I went up there and we spent

28:30 the six, seven days.

She was in the AWAS wasn't she? Your wife?

Oh, she wasn't in the AWAS, that was; they didn't start till 1942. No, Lucette was, I don't know how old would she be, she'd only be about 18 then. I was 20 but it was a good leave and

29:00 there was a lot of 'em went up there and we went and we used to get on these little rattlers [trains], take the ordinary train, steam train, to Bendigo and then they had these little beetles [single carriage trains] they called them flying all the little, they'd stop at a place and everyone'd get off, go over the pub. Have a beer and the bloke beetle [driver] couldn't go and he'd come back but…

Were you looking forward to going overseas?

Yep. Yeah we,

29:30 well, and that was one of the bug bears [complaints], because we just didn't look like getting overseas. I mean we were there, we came back from leave and started you know and started training again and after a couple a months we had another shift and they took us to Bathurst and that was a good camp. It was a good hard camp. It was get starting to get towards

30:00 the end of summer and it was a cold place but we you know we'd been training for 12 months and there wasn't much more they could show us and they started to say, "Well, you're not in the AIF, we're in the IAF, In Australia Forever," and it looked as though we were, because they were holding back troops. They must a known something about the Japanese coming in and they were trying to hold back troops to defend

30:30 Australia because they were all leaving and so we spent, we got up there in January and we were still there in April and we were you know we'd fully trained, fully fit and very bored and so one day this fella in kilts, he appeared on the scene.

31:00 We were all looking at him and a notice went up on the routine orders board that anyone interested in joining a special unit, 'hush-hush' unit [secret unit] they called it, to report to their section leader and he would let the old colonel know and he'd give you an interview. Well, this Scotch bloke was a bloke called Freddy, Captain Freddy Spencer-Chapman

31:30 and he was a British commando and it turned out that in 1940 things weren't going too well in England. They were gettin' knocked about. They had Dunkirk and there was a Lord Lovat. He had estates up in Scotland. So he gathered a few ruffians as he called them, took them up to his

32:00 estate and trained them and then started little raids across the coast, you know, across the Channel [English Channel], St Nazaire, Norway and it was startin' to worry the Germans a bit. So someone there said, "Well, these bloody Australians are all a bit mad. We ought to go out there and train some of them," and so there was a colonel called M…oh it don't matter anyhow, and two

32:30 captains, Freddy Spencer-Chapman. Now he was, he'd climbed Mount…or he tried to climb Mount Everest and he'd been an explorer. He was the fieldcraft instructor, teach you to go by… 'Mad Mike' Calvert [later Chindits in Burma] was another captain. He was the Royal Engineers and he was the explosive expert and they had a couple of warrant officers. Stafford, Stafford was a weapons expert and another one was the signals. So they

33:00 headed off to Australia. Never told anyone they were coming and when they got there, the Australian army didn't want to know anything about it, didn't want them at all but they persisted and they finished finally they got to Bob Menzies and he leant on somebody and they said, "Well you can form, you know, some companies," and so they split up and that's how we met Freddy Spencer-Chapman and

33:30 we had an interview you know and then they said, "Can you street fight? Can you sail a boat? Can you fly an aeroplane? Can you guide by the stars," and I said, "No, no, no." Forgot all about it, you know. Anyhow about, oh, about a month later I was out on bivouac actually. Used to go out on sleepin' out in the paddock and a bloke come,

34:00 despatch rider come out and said, “You’ve got to hurry back to camp. You’re moving in two hours.” I said, “Where?” He said, “We don’t know but you’re moving. You’ve gone into that hush-hush unit,” see. So it was great and there was quite a few of the 2/29th Battalion. 2/30th Battalion was New South [Wales], 2/29th Victorian, 2/30th was a New South Wales

34:30 battalion that was also in Bathurst and the 2/26th was a Queensland battalion and they made up most of the First Independent Company. The officers, there was quite a few officers and what had happened was the NCOs and the officers had been notified before us and they’d gone to Wilson’s Promontory to do a

35:00 [cadre course] and they had six weeks there so they could instruct us and you know what to do. So we still didn’t know any what it was. We got on the train went to Sydney, you know, went down to Melbourne, had a night in Melbourne at Caulfield and then we caught this old rattler to Foster. Still didn’t know what it was that and they only had one truck I

35:30 think because we all had to stay in Foster and this one truck shuttled us out there and on the way out, at Yanakie we passed an airfield and so that was it, paratroops, and so we eventually all got to Tidal River and they paraded and told us and now after about two or three days they told us what we

36:00 were going to, we were independent company. Well, no one knew what that was. So they said, “You can pull out now if you like. You’ll be thought none the worse of, but if you go past here you’re in.” So we’d found out then that what it was and why they picked Wilson’s

36:30 Promontory. It’s isolated. It’s rugged. It was more or less like the coasts of Europe because it turned out they were training us to go to the big raid at Dieppe, and Wilson’s Promontory is, you know, it’s like that. It’s got a narrow neck, which is only half a mile wide and they had guards every few yards across and no one could get onto them and

37:00 they kept a pretty close watch from up in the hills to see there was nothing coming by sea because we believed there was a lot of fifth columnists coming down to wonder what was going on.

Can you tell us what fifth columnists are?

Yeah, they’re spies. You know, I mean, ‘quislings’ [collaborator, traitor] they called them in Europe. They were civilians that were planted or they might a been locals you know

37:30 that was recruited and they used to go round with their ears and eyes open and pick up any information and despatch it overseas. How they did it, they had their own wireless but this infantry it was called Number 7 Infantry Training Centre. Now there was a number 1, 2, 3,

38:00 4, 5 but there was no 6 and this Mike Calvert, the explosive expert, he was a bit cunning. He figured if we call it Number 7, the fifth columnists won’t be able to find Number 6 and they’ll be looking for it, and there was no Number 6. So he and they took us down there and we were isolated then and it was intensive, really intensive

38:30 training. We had a lot of weapons that weren’t, what would I say, commonplace in Australia and we had the Tommy gun [sub-machine gun] with the first lot of Tommy guns that had come to Australia. We had 45 Colt automatics [.45 Colt pistols], which we trained with and they were no good in the jungle cause they got too much mechanical workings used to get corroded, and they had

39:00 plastic high explosive. Well, it was just a new explosive. I think there was only 20 tons in the world at the time made every year. We got that. We had sticky tank grenades. Oh, some horrible weapons, you know, they give us garrottes: piece of piano wire with a toggle on each end. They reckoned it’d take a bloke’s head off. I never tried it but, or knives.

39:30 They even taught bows and arrows because they were silent and on top of that it was five o’clock up and there, I don’t if you’ve been to the Tidal River, there’s Mount Oberon. Well, we had to run up and down that before breakfast and they give you a dose of rum to charge you up. It was at the same time,

40:00 there was a company of New Zealanders, commandos came over and training and they used enemy both ways. I mean, you’d be sittin’ down to your meal and they’d come in and they’d pour in the door and in through the windows. It’d be on and it was really serious. There were broken noses and broken arms and wrists and they used

40:30 to get stuck into it and the next night we’d go over and raid them and then one night they had a combined night exercise with them out in the bush or us in the bush, I forget which, and they come out to try and find us and they set that as an exercise but it turned a failure in the finish because the word got around if they were taken prisoners they took ‘em

41:00 back to the wet canteen where the beer was. Of course everyone was gettin’ caught then to get back, so that didn’t really work.

Tape 4

00:33 **Okay perhaps**

Yeah.

Sandy, can you tell me now I'm interested, can you tell me a little bit more about your commando training at Wilson's Prom [Promontory]?

Yes. Well as I said, a lot of the equipment was new; we had to really start training again. For instance, they had sticky tank grenades and they were a like a big glass ball

01:00 with a handle on it and they had a big sheet of sheet of cast iron, and we used to have to go up and you'd jab the grenade onto that and it would adhere. When it let go the mechanism started and it'd blow a great hole in it. That was one thing. We had to do a terrible lot of, well, for instance mapping. We had to

01:30 do what they call 'panorama sketches'. You'd get up on a hill and you'd sketch the outline of the coast or wherever you're looking at and I remember once we had to climb up Mount Latrobe, which was long day's climb. We went up there to do a panorama sketch and we got up the top and the clouds went out. So we didn't see anything and I think we went up about three days before we got a thing. This

02:00 Spencer-Chapman was fantastic on the hills. He'd be up with us and he'd be up the hill and down again and showered and dressed before we could get down and he expected us to keep up with him. Under-, we did an underwater demolition. We did a lot of that with sticks of gelignite and they found that the best way

02:30 to waterproof it was to use a condom. Put the gelignite in there and seal it off and drop it in the thing. We would have to swim in the cold water, supposed to be silently, where you could hear everyone gasping with the cold from about 100 metres away. Then a couple of weeklong treks out around the promontory and coming back, just to get used to trekking with, we had

03:00 packs, sleeping bags and that which had been used on Everest expeditions but they were quite good. We used to go out, we practically lived in the scrub and a couple of our fellas had a bright idea one day.

03:30 Both the New Zealanders had a ration truck and we had one and coming from Foster to Tidal River at one stage you'd come up a steep hill, which used to drop it right down into the low gear. So a couple of our fellas had the bright idea that they'd hijack the New Zealand truck when it was coming up near the peak. So they waited till it come along. They could hear it grinding up the hill. They sprang out with fixed bayonets

04:00 and that and pulled him up and were making the driver get out so they could get in truck and drive it into the scrub somewhere but they'd forgotten that the driver had a couple a mates in the back a the truck. He jumped outta the truck, the driver, and was confronting our two fellas and his two mates got out of the back with a lotta big turnips and attacked our blokes with that and they soon lost the idea of pinchin' the truck but that was the sort a thing was encouraged.

04:30 It was they were the enemy and we were the enemy but we did you know a lot of a lot of the time out at night sleeping out overnight or sleeping in the bush. Go down over the Saddle to Sealers' Cove and sleep there and blow fish up and you know live off the land. It was a national park and in those days there were

05:00 deer down there. Well no one was allowed to touch the deer but they sent us out on a three or four-day tour, trip, exercise and they wouldn't give us any rations. They give us five live rounds each. So the deer used to suffer. We used to shoot and a mate reminded me the other day, some of the city blokes didn't know a deer from a cow and they'd shoot the cow too,

05:30 because there was a few of the farmers used to put their cows down there but we only had six weeks training but it was terribly intense and when we finished we were right, but just before the finish they decided we'd had enough and they gave us a weekend off, Saturday night off or Saturday afternoon and so they arranged to play a football match against

06:00 the Foster football club and there were Victorians and New South Welshmen and Queenslanders and the team, our team, consisted mostly of rugby players. The Foster crowd never knew what hit 'em. They had broken noses, broken ribs but we finished up quite friendly and we had a night at the pub and the Kiwis [New Zealanders] were there too, and one thing I'm ever to remember is

06:30 there was about a half a dozen Maoris [indigenous New Zealanders] got up on the publican's billiard table and did a haka [Maori war dance] in their boots and he wasn't very pleased with that but once again the local constabulary were very understanding. They had a dance. They left the pub open till the dance finished so there were no drunks around the street and we had to catch the bus home about 11 o'clock and once there was

07:00 the officer was counting. He was, "One, two, three, four," one down in the gutter, "five, six, seven." So but they got back. After six weeks, they gave us seven days final leave and my friend the 2IC [Second in Command], old Lex Fraser, he often reminds me that when he had the leave passes but when it's time to go they hadn't supplied him

07:30 with any railway vouchers to get, so he said he just sent us all on the way with no vouchers and he said, “I rely on you to get home under your own steam and come back,” but the railways never missed anything much, but we were there was three or four of us and in our section we had a fella called Dick Ellam. Dick, don’t know how he got there, he couldn’t see 10 feet in front of him and he stuttered but he was a lovely bloke, but anyhow we were all

08:00 come to Flinders Street Station and we were walking through and first one went walked back the ticket collector and the next one went past the collector, no tickets and old Dick was always last. He stumbled about and he come and the bloke and he couldn’t find the opening to go through and he eventually found it and the bloke said, you know, “No ticket? Where do you think you’re going?” Old Dick said, “Oh I, I, I, I’m going to the b-b-bloody war. Are you comin?” and off

08:30 he went. So we eventually all got back from leave and then we were told we were going overseas. It was about the 12th of July I think, no, be about the 10th in Foster. So we had to catch the old train to Melbourne, train up to Sydney and then we all boarded the Zealandia.

09:00 Oh, troop transport, about 7,000 ton, an old tramp steamer and we headed off on the 12th of July. We stopped in Brisbane. It was a bit of a shambles. We’d been issued with a new colour patch, which was a green double diamond. Nobody knew what it was and then everyone was querying us about it. Anyway we all got into town and they all got into the pub, havin’ a

09:30 few beers and one of our friends, Sticky Wills, disappeared. After a while he come back and he said, “Do you wanna go for a tour of the town?” “Well yeah.” So we four or five of us sprung up. Old Sticky had pinched a horse and cart, a lorry, down the street from the brewery and he took us around the town in this and looked up, one of our blokes was stalkin’ the policeman on point duty. Anyhow they all

10:00 got back, we got back onto the boat and it was supposed to be very secret but they had a militia unit on there and about 200, well, C [Civil] Construction Corps, civilians. So we headed off up through the Samarai Straits [eastern tip of New Guinea] and up past New Britain. Now at that stage we were supposed to stay at

10:30 New Britain. The 2/22nd battalion were at Rabaul plus some aeroplanes and artillery and we were supposed to work with them there, which would have been ideal because New Britain’s very mountainous and we would have probably been able to do the same job as the 2nd Company and the 4th Company did at Timor, but we got about halfway up New Britain and the army headquarters sent news, “Don’t take them to Rabaul. Take them

11:00 to Kavieng on New Ireland,” which was another day away. Well that was alright, but New Ireland was a place, it was impossible for us to defend. It was a little narrow strip up there and the Japs [Japanese] only had to land on two beaches and they cut us off. If we got into the bush it was all scrub, ah swamp. Nowhere, there was no native gardens to live off but that was in the future. Anyhow we

11:30 got to Kavieng. There was no one knew we were coming. There was no accommodation ready but the town people were pretty cooperative and there was a few big houses empty. So they billeted us in the few houses and then we started training again. We used to they’d start about nine o’clock and they’d have route

12:00 marches and they’d have, you know, pulling Bren gun down till we were sick of the sight of it. It was all very boring. Nighttime they had a wet canteen and we used to have various sort of turtle races or horse races. That was alright but eventually I got sick of this eternal marching up and down and forming fours. So our officer, Jack

12:30 Mackie, wanted a batman. So I thought, “This is alright.” The batman, he used to pay him a pound a week and if you went down to the canteen to buy soap or toothpaste or anything, you bought the same for yourself on his bill. So that was good. On top of that, what was best, you didn’t have to do any duties. After you finished your duties, you were free to go. So I started off on this and

13:00 old Jack used to take our section out and he’d march ‘em off down the ground into the jungle somewhere and he’d be comin’ back and McNab’d be sittin’ in Sang Sang’s pub having a beer and he’d look at me and he’d march the section off back down to the headquarters quickly and go in and have a look and his bed was made, his shoes were shined, his shorts and everything were nicely

13:30 done. So he, “Oh.” Anyhow another time he’d come home and I’d be out playin’ golf and he’d rush back and it was all done and that went on for many weeks and it was a good thing for me because I’d found a little black boy to do all the work and I was payin’ him six bob a month and Jack was payin’ me four pound a month. So I was makin’ a profit and this young bloke he used to do all the work. I’d go down and do the shopping and call in and have a

14:00 beer and old Jack, anyhow, eventually he caught me. So he sacked me and he kept the black boy on, but another thing, when I used to go playing golf, I’d also take me little black fella with me for a caddy and I’d hit a ball in the scrub and he’d go in and he’d come out with about six and I was makin’ a profit on golf balls. Anyhow poor old Jack, he woke up in the finish and he sacked me and from then on I was on permanent

14:30 guard duty and God knows what, but we finished up good mates, Jack and I. He died a couple a years

ago but he was always good, but he never let me forget about his batman, I can tell ya that. So to make things, the army had told us, and they must been expecting that when the enemy came, if they came in any numbers, which they would,

15:00 that they would not help us. We'd have to get out the best way we could and they told us that. They told the 2/22nd, [at Rabaul] they threw…and the 2/21st was at Ambon, the 2/40th in Timor, and they threw them all to the wolves, you know, they just had no hope. So they told us, you know, "When the time comes, you'll just have to do the best you can." So and to make

15:30 the things worse again they started splitting us up and wherever there was an airstrip, they put one of our sections there to guard it to stop the Japs using it for as long as possible and when they had to get out, to blow it up, and that was, we had an airstrip at Manus, that was up on the Admiralty Islands, and Number 4 Section was there. They detached five men down New Ireland a bit from Kavieng to Namatanai

16:00 and they had a little airstrip there. Our section, Number 3, was at Buka Passage [Buka Island, north of Bougainville], where there was an aerodrome. Number 1 Section went to Tulagi [Solomon Islands]. Well they didn't have an aerodrome there but they had two squadrons of flying boats and a big air force wireless station and air force staff and you know maintenance men, they were there,

16:30 and then further down at Vila [Vanuatu] we put a section there and had the headquarters of our platoon was down there but why they put 'em there I don't know because there was they were right out of danger but anyhow came the time we went across to Buka. Then they split them up all over the whole

17:00 thing but after we left, our other fellas started preparing defences, so they must have known. They were digging gun pits and the beauty of it was that every week or so a Japanese ship would come in. Of course then we weren't at war with the Japanese. Sailors'd get off. They went all round Kavieng taking photos of our blokes digging pits. Getting ready for, you know, defence, and so when the

17:30 bomb did go off, they knew where every pit was and there was nothing our fellas could do. They knew they were doing it, as I said, but they're neutrals. We're not allowed to touch them. So that was alright. So we went across to Buka and I could tell all the stories of Buka, Bougainville, I can first-hand, but from the other sections I just had to rely on

18:00 some of the survivors to tell me what happened. So I'm not so accurate in that light but it was October you know, still no war. War was thousands of miles away from us and it was like a big holiday at Buka Passage, an idyllic place and we used to just poke about. Well there wasn't much we could do really. We had gun pits around the aerodrome and that was it.

18:30 So we fraternised with the planters, had parties and occasionally our lieut [lieutenant] was a bit wary. We sent at us Buka Island is only 80…about a half a mile from Bougainville is what they call Buka Passage. There's a terrible current flows through there but we used to go over to Bougainville and get down up in the hills and make a few

19:00 food stores there. Not much, we didn't have much, and that went on and then eventually on December the 7th, I can always remember, there was an old army colonel lived in at Buka Passage. He and his wife lived there, cause on his pension he could live like a lord you know, servants, and he'd come running up the track and he'd just heard on the wireless that Japan had entered the war.

19:30 So from then on, we were you know on a war alert. We had our engineers set booby traps all round the aerodrome and we used to patrol that at night. We had a lookout up on a place called Mount Hagen, ah Hanahan and there'd be someone there watching down over the sea and every hour

20:00 through the night they'd signal with an Aldis lamp and our signallers were in the middle of the airstrip and they would get a signal. If they saw a signal everything was okay. If there was no signal, there'd be a bit of a worry. So one night there was no signal for about two hours and our corporal, a bloke called Don McLean, who was very army minded and very correct. So he had to,

20:30 well I suppose it'd take him about an hour to climb the hill and see, and the bloke was sound asleep. So there was terrible goin' on's then but anyhow he got over that, but they had all these booby traps set up around the drome and we were sitting there one night and one of the booby traps went off and the officer sent a corporal and me to find out who was doing it. Couldn't find

21:00 anything and then virtually anyhow we found a bit of a dog. A dog who was going through and he'd hit the trip. Another night a big crab did and another night we heard gunfire and we tore down to the passage. It was a bloke called Bill Wilding, a captain of the Macdhui [Burns Philp motor ship], a boat. They'd given him a gun and so he was practicing as he went through the thing, but things were pretty quiet

21:30 from the early part and then Japanese planes started to arrive. They were what they call a Serial 43, a big four-engine plane, and they were up that high. We only had rifles and 303, you know, light machine guns, and we couldn't get anywhere near them. So they used to just circle around and

22:00 have a good look what was going on. Once they came too low and we got into them. They never came

down again but from then from there I think I should sort of come down section by section because it was at Manus they were like us, they had a little well they had to make the drome there. The natives thought they were mad because when

22:30 they first went there they employed hundreds of natives rolling logs up and down the ground, flattening the thing and they no sooner finished it than a couple a planes landed but the next thing they were blowing it all up again. So the natives reckoned they were all crazy but the planes from New Guinea, some of 'em used to stop and refuel at

23:00 Manus on their way to Truk, which was the island a bit further on, and there's a couple a planes landed and the boys were talking to the crews. He said, "Oh we see you're," you know, "we see you blokes flyin' around here." He said, "You haven't seen us flyin' around here" he said, "It's the first time anyone's been." It was the Japs flyin' around and havin' a good look. So they were all ready

23:30 and about the 21st of January they got attacked and they had a big wireless mast there for an AWA [Amalgamated Wireless of Australia] civilian station and the planes would come in and they were bombing away. Our blokes shot one plane down and they were startin' to go away and the civilian radio operator rushed in and got on his radio and started reporting the thing and the planes heard him and they

24:00 come back again and they bombed it and he kept on reporting the thing while they were still about and our officer had to tell him to get off the air and stay off the air, which they did very reluctantly. So eventually they went away and they were left alone, but they knew an invasion was imminent. So they got up into the hills and they made base

24:30 camp and set out outposts and they were settled in nicely and then about in March the Japs landed and they landed with a fair size force and it was only 25 of our blokes, so they did a couple of raids, just poking around, you know, keepin' out of the way, see what's doing. One night, one day they were out and the Japs came after them and the Japs got 'em in a corner in the finish

25:00 and they reckon that there was a little Japanese officer in charge of the crowd chasing 'em and he had white gloves and that, and they were that confident, they sat down and had a smoke while they were waitin' and while they did that in come a storm and it rained and our blokes just faded away in the storm. The Japs lost 'em. So they waited a while longer. Their officer was incapacitated. He had bad legs

25:30 and he, they said, well they had a couple a boats hidden in the mangroves. They said, "Well, we better make tracks now cause we can't do much more here," and the Japs were aware they were there and were after them and there was no advantage in stopping. So the old Allan Palmer, the lieut, he wanted them to leave him in a chair with a machine gun and a couple of grenades and he'd hold the enemy back. They said,

26:00 you know, "Rubbish," that you don't leave, well you were, we were supposed to leave anyone wounded and don't let 'em hold 'em, but they took him they carried him down to the coast. They got the boats from Manus and then they cut about, oh it was about 300 miles down to Bogadjim [north coast of New Guinea, south of Madang] in Queensland. They landed there and made their

26:30 way from Bogadjim up over 300 miles through the mountains to Mount Hagen [Western Highlands of New Guinea]. From there they waited for a while, got a plane to Thursday Island and then were home. So they never lost anyone and so that gets down to Kavieng. They were, you know, making all sorts of plans there, the headquarters. There was supposed to be about 140 blokes there but I'm not too sure of the numbers but they'd been

27:00 there and the planes used to come in and on their way to bomb [in the Caroline Islands] and one day one went to land in the water just off Kavieng and he went straight to the bottom. So our 2IC was handy. He swam out and tried to get down to get the crew out but they couldn't get 'em. So they lost that plane but anyhow they were attacked on the 21st too. Ah about six o'clock in the mornin' he tells

27:30 me the fire alarm went, which was a siren, which was an air raid thing, and they had about sixty planes over 'em and then they gave 'em you know a real doing over. They bombed everything in sight but except the drome. They never used to bomb the drome cause they wanted to use 'em. So our blokes fought back, fought back well. They shot down seven planes

28:00 and they were with light machine guns. So that was pretty good and on top of that, I must tell ya, we had acquired a schooner, the Induna Star. Well how it came about the army said to our, a mate a mine, Jack Burns, a lieut and he was the finance man, and the army said to him you know, "Anything you want just buy it." Meaning you know coconuts or vegetables and that. Jack went out and bought a schooner

28:30 for 10,000 pound. Nearly broke the army but it was a good thing for us in the finish because when we were shifting sections about they used that and this was to be used in an evacuation. So they had made arrangements, they expected the planes and they told the crew on the Induna Star soon as these raids start to get out into the channels and head down to the islands and get cover,

29:00 which they did, but they never got to the cover because six planes peeled off and took to them. Well they had about half a dozen of our fellas on it and they had a Bren gun on the roof of the wheelhouse, which was terribly exposed. So there was a signalman called Munro was working in a Bren and his

number two man was George Anderson and they started off firing and the other blokes had their rifles

29:30 going. Anyhow, Munro got hit in the spine. He fell down and Anderson took over and they shot him through the arm and he changed, kept on firing, changed arms and they come back and they opened him up across the top and that was it. He fell down. A bloke called Lex Noonan, he got shot through both legs but anyhow they ran aground then and then the planes left 'em alone. So

30:00 Lex Fraser come out and saw them and they evacuated. Munro was the spine wound and Anderson was you know pretty well gone. They took him and the others went to the hospital and that was on the evening of the 21st. So they could see by the number of planes that it had come off an aircraft carrier and it was

30:30 certainly gonna be an invasion. So if they'd a stayed in Kavieng, there was no way they could defend it and no way they could get out once the Japs landed. So the CO [Commanding Officer] took most of the company down to a place called Kaut. It was in the swamps. He left a section at the aerodrome to

31:00 defend it and blow it up and he left the engineer officer and about four engineers and a driver in town to destroy the wharves, the copper sheds and that and the rest headed off round the scrub. Well there was a fella called Peter Jack Dixon, the engineer officer, and they'd been up for a couple a days you know with all this fighting and that and they went round and they set charges at all

31:30 the places and Dixon said you know, "We'll go and have a sleep and we'll get up at four o'clock in the morning and set these charges off and then we'll get away," but the only trouble was, the Japs landed at three o'clock and Dixon's buggered asleep and they couldn't wake him, but the Japs soon woke him up and they captured those and that's one of the blokes on the front of the book is there. So they were captured.

32:00 Our CO happened to be in one of the houses, one of the civilian ones. He'd sent the troops away and stayed back to see things were right and he was in Burns Philp house or somewhere with this other, I've forgotten his name, a planter, and the planter heard the noises and he got up and they both got up and he put the front light on and he could see Jap soldiers in the front garden. So he whipped the

32:30 light off and him and the CO went out the back and he had the staff car under there. It never ever would start and it started first up and he drove off. He went right through the Japs and they never stopped him and he headed out to the drome [aerodrome] and Jack Burns was the officer in charge there. So he said to Jack, "Blow the drome and get going," and there was a lot of

33:00 petrol to be blown up too. So Jack blew the drome up and then he blew the petrol up and before that was all done the Japs had arrived, but in their usual form they used to just come in a block, you know, and they'd come onto the drome and Jack was there with the Vickers gun and a couple of Brens and Tommy guns and he said it was like daylight. They were just walking on the drome

33:30 and in, not spread out or anything. So they killed about 300 and then that was the lot that had landed at Kavieng. Another lot landed over on the west coast at the beach and they were coming into Kavieng but Jack's section managed to slip through them and the last Jack heard was these two lots of Japs were fightin' each other in the dark. So they got away there

34:00 and they had to make their way, oh a couple a days down through the swamp with row boats and whatnot, and the motto in the company was that any injured, you know, had to be left behind and so the two badly injured blokes, they were taken to a place called Lemoncott. There was a Roman Catholic mission there and sisters [nuns] and they left them there with the sisters and they were looked

34:30 after. Lex Noonan, he was shot in both legs you know and he kept walking. They made him a couple of pair of crutches out of trees anyhow and he got down. So they all got away down to Kaut. Now there was a lot of civilians and they were in one camp and our blokes were in the other and the Enduna Star had got off the ground and been sailed down to the bay just

35:00 nearby. So the civilians were a bit funny. A bit funny these islander blokes and they wouldn't join our fellas, but our engineers got onto the Enduna Star, which had been badly holed. They fixed it up. It had been down under the water and the engine was under water and they cleaned it up and got it all going. It took 'em about a week and they went back

35:30 and saw the civilian fellas and told them, "We're going," because they'd heard that the 2/22nd Battalion at Rabaul was still fighting and said, "Well we can't fight here. We won't last any time at all. We'll go down and help them," and offered the civilians a berth on the boat to go down with them, but they wouldn't come because they said that if they were caught on an army boat they'd be treated as spies,

36:00 but when they got back to Australia they said that our blokes deserted 'em, which was not true, but that's doesn't matter. So they got the Enduna Star going. They had booby traps set. Silly buggers with these booby traps, set around the camp so no one could get in, and one day they saw some natives coming through and being a bit suspicious you know,

36:30 and they realised that these were natives from Kavieng who'd been sent out by the Japs to try and find out where we were and so one of the engineers, Bert called Bertwhistle, started to chase 'em and they

take off and he ran straight into his own booby trap and killed himself. So they thought, “Well, best we get going.” So they got onto the Enduna Star and they only sailed by night

37:00 and they made their way down the coast till they were almost opposite Rabaul and they called in, it was getting towards daylight, and they pulled into a creek and covered the boat up and then they tried to make contact with the six blokes over the other side of the island but they couldn’t contact ‘em. Couldn’t wait for them so they met up with a planter and he told them that the 2/22nd weren’t fighting. They’d

37:30 gone, you know, they’d been overrun. So they headed off and they were heading in our direction at Bougainville at Buka and, as I told you, the main government headquarters on Bougainville was the place called Kieta, and there was a district officer and radio operators and doctors or you know assistant doctors all over the place down there

38:00 and a big Japanese flying boat landed and these fellas panicked and they burnt the wireless station and they jumped into their boat and were getting ready to make off and the flying boat took off and went away again but they panicked, really did panic, and headed off and they got to Australia and they told the authorities that Bougainville was occupied

38:30 and so from then on, like our headquarters they contacted Moresby and say, “We’re evacuating,” and they told them the authorities told our company, “Don’t go to Bougainville, it’s occupied,” which it wasn’t at that stage, and had they’d come they would a got safely down. So

39:00 they were making their way to Woodlark Island and Faeroe to hopefully to New Guinea and they were going pretty well and suddenly they spied a plane. Well some of the experts tell me they should have immediately stopped their engine and just floated because it wouldn’t show any wake at the back from the fella, but they never did. Lex Fraser put everyone below deck, except the natives. It was a native crew. He put on his pyjamas over his

39:30 uniform and climbed the mast and was waving there makin’ out he was a planter and the next thing, this plane was circling above. It opened the doors and dropped three bombs and one missed the boat, the other one hit it and killed about three and wounded a lot and Lex couldn’t understand that, but he looked behind him and our CO’s standing behind him in full uniform with all his

40:00 decorations and whatnot and the Japs saw that. So the Japs then dropped ‘em a message to say…

Yes, yes. We’re down to the last minutes. So just…

And dropped ‘em a message saying, “Go to Rabaul so-and-so bearing”, you know, and then he opened his bomb doors and he still had three bombs left. So they said, “Well, the best thing we could do is do that.” They came down and

40:30 the injured were gettin’ there. We had a doctor and he was downstairs fixin’ up the injured. One bloke had his leg just hanging off and so forth and they thought if they could just stall until dark they might get away but before dark come a destroyer turned up. It had been called up by the thing and so they were gone. There was no hope then for them. It was the navy and they were quite

41:00 good to our blokes. They hooked on and towed it in. They took the wounded over and on to their, one bloke died and they gave him a funeral, the Jap took our officers off and took them down to the ward room and treated ‘em to drinks and tea and that. It was an old British cruiser or destroyer or what it was. So they then.

Well perhaps we should just pause there, because we’re

41:30 **gonna run to the end of the tape.**

Tape 5

00:31 **Okay**

You’re right?

We’ll get going again.

Yeah. Well they were taken to Rabaul, which was made into a big prisoner-of-war camp, ‘cause there was the 2/22nd, I’ll have to tell you about them later, there was a lot of them there. The air force had all got away mostly. A lot of the civilians, the society women were being raped. You could hear ‘em all going on,

01:00 but they separated the officers from the men, which was their wont, because they think if they thought they do that the men wouldn’t have enough brains to do anything and so they were there for about six months working in the or around the place for the Japs. Our company sergeant major, a bloke called Harvey, he was a very good mechanic and they had him working at the

01:30 camp on the engines and that for cars and trucks and engines in the engine shop and after a while our planes started to come back up bombing Rabaul and of course the Japs had all charged out. Our blokes weren't allowed to get in pits or anything. They had to take the brunt of it. The Japs'd go and Harvey would run around and set all the machines going

02:00 flat out with no oil in 'em and wreck 'em all. One of our officers, Jack Burns, he's still about, they caught him laughing when the Japs were gettin' bombed and they gave him a terrible doing over and I don't think he's ever really recovered but they generally speaking I think they were pretty well treated there,

02:30 especially when the navy, the navy were good. The army weren't so good but I've got a copy of a letter, and it's the only one I've seen, that one of our blokes got out of the POW camp and he wrote to his mother and he was he said, you know, he's a POW, "and we're being treated well and I'll see you soon." Well that was in February '42 and they never heard anymore till about November '45 and they told 'em they were all dead.

03:00 So after about six months, they decided to send them to Japan or I think the other ranks, corporals and privates, were going to a place called Hainan in China. Now there's been many, many rumours since the war, and I've heard it from planters, from Roman Catholic bishops,

03:30 that our men were marched onto this boat the day before the boat went out and came back without 'em but there's no proof. I mean, they've never ever found any bodies but I've heard that story. The rumours still persist and there's no one alive that I know of could say they saw anyone march onto that boat, but we've only gotta take that as the truth. So all the others these fellas

04:00 went onto the boat. There was I think 1,073 soldiers, a couple a hundred civilians, and they set off and they were off Luzon Island, the Philippines when the U.S. submarine Sturgeon sighted 'em about midnight on 1st of July and he followed 'em for a while and the Japanese would not do what

04:30 they were supposed to do, which was a prisoner-of-war ship would be fully lit, marked with a red cross, so you know and then everyone respected that. The Japs' idea was, if they don't mark that, the enemy won't know whether there are prisoners of war on it or not and therefore they wouldn't fire at it, but they don't know the Yanks [Americans]. The Yanks fired at everything. So they sank the Montevideo

05:00 Maru it was and there were no survivors far as we know, except some of the Japs. They got into the boat. They went on to the Philippines somewhere, I just don't know what it was. The guerrillas there caught a lot of 'em, killed a lot of 'em but two or three got back to Manila and just as we say that, about a month ago I got a letter

05:30 from a bloke. Oh dear, because…does that matter?

We'll pause for a moment.

A fella contacted to say they found a survivor of the crew. Well, he told the story and they're investigating it. I can't believe it. He said you know, "We got on very well with the prisoners-of-war. They used to come up on the deck and we'd have a sing-song." I thought, "Yeah," but he said they were supposed

06:00 to meet some destroyers from Japan to escort 'em into China and when they got to the rendezvous place there was no one there. The two vessels that had escorted them from Rabaul had to go back. So they turned around and left and the Montevideo Maru was on its own and it got sank, or got sunk.

06:30 Anyhow this survivor reporting, he said, because any rate he said, and they had a lot of wood on the deck, logs of wood, used to cook the rice for the prisoners and he said there were a lot of prisoners. They got into the lifeboat, the crew. A lot of the prisoners were floating around singing Auld Lang Syne, he said. He said, "and we gave 'em our life jackets."

07:00 Well I mean, they're not likely to do that. He said, "And they got away," and then he said, "Afterwards the escorts from Japan turned up and took these fellas to Japan." Well now there's never been any report of it at all. But that was the story that guy but that was the end of our company, the bulk of 'em anyhow, but the officers, they went

07:30 across on another boat and they got through to Japan and they were there for the rest of the war, anyhow in Japan. I think they finished up working in the coalmines but they were I don't think treated too badly but they came back and until they come back we had no idea what happened to our blokes at all. There was, I mean the mothers and lovers and

08:00 wives had been writing. Every month they were allowed one letter a month for the whole war to these blokes and after the war finished, they got the letters come back in a pile this not opened, never get it. So they were finished. The officers were gone and I might as well tell you the story about Rabaul itself cause we had a couple a blokes

08:30 there. There was the 2/22nd Battalion. There was an air force of about 12 Wirraways [light training/fighter aircraft]. There was artillery there and anti-aircraft guns and there was the same thing on the 21st. They got attacked. They had about a hundred planes over 'em and it give 'em a terrible pasting and it knocked the anti-aircraft guns out.

09:00 The air force, well they only had old Wirraways, which were more or less only training planes, and John Larue was the OC [Officer Commanding], the CO of the air force and he had a fella, his 2IC I think, who spoke Latin and he sent down to air force headquarters, in Latin, the

09:30 oh what do you call those Roman gladiators' farewell, which was to say, "We who are about to die, salute you," and they didn't die. They got shot out of the sky as fast as they went up but I don't think there was too many of 'em killed. They got parachuted down but they did a fantastic job, the air force. They had a couple of bombers and so they evacuated all their men you know. It was no use stayin' there. On

10:00 the morning of the 23rd of January, their defences were ready. They were expecting a thing. In come two aircraft carriers, about seven cruisers and destroyers and seven transports and 15,000 troops landed. Well there was only 1,000 fighting men. They killed 3,000 Japanese on there 'cause once again the Japs landed and

10:30 marched up the, you know, just in full view. They got mowed down but there was no hope and the officers gave a strange order, the "every man for himself." Well they just wandered off, the blokes, you know. They knew they had to get down the island, down south and it was a terrible route. They had to go over the Baining Mountains

11:00 and they had no, you know, they had no rations. They had never been out in the bush around about. They didn't know the bush but they staggered along. A lot of 'em gave up, sat down and just waited for the Japs to pick 'em up. A lot of 'em tried but we had two men, there was Wally Hook and Mick Morrell. Now Wally was 40. Old, old man you know as far as we were concerned, and Wally had had some, I think,

11:30 stomach trouble and Mick Morrell had ulcers all over his leg and so our doctor at Kavieng had sent them to the hospital in Rabaul and there they were told they were not fit for tropical duty and they were being discharged and sent down to Australia but the Japs come before the boat come. So Wally and Mick, they were out of the hospital. They made 'emselves useful around the place. They,

12:00 I know he told me that they spent all night burning records and rushed a pinched ute [utility] and went down to town, picked up anything that was any use still in the town, come back. Then the sisters were moved to another hospital at, out near Kokopo and they took the wounded out there and Mick and Wally were on their own. No, you know, no officers or anyone

12:30 took any notice of 'em. So they decided they'd make their own way and they struggled over the mountains and they thought, "Well this is no good, these mountains." So they made their way to the coast and they sort of figured it'd be on the flat ground, which it was. It was easier. So they got to a place called Toll [Plantation] and there was about 140, 150

13:00 something like that 2/22nd blokes sittin' there despondent, no food, and Mick and Wally decided to stop with 'em. Anyhow they woke up in the morning, early, and Wally said, "Look Mick, I don't like the smell of this place. We'll get going," and Mick said, "Well look Wal, me legs are too crook. I think you'd better go without me and you make your way down."

13:30 So old Wal said, "Well look Mick, if I've gotta bloody well carry ya, I'll get you back to Australia." So they got up and they helped each other and they went down to the beach and it was nice easy going along the sand. All of a sudden a Jap boat appeared and opened fire on 'em and they were never very good shots anyhow but they never hit 'em and Mick and them went into the bush and made their way off but that boat landed

14:00 and captured all this 130 - 140 2/22nd blokes, tied 'em up in loose lots of threes and took 'em into the bush and killed the lot. Bayoneted 'em, shot 'em. Some of 'em survived. One bloke had 11 bayonet wounds and he just lay there and made out he was dead. He got away but the rest of 'em killed. Well then old Wal going to made their way down the island slowly and surely. He passed

14:30 the CO of the, saw a lotta red ribbons and he thought, "Oh here's the Japs comin' here again," but it was the CO of the 2/22nd. He was goin' back to give himself up because he thought that he might be able to help his men that were getting caught. So I think Wal and Mick were about 11 weeks on the road and they eventually got down to a place where a couple of officers had taken

15:00 charge and done something about it. They formed the camp because there was a government district officer called McCarthy and he'd been going around trying to get 'em all to go to the south coast where he was trying to arrange boats to come across, you know, little boats, any boat at all, come across like Dunkirk from New Guinea. So old Wally and them, oh he was a cunning old bugger old Wally, he

15:30 and they got to this camp. There wasn't much food but you know it was something but there was a civilian bloke that knew something about gardening. So the officers got him to go back in the scrub a bit and start a garden because a garden grows in about three weeks there and old Wally said, "Come on Mick, this'll do us." So they went and helped the bloke in the garden. Well, he reckoned for the rest of the time,

16:00 they had food because it was growin' it there and they caught a bit of water. Anyhow they were about 12 mile away and they got somebody got word, "You gotta be there. We're goin' off tonight," and

McCarthy had got a lot of people down and there'd been a brave little boatload of signallers and an officer come over from New Guinea, found out where they were, sent a signal back and a couple a days later,

16:30 the big government ship called the, I think it was the Loravado, he come in and took 'em all off. Well old Wal and then they got off, they went right around to Port Moresby and they got off one boat onto the Macdhui and it took 'em home. I dunno what happened to Mick during the rest of the war but old Wally, he was a sergeant and he was in promotions. He was on a lotta the billboards, shakin' hands

17:00 with civilians and buying bonds and two days after the war finished, he got run over and killed. So he didn't make it but that was what's happened to the bulk of the thing and they're down under the sea. The other six blokes on Kavieng was Sam Rogers was the corporal and these five other blokes, and they're sittin' there and they're seein' planes go over. They're seein' ships go down and they're trying to make contact with the

17:30 headquarters. Well our headquarters had destroyed their radio because it was too heavy. They couldn't carry it and so they had no radio at all and old Sam's trying to make contact with them and he had a couple, Snowy Edwards and Lofty Moran, Snowy was always wantin' a fight and Lofty was very cautious, and he put 'em in a truck and said, "Go up and see what you can find out," you see. Well of course they're driving

18:00 further north and north and north and they're getting no, old Lofty is sayin', "We should turn back now." Snow, "Oh just 'round the corner. I'll," and they were damn near back to Kavieng before someone said, "No. The company's evacuated. The Japs are just up the road." So back they come down to Namatanai very quickly. So there was two coast watchers, good blokes, the Japs got 'em and killed 'em afterwards and Sam said, "Well,

18:30 we'll come and help you blokes," and the coastwatcher said, "It's no good comin' with us. There won't be enough food for us, let alone you." So that's what hope did our company have? They couldn't feed six and he said, "No." So they contacted Port Moresby and Port Moresby said, "Well don't go to Buka 'cause it's occupied," which is you know the same old tale, "make your way down to Don Russell." He was the lieut in charge

19:00 of the crowd down Tulagi way and so they said, "Alright. How we gonna get there," and they're pokin' about and there was an old New Guinea Air launch there, which a Chinaman had bought but he'd taken out the injectors and all that and hidden 'em all in the bush, see, and he wouldn't give 'em to our blokes. So they had to stand over him with guns and they got the injectors and a bit a fuel and they headed off and there was our

19:30 six blokes. I think there was the five or six civilians and one of 'em was a German and he was the sailor. He knew how to sail, see, and they couldn't leave his side because they reckoned he'd turn around and go back if they didn't watch the compass all the time but he turned out to be alright and they had a week of the most mountainous seas, terrific seas you could get there, and storms and

20:00 eventually they survived that and they got down into the Russell Islands and round the around in the Solomons and they thought they'd make themselves useful. So they started calling in at the plantations and destroying any equipment was about and old Lofty told me, he said they got to one there and there was a big boiler and they thought, "Oh this is alright," and so they put a charge inside it

20:30 and unbeknown to the other, Lofty put the lid back on and it went 'bang' and the lid went up about 500 yard and they said they were standin' there wonderin' when the hell it was gonna come down and it come down safely and old Lofty said, "Well, no one told me not to do it." So they picked up a few more civilians and went down to Tulagi and there they joined Don Russell's Number 1 Section.

21:00 They just got there in time for the civilians to catch the Marinda, which was an interstate ship, and they went away. Well then from then on at Tulagi or two little islands, Tanambogo and Gavutu, where the air force stuff was, they got bombed every day for three months. They got a terrible plastering. Well they managed to shoot one plane down 'cause

21:30 they never did anything for a while and the planes were up high and they never opened up on them. They waited and one day they come in low and they let 'em have the lot. They shot one down and they were you know quite happy, well, not quite happy but they spent most of the day in slit trenches with bombs comin' around 'em and…

Excuse me Sandy. I hope you don't mind me interrupting you. I know this might be a bit difficult, seein' as you have written

22:00 **the book on…**

Yeah.

the whole company…

Yeah.

but for the purposes of the archive if you could just limit it to your own experiences and just tell us your own point of view of what was happening to you at that point?

Well I can do that, yeah.

Yeah? That'd be great.

Well, we'll go back to our section on Bougainville. Do we?

Yeah.

That's right. Well I can tell you very briefly what happened to these blokes anyhow. They stayed about three months. The Japs turned

22:30 up. They had a couple of blokes with them and they went to Vila and at Vila the blokes there had been training the Yanks to come back the other way and eventually they all got on the [HMAS] Manoora and back to Australia, but our section on Bougainville and Buka, we were quite ready for what happened and they never attacked us on the 21st of January like the

23:00 others. On the 23rd of January there was about nine planes turned up and we had the aerodrome loaded with explosive for demolitions and we was, when our headquarters went off air on the 21st and they sent a message, "We're going off the air. We're evacuating.

23:30 Take your orders from Rabaul." Of course, they went off the air at the same time. So our signallers are desperately trying to get some information from somewhere. There was none at all. So on the evening of the 20th, not the 22nd Jack Mackie, the lieut, he said, "Well they must be coming," and we were on Buka. It's only a small island, 40-odd mile long and bit wider. No water.

24:00 He said, "We couldn't survive here, so we'll move across first thing in the morning to Bougainville." So about half past three we started and this terrific current was going through. You get in a canoe and before you got across the half mile you were three miles down the other way. So half of us, well most of us got across. There was half a dozen blokes left on the

24:30 drome to fight the planes off, which they shot one down when they came, and blow the drome up. Well it was they were all set with fuses, you know, and you had to light 'em and away you go but the trouble they'd all got wet and then nothin' lights. So they had to saw the thing off and light it a bit further down and all the time there the Japs weren't bombing it

25:00 but they were strafing and our blokes'd run out and try to light the thing and over they'd come but in any event, eventually they got blew it up and they came over. Buka Passage at that time, well up til then, had been a half way stop for some of the Catalinas [Patrol Bomber Y (PBY) amphibious flying boat] down at Tulagi and they used to come in, we never saw them, they'd stop at a place called Soraken and they had fuel there

25:30 and they had a dump I think of 500-pound, 200-, 500- and 50-pound bombs they had with us on the drome. So our engineer, old Bill Dalby, old Bill was that other one, about 40 but oh, and he could fix anything you know. I saw him fix a bloke's false teeth there with a penknife and a pair a wire clippers and that, but that, he

26:00 set the charge and we had time pencils and I think he set it for about four hours. To give him time to get across the other side and we're sittin' over there. Four hours went past, five hours went past and nothing happened and we said to Bill, "You've gotta go back and have a look." Anyhow and then the next day they still hadn't gone off, I dunno why, and old Bill went over and the

26:30 boss said, "Well bugger that. We're not gonna have any more of these time pencils." So they had to take all these 250-pound bombs. Roll 'em down the track, over the pier and toss 'em into the water, which they did with the 500 of 'em, and some time later we came back and here's one of the natives. He's got one of the bombs out trying to knock the front off to get the charge outside to blow fish. So we left him to it but he never, they never, I

27:00 never heard any bang. So that was that old Jack Mackie, he figured, "Right you know look these planes are off an aircraft carrier. They must be coming to occupy." So we all made our way across. Went down about 20 miles down Bougainville and then we headed up the hills, which were to be our

27:30 saviour from now on, the hills, but it was a funny turn-out because everyone had different priorities. I'd grabbed four packets of, four cartons of Ardath cigarettes outta the thing. That was important. Old Bill Dalby had a bloody alarm clock hangin' off him and all, everyone had their own ideas. So us young blokes, we headed off down the thing. There was not a native in sight for a carrier you know. After the bombing, they just disappeared. So

28:00 we were carrying out packs and the young blokes we left these there was we had about four fellas with us, or five, about 40 you know, and you'd think, "What are they doin' there?" Any rate we'd head off at a great clip [rapidly] down the old and we'd have to stop every hour for a blow. The old fellas'd come ploddin' down. They never stopped all day and at the end of the day they were still there. So we got back up into the hills. We didn't know what was going on. We couldn't

28:30 contact anyone, so we didn't know whether Australia was there or not. So we got back, went it took us… we weren't used to the hills. It took us a day to get to Rugen, a place called Rugen. It was only 1,000 feet up but we all gathered there. Eventually they all straggled in. There was a few plantation people

still there but they were staying on the coast on their plantations

29:00 with the hope that the Japanese'd let 'em keep operating. As I said, you know, I said they're funny, cause a lot of 'em, you know it takes about I think it was seven years or something for a plantation to start paying anything, and a lot of 'em were still waitin' for it to pay. So we got up in the hills and no Japs came. There was, you know, we had

29:30 this couple of, the district officer, he was a coastwatcher and he was bloody useless but he started giving, he'd hear that a Jap party of Japanese were coming ah so and so. So you know they were landing in boats and the most we could put together was about four men for a patrol you know. These four blokes would head off and you'd run into three

30:00 hundred Japs. So anyway after a while we got sick of that. We said, "Oh no we," you know, "we'll do our own spying," and so while things were quiet Jack Mackie, Bougainville is 140 mile long. It's a fairly big island. So he put a crowd down at the right at the south at Buin, one crowd at Kieta and one at Numa Numa, one at the Buka

30:30 Passage and still one on Buka itself, which covered the whole area, you know, to keep an eye on everything and those blokes familiarised themselves. The rest of us were up in the headquarters in the hills and we spread out and learnt all the tracks and so from that there was a period of the Japs just turn up and go out

31:00 and the crowd up right up the top of Buka, they woke up one morning and there's a place called Kura or, oh it's a haven anyhow, Lemankoa Bay or something like that and as far as we knew it would only take small boats and they got up in the mornin' and these two big cruisers are in there, "How they'd get there?" Then we woke up,

31:30 for many, many years there'd been a lot of Japanese on the island, some working on the plantations and a lot of 'em doing trochus shelling around the beach. Well, they were just mapping the whole seaboard. These blokes come in. Our fellas had a radio with them. There was a Roman Catholic preacher and a planter called Percy Good in the vicinity. Percy Good

32:00 was an old radio man and had had a tele-radio for the coast watching. Well our blokes, he's 70-odd, you know, bit old, our blokes took his tele-radio off him and took it off into the bush to make an observation post but unfortunately they left a lot of spare parts and that about that old Percy took with him. Anyhow, they got up and these two

32:30 cruisers were there and they watched a few boatloads of Japs coming ashore and going into the plantation and they just kept outta sight and the next morning they went down to see and they'd been pretty well treated, the two blokes there. They, Father O'Sullivan [he means Hennessy], he'd been warned

33:00 not to leave the place, not to contact anyone and Percy Good, they come in and they saw all his bits and pieces. They said to him, "Where's your radio?" He said, "The soldiers took it." "Where are they?" "Oh, I don't know. They're gone," you know. They said, "Well you're on parole too. Don't contact anyone. Don't make any move at all. Just sit there and we'll be back." So our blokes saw all this

33:30 and they got onto, well, they got on the tele-radio to the bloke at Buka Passage, the district officer bloke, and they told him that the Japs had landed and that, see, so he sent the message to Australia. Well now, instead of keeping it to themself, they put it over the ABC [Australian Broadcasting Corporation] that the Japanese had visited Kessa and the Japs picked this story up, this message

34:00 up, "Hello, someone's been spotted, so that bloke down there that had the radio must have put this through." So they came back and they took Father Hennessy away and they shot Percy Good. Bashed him up and shot him, and so that sort of threw things out on Buka and then they went away again. There was no one about, so our

34:30 boss and a couple of our blokes went round to see what happened to Percy Good. They dug him up. He was only very shallow, he'd be, they gave him a decent burial and then they sent two of our blokes with the tele-radio, still on Buka but in a bit more secure place. So Jack had the whole island covered. We

35:00 spent all our time going out on patrols finding the, meeting the natives, finding the joint and we had a medical sergeant with us and a few supplies, but anyhow, about, he was a bit of a dog this medical bloke, and Jack, we were running short of supplies you know. Twenty-six blokes and we're feeding the civilians

35:30 and there a lot of those there and they were eating into it and our supplies were getting low. So the army wouldn't feed us but Jack Mackie got in touch with the Vila crowd. They were safe. They had and they said, "Yes. We'll send up, we'll get hold of an old schooner and a couple of our blokes will…" I think it was couple of thousand miles, and they'd come up and this set the

36:00 medical sergeant bloke thinking. Anyhow, he, the lieut and me, since the batman thing, old Jack wouldn't let me out of his sight. He used to take me everywhere with him. So we were heading down the island to visit these outposts and halfway down the island the sergeant got a, oh you know, terrible pain, and he diagnosed himself with appendicitis and so

36:30 we got down to where there was a radio and they said, “Yes, we’ll evacuate him.” Well they didn’t wait for the schooner to come up. They sent a flying boat up from Tulagi and picked him up and took him off. So we were, and the army never replaced him. So for the rest of the time we had no medicine and no bloke to work it. They’d had a look around and I was a baker. They said, “Well, you can be doctor.” So

37:00 the only way we could, funny, I’d have to go around if the blokes had cuts or bruises or ulcers I’d find a native with something like it and I’d practice on him and oh God it was funny, and the native will never get better if you give him the best healer in the world and it doesn’t hurt or the best cough mixture in the world that doesn’t taste awful, they won’t get better, and the way they used to cure their ulcers, you’d fill ‘em up with Condy’s crystals [Potassium Permanganate –antiseptic/antifungal agent]

37:30 and they’d roll on the ground and kick up a terrible fuss but eventually it’d turn it into a burn and you could treat the burn. So I used to have to put Dettol [antiseptic] on our blokes and that was bad enough but anyhow that doesn’t, but that’s how we went. So this fella…

Why do you say that was that the natives would only get better if it hurt a lot?

Yeah if it was a pleasant they wouldn’t

38:00 get better. Oh they were pretty, they’re pretty tough. I mean, I was one day, we saw there was two little kiddies playing and they had a watermelon and a big bush knife and the other big bloke got him to hold it while he knocked the melon and after he knocked off two fingers and I bound it up you know best way I could. The kid never cried you know. Anyhow, so we had to go and visit all the

38:30 things. Well we did and we had we had another schooner called the Malaguna and Jack Mackie and I used to travel around in this great thing. It was like bein’ lords of the sea. So we went down right down the coast to Buin. At the south coast at about 18 mile out is what they call the Shortland Islands, five or six and that and the

39:00 Catalina said, “We’ll meet you over there,” and there was a Father, Father Sullivan. Father Hennessy was at Buka that was got taken away. Father Sullivan was an Australian father and he knew the water. So he said he’d take us over. So we headed off about three o’clock in the morning but they said the bloke on the Catalina had landed, landed there the night before and there was a Jap,

39:30 did what they called the milk run. He used to come down between six and nine o’clock and we were worried about this Catalina sittin’ on the water. So we got over there early and the lieutenant from Tulagi, Don Russell, he was on the thing and we bundled old Arthur Layton onto it and away he went and we never saw him again, which wasn’t very unhappy about that and

40:00 so then we were on the Shortland Islands and our boat, schooner had been to Tulagi and was making his way up. So we said, “Well we might as well stop here for a couple a days and meet him.” On the way down, there was a German on Bougainville, a German planter, and he’d been, well, he’d been good and bad in a way. When all

40:30 the government officials cleared off from Keita, the natives started looting and he come in and he stopped that but he also told the natives, “Don’t take any notice of the soldiers. Wait for men from Japan,” and so we decided this old, oh I’ve forgotten his name now…

How did you find out about that?

Oh the natives told the police boys told us, and so

41:00 we went and he had a half-caste wife. We went and grabbed him and his wife and took ‘em down with us to Faisi in the Shortlands and we were waitin’ there and we were just, it was only a small island. We were only pokin’ around and there was a fella called Bernie Swanson and I, we were mucking around on the wharf and Swanson said, “Have a look” and there’s a big schooner coming in and all we could see was rifles pokin’ over

41:30 the side. So we had nowhere to go. We got behind a couple of copper things and we thought, “Well there’s only two of us and there’s about 40 of these blokes. It’s gonna be funny.” Anyhow, the boat pulled up at the wharf. All of a sudden the Union Jack [English flag] fluttered out and it was the fellas from down a place called Segi, down the island, and there was a fella called Kennedy, a district officer, and he was magnificent. He had his police boys and he stayed on that little island down there all through the Japanese

42:00 and they used to send patrols out

Tape 6

00:31 They turned up about on March the 16th. They’d had a pretty rough old time in (UNCLEAR). There was two of our men and two New Hebrideans.

You’re referring to natives?

No.

New Hebrideans?

No, no, white men and we had these two German internees and a couple of planters

01:00 to go back, so they got on the boat. We had a bit of a party and they sailed off on about midnight and so we transferred all the supplies onto our little schooner and we headed off then. Pulled up at Buin and unloaded some of the stores. The next stop was Kieta and that was just recovering

01:30 from the looting by the natives and there was a Chinese storekeeper there called Wong Yu and he had a lotta stuff he wanted to be carried up into the hills. So we rounded up a lot of native carriers for him and he got 'em to carry up

02:00 the stuff and when he got 'em up the top he used to pay 'em a shilling or something and he'd open his store when he'd come down again and sell 'em all the rubbish he wasn't carrying and get his money back. So he got all his stuff carried up for nothing. So we left him there. We called up at Numa Numa and while we were at Numa Numa where's there a party of

02:30 four there, we unloaded the stores and then we got a wireless radio to say that the four men on Buka had been chased and chased out and so they'd come down to the Buka Passage and two of 'em had gone up to another hideout on Buka with the radio. So Jack Mackie, the officer, decided that he and I had better get up there quick and see what's going on.

03:00 So we left our schooner and took a small launch that was hangin' about somewhere and we got back up to the Buka Passage and late at night we made our way to a place called Scotland, where our two men were there with the radio and we stopped with them for a couple a days

03:30 and they were alright. Jack Mackie looked around and at the place. There was no Japs. So he had a bright idea. He said, "We'll circle the island and call in all the villages and tell the people that the Japs have gone. We've frightened 'em. We chased 'em away. We're not frightened of them." So we go to every village and Jack…

Now which island was this?

Buka.

Buka?

Yeah. It's only a small island. We could walk…

What year was this?

04:00 What year?

Yes.

This'd be March '42.

Okay.

And so Jack was givin' a great speech in each village how we brave soldiers had chased the Japs away. We stopped at a Roman Catholic mission halfway round. The next mornin' we got up and we heard a bit of bombing and that. We didn't take any notice because there was always some bombs had been dropped somewhere

04:30 and we headed off down the other villages givin' our lecture and we got down near the Buka Passage and Chinatown and a police boy come trotting up. He said the Japs had come in, shelled the place and landed that day and he said there was a big party of 'em comin' up the track just behind him. So we had to turn around and go hell for leather up the track, through all these villages

05:00 that we'd told we'd frightened the Japs away from and they were, you know, we weren't frightened of the Japs and we was flyin' through the, it was raining like mad. Our footsteps were clearly imprinted and the Japs were following us. Anyhow, we got back to the Roman Catholic mission and the Father said, "Well," it was pretty late, "stop here tonight. I've got good boys out. They won't, they'll warn us if the Japs are coming,"

05:30 and so we slept the night. Got up the next morning and oh early and headed off back to our two men with a radio down at Scotland and they hadn't heard anything. They'd just heard a bit of bombing and that and their radio went bad and they diagnosed that a valve or something was bad and we didn't have the spares there. So we sent a police boy back over to Bougainville

06:00 to get the part and bring it back to us and he went from us to Bougainville, got the part, brought it back, gave it to us and then went and gave himself up to the Japs because he'd done some silly little thing and he was frightened he'd get punished for it. Well, that meant that the Japs knew where we were. So we moved out of the mission house and into the bush and we were getting we had a

06:30 big war canoe ordered to take us with our radio and everything back to Bougainville and then at that

night the monsoon arrived and it flattened, it blew, it smashed our canoe up on the beach and we couldn't move. We couldn't get out. The Japs knew where we were but it was too rough for them to come and get us and so we sat there for about four or five days and then the

07:00 monsoon eased and instead of going away from the Japs we decided to go to them, cause they were at Buka Passage on the aerodrome and we went back to a place called Novanek, which is just across the other side or on the other side of the river. It was fairly late in the afternoon and there was a Fijian minister

07:30 who was a missionary, bloke called Usiah Satutu and he was in charge of all the church in the area and he caught up with us and he said, "Well alright. Come to Novanek. We'll hide you there and I'll get a boat." So we were about half a mile away from the Japs sitting up in the native huts and they fed us with WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s [chicken] and God knows what and we had

08:00 to get across the passage. Well they were on a, Japs were on a little island in the middle of the passage called Sohano and they'd set up searchlights and guns and at night time they had the searchlights going because they said any boats trying to get from Buka to Bougainville will be fired on, you know. So that's to stop us. So it was about, night falls very quickly, and we went out in the twilight. You know

08:30 it was fairly dusky, it wasn't dark, and we jumped in we had this canoe and it was and as we were paddling across the strait we could see the torches of the Japs coming down to where the searchlights were. I tell you what, those boats went quick after that. We got across to Bougainville. Transferred into a big war canoe called the 'mons canoe' and they had about 20 paddlers and they took us down

09:00 about 30 mile down the to where Uziah the Fijian missionary lived and we got there about three o'clock in the morning. Tired out, worn, wet, no tucker. So he took us into his house. His wife gave us - she had no clothes - she had lap-laps [cloth wrap] of the natives. Well she give us clean lap-laps and we slept down there. Had a good breakfast. Next day was Easter Sunday where we had to go to church and hear Uziah

09:30 preach his sermon and in the meantime our fellas, you know the main body of 'em were up in the hills. They thought we'd been captured and killed 'cause they hadn't heard from us for three or four days. So we left Uziah on the west coast of Bougainville and our team were over on the east coast, which meant we had to go over a mountain range with volcanoes

10:00 and about 10,000 feet and we couldn't find a way over and we couldn't find any natives willing to take us. Each day we had to go further up the island towards the Japs and, "No. No. No way over." Eventually we were almost into their camp and Jack Mackie, the officer, he said, "This is no good." So he took his, next village we come to, he took his revolver out and held the

10:30 village chief up with it and sure enough they had a way. So they took us over the range. We walked night and day because, you know, it was so dangerous. We got there and about two days later we got to our old camp and there's no one there. They've all gone and Jack Mackie was pokin' around and he found his trunk in the

11:00 bush and what happened was that, things started to get a bit hot and the corporal in charge, Don McLean, he figured that better to get further back in the hills because Rugen was pretty exposed. So we landed there and Jack Mackie and one other fella he went back up the hills and he left me and the signaller, called Snow Sly, down at Rugen to make contact and let 'em know we were safe and

11:30 back. Well, so we stayed there a couple a days. We had the radio set up, made contact with everyone, let 'em know. Then the Japs started pokin' around in an aeroplane. So whether they saw the antenna or not I don't know but we stayed there for three or four days and then we went back and joined the general

12:00 piece and we found out that the lieut and I had, we both kept diaries and this corporal he was very regimental and, "You're not allowed to keep diaries," and so he burnt 'em. It was very frustrating but Jack and I, and I've often I've looked at my diaries, looked at his and I couldn't realise the first four months were identical

12:30 but I remember now, we sat down together and went over what had happened and rewrote the diaries up till that time. So we got back in the hills and then we started to get reports that all the outposts had been chased. The ones down at Buin that was near Faisi they were very lucky. They stayed in a house, which they shouldn't have done,

13:00 went to bed and they got up and the Japs were over about eight on these islands about 20 mile away. They knew they were there. Anyhow, they got up at about six o'clock in the morning and they set the battery charger going to charge the battery for the radio. It they didn't hear anything and then they shut the radio off and they heard motors and they looked down the track a couple a hundred yards

13:30 away and the Japs are landing. So they had to smash their radio, head for the bush and they stayed for a while and they could see the Japs were permanent. You know, they were making permanent so they made their way over through the bush and up the spine of the island, which is very mountainous, and they made contact with a crowd of four

14:00 other men who were at a place called Keita, about halfway up the island, and at that time the

coastwatchers said they wanted someone down there in Buin because that was a vital part of it. They had a big harbour there and they wanted to keep a watch. So they said one of the civilian coastwatchers was going back and could two of our men go with ‘em. So Jack allotted the

14:30 corporal signaller and another one, Jack Wigley, and Slim Ottan, to go back with this and then they picked up the four men that were at Keita and they’d been chased. Two had been out on patrol and two had been left there and they were talking, you know, through the night and their hut was about half way up a hill and they had natives on top of a hill in an

15:00 O-Pip [OP, Observation Post] and for some reason or other these two blokes decided to go and check on the natives and so they went up the hill, found the natives asleep, but at that time lights went on everywhere. The Japs had landed down below and luckily they charged to the house. They got some of our gear, our men’s packs and that, but

15:30 all the men were safe. So they then banded together and started to make their way back up the hill to through the hills to us. The same thing happened at Numa Numa, which is further up the coast. They woke up to see a Jap boat outside but it was very hard to get in there because of the reefs around the place.

16:00 So they had time to get their radio and get back to a hide out they’d prepared in the hills above the plantation. The Japs landed and our fellas then once again took off to the bush and started to make their way back to headquarters up in the hills. The rest of us were pretty tired, pretty sick. No food. You know there was no food, no

16:30 medicine and we were up about at a place called Mutahi, which is about 6,000 feet. It’s cold at night. You had to have a lot of blankets but the boss wanted to bring them all together and not know anyone know where we were. So it was the Seven Day Adventist Church and mission and the head boy was fantastic. So he took us

17:00 into the bush. He had his village knock up a couple of, they only took half a day to build a hut, couple a huts and we stayed in there and he sealed off the entrance and within about three weeks you couldn’t tell there was a path in at all. So we sat there until all the different parties came in and the boss was happy then. He had ‘em all under his control

17:30 again and that meant, outside the two fellas down at Buin with Paul Mason the coastwatcher, he had all his men in the one place again and so from then on we started patrols. Patrolled all the villages, all the paths. Met all the natives. Make ourselves, you know, we always treated natives with a great lot of respect. Never touched their women. If we got anything from them we paid

18:00 and that’s where the Japs, they used to just rape, take whatever they wanted in goods. Never pay anything.

How did you communicate with the natives?

How?

How did you communicate with them?

Oh we learned Pidgin [Papua New Guinea Pidgin].

Can you speak Pidgin?

Yeah.

Still?

Oh yeah. You know I’m a bit slow now but…

Can you…

When I hear ‘em talking on the thing, you know, I don’t get a lot of it. Oh yeah we, it’s not hard to learn. I mean…

Can you say anything for the camera?

18:30 **Pidgin? Like the standard sort of thing you’d say to the natives?**

Yeah. I can tell you they saw a crosscut saw, and they knew what an axe was, is “akis” and they say, “Im olsem long brata bilong akis. Yu pusim i go, yu pulim i cam,” [Literally: “It is the same as (the brother of) the axe. When you push him, he goes, when you pull him, he comes”] and that was a saw. “Brata bilong akis” is “we’re cutting wood” and “Yu pusim yu go, yu

19:00 pullim i cam,” that’s a saw. But you know we weren’t perfect but we could make ourself understood and as I said, we treated ‘em with great you know, they were nice really, lovely people. We treated ‘em with a lotta respect and while we were in the district they were terribly loyal to us. You couldn’t blame the ones where the Japs were. You know, I mean, Japs were

19:30 brutal. I mean if they didn’t do what they were told, the Japs would kill, burn their villages and

everything. So they went over to the Japs and we understood that, to a certain extent. So eventually Jack got all the crowd together and we stayed together for a long while. We used to go out on the coast, on the plantations there were quite a few

20:00 herds of cattle, Hereford cattle and that, and we used to early in the piece we could go down and knock off a beast. We'd take natives with us and we'd butcher it and they'd cart what we wanted and we let them have the rest but as time went on and the Japanese started they come down the coast and on top of that the cattle became wary. They

20:30 knew they saw us and so it used to take a lot longer and at times there I think we'd get down to the joint and we first shot we had to be quick because more often than not we were at one end of the plantation and the Japs were at the other. Well, the natives could hack a beast up and they would be gone. There wouldn't be a hair left in about 10 minutes. So we got those, this was

21:00 March the 30th the Japs landed. So we for the next few months we just - it got a bit boring at times - we were just sitting about. Maybe every now and then you'd go on a patrol, go and visit a village. Just keep there you know but generally speaking, there was nothing doing. We didn't know anything about the war until

21:30 there was this coastwatcher, he arranged supplies to come for himself and they sent a plane up for him. We never got much of it but I think there was a parachute for us and it got caught on the tail of his plane on the way out and he tried to shoot it away. He did everything but he finished up he sailed back to, flew back to Australia with it. Things, we were getting

22:00 slowly getting sicker. We had no medicine, no Quinine [antimalarial drug]. Everyone was or most people were starting to suffer from malaria. Hungry. One fella, we had Keith Walter was one of the elderly ones and he got dysentery and there was no way I could treat dysentery. I didn't know what it was even. So we were a bit worried about Keith but at the same time,

22:30 this district officer who was a bit of a nut and he had a set…

Was that Mason by any chance?

Hey?

Mason?

No, no. This is

Or Read?

Read. Read. He was a bit of a mongrel in my opinion. I mean a lot of people liked him but I didn't but there was an Austrian planter there called Fred Urban and he was good to us you know. We used to

23:00 call in and he'd give you a feed and that but Jack Read decided that, he was a menace, he reckoned the Austrian-German, he must be a spy and so he sent word back to his headquarters, a bloke called [Lieutenant Commander Eric] Feldt, and the reply come, "You carry out any action you like. There will be no inquest." So we said, "This is funny." So he orders

23:30 our officer to send some men and arrest this Fred Urban and bring him back for a court martial. So our, this bloke was a navy lieutenant over our blokes, although he didn't know a thing about, he never even joined, he just got made. So he said, "Yeah, well bring him up,"

24:00 and so Jack Mackie sent Corporal Don McLean and a few blokes off to pick up Fred Urban and bring him up to be tried as a traitor, a spy. They were halfway back and they ran into another one of our parties coming back with a fella called Keith Walter on a stretcher, who had dysentery, and Fred Urban luckily enough had some medical

24:30 knowledge. So our blokes said, "Well look, how about looking after Keith?" He said, "Yes." So they sent word to say that, "Fred won't be comin' up for his trial." We, and he stayed with Keith and I've got the medical reports he made every now and then and he cured him of this thing but we knew he wasn't a spy, you know. I mean it was ridiculous. Here he is saving our life and this other bloke wantin' to,

25:00 you know, bring him up and execute him. So eventually he did get back there and they had a bit of a trial and they put him on parole. He was allowed to go to his plantation but not to make any contact with the Japs, which he did. So he cured Keith and time was marching on. We were, we had, Japs were starting to spread out down the coast

25:30 and we could get down there and have a look, you know, but we couldn't settle ourselves down there but while we were in the hills they were very reluctant. First thing we did was we set up a defence. We had a Vickers gun, that's a medium machine gun, and we had a Bren gun, two Bren guns and a couple a Tommy guns and if anyone had a come up the hills after us they'd a been in a lotta trouble. So

26:00 as I said, we kept on spreading out learning the country, assuring the natives and our boss come on a brilliant idea. In the village life they have what they call garamuts [native drums]. They're big hollow logs. They thump 'em with a thing like a drum and they used to play these garamuts for getting up in

the morning, going to church, coming back

26:30 for lunch. They were always playing it. So the boss when we went into a district he would go around and see all the chiefs and say, “Well,” what you call tambu [pidgin for “taboo”, forbidden] the garamuts, “Don’t, not allowed to play the garamuts unless a Japanese is in the vicinity.” From then on, if we heard a garamut, we knew the Japs were coming. They had no hope of catching us. So that went on for the rest of our time. It was the best early warning system you could

27:00 do and there’s only one night we got caught out. We was a bit worried but the Japs’d never travel at night. You couldn’t see and the next morning we stood to about one o’clock but the next morning we found out that they’d landed on a barge, off a landing barge down on the coast and the natives had heard ‘em and was banging his drum and they’d got back on

27:30 and gone away again. So we were gradually getting sicker and sicker and hungrier and hungrier and our boots were wearing out. Our clothes had all gone but we still kept going, and on August the 7th ’42, I was with the officer. We were prowling around in the scrub down near the b(UNCLEAR) seeing what was going on and a native police boy caught

28:00 up with us with a note to say that the Americans had landed on Guadalcanal [Solomon Islands] Oh God we thought we were made. Thought, “They’ll be here next week,” and this was August. So we got back to headquarters pretty quick and planes were starting to come overhead all day nearly for the start. It was the Japs heading towards Guadalcanal.

28:30 Soon as we saw them, we’d make a count and then we’d send, well originally we had to send a message to Port Moresby. They sent it to Brisbane or somewhere and then they’d send it to Hawaii and Hawaii would come back to Guadalcanal. It might take about 10 minutes, quarter of an hour but shortly we made direct contact to Guadalcanal

29:00 and we could give them two hours warning of the planes coming. So the Yanks and then our other two men at the bottom of Bougainville, 140 mile away, they’d be another half hour or so away. They’d report in. Then there was a couple more at Kennedy I told you about. They were down on the chain of islands and they got a report about every half hour and I think about an hour before

29:30 they were ready or half an hour before they were due at Guadalcanal, the Americans just get into their Mustangs and Marauders [fighter aircraft] and climb up to 30,000 feet and be sitting there waiting for ‘em. As soon as the Japs arrived they’d just dive down on ‘em and we listened to them on the radio on their band and you could hear ‘em, “Just like shooting flies down,” they were saying and they shot down hundreds a planes and then

30:00 at the same time we saw a lot of transport ships out to sea and with the escort and they were making their way with reinforcements to Guadalcanal. I think there were about 21 ships all told and they sank about 17 of ‘em. They were and they had plenty of warning and so that went on

30:30 from then on and from then on, they started to feed us. So they, you know, every full moon the Catalinas would leave Townsville. One plane would have our stores on and they’d have another couple a planes with them and they would go and bomb Buka Passage and keep their heads down while the plane dropped the stores to us. It was rather funny because we were very naïve about, didn’t know

31:00 anything about dropping stores and they said, “Well, get into a clearing in the jungle. Give us an approximate map coordination so we can find it and light four fires.” Well in the early pieces, we used to do a perfect job. We’d build little stockades and fill ‘em up with copra, dried coconut, and light that and it was a terrific fire and we’d also be able to go down on the beach

31:30 and it was easy for them. It was flat country. It was easy for us. It was pretty open country and they’d come over oh generally between midnight and three o’clock in the morning and first time, you know, we didn’t know, we standing out there in between all the fires looking up, waiting for the parachutes to come but the trouble was,

32:00 they had lots of boots, bags of flour, bags of sugar and all that stuff. They’d put half a bag in a full bag and when it hit the ground it wouldn’t burst and we’re standing here and we could see the plane circling you know, “Oh, it’s great.” The next minute there was bags of boots and bags of flour landing all round us. So we had to head for the bush quick. Then after they’d done that, they dropped

32:30 their chutes. So we woke up and that in the finish. You know, we always wait til it was over. They dropped I think about 13 packages to us and the best package was a package of mail because we hadn’t had any mail for nine months. Anyhow, it was in the bush and so some of it

33:00 went away from the clearing a bit and we couldn’t find it and there was two or three packages, which is a lotta stuff, and so we never found it for three or four days and we suddenly woke up and we got the police boys to question the natives there that were there carrying for us and what had happened was, they’d found it in the bush and there was tins of stuff you know and everything. So they took it back to their

33:30 village and buried it and never told us about it, but the police boys found out about it and so we had to hold a court and get all the guilty persons and punish ‘em. Well the biggest punishment was, in all these

villages there's a government-appointed official, like the head of the village was the 'kukarai' and then 'luluai' was the second in command and then they had a doctor boy and a teacher boy and they all had

34:00 little peak caps with different coloured ribbons around 'em for different jobs. So we took their hats off 'em and we fined 'em 30 shillings and told 'em not to do it again but this one bloke never turned up. He went bush. So we said send the bush the garamuts go and tell him to come in otherwise we'd burn his house but he never come in, so we had to carry out the threat and we

34:30 went in and burned his house but we never had…you know, they took all these people and put 'em inside a fence while we were havin' the trial and never let anyone out and they never had food. There was cryin' kids. It was terrible but we had to do it and we never had any more trouble.

Well why did you have to do it?

Well if we'd a let 'em get away, they'd have stolen the lot the next time. You know that was our food and

35:00 it was not only food, they dropped us petrol and things for the chargers and bits for the radio and, as I said, the mail. Well if we, you know, hadn't a stopped 'em and they accept their punishment. There was no doubt they'd have realised they'd they deserved it and they never, you know we thought, "Oh gee, they might turn against us now," but they never. Not

35:30 til near the end.

What do you mean "not til near the end"?

Til, well, in the finish and I'm getting a bit ahead of meself.

No, that's okay. You can speak about it. It's alright. No, you can still talk about it because we can…

Yeah well.

Get back to the original story.

In the finish, the Japs were starting to press hard. They were even startin' to press us. They'd chased us. I mean we used to go down to the beach and

36:00 get our supplies. Well, they woke up. The full moon, supplies and they would have patrols out. So we had to go, well once we went further down the island, you know, where there's none of us and none of them but it was too far to get the supplies back. So we had to back into the hills and it was a dangerous job. So we

36:30 did thought that the natives might turn against us but they never and towards the end the Japanese started to get to them, "If you don't tell us where the soldiers are we'll burn your village. We'll knock the head off the headman," which they did do a couple of places. So it was it got a bit desperate then but we well it was August.

37:00 Right up till Christmas we were quite safe, you know, I mean we did a lot of damage in that time.

How did the Japanese communicate with the natives?

Well, as I told you earlier, there was a lot of Japanese working on the plantations and there was you have a fella called the recruiter and he used to go up into the hills, this is in peacetime, and

37:30 collect natives to work on the plantations. Well there was a fella called Tashira, a Japanese, and he was the recruiter and consequently he knew every little track around the place from going there and when the Japanese arrived, he came in with them as an intelligence officer and he gathered about him a lot of natives from down where they were.

38:00 What they call the 'black dogs' and he gave us a bit of a rough time for a while but the natives where we were stayed loyal to us until it got too much. I mean they were burning their villages and raping their women and killing their leaders, you know, you couldn't blame them for turning against us, cause we had nothing to show 'em

38:30 until the planes started turning up. Alright? We got some left?

Yeah.

And so for the next few months we kept patrolling, kept an eye on the Japs. Kept, I mean for some reason or other they never tried to take the planes away from us. They kept bringing 'em over and we kept reporting and they kept getting shot down. At the same

39:00 time, our two fellas down at Buin, they had seen the big fleet getting ready for the Coral Sea battle and gave warning that that was coming down. So I can remember, you know it was funny. I was on one night they said to me, oh they sent me and another fella down to get some beef. It was a couple a times really and this time we got down there.

39:30 We left home you know early in the morning. It was a long way down to the coast and we slept down on the coast. The natives, we wouldn't sleep in the huts because the natives, the Japs'd hear about it and punish 'em. So we slept out in the open. Got up about six o'clock in the morning and of course these cows by then they'd been used to us and they took off and we chased 'em and we chased 'em. It was about three or four o'clock in the afternoon before we caught

40:00 one. Shot one. The natives butchered him up. We took the hind leg and maybe the fillets or whatnot and they strapped them and started to carry 'em up and the rest of it they'd take to their village to pay for the carrying and so there was a fella called, it was the McDonald with me and he was wiry little bloke but he was tired. We'd been

40:30 goin' for two days, no food and running you know and so I said to him, "Well," there was a short cut, "you take the short cut," but I'd have to go with the beef cause the other way's where you picked up the carriers. They carry it from one village to the next village and then change carriers. So it was getting late and I was hurrying along and I got lost because all these tracks, you got no

41:00 idea, and I took the wrong track and I'm walkin' along it. I didn't realise I was lost till I struck a bloke in a garden. This fella and I spoke to him and, "Oh," you know, "yeah. I'm on the wrong track." So I learnt from him where to go but by that time it was getting late and I was hurrying trying to get home before dark and I suppose I was about three or four mile away from home and darkness came and you've got no idea. When darkness comes it's just no hope. I had a box of matches

41:30 and you know I couldn't, I'd light a match or a handful a matches and they'd burn out. So I couldn't keep walking in the dark because there was cliffs either side of me. So I just lay down on the ground. I was tired. I was hungry. I was dispirited and so and then it started to rain and I'm lyin' in this track and I could hear the pigs snufflin' in the undergrowth and they'd eat you if they were hungry enough.

42:00 **You bet...**

Tape 7

00:32 Back in, the pigs are closin' in on me, which was true, and I was, you know, I was hungry. I hadn't had a feed for two days. I was tired, I'd been running, and so I lay on the track and I said, "Well." It's all I could do. I couldn't see to go anywhere. It started to rain.

Can you just take me back a little bit and explain what's happening here?

Yeah. Well I

01:00 **Just back track a little bit and see if you can explain it to me.**

Well, two of us went down to get the meat, killed the beast after about eight hours' run. Me mate was tired. I said to him, "Short track home," you know, there's a short cut. No natives. So I had to go 'round with the beef around the long way to pick, you could pick up a carrier at that village. They'd carry to the next village, change carriers to the next village. So I said, "Well, I'll go with that,"

01:30 and I got meself lost and I got behind schedule and I got caught out about three, four mile out of the village where we were in the dark and so you just can't move and it was steep falls either side. So I just lay down. I think, "Well there was nothing I can do. I'll have to wait for the morning." I lay down and it started to rain and I started telling,

02:00 you get the wild pigs and they are wild. They'll eat you, you know, and I could hear 'em snuffling around in the bushes. I thought, "God." Anyhow I was just got down to about the lowest ebb when I saw a light coming down the track. It was two mates of mine, Col Francis and a bloke called Bernie Swanson, and McDonald, the other bloke, had taken the short cut home. He'd got home and told 'em. He said, "Well, Sandy must be on the track somewhere," and

02:30 I'd got ahead of the beef carriers, cause they carry on a lot you know. I mean they gotta make a lotta noise and a lotta discussion before they do anything. So I left 'em and I said, "Well," you know, "I'll go ahead. You bring the beef up afterwards," which they did, but old Col and Bernie they'd said, "Well, we'd better go down the track and see," and they brought a hurricane lamp and they brought down, oh it was funny because I'd got

03:00 chafed in me cheeks of me behind. I was sweatin' and so I couldn't walk and I said, "Well, I'll walk." So I finished up, I took me strides [pants] off and I walked with no strides and they're going through the village and I could hear all the village women tittering and laughing at me and I'm going through the village. Anyhow I got back to the huts and I thought, "Oh well, I'll have something to eat," and there wasn't a skerrick [trace] of anything to eat. Nothing to eat. No tea to drink.

03:30 I just sat down and cried. I thought, "Gee." Anyhow I went to bed and they landed with the meat about three o'clock in the morning but I never heard, but that was my worst night, I think, there because there's just everything went wrong, you know, and anyhow we got over it but the old natives they were

funny. They were good. You could leave ‘em on their

04:00 own. They’d bring it up you know but oh God they made a noise and they used to light ‘bon-bons’ as we called ‘em. It was a palm leaf for two of ‘em and they’d carry all night but that was about oh I suppose in August. No, it’d be in September I suppose. The Yanks, you know, we were still…

Which year was this?

‘42.

Still ‘42?

See, the Yanks landed. It might have even been later. They landed on August 7th,

04:30 ‘42. That’s right too. Told Sergei [interviewer]. They started to feed us then and they used to drop some good supplies and the air force blokes were terrific, you know, must say about ‘em they used to leave Townsville and they’d be in the air for over 30 hours. They’d come up right over you know Jap territory, nothin’ but Jap planes, and they’d come up over us and they used to signal,

05:00 “Good luck,”’ and they’d turn around. We’d think, “You lucky buggers you’re going home,” but they weren’t. They were going from Bougainville across to New Britain to drop supplies over there then go home and it was, oh God, they never, you know, wonder. They weren’t all shot down and they’d always put a couple a bottles a whiskey or rum or something too for us to have a drink with and drop us cigarettes. You know I thought, “God they’re doing enough as it was,” and two…

The Americans?

05:30 No, yeah, ah Australians. Australian agents, Catalinas. Oh the Yanks were alright as far as that went but we never saw them. Though we saw, I was walking one day, that was one of my greatest things. I was down at in the jungle on my own going somewhere or coming from somewhere and I come across the packet or the paper off a packet of Wrigley’s chewing gum.

06:00 It’d be one of the Flying Fortresses [American B-17 bombers] were coming up and bombing Buka and going back and they must have dropped it out somewhere or other. It landed on the bloody path. I thought, “God. It’s the best thing I’ve ever seen,” and but we kept, in all this time from January, we hadn’t got a mail out. People, Lucette and them, didn’t know where we were or, and

06:30 I think some time in September they were told they could write to us and we were at the moment safe, so that was something, but we couldn’t get any mail out and so we, you know, we with the supplies starting to come in, it bugged us up a bit and we got the mail, though it was funny because the first thing they’d do when they looked for is the mail bag and they’d open it up and bugger the rest. They’d open, read their

07:00 mail right there where they got it. So eventually, the Yanks were in real trouble down below. They were just hanging on by the skin of their teeth but we kept their nose in front because they could, they were shooting all these planes down. They couldn’t get any reinforcements down because the Yanks knew they were coming. We told ‘em and so they were quite chuffed

07:30 you know. They eventually sent word, you know, how much they appreciated us and they wanted to give everyone a decoration but our government said, “Well, it’s right, too,” said it’d cheapen the decorations too much if they give everyone one, so they gave us four silver stars. That went to the boss and three signallers but that was alright but we kept battling on

08:00 there and things were getting worse and worse as far as our health goes.

What was your morale like or the morale amongst the men?

Good. Good. It really you know considering the situation. We had these old blokes with us and they were fantastic. They steadied us young blokes we, you know, we were all over the bloody place. Didn’t know what we were doin’ but these young blokes the old blokes you used to laugh because we’d be sitting

08:30 in the village and you’d have tea you know. Particularly when they started dropping, you know, we had a bit to eat or even before we always had vegetables of some sort. Sweet potato or something and then after tea you’d see all the old blokes. They’d get over in a corner and they’d be discussing the situation. They wouldn’t talk to us about it, so they kept up the morale. Our

09:00 morale was, you know, not…we weren’t bubbling over with laughter but I can’t remember ever think feeling hopeless. You know we always believed, and for no reason, believed that we’d get home because we really shouldn’t have gone home really. If it had been Australian troops in the place and the Japanese troops and we’d been Japs, we’d have sacrificed something to get ‘em out but the Japs wouldn’t come in

09:30 after us. So but we kept I was just thinking, we, you know, the mountains go up to 10,000 feet and there’s Mount Balbi and Mount Bagana there, volcanoes, and it was hostile country you know and we got up six further you couldn’t see a bloody thing. You know we could hear the planes goin’ over but you couldn’t see ‘em for cloud but we used to patrol. I fairly well remember one

10:00 night or one day Bernie Swanson and I were up in the hills poking about. We always you know just to see what's doing or if there's a new track or something and up that far they hadn't seen many white men but we treated 'em with a lotta respect and they knew it and they always treated us well and you'd come to a village and in peacetime they went to what they call a 'house kiap' [government guesthouse] A kiap

10:30 was the government head and they had a house there, because the patrol officers come through, they'd stop in that house and you know away from the village. So they used to let us use the house kiap and they'd generally bring us a feed. It would generally be a bit a sweet potato, taro, maybe some bananas. You know there wasn't much. They'd give you what they had. Anyhow, this night Bernie and I got there and the old chief comes out

11:00 with two plates of beautiful chicken stew. Geez, you know we hadn't had anything like that for years. So we were sitting there whopping that into ourself and we used to, it's a funny thing you keep thinking now, we used to smoke like mad because the natives used to grow a bit of tobacco and it was pretty rough but they made what they called 'Buin twist' [native twist or black twist tobacco] and we'd up we could make a cigar out of it. We'd,

11:30 you know, put a bit of sticking tape around the end. We were sittin' back after this chicken feed having a smoke and I said to Bernie, "I can't see any WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s around here. He must a killed the last one for us," see, and I said, anyhow he come back for the dirty plates and that, and I said you know, "What's names in this fella? Is it WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK ?" I said you know. "Oh no, no, no" he said, "Pussy cat." Bloody cat and I'd eaten it. Bernie headed off for the…

12:00 I said, "Well, it was alright." Oh the poor old bugger. Because the planters couldn't keep a cat. The natives would knock it off all the time. I laughed but anyhow you know that sort of, those sort of things happened all the time. I mean, with Pidgin, there's things, I mean I remember our doctor, he thought he was pretty good you know and he wanted a bike

12:30 and he went to the Chinese shop, see, and he said he wanted a 'push-push' and the old Chinaman looked at him, chased him outta the bloody shop cause he had a couple a nice daughters and 'push push' was having sex. He should a said a 'wheelie-wheel'. Anyhow, poor old doc. He reckoned, oh, there was some funny things then but the Chinese were…

Can you tell me some of the other Pidgin terms or phrases you learnt?

13:00 Oh lavatory's the 'house pak pak'. 'Susu' is milk. What do they call it? 'Cockarau' was a chicken, 'kio' was egg. We or I used to be you know we used to be able to speak like anything but you forget it and I

13:30 listen sometimes you see on the tellie [television] you know. I can't understand a bloody word they say 'cause they talk too quick for me now but we always could get it and I've got a very, very great soft spot for the natives in Bougainville, you know, and they've been in trouble enough lately with the Bougainville Revolutionary Army. I've got photos there of the general and all because after I wrote the book they got in,

14:00 there was a bloke called Moses Havini, he was one of the Buka chiefs but he spends all his time at United Nations now. He's married to Marilyn, who was an Australian girl, and she got in touch with me. She said she's so pleased, because they've been trying for years to convince the United Nations, our government, that they had not been pro-Japan, all pro-Japanese. Well my book come out and you know we've got nothing but praise for the

14:30 natives and it pleased them so much and I, I mean, I'm still keep contact with them and I wrote to her the other day to get, or a couple a weeks ago now, to try and get the inside story of what's going on now and haven't had a reply, but I said you know they talk about down the Solomons [Solomon Islands] ,they're wild down there. I said, "They'll never get 'em if they don't

15:00 want 'em to get 'em." I mean, they couldn't catch us and we were white, you know. So anyhow but we kept patrolling and we kept sending these replies back but there was a lot, oh, not a lot, but a few missionaries, sisters, fathers, a few Chinese. The Chinese were terrific. They're never any trouble. There was a few planters who were always grizzling [complaining].

15:30 I mean, they wanted to stay on their plantations to keep 'em going, even though the Japs, they'd trade with the Japs, but after they killed Percy Good all the planters took to the hills and demanded we feed 'em and we do this, and some of 'em were alright but our boss used to always give 'em half our supplies and we used to have to go on half, and there's a few a them about and the sisters and there was a Father Lobell,

16:00 who's American, French Canadian, I'm not sure. But he was very good to us. He had a bit of medical knowledge and if we got into too much strife, we'd get him. I mean we didn't like him to come near us because they'd get blamed, you know, but a couple a times we had to call on him and he'd come and helped us, and there was Father Sullivan and a few of them and so he was Father Lobell.

16:30 Oh no, Bishop Wade sorry, there was a bishop there, Tom Wade, and he was worried about his flock. They wouldn't leave the natives but there was the nursing sisters and missionary sisters and they were in terrible danger with the Japs about. Some of 'em had been killed down there and raped down further and so he was trying to get 'em out and it by this time it was well into December

17:00 and so Jack Read, the coastwatcher, he tried. They wouldn't take any notice. So Bishop Wade said, "Can I get on the phone, on the radio and talk direct to Guadalcanal," which is only 400 mile away and so he got on there and he got onto General Patch or [Admiral] Nimitz or someone and he said, you know, "I am an American. These

17:30 are American women up here. We want to get 'em out," and so within a couple a days the answer come that, "There'll be a submarine calling in within a few days." It was round Christmas, round New Year's Eve. Anyhow they turned up New Year's Eve and we had gathered all these people, got 'em in down to the beach and they were fantastic, the

18:00 submarine service. We'd just light a couple a fires and they'd, you know, on a compass bearing and they could bring in their sub into a little bay. This first one, he was coming, it come up and there was a Jap ship in the bay. Well, they had to go down and sit there and that was on New Year's Eve and they must a been celebrating because down on the

18:30 coast and we had all the sisters there, most of the fathers. There was one missing and some of the planters and there was two planters, they were not well, you know, she was a bitch to her husband and she was away up the track somewhere, still coming see. So they sent two of our blokes back to hurry them up because the sub [submarine] was due in and she come down and she had bloody chests of stuff

19:00 she wanted to take home, see, and her husband was there and they said, "Well look, the sisters, that and the men will have to miss out, or some of 'em," you know, "because there's no room," and so about midnight we could hear a faint calling, "Waaaay," in the bloody distance see and someone said, "That's coming out from near the reef," but they got a couple of lakatois

19:30 they were called, canoes, and they went out and these two Yanks on the rubber boat were stuck on the reef and they'd been into the bloody brandy and they were as full as boots. Read went out and they wouldn't move till he went and had a drink with 'em and so they came in and they got the nurses and that, the sisters, and all the women, they thought, and they got half way out and here's bloke this Claude,

20:00 oh I've forgotten his name now, don't matter. This Claus, he's sitting in the middle of the bloody boat with his wife with all her bloody chests you know. So they took them out and they come out and they took all the women, all the men. They must have been bloody bulging at the sides and so they left us. They sent us some tobacco and some drink and batteries for our wireless and it was good. That was on New Year's Eve and we got

20:30 up in the morning, you know, well we stayed on the beach and cleaned up so there wouldn't be anything. So they got away and they took mail. We knew the, they said, you know, "Give us a letter," and we just wrote letters and put the address on the back of the paper and the sisters went to New Zealand I've, and they put 'em in envelopes and sent 'em back but they kept in

21:00 touch. It was one of the sisters, I've forgotten now, she wrote to me quite a few times during the book but they're all dead now and Father Lobell, I think he's dead, but it was quite an experience I tell ya and so we were then unburdened. It was a terrific strain off us you know. We thought we worried about 'em all the time and we still had the Chinese. The poor old

21:30 Chinese. They never got off till a bloody long while afterwards and there was one planter left, bloke called Bob Stewart. He finished up in Angau [Australia and New Guinea Administrative Unit]. Oh, he led an army of his own on Bougainville in the finish. We came back. So we got rid of that, was in December, New Year's Eve. Well, we still had the Guadalcanal was

22:00 not secured until about the February I think, February, and so after that you know we were almost redundant. We were sick. We were tired. We were bloody fed up and so after a while and Jack Mackie just said to the boss, "Send a message out advising that we

22:30 be evacuated," because the planes were coming up each day, reconnaissance planes. They saw everything was going on. As he said, the half of the section were just rotten. No hope at all. If we had to survive, we'd have to go up in the hills. We would be no good. It was getting difficult to get supplies to us.

23:00 The natives were starting to get restless. I mean, they'd just put up with it for a long while. The Japs were really leaning on 'em. He said, "Well, the only object," he said, "is to evacuate everyone." He says, "The job's done," but Read and Mason; they were a pair a ratbags, really. Mason told lies about us. He reckoned we deserted him and that, but it's in the book, we never did that, and they

23:30 had read somewhere, it was down Guadalcanal, a bloke met and walked down the beach and met the Yanks as they landed and Read wanted to do that but Read, all the time we were there, he had us between him and the Japs. They had to get through us to get to him. He was quite safe. So no, he said and to add insult to injury, he was a friend,

24:00 a great friend of the head of the coastwatchers, Commander Feldt, and so he must a said something to Feldt that we weren't cooperating with him, which we wouldn't, because he had no idea, you know. We

said, “What about casualties?” He was trying to arrange raids you know, “What casualties?” You know. All this. He’s got no idea. So we wouldn’t take any notice of him or do what he wanted. So he told Feldt that

24:30 it’s better to give him a new lotta blokes. So the next thing we know is that we’re not being evacuated, we’re being replaced and they made Read in charge of the section, cause he was a navy lieutenant over our lieutenant so he called a meeting and all the time I was there I only saw Read twice. You know he never came down so he come down

25:00 and he called the meeting and told us he was in charge and what he was gonna do and some of our blokes, you know, old tough hard old bastards, they got up and said, “Well, Mr Read. We’re going home.” “The only place you blokes are going,” he said, “is on patrol.” He said, “I’m getting new guns, new wirelesses, new that and you’ll be going on patrol.” “And are you coming with us, Mr Read?” “Oh no, I’ll have to stay behind on

25:30 the radio.” So they said, “Well, you can go to buggery, we’re not going”, see, and of course he headed off and you know we had some tough blokes with us though. They wouldn’t take any nonsense from this ratbag. So he got on the blower [radio] then and didn’t say to, he said we were incompetent. Mason said perhaps he could make good soldiers out of us, you know, all this sort a rubbish. So they sent the message down that we should be

26:00 replaced and so it happened. I mean we would have been, half of us were alright, we would have been prepared to stay there for a little while longer because these new blokes had no hope. They couldn’t speak the language. They didn’t know the natives. They didn’t know the country and they were just sheer murder to send ‘em. So anyhow, half our six went out at the end of March

26:30 and 11 of us stayed behind and 11 of these new blokes came in and we stayed with ‘em to give ‘em some hope, you know. It was funny because they come in about midnight and our blokes went out and they come in and there was you just imagine standing on the, you know, 400 mile behind the enemy line, “Now what the bloody hell am I gonna do?” and all of a sudden our

27:00 natives were lit all these bloody torches, you know, bonfires and there were they could see you for miles but we had to do it. We couldn’t stay on the beach. If we’d a been on the beach in the morning we’d a been gone and these blokes said, “Oh God.” You should a seen ‘em go. They went up the hills twice as fast as we did. So we took ‘em up and they was, I don’t know, they were all sergeants. That was the biggest trouble with ‘em. They all wanted to be in

27:30 charge but they were, we, I’m still, you know, we still have reunions with the few that are left but they were good blokes but the poor buggers had no idea what was going on and we got up off the beach a bit you know and we stopped at a village and they said, “Where are the Japs?” and we said, “Down the next village.” “Oh, God!” And they were up at about four o’clock and on, I mean, the Japs wouldn’t move at night. We got up at daylight and we’d go and we’d be safe.

28:00 So we took ‘em in. We showed ‘em, you know, they were good soldiers, they sort of belittled, took ‘em out, you know, “I might take two out this way,” and someone showed ‘em the islands. Talked to the natives about ‘em but the natives were starting to get, you know, fed up with it I suppose and when they saw us going,

28:30 they said, “Well what’s going on?” You know, “The masters are going.’” So we tried to convince ‘em these blokes were alright but these blokes couldn’t talk to ‘em. So we stayed a month with ‘em and we said, “Well, we’d better show you what we do with a drop.” You know, supply drop for the plane. That’s alright. So we arranged that but by that time we

29:00 were way back up in the hills. We’d, you know, we had to get ‘cause as soon as the full moon come out the Japs were on the move. They knew supplies were coming and they knew they were gonna get bombed. So we had to get way back in the hills and we took, there was about three of our blokes, I wasn’t there, about three of our blokes and three of theirs went up to get these supplies and about

29:30 12 o’clock at night, you could hear ‘em coming. They came in. They came in and they did a run, turned to the left and come around. Come in again. Dropped the supplies. Turned to the left and come around. Come in the next time and they never dropped supplies and they turned right and went straight into a mountain and the pilot, the co-pilot and the engineer got killed straight out and our blokes couldn’t find ‘em in the dark.

30:00 Anyhow, they waited till daylight and they found ‘em, and there was six more and they had broken legs and oh God, you know, all sorts of injuries. Deep cuts and they were sittin’ in pools of petrol you know and frightened to bloody well move. So luckily the new blokes brought in a medical sergeant with ‘em and he was good, a bloke called Lucky Latimer, who was originally in our company, and he got these blokes

30:30 and he got ‘em all mobile but that was today and we were supposed to catch the submarine the next day or two days later and we said, “Well we’ll get these wounded,” couldn’t get the dead out of the plane, we just had to leave ‘em, “Get ‘em down to the beach and take ‘em home with us on the thing,” and…

Do you have any idea of what caused the plane…?

Hey?

Do you have any idea what caused the plane crash?

31:00 **Why?**

No just one of those, these blokes don't know. You know there was he just turned the wrong way. Whether they didn't know, whether the pilot and co-pilot had switched over or why he got a bit flummoxed [confused] when they never got the stuff out. He just turned and "bang," straight you know.

So the pilot and co-pilot were dead?

It just, dunno, and well they're all dead now, all the, well I've been

31:30 talking to one of 'em. He said, "We don't know what happened," and they don't know why he did it but anyhow they couldn't, there was two of our blokes, Bill Dalby and Col Francis, and they took the beds bunks out of the joint and made stretchers out of 'em. Took the weapons out of the plane to use and then they started to carry 'em down the hill, the mountains. They were up about 8 - 10,000

32:00 feet and it started to rain. They went, you know, and it rained and rained and rained and they were up to their hocks [ankles] in mud and they just couldn't get 'em down there but couldn't get 'em across the river. So the news come through, "Leave 'em there. We'll get a plane in for 'em later and you two blokes are gotta get down to the beach," and so they came down and

32:30 we were gettin' ready. That was the end of April and the other 13 of us, I think it was, got on the plane or were to get on the submarine and come home but it was a bit of a trial too because we had to go to a new spot to be picked up. The Japs had woke up to we were picking 'em up at a place called Teop and we went to Teopasino, to another place, and

33:00 this Read was there and he wouldn't light big fires and he had little fires there and we were sitting there and they're supposed to be going at nine o'clock. Ten o'clock nothing was happening. Eleven o'clock nothing was happening and I was walking up and down the beach with a fella called Benny White, and Benny said, "Bugger this," and he went over to the fires. He gave 'em a kick and put more stuff on 'em and up come the submarine. It just couldn't see. It was sitting out in the bay. So

33:30 we got on, went out, the new blokes come in and we took the canoes out again and got on the plane, on the sub and the rotten buggers, it was very sad really because our natives, you know, we all had a native generally help you. He'd carry your stuff and that, and this one of mine was bloke a mine was crying

34:00 cause we were going and no wonder they turned. They said, "Why are you going?" you know, "Is it, is the war lost?" and we tried to tell 'em, "Well, we'll be back," but he gave me a beautiful walking stick carved in ebony and I stuck it in me pack and we got on the boat on the joint and passed your packs down They're gone in down and then scrambled down yourself. By the time I got to the bottom, the stick was gone and I searched that bloody submarine from one end to the

34:30 other, couldn't find it, but it was an experience on its own the submarine, I can tell you. We got and we were sitting there you know, "Aren't they ever gonna move?" It was about one o'clock in the morning and we'd been on since midnight. I said, "When are we getting going?" He said, "We've been going for an hour." You couldn't tell how it moves, you know, underneath and so

35:00 you'd go to the toilet and there was 17 different actions you had to do when you went to the toilet.

It's alright. Keep going.

You had to you know you turned this wheel and pushed that lever and stamped on that pedal and pulled this and if you didn't do everything right it'd blow back up on you, see, and we didn't care. We used to go and get a sailor and say, "Come and work this bloody thing," you know,

35:30 but we had old Father Sullivan, a very straight-laced old priest. He wouldn't tell anyone you know and he'd come out covered in it. He's trying to do it himself but so we got on a sub and it was a big crack in it and I said to one of the sailors, "What happened here?" He said, "Oh we got hit with a depth charge on the way up." I said, "God, I hope it's not," it was, you know it was, "Whoooo," a great big crack

36:00 and so they and we you used to go down and there was a place called the slot, which wasn't very deep, and we had to go down through that in daylight but we got through there and that next night we transferred from the submarine to a sub chaser and we pulled up you know in the middle of this dark night in an ocean and this submarine chaser, they're wooden boats,

36:30 and I had one a the sailors saying, "Come on. Hurry up," he said, "we're getting something on the radar and we don't know what it is." Jesus. We made a swift change. So we got on this sub chaser and God it was like getting on a racing car. When it got going, it was flying along and they gave us Bull Durham's tobacco and oh, they looked after us. Had a good feed. It was wasted on, you know, we were getting sick as fast as we were eating 'cause we hadn't eaten for a couple of years.

37:00 Then we went down a bit further, got near Guadalcanal, and they transferred us from the sub chaser to a landing barge then onto the ground and we thought, "Oh well. Nearly out." You know, this is the front line with the Yanks and the first thing they did was they gave us the cotton sheets, you know a stretcher

and sheets and took us up and we had nice tents

37:30 and they said, “Well it’s chow time now fellas.” We went down and they had ice cream and a bottle a beer, and this is all the front line you know, and they were and we didn’t give the mess tent you’re goin’ along and I got to the end of the line and I had sausages and potatoes and onions and ice cream and jelly and pears all in the one plate. They’d just mix it all up, “Oh it all goes down the one way.”

38:00 So we were there for, and our boss, well, we got a lot of attention because he was a lieutenant with two pips and they thought he was a two-star general and he, we used to get, they had pictures on the front line every night. We’d go to the pictures and the two star general would get us front line seats and we got up the next morning. We heard “bang” and there’s a gun up in the mountains and it fires a round right into the middle of the Henderson Airfield

38:30 and they just rushed out and they filled the hole up and they went and next day the same thing again. We said, “What’s going on?” They said, “Oh there’s a gun up in the hills there.” We said, “Why don’t you get him?” “Oh,” they said, “he’s not doing much damage. We just fill it in,” and that went on for, I know I heard in the finish that a section of New Zealanders who were there they went up and rooted ‘em out in no time but the Yanks were quite happy to let him keep blowing

39:00 the bloody drome up, and we were, I finished up in hospital there. I had bad legs. I think I got hit with a stinging nettle or a poison nettle on the way down and my heel all got ulcerated and I went there and I was having a great old bludge in the hospital and old Jack Mackie said, “Come on. Hurry up or you’ll miss the plane to Australia.” So, “God.” I got

39:30 outta hospital. We got onto a plane. We flew to New Caledonia and that was a turn. We got half, the airport was half way about 40kms out of the town and we was in a tip truck somehow or other. All standing in the back of that and we got near the town and the MPs [Military Police] pulled us up, pulled their guns on us and told us to get out and reckoned we were a lot of fifth column

40:00 spies or something. Anyway, our blokes jumped out and protested and they said, “Oh well,” and they sent us down to what they call the ‘shipwreck survivors’ camp’ and that’s a camp where the bloke gets shipwrecked and they put ‘em in this camp till they get another ship and they can’t get out, see, and we landed in there. We said, “No,” the bloke said, “Don’t get any leave out of here.” We wanted to go and have a look around the town but

40:30 we had a fella with us called Louis Johnson. He’s French and he came from New Caledonia and his mother and father owned farms up in the hills. They owned the Ford Agency. They owned the general store and so our lieut said, “Look, Louis has been,” you know, “he’s been missing for 18 months. His people don’t even know that he’s alive,” he said, “He’s here.” “Oh alright. He can go

41:00 home but he’s gotta be back here at nine o’clock in the morning.” So away Louis went. He come back at nine o’clock in the morning alright. He had his uncle with him, who was the British consul and he got stuck into ‘em. The next minute they gave us a leave pass each, “Oh just come and go as you like,” and we did.

Tape 8

00:31 **Picking up where we left off, you were in the shipwreck camp?**

Yeah. Well Louie turned up with the British Consul and that settled all our problems. We spent a bit a time around New Caledonia. Louie naturally stayed there with his people and he took us around the town. It was the harbour was full of American navy ships and m(UNCLEAR) New Zealand blokes and

01:00 we had flown from Guadalcanal to New Caledonia in a DC3 [Douglas DC3 transport aircraft] and it was an old thing. We got in and they just had bucket seats down each side and the seats were all full of water. It was leaking, see. Anyhow that was alright. We got there and we went out to the airport to make our final trip home and it was the same plane, the same crew,

01:30 and someone said to ‘em, “I bet you’re a bit surprised to be going to Australia.” He said, “We are in this.” So it wasn’t too…but we got back. Now, it’d be into May I suppose, early May, cause I and we landed at Ipswich. We went to Brisbane and they would only pay us 20 dollars, 20 pound each. They said, “You’re,” you know, “you’ll get

02:00 robbed or something.” So they only paid us 20 pound each and from there we split up so, you know, I mean, we had in our section, we had Queenslanders, New South Wales, Victoria and two, no, one Western Australian in our section and so they all went every which way. From then on, some of ‘em I never saw again.

02:30 They split us up and the Victorians we, I suppose for the first week we all met down at the Port Phillip pub or we had, you know, then I got married. Benny White got married on the Friday, I got married on the Saturday and they all went home. I mean Haywood and I never saw, oh well, I

03:00 got I finished up, they gave us seven weeks' leave, which you know people didn't believe, but we had that. We used that up and we went back. We met at Brisbane Showgrounds, some of 'em. Some of 'em were still in hospital. A lot went to hospital. Some never turned up from anywhere at all. Our old engineer bloke, Bill Dalby,

03:30 he lived at Kyogle, which was a couple of hours by train I suppose. So he took all of us that had turned out down for a weekend at Kyogle. Then they sent us to Canungra and within three weeks we were either in a convalescent camp or hospital, how it nearly killed us. I got made B class -

04:00 not fit for tropical service anymore. A lot of 'em went to a place called Tallebudgera near Been-, oh not near Beenleigh, somewhere near there, and joined the coastwatchers, which is M Special [Unit]. I was in the - that was in August - I was in the convalescent camp till January and I was still getting no better, so I got transferred to a

04:30 bakery in Brisbane, First Australian Bakery I think, and we were in the Valley in Brisbane there for five or six months I suppose probably and then I got transferred to Victoria.

Can I ask you, how did you find it when you first came home? What was your reaction

Couldn't…

to being home?

Couldn't stand to be away from me mates and Lucette will tell you it took a while. We went on our honeymoon with some of me mates.

05:00 Went to his place at Haywood. It just, we were so close and it stayed till they died you know. I mean, I'm the only one in Melbourne now that marches, even of the whole company, out of the whole 300 there's none left, but my mates in the section, it was just so painful not to be with 'em really.

05:30 **Did you find it difficult to adjust to civilian life?**

Oh yeah. Yeah. I mean I was still jumping out of bed of a night you know. Jumping all over the place, yeah. I couldn't settle down, but then I had, that was I went back in say July '43 and it was

06:00 September, October '45 before you know, I had about two years home in normal circumstances. Did settle down a lot but at the start, you just couldn't settle down without seein' those familiar faces about you know. You'd be they sort a grew with ya and…

So you think it was separation from your mates more than anything

Yeah.

06:30 **That you found it…?**

Yeah, that's what I found. I didn't miss the lifestyle, not one bit, and I mean you know the starvation and that sort of thing, but we'd, there's still three, four of us left at the joint you know and it's we keep in touch and have well they haven't had a reunion for a couple a years now. They're gettin' too old but we still write

07:00 and we, and it started when we when the First War finished, that was the separation. I mean you never kept in touch then because you were married. You had a young family and it's, it sort of didn't get, but then come 1984, your family's gone, and we started having reunions again and I think the first one we had

07:30 about 10 of the section there and since then it's just dropped down and now there's only four of us and one of them's not too good, so.

Do you talk about the war? When you get together do you still

Oh.

talk about the war?

not the tough times. You talk about the funny times you know and see a lot of 'em that went back, they had a tough time again. I mean some of them went back

08:00 to but no, we talk just funny times now when you get you know and they are funny. A lot of mates who were the greatest mates you could ever have, but of the whole company there's only about not 20 left outta the whole 300 or so, and that it's…

Did you…?

And when I wrote this book it just about broke my heart. I mean I got letters

08:30 back from a sister or a wife or something. We, and I, a couple a weeks ago, people rang me up. Oh they'd got hold of the book on the Internet and, "My uncle was in the," you know, "we don't know what happened to him," and I asked his name and as it happened, he was a good friend a mine. Oh, well, a good friend, we used to drink with him every night. He was in the officers and

09:00 he went down with them on the Video [Montevideo Maru]. Well, 60 years later they know he's dead, but they don't know how or why. They thought he was shot on the beach. Well, he was one of the ones on the Video Maru and that's happened, well the book come out in 1998 and, not only that, I've had half the [United States] Marine Corps ringing me up, ah not ringing, writing to me because

09:30 somehow when I was writing the book I got in touch with a marine captain, a Yankee marine like, and he was writing a book and he had things all ballsed [messed] up and I helped him a lot and then he…

When you say, "all ballsed up," what, he was upset or…?

Hey?

What do you mean he had things 'all ballsed up'?

Oh well, he didn't know much about us, you know, and yet he was trying to write in his book about us and so

10:00 he got in touch with people that didn't know and they told him. So he's written a book, but he also joined me up in their Guadalcanal Veterans Association, you know, and they have a magazine and so one of 'em was writing about in the navy he was and with the marine he was a navy bloke and he was talking about going out and sinking 12

10:30 ships and I thought and I looked up the date and it was the 12 ships that we seen going down that was reported and I wrote to the magazine and introduced myself and told him about it and you, oh, the letters I've got in is funny. One navy bloke wrote and he said, "You saved my life." I've got the book there, he sent me a book about our (UNCLEAR), which is all lies written by someone else. He said

11:00 they were unloading marines at New Georgia, he said, "And all of a sudden we got the order to pull out to sea," he said, "and then 60 Jap planes turned up." He said, "And I've spent 60 years wondering how the hell they knew they were coming." He said, "I know now," and it's been good that way. I've got a…

Have you talked about the war with your family?

No, not really. No.

Did they ask?

No.

11:30 No, they know I was, you know, knocked about a bit and knew, they knew all me mates and that, but no. Well, my son was in Vietnam [War]. He never talked about it to me either. He just, it's just one of those things. He went away and come back a changed man, you know. He wanted to go and when he come back he wished he hadn't a gone, but no, I've, until, you know, they read the book and they said, "I didn't know that," you know,

12:00 but you don't. I think you would find that universally, wouldn't you? Most people don't talk about it.

Most of them, yeah.

Yeah. I mean, when I'm talking, I've got a marine bloke and I'm sure he talks to his family all the time. All he talks about is and he writes me letters, I'll get one today and one tomorrow, see, whenever he feels like it. All he talks about is Chloe [iconic nude painting hanging in the upstairs bar] and Young and Jackson's [hotel in Melbourne] and I

12:30 went to Young and Jackson's and talked to the manager you know, and he gave me a hat and a photo of Chloe and I sent it to this bloke, but we saved them, many, many lives and many, many planes. They lost some and they lost some lives but…

Did Chloe mean much to you?

Well, it's an icon. I mean

13:00 Anzac Day we always have a reunion. We go to the Eden on the Park and…

Sorry, I'll pause for a moment.

Alright, we're rolling again.

And we used to always go have a beer.

Did you go and see Chloe before the war?

No, on the way back.

Okay.

After Lucette would go to the reunion and we'd take her in and introduce her to Chloe, then take her out to dinner, buy her a pie at Flinders Street Station, but we always used to go but the last couple

13:30 a years, well it's starting to fall. We march, and as I say, there's plenty of other commandos marching but I'm the only Number 1 Company bloke that marches and I suppose it does mean something to us. I know it means that it's an icon but there's no doubt about it. These Yanks, they know it. They've written a book called Melbourne's Marines, you know, and it's on sale they tell me, but

14:00 a lot of 'em wouldn't have come down home, I mean, you never know with the marines because like, because we come home and we were around town you know and we had our, no one knew where we come from but we were playin' up a fair bit and I saw a Yank there with a 'Number 1 Marines' and 'Number 1 Guadalcanal' and he was in the

14:30 pub. So we got talking to him, "Oh," I said, "we, you know, we've just left Guadalcanal. When were you there?" "Oh," he said, "I'm going." He hadn't even been there and he was wearing things, you know. So, but they were, there was General Patch, Nimitz, Gormley, oh, a whole heap of their head men, real, they thanked us and sent us

15:00 congratulations and when we left but I, you're talking about supplies. I must tell you one final story. When they stopping us telling us, started dropping supplies and we used to get boots. The first lot a boots, there was hundreds of them, the biggest was nine and I took 10, so I had no boots. They dropped shirts and supplies and that and tobacco

15:30 and every man got two ounces of tobacco per month, which you know was not much. Anyhow, when we got home we were the, like, well, I mean, the only lot that had been supplied by air at that time, but part of the very few that had been and they were wondering how it was and the head of the service corps and general this-and-that, they took us in and they started questioning us about the supplies and, "What did you think of

16:00 'em?" Well we used to get some Yankee thing, what they call a four-be-four. It's a kerosene tin and it'd have everything in it. Cigarettes, a book to read, you know, but, and I thought, "Oh well, bugger 'em." So I said to him, "Well, we appreciated the tobacco." I said, "It was," you know, I said, "but two ounces a month's a bit light," and he looked at me. He said, "We've been sending a pound per man

16:30 per month ever since," and some rotten bugger back in the stores knew this and he religiously left us two ounces each, never took the lot, and kept, you know, 14 ounces 26 times every month. He must a made a fortune with that tobacco cause you couldn't buy it. Every month, and I laughed when he said, "We were sending you a pound a month." I don't know whether they ever caught him.

How long after the war did you

17:00 **smoke for?**

Till about five year ago. Yeah. I was never a heavy smoker though when I come back, I finished up I suppose the last 10 years you know, and I smoked about three a day and then I suddenly thought, "Well, this is crazy," you know. Although I still get the urge. I'd like a cigarette but…

Did you smoke before the war?

Yes. Yes. Not much. Not much and

17:30 I didn't drink before the war either much, but I still have a, you know what I mean, but…

Did you drink a lot after the war?

For a long while, yes. Yes. Particularly even in the last couple a years in the army, you know, we were always in Brisbane. I was at Murchison East. I was at Seymour. Now I drank a fair bit then but

18:00 I, you know, it, if we go to the Eden on the Park now for a reunion and we march and we're finished and down at the reunion at 11 o'clock in the morning, and we used to have a free and we stay from 11 till three and the beer is all supplied. Well, you know, they say, "You can drink as much as you like." There's bottles a wine and there's three

18:30 course [meals]. Well, if they did that 20 year ago, we'd have drank the place out of house and home, but now you leave and there's, you know, half the wine's still on the table not touched and we're lucky to drink three glasses of beer a day now and there'd be 200 blokes in that room and there wouldn't be a smoker among 'em. There might be one or two but they don't smoke in, it's just amazing.

Yeah we haven't struck any veterans so far that smoke still.

They don't,

19:00 they don't smoke. You haven't struck any, yeah.

No.

No, and I mean we were encouraged to smoke. They used to drop this four-by-four. It had cigarettes in it and they dropped us, you know, the, well a pound a tobacco a month would a taken some smoking, but I feel that it was necessary really. I mean, it used to steady us down and calm us down, there's no doubt about that, but it just it didn't do us any

19:30 other good but and then they used to drop this, they'd drop two bottles a whiskey and two bottles of rum and two bottles of gin or two, yeah, you'd have one of those and you'd be half silly. Medicinal purposes, they reckoned it was for, but…

Do you look back on those times now? Do you think they're the strongest

20:00 **memories that you have?**

Yes, I think so. I don't regret any of 'em either you know. I mean they're all good memories as far as not enjoyable, all of 'em, but it's all positive memories to me. I was just thinking you're talking about the supplies because they used to also supply us with a pound a sugar a month each and we had, everyone would get their tin and fill it but you never used that. You used that

20:30 for gambling. We played cards of a night and I never ever had any sugar. Some bugger used to win every week you see, but…

Are there other memories that disturb you?

Oh what happened to my mates on that boat, I can't imagine what it was like, you know, trapped down, locked down and on top of that, it's not like the command of the 2/29th Battalion, who I

21:00 had some very close friends and they got caught in Malaya and they got chopped to pieces you know, and the ones that weren't killed were killed on the Burma railway. That upsets me. I was just saying to Lucette last night, it must be you blokes coming, you know. I dreamt about three of my Bougainville mates just, and that happens for all the time,

21:30 for I'm always gettin' chased. It hasn't been so bad lately but I used to be getting different locations and I'd always look up and there'd always be a team of Japs after me and they never caught me, but oh God it used to, you know, Lucette will tell you I nearly jump outta bed with jumping and hopping.

Well you mentioned and your description of it was being thrown

22:00 **to the wolves and really you were cut off, you were alone most of the time fending for yourselves.**

Yeah.

Was that is that your strongest feeling of being on the run and being

Look.

cut loose?

You know, I was 20 - 21 and so young and silly I didn't really worry about it until I got home. I can't remember ever, although I got a letter from me mate the other day and he's saying, "I can remember sitting

22:30 on the pier at Numa Numa and looking to Australia and wondering, 'Will I ever get there?'." Well I can't remember ever having doubt that I'd get home and I mean I should have had, because it was almost impossible to imagine us staying there, never lost a man. We should have fired a few shots in anger but not too many because we were ordered to not make contact,

23:00 because they'd heard about if we started making a nuisance of ourself, we'd have been, these blokes that relieved us, they only lasted three months. Half of them got beheaded and that, but we were told the job we were doing was too important to, you know, sort of put it at risk by well, we did go looking for trouble for a while but it was just not worth it. I mean there was

23:30 no way we could do any damage to them without getting a lot of damage ourself and it would have spoilt the whole thing because we just kept outta their way. A couple a times they, you know, if they chased us we just slip up the couple of thousand feet and they wouldn't come you know. If they had have come, we were ready, there was no doubt about that, but…

So do you feel that the training

24:00 **you got in Australia was adequate?**

Well no, because they trained us to go to Europe to do hit, run hard, you know, hard tactics all the time, although Freddie Spencer-Chapman said, "You might be put on your own, having to live alone on an island somewhere," but our training was all assault. You know, like, I mean, what they intended us for was the Dieppe

24:30 Raid and we were as a company you could go in and you had everything. You could cause a lot of damage and probably get out relatively lightly, but instead of that they split us up all over the South Pacific and we were just lost souls really. It was - they didn't care. And they, you know, when we did make contact they said, "Well,

25:00 stop there and do as much damage as you can." Well, there's not much damage we could do with 26 blokes against 50,000. So we stopped there but we, you know, and I'm glad we did stop there because it

was a significant part of that war. Well I've no doubt we shortened that war up there and saved these marines because if these planes,

25:30 they'd like, there'd be 100, 150 planes going down at a time. If they'd a got over the marines, and they were really struggling even then to hold (UNCLEAR)foot because the Jap was a fanatic, you know. I mean there's no doubt about that, he was a good soldier, a brutal soldier, and they gave 'em buggery on in Guadalcanal. The Yanks just managed to hold on long enough and in the finish, us supplying

26:00 the advice that reinforcements were coming and then being able to chop it off, that's what finished the Jap. He couldn't get any reinforcements or supplies, and in the finish we saw them coming back to Guadalcanal you know. They had no weapons. They had no you know we could have gone in and slaughtered hundreds of 'em because they had no defence and they were starving and they stayed

26:30 well after we left, you know, and it was still a lot of fighting done on Bougainville with the Australian Army.

Well, what was your opinion of the Japanese soldiers? As you were fighting them from the beginning, you may not have heard about the…

Atrocities?

The, yeah, the prisoner-of-war camps.

No.

But then later you would have heard some rumours and stories.

Ah.

Did your opinion change?

No,

27:00 we didn't get any news at all except, I mean, I got news that the 2/29th Battalion had been decimated. Some were killed, some of your mates, but there was no reports of what went on. I mean, we didn't even know our own men were POWs but the soldiers, you know, they were brutal, there was no doubt we, you know, we saw

27:30 the results of 'em being there and yet we've seen the missionaries told us about young boys sitting on the beach crying, wanting' to go home.

Did you respect them as fighters?

Oh yeah. Yeah. You had to. I mean they never gave up.

Sandy,

28:00 **I'd like to ask you a few questions about your combat experiences with the Japanese.**

Yep.

You've told us a few stories of what took place but I'd like to ask you about actual encounters. Like one on one encounters with the Japanese soldiers in battle.

Never had it.

You never had it?

Never had it. No, that's what I can't understand, that they didn't come and get us because

28:30 they knew our name, they knew where we were. They sent us invitation to come for Christmas dinner but they wouldn't come into the hills and get us. We were just forbidden to go and make contact with them that way. We, you know, we went out a few times on fighting patrols and didn't make contact and in the latter part we were absolutely told to keep outta the way, but

29:00 if they'd a wanted to find us, they knew where we were, but no, we never had a one-on-one but yeah they were good soldiers, there's no doubt about that. I mean…

Can you tell us if you've encountered any examples of cowardice?

On our part?

In your service?

Our part?

Yes.

Well,

29:30 I've got me doubts about our medical sergeant that diagnosed himself, when they first attacked us I

happened to be with him and he was a menace you know. I mean they started dropping bombs all ‘round us and I started getting nervous and I lit, wanted to light a cigarette, you know and he carried on, “They’ll see the cigarette.” It was in broad daylight,

30:00 you know, and in a hole, and I threw me pack out and on the pack was a white mosquito net. Oh and he performed there. He said they’d see that, “They’ll come and get us again,” and so he was a good medical man but I think we were well rid of him really. He was a coward I think and to make things worse, we got home,

30:30 he was a lieutenant instructing in jungle warfare. He’d never seen any, but no, as far as my mates went, they were great. They, you know, you never had a worry if they were at your back. They were all just ordinary, nothing special about ‘em, and our officer was the greatest of officers but he was an

31:00 electrician, apprentice, when he joined the army. There was a few farmers.

Sandy, what about the term LMF, ‘lack of moral fibre’, have you heard of that term?

No. I don’t know what you mean.

You’ve never heard of it?

No. No. Lack of moral fibre? No. No, they used to say he had a yellow streak or no guts, but I’ve heard of that one. That’s a

31:30 modern term, isn’t it?

Well apparently a lot of people in World War II used to use it, so the servicemen…

Hey?

some servicemen used to use that term.

Ah no, that they that was it, a yellow streak or gutless or…

So yellow streak?

Yeah. Up the back. That was as much anyone, but oh no, well I’ve heard of one bloke we knew but

32:00 he was frightened, but he wasn’t a coward if you can understand what I mean. He just was terrified when they started dropping bombs and it wasn’t his fault.

Do you think everyone was terrified?

Hey?

Do you think everyone was terrified?

Oh well yeah, I think if they weren’t frightened they’re telling lies, because I was, everyone was frightened but someone could, you know, you could control it or you don’t

32:30 ignore it, but I met blokes that had no fear and they were a menace because you know they’d go anywhere, anything. With a couple of them, you know they wanted to win the Victoria Cross and they took blokes into situations in other companies that were very dangerous and unnecessary. So they were a bit of a menace but

33:00 I don’t know of any cowards. I’ve talked to you talked to Worley Baldwin. Well his OC, Bernie Callum, and I spoke to him, you know, and he said he’d seen many cases deserving of a Victoria Cross but in the commandos there was never anyone of high office that

33:30 could recommend you for that. So the best they could ever do was a DCM [Distinguished Conduct Medal] but…

Do you know of any examples of people going troppo [crazy]?

I’m trying to think. None of our blokes went, oh, except, you know, I mean, we were a bit queer and the coastwatcher said we were all troppo, but we weren’t. Ah no, I can’t, not

34:00 anyone I come in contact with. Our blokes all came home, they were sick. They were weary but they had their senses about ‘em. I’m just trying to think of anyone in the company. I mean we had one bloke blew his hand off cause he jumped in a hole with a detonator in his hand and a few meningitis and things like that but no, none with

34:30 ‘battle strain’, as you would say.

What about have you see any acts of desertion?

Well, get back to our medical sergeant again. That was one but not in the face of the enemy. No, I’ve heard it as I tell you this little bloke that was terrified but he was in another section

35:00 but he used, they were bombed every day, and he used to get in a canoe early and go out to a deserted island and stop there all day and they thought no more of him. He was out of the road but no, our blokes were pretty staunch. You know if there was any danger they were there with you. They'd never leave you but as I said, you know when I was lost in the

35:30 middle of the night they come out and found me but they could have easily said, "Oh well, bugger him. Leave him there till the morning", cause I would a been still there. You know we had blokes as I was tellin' you, when they were attacking our airfield we had blokes standing up there when there was bullets all flyin' around and lighting the fuses to blow the place up.

36:00 They never flinched.

What about acts of heroism?

Well…

You must have seen many of them.

We were never really in a position to see there cause we didn't front the enemy and I mean, if you know it's when they're dropping bombs and that, well, there's not, you know, you can't do much about it. There's

36:30 plenty of blokes we, you know I remember myself, there was an attack. They'd attacked us a few times before the big one and there was this plane coming at me, you know, and I was firing the Bren gun and after a while he went away and I thought, they taught us to change the barrels of the Bren gun when it was hot. So I started to change the barrel and he come back and I, God, I couldn't get

37:00 the other one in. No use bein' a hero. I couldn't, you know, me hands wouldn't coordinate with me brain to get the new barrel back on to start firing again but I think I'd do it all again.

You would?

Yeah, I think I would, especially with the mates I had. They were,

37:30 the boss we had, the officer, he was fantastic. We had a couple of corporals. One was good and the other one was good, too good, and…

Can I ask you if the war was the best period of your life?

After the war?

No, during the war as far as experience was concerned

Oh

Just life experience?

Well, I think as far as a learning curve it'd have to be on Bougainville. I mean, you know I've had plenty of good times

38:00 in the (UNCLEAR) but that's that doesn't count, but as far as satisfaction, yeah, I was very satisfied with our occupation there and the results we got. It was, you know, I mean it was well worthwhile when you can sit up there and see the results of what you're doing, that it's doing some good, you know. You can see,

38:30 we could see 150 planes go down, six come back. So that gives you a lot of satisfaction, and we used to like, of a night, when we would get our supplies dropped, we were up in the hills, we could look down over the Buka Passage and see the bombers bombing Buka Passage and that was great and then in at the finish it got that way that

39:00 the Fortresses were coming up in the day time and we could watch it and that was satisfying.

Unfortunately we're running out of time.

Yeah.

Is there anything else that you'd like to say that you've never told anyone else for the record, for the historical record?

I don't think so. I think I've covered it, pretty well all that I would like to say except that, as I said, it was, I felt it was an honour to be able to be there

39:30 and take a part in that and have such great mates and still have 'em. Well, I've got memories of most of 'em now and I'd like to thank you blokes for coming down and taking it.

That's okay.

It's been my fear, that's why I wrote the book, that our company was disappearing without any trace at all. There was no record of it.

40:00 I mean, if you go to the records, they say, “Oh we’ve got no records of the Number 1 Company,” and it was, you know, it was a fear a mine that we’d all disappear, so I wrote the book and that’s fair enough and now you fellas have put that in the archives and that’s great, really great.

No worries. Well, thank you very much and it was a great pleasure to interview you.