

# Australians at War Film Archive

## Colin Finkemeyer - Transcript of interview

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<http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/93>

### Tape 1

00:41 **Thank you Colin. Could you please tell me Colin when and where were you born?**

I was a country boy. I was born in a place you probably don't know about, called Coromby, it doesn't exist anymore.

01:00 I was born in 1920 on a farm, and in those days the doctors came to the farm and delivered their young ones. I was on the farm for three or four years and then went onto Melbourne for awhile. I went to school at Caulfield Central until I was fourteen and at that point in time I went to,

01:30 the family moved to Horsham, again back into the country, and there I went to Horsham High School and I spent the days up until what we called matriculation, in those days, A Grade, and studied English, and I liked English and languages I was going to be a

02:00 clerk I thought at that point in time, with the Defence Department. It was at Horsham that our teachers told us a little bit about Japan and Australia, how attractive Australia was and how Japan was very hard pressed with its millions of population and so on and one of our history teachers, Hank Menadue was very keen, he belonged to the White Australian group, he was very keen

02:30 to make sure that we were aware of the fact that we were vulnerable to the Japanese, and that was one thing that sort of stayed with me. He used to say, "The yellow fellow one day will come and invade Australia." That was what he felt. "You young people you may be the ones who are called upon to do it." He said, "One of these days." From there I think

03:00 I went to Melbourne I worked for the Defence Department and from there I enlisted on my own. I was watching a march one day; I thought I had better start thinking about all this because I remember what Hank had told us. I enlisted and went to Puckapunyal and from there moved into Singapore.

03:30 **I will take you back a bit. That is sounding great. Back when you were a boy, if you could tell me did you have any siblings at all?**

Yes I had two sisters. I was in the middle so I was well looked after on one side and I looked after my little sister on the other side. We had a happy family we lived in Caulfield in the Depression years

04:00 even in the 30's to 40's it was the Great Depression but we weren't too badly affected. We had a good mother and Dad had retired, he went back to work and we seemed to be fairly well off, relatively, we didn't ask for much because life in those days was very unsophisticated. It was very simple We didn't have all the supermarkets; we didn't have all the attractive food houses

04:30 so we lived off Mum's cooking which was simple and straight forward, we had a very happy childhood. A happy family. That seemed to be Mum's role in those days to bring up a happy family which she did.

**Tell me about the Depression Colin, how did the Depression**

05:00 **affect your family?**

My Dad went to work but basically we were hardly aware of the Depression. People in those days lived well according to their means. Sure life was terrible as I said it was very unsophisticated, we lived on simple things. We had a roast for dinner and that lasted for a week nearly and then we had sweets which were mainly little biscuits

05:30 with hot milk on them. Food was very simple. Fruit was all delivered, milk was delivered everything was delivered to your door and the fruiterer was always kind, the baker was kind. The fruiterer would give you a banana or perhaps a bread roll from the baker. We always appreciated that but life was straightforward and schooling. We went to state school

06:00 and enjoyed that. I was one of the ones, it was only after the war, when I went to Caulfield State School,

it was only four or five years, or a bit more after the war, then of course when we played Lone Pine Ridge, they would say, "Well where is the Hun? There he is up on the hill!" so up on the hill and charge.

06:30 All the young fellows would charge I felt that was just a little inkling of racism, again that must have broadened my thoughts a lot about races, I was quite happy about that because when I got into the army all that was forgotten. As a schoolboy I really could have complained about racism. I used to go home to my mother and say, "Oh gosh, this name Finkemeyer why

07:00 can't we just have a name like Brown?" She said, "Just say Finkemeyer, it is quicker and shorter." She never ever agreed about my childish ideas about changing the name to Brown so they couldn't tell me from any of the other fellows. But I was aware of it so I also thought about other people coming from other countries would get the same thing. Again, you put up with it and live and perhaps be a little stronger as a result of it.

07:30 **Did they ever give you a hard time because of it?**

No they used to give me a belting. When we went up to the hill they were charging there was blood and guts flying. I would finish up with a bloody nose or a bit of a gravel rash or something. I put up with it that was part of growing up.

**Did you know any World War I vets?**

Yes. We lived close to Caulfield Military Hospital and on Wednesdays I had

08:00 a little billy cart and I used to take that to school on Wednesday afternoons and instead of religious instruction I was conditioned, petitioned to take this billy cart [like a small trolley] and all the fellows bought flowers we used to put them in this billy cart and take them to Caulfield Military Hospital

08:30 to all the diggers [soldiers] there. Those diggers loved it, they would give us lollies, sweets, they appreciated it very much and I did that every Wednesday for almost a year that I was in that particular grade. I got to know them and they would talk to us and they would tell us about, a lot of them were gassed and they had this awful cough. They were there and I got to respect them and they were heroes in my mind.

09:00 Apart from that I had an uncle or two in the First World War but they didn't talk about it much. In fact no one talked about the war much then. The people at the hospital they were all terribly pleased to see us and they made us feel good. They appreciated it, I mean bringing flowers to diggers.

09:30 That is not really the done thing. They liked it and it was fine.

**Tell me a bit about the school you went to?**

In those days the first school, the Central School that was primarily went to 8th Grade, Merit Certificate

10:00 and the boys and girls were separated in those days, we had boys class one side and girls class the other side. Mr Gollop was one of these good teachers, very impressive and very strong and he had a little apron he used to wear with a little strap in it and if you misbehaved you got the strap. You either bent over and you got it on the bottom or you got it on your hand and that was permissible in those days. Occasionally

10:30 some of the teachers used to exert themselves a bit. I remember one case, very embarrassing, when I was a bit tired, I was doing some sort of geometry, and I wasn't keen about geometry I must have just yawned and Dollop said, "Finkemeyer, come out here." So out I go and the next thing, he said, "Do that again." I had to yawn and he put a piece of chalk .

11:00 "Now stand there until I tell you, you can go." I was standing there with my mouth open and all these kids were standing around having a great old time laughing but that was the way teachers were, they were very straight, but we learnt and we accepted all that.

**And then you moved to Melbourne?**

That was in Melbourne. Then I moved to Horsham. Horsham was good, I enjoyed sport,

11:30 we took up boxing, I was always keen about boxing, and I finished up a prefect and then perhaps captain of one of the houses and we used to do a lot of running and particularly boxing. I nearly won the boxing championship for the school, except that, I would have, except that my friend who I was opposed to in the final bout, his house master was the referee.

12:00 We lived through that. He was awarded the bout and we always used to clip each other about that. I said, "I licked you" at that fight," He said, "Not on your sweet life, I won." and of course I came second. Bruised but not badly.

**When did you actually leave school Colin?**

I left school after I did my matric. I did two years matric [matriculation]

12:30 went then, I was eighteen, we had to sit for exams and I joined the Defence Department in Victoria

Barracks and then I enrolled at Melbourne University in Commerce, which was one of the best things I ever did, to do that before the war because after the war it was always a bit iffie but because I had done it before the war before the war was over

13:00 they allowed me, they gave me a Commonwealth Reconstruction Course and allowed me to complete my four year course on the government. It was mainly because I had already had a year at it and fortunately I passed. That had its benefits to because I did economic geography because when I was in Changi they were looking for instructors to run this course at school,

13:30 to run a Changi Certificate. So they said, "Anyone know anything about geography?" Well of course having done economic geography I knew all about it so I really didn't, anyway I became an instructor, we had a lot of fun there because the boys used to know as much as I did anyway and he used to have these little discussion sessions and we used to have a great time they used to shriek at me and they would have to prove everything

14:00 and it put the time of day in. That goes back to university days. After that I was twenty then I enlisted.

**When you say you joined the Defence Department, what do you mean by that?**

Well I was appointed as a, they had exams for entry on a clerical level, and I joined.

14:30 We thought that was a very important job at Horsham, it was big time to work in the Defence Department. I worked in the Staff and Industrial Section, the personnel section which is where I made my career after I came back. I worked and studied personnel and concentrated on that. I was in the Staff and Industrial Department, I learnt a lot about bureaucracy.

15:00 I was one of them.

**Did you learn much about Australia's defence policy and our position in the world at the time?**

No, not there. Our Defence policy we didn't really have one, in my opinion, there was a few members of the AIF [Australian Imperial Force] but apart from that

15:30 there was a militia and they were scattered around a few of the country areas, but there wasn't terribly much to be seen for the visibility of the Defence Department. I worked in the Staff Department supposedly looking after the records and we used to enter records and overtime worked and salaries and in the end I worked on the job of transferring, those people who had civil positions to military positions

16:00 and to give them the equivalent rank. So that the senior head of say Wages Department would be chief, he might be major in Finance so I did all that. That is where I met Captain Cooper. He was at that point of time, he was in something to do with, I don't know quite exactly what he did,

16:30 he was friendly with me and he said "You should join this Anti-Tank Regiment. They are a group of country fellows you would love them." He said "Beside there is opportunities who knows where it might lead?" I thought this sounds pretty good. So I went and joined up with the boys I went to Puckapunyal

**This was the militia?**

Yes. I went to Puckapunyal, I was by myself. I met

17:00 some of the country boys from Numurkah, from then on I was sold that was going to be my regiment. No matter what happened. I stayed with them and still with them.

**When did you enlist?**

That was in 1941.

17:30 It was before the end of the year so it must have been about November 1941.

**Whereabouts did you actually enlist?**

I enlisted at the Royal Park. I went up by myself, I wasn't with anyone, I went up to Royal Park and joined the queues of people all enlisting

18:00 and that is where I first came acquainted with inoculations. We had to have vaccinations and things and here are all these fellows lined up and what got me and it still stays with me, here are all these fellows who are going to defend Australia and of course the doctor came over with this needle and they would keel over. Every fourth guy keeled over. I thought that I can't let that happen to me.

18:30 I pretended that can't happen to me so of course I was very brave, it was a great long needle and I had my first injection. From there then I got trained at Pucka [punyal] and got off at Pucka and walked, I was still in civvies [civilian clothes], from Singleton to Puckapunyal, I was in my civvies, and an army truck pulled up and he said, "Where are you headed for digger?"

19:00 And I said, "Down to Pucka." so he picked me up and I was equipped out and away we went.

**Tell me about Puckapunyal, what were the conditions like?**

Certainly a bit different to what they are now. When I got there first they said, "You are in that hut and you're in this troop, you're in George Troop, that is that hut." he said, "Get yourself a sack

- 19:30 fill it with straw." So I got the sack and I said, "Where do I get the straw?" because I was as green as grass and I had to be taken to a shed where you fill this sack with straw and that is your bed. "Here is your bedroll." and they gave you three or four blankets and that was your bedroll and there was no pillow that was it. You slept on the floor in this big hut; it was a corrugated iron hut
- 20:00 it had about half a battery of boys, twenty to thirty fellows all sort of close together, we were all very fussy, we had to make sure all our bed rolls were properly folded in the morning. They had hut inspections, you stood to attention outside along the wall and the officer walked past and checked, made sure
- 20:30 all your blankets were folded properly, a bit ridiculous, the times were so different and we all accepted that. Life in the army was rugged, most of the boys were country boys, who had lead a rugged life, they don't want any pandering, and I don't think anyone thought anything about those sorts of condition, but now having been back again
- 21:00 they have nice sheets, blankets and proper beds, civilised.

#### **What sort of training did you do there?**

We did a lot of training. We all had our rifles we did a heck of a lot of marching, army drills

- 21:30 in fact in the anti-tank we were the elite, we had a pipe band and they had recruited fourteen members from Mildura, they actually recruited the whole of the Mildura Pipe Band. They became our pipers and of course with a pipe band our colonel was very proper and he used to love to march us up and down with this pipe band in front and then we had our garter flashes. Instead of us being slovenly as we did
- 22:00 before the pipe band now we had to march to attention. We did a lot of marching. We didn't have any anti-tank guns at that point of time, but we used to train we used to go out to the artillery hill and we would train there, but instead of a gun we would use an old red gum log one way and one the other way, so it looked like a bit of a gun, and we would do our drills around that and
- 22:30 change around on imaginary logs and we did that until in the end they did bring out a couple of real anti-tank guns and we had some live shoots on that. We weren't too bad; it was amazing how accurate we were. Because when we had the live shoots they had all the bigwigs and all the top
- 23:00 brass. They were all watching us and we did our drills all very properly and it was pretty good. They said, "Australia is in good hands." With that they shipped us off to Singapore.

#### **Tell me about that? At what stage did you go to Singapore?**

We left for Singapore

- 23:30 from Princes Pier, it was all very secretive in those days, they didn't have any fanfare like they do in these days, when they went over to Iraq, it was all very hush hush. We came down from Pucka at night time and got to Melbourne, we were singing goodbye Melbourne town ourselves and we went off down to the pier
- 24:00 and there was the little Zealandia, it was a horse transport. The Numurkah boys sort of looked at it and there weren't any other ships and it looked as though this was the one we were going to be sort of loaded onto. He looked at it and said, "Christ, I could piss over the bloody thing." It was true. It was an old horse ship and we
- 24:30 all slept on hammocks outside, and underneath the deck and off we went. We were escorted, we went around the Bight to Perth and then we escorted one of the ships, the [HMAS] Australia.

#### **Did you stop in Perth long?**

Yes, we did. I was unlucky, all the boys had a whale of a time, they

- 25:00 had their last love affair in Perth. I was one of the ones who was drawn out of the hat who had to scrub the sides of the boat with a spew which had occurred across the [Great Australian] Bight. It was pretty rough trip. Most of the boys were seasick. I wasn't, I had been a bit accustomed to boats and things but I was one of the ones who was drawn to stay on ship service
- 25:30 that is the luck of the draw. After that my luck changed, I was lucky right through.

#### **What was the food like on board?**

I can only remember the smell in the hold it was typical army food, all that means is that it is stews and things like that. I can't remember exactly what it was. It was mainly all stewy things

- 26:00 it was a continuation of army food which was very straightforward, it was always inclined to be a bit meat and vegetables or bully beef and things like that.

**How long did it take for you to travel to Singapore?**

We had a good time, I know that, we had a lot of fun. It must have been about a week.

26:30 We played, Tommy Widdington was one of our entertainers, he was a gambler, he ran the two up school and things like that. On board the boat we couldn't play two up we used to play swy. Swy is dice, head and tail dice. Tommy used to run that and we would all bet our

27:00 five shillings a day and most of that used to go on swy or gambling. Tommy used to have this and he would run this jolly school on the deck and of course the dice would go all over the deck. People would be running all over the deck to see if it ended up a head or a tail to see if they had won or not. It was all right.

27:30 **Were the conditions all right on board or were they....?**

Not relatively. For two weeks I don't think we expected anything other than what they were. Those who were seasick a lot were, if it was too rough you would hop back into your hammock and stay there for a little while until the storm was over. It was all an adventure. We were all

28:00 eighteen and none of us had been outside Australia. Anything, flying fish all those things. They had these anti- mine lines out, we were looking at those, it was a big adventure for us, I think most of us would not say anything derogatory about it, we all enjoyed it. It was good fun. We had boxing

28:30 matches on board to keep us fit and we would do our bit of running on the spot.

**Tell me about the day or night that you sailed into Singapore?**

It was day and it was marvellous. The whole of Singapore was a completely different country. It was all green and lush and jungle covered, it was beautiful

29:00 and we were all piled off, grabbed our army kit bag and off we went. We were trucked around and around Singapore and then off to a place called Tampin across the causeway, not far into Malaya, it was a great adventure as far as I was concerned and I think all the other boys were much the same

29:30 it was different people, different country different smells, different everything. The native customs were all very interesting to us. As we went off we went around Singapore and we wondered why and we didn't know until later that it was to sort of deceive the Japanese spies, the 5th Column they were and they would report on all our moves. If they saw one truck come past, then another truck come past, they could say well Singapore has received a heck of a lot of

30:00 reinforcements. In fact there was only a couple of thousand. Two or three thousand.

**What happened when you got to Tampin?**

There we were met by, the 13th battery had gone ahead as one of our batteries had gone ahead earlier on the Queen Mary, they were

30:30 mainly to sort of pave the way for us. Again we went back into these tin sheds, big long sheds much the same as we had in Puckapunyal, but there instead of our palliasse we had charpoys

31:00 which was an Indian bed with a base and a proper mattress and we had a mosquito net, anti malaria net and we were pretty well off we thought. Again the food was pretty straight forward. Typical army food, herrings in tomato sauce, little Christmas Island potatoes. Apparently they were there in abundance so we had stacks of them I remember.

31:30 **What sort of training did you do there?**

There we did pretty intensive training, we did a lot of jungle training, driving through the jungles, we did manoeuvres right through the jungle. We did a heck of a lot of marching through the jungle

32:00 and a heck of a lot of driving through the jungle and we sort of had one group conceal itself imaginary in say in the jungle as an anti-tank group looking for tanks and things, and a group pretending that they were the tanks and they would come marching by. Our job on the land was to see them, spot them,

32:30 bomb them, we used these water bombs, which were actually condoms filled with water, we would use them to bomb them instead of firing. We trained strenuously in the jungle and then of course we had some live shoots too.

**You were really acclimatising yourselves.**

We had a good,

33:00 we got there somewhere around April so we had a good six months before the Japs arrived to get used to it all. We thought we were in pretty good nick. A lot of the infantry were better trained and more concentrated in bayonet practice and all those sorts of things, hand to hand fighting. Bennett [General Gordon Bennett] was very keen about training our people, so he did it very well.

33:30 The infantry sort of bore the brunt of his training and they knew that they were getting, sharpening, honing their abilities and things.

**What sort of equipment were you working with?**

For the first time we were working with everything other than anti-tanks guns. We had Breda guns, which

34:00 were captured in the desert from the Italians. We trained on those and then we trained on eighteen pounders and then we trained on French 75's. They were supposed to be anti-tank guns, but none of them were, well I suppose they were effective as tank guns, ultimately we did get our tanks before the invasion so we were able to train on those.

**OK.**

Some

34:30 of them hadn't fired a gun, an anti-tank gun, they had fired other guns, they were still able to transfer their skills across to using the anti-tank gun.

**We might move onto the next stage of your experience which I guess would have been the invasion, the Japanese invasion. Tell me**

35:00 **about, were you anticipating this, were you prepared for it?**

Yes, we were prepared. We were aware that they were on their way. They landed at Kota Bharu I think that was about December, shortly after the 7 December when they landed in Pearl Harbour, they went over to Indo-China and then

35:30 onto Malaya. Singapore was defended by huge naval guns but they were pointing south. The Japs decided to avoid that, they were a bit smart and they decided to come from the north and go

36:00 through the impregnable jungle which was supposed to be impregnable jungle and impregnable island. No one thought that anyone could ever invade Singapore because of these great 15 inch guns they had. They were all facing south and the Japs cunningly came from the north at Kota Bharu and at that time we were aware of it. We were sent up to Mersing to try to hold them

36:30 then slowly but surely our battery, our anti-tank regiment was engaged with the Japanese at Muar and Gemas. At Gemas one of our sergeants knocked off six tanks and a couple of carriers and then the commander,

37:00 the Japanese guy moved across to Muar and decided to come down the main trunk road there towards Singapore and Clarrie Thornton shot eight Japanese tanks and blew them up. That was quite an event. Our gun crew retreated; we were sort of fighting a rear guard action. We retreated to

37:30 Johor Bahru and then across the Causeway into Singapore ultimately. We had a few scares but we didn't confront any Japanese until we got into Singapore and at that point of time we were in pretty close contact with them.

**Could you tell me about the day you were actually**

38:00 **taken prisoner?**

I was, it was the 13th and on that day we were fighting against the Japs and they were in pretty direct contact. Our gun, instead of shooting tanks we were shooting at snipers in rubber trees and we were firing high explosive

38:30 shells at them. It was there that I got wounded in the shoulder and I was taken into Victoria Hospital and I spent my day in there. The day of capitulation was the 15th that was two days after, up at the Botanical Gardens; I was in hospital at that time. I decided being alone again; there were all these English people and all these people in hospital a lot worse than I was

39:00 that I am going to get back to my regiment. I then wound my way back through Singapore. Through the Japanese. The Japanese had taken it then. To me it was amazing that the Japs who had been so bitter in their invasion and they were pretty rugged, they suddenly just went into neutral and I walked around and they didn't take any notice of me. That staggered me a bit.

39:30 They just sort of looked at me, I didn't salute I didn't do anything I just sort of walked on looking for my regiment. I got some help from Military Police and they pointed me in the direction of the Botanical Gardens and I joined them up there. It was great to do, but I still had a crook shoulder and I couldn't carry things. They said, "Scout round and get yourself some utensils and things because this is where we are going to be for awhile." They lined up all their anti tank guns.

40:00 They had lined up all our guns and some of them had their 303 rifles, took the bolt out and threw that in the Botanical Gardens lake, a beautiful lily pond.

## Tape 2

00:34 **Colin you were telling me when you went to the Botanic Gardens in Singapore when the Japanese took you prisoner, if you could continue on with that.**

After lining up, they were ordered to line up the guns and things alongside the Botanical Gardens

01:00 they did that but they first took out the critical firing points and threw those in the lily pond and then most of them, who hadn't had a sleep or a decent wash for a week or ten days dived in afterwards so there they were bare bums amongst all these lilies. It was about that time that I found my way back to the boys and that was a great celebration because anyone whose face had been missing for the last day or so

01:30 was deemed to be probably missing, probably killed in action. I marched in, there was a great welcome and it was good to be back with my own boys again and we felt fine. After that our CO [Commanding Officer] addressed us and told us that we were going to sleep overnight and the next morning we were going to march to Changi. The next morning the boys carried my bag for me

02:00 as I was unable to, that was mateship the way it began. I walked along with them and we went about twenty miles, from there to Changi, but it was a hot dusty day and the Japs to say the least about their victorious habits, but they had beheaded stacks of Chinese and they had all the heads on bamboo posts

02:30 on the corners of each of the roads, it was a rather gruesome trip back to Changi. We knew then that the Japs were pretty brutal. We struggled through. We got through to Changi in the dark at night and laid ourselves down as best we could. We were on a padang, a playing field, and that was all pitted with bombs

03:00 a lot of verandahs, we bedded down as best we could in the morning and from then on we had a long period where we were without food, only the food that we had bought and not too many of us could carry much and from then we started on our rice diet. On that we weren't too happy about it because there were sorts of rice,

03:30 so many different sorts of rice. Nothing is clean like we have here. Floor rice and dirt rice and lime rice, so many types but none of them tasted any good. The strange thing about it was that we had swapped diets from European diets to rice diet and we were constipated. That doesn't mean a day or a week it was two weeks, in fact it was twenty days, up to twenty days constipation.

04:00 We were all concerned about that but the medical officer said, "That is nothing, that is just a diet change." I am like that and everyone was the same and that moved on. That was our introduction to transferring to a rice diet. From then on we started to look forward to it and anything that we could eat we would look forward to it. We ate very carefully and we ate very slowly. Every grain of rice from then onwards

04:30 that we were lucky to get.

### **What were your sleeping quarters like?**

Well they were officers' quarters to start with, that sounds great, except we slept on the floor because the barracks were built for something like 30,000 or 40,000 British territorials and we moved in something like 150,000 POWs [Prisoners of War] so we slept

05:00 on the concrete floors. We slept on them; we had very little bedding, because you didn't need very much in the climate, Singapore climate. We slept on a ground sheet if we had one, or a blanket if you had one, we just slept on that. Again that is the way we were brought up from Puckapunyal from the old palliasses to this, it wasn't that terribly different. No one complained.

05:30 The interesting thing was because we slept on the concrete floor I felt there was a rock underneath the floor. We had lost weight, I suppose two or three stone by then. I was sleeping on the floor and I felt this rock underneath me a little stone. I couldn't work it out We looked underneath. I had a friend of mine Des Boyd, he slept alongside.

06:00 He said, "You are crazy Finke." He said are you sure there is something there, "On your back." He had a look and sure enough there was the bullet that I had in the shoulder. It had stopped an inch from the spine and was sitting on the outside of my rib and there it was. He said, "Does it hurt?" I said, "No."

06:30 We manoeuvred it to put it parallel to the ribs and from then on I slept without any trouble. That's true. That stayed in until Weary Dunlop took it out when I came home. It stayed there right throughout. Then again because Des was able to manipulate it he put it parallel to the ribs, between the ribs so I couldn't feel it.

### **Why didn't they take it out at the camp?**

07:00 We didn't have any facilities for it first and secondly I never even thought about it again. I had thought that when I was in hospital, see not having slept for about ten days when I got into hospital I just passed

out and I remember only two doctors coming around and probing, because I was full of morphia and stuff so I couldn't feel anything.

07:30 I just thought they had taken it out and thought no more of it until when I was sleeping on the floors in the officers' quarters there it was. It was one of those unusual things.

**What work did they get you to do in Changi?**

A lot of stories from a lot of people. For the first few months we did very little, look after ourselves

08:00 and had work parties which were allowed out of the camp area, we worked on those but ultimately they decided that this good labour force, we will get them to work in Singapore but a lot of them went on to transport jobs in Singapore and they had a whale of a time because there was all this great stacks of food which they scrounged at a risk, if they were caught they were pretty severely belted but they still took the challenge,

08:30 being Aussies they had plenty of different ways of working it out. They used to build these scrounge boxes on their trucks and things because the trucks were always searched before they went into camp. They would put tins of bully beef or whatever; hide them in spots in the truck. Underneath the driver's seat or one of the LAD [Light Aid Detachment]

09:00 who did the maintenance on the clapped out trucks in the camp, found out if they put a metal strip across one of the structures of the trucks you could put a whole stack of tins of bully beef or tins of SPC peaches and whatever and they used to scrounge them this way. They had a whale of a time. I personally was on a job building shrines for the Japs. The Japs thought more of the dead than they did of the living.

09:30 They were building a shrine on Bukit Timah, that was where one of the major battles took place. We were on this job. I was on a cementing group and one time we cemented steps up and I was on that job and those steps are still there after all these years, we saw them my wife and I when we went back. At that

10:00 time they put this huge pole, it was the biggest tree on Singapore Island and they fashioned it into a big totem pole and on it they had their characters, our glorious dead. All the diplomats coming down from the various countries being repatriated home would call in there to pay their respects to the dead. We had a little Christian cross at the back of that

10:30 I don't know how it got there but I think the Japs decided it was right to have it because they had Christians as well, these Shinto people and they used to go round there and they would pay their respects too. Then they would come down and knowing that we were Aussies they would say, "You are lucky, for you the war is over." Of course we didn't know what was ahead of us. Worse to come than going through the war.

11:00 They would say to us and this is where we first got the impression that they were definitely keen to come down they would say, "For you, the war is over but for Japan it will never be over until one day we take Australia and we will take Australia, either we will win this war and we will take Australia. If not this war then 100 years, we do not mind, but we will take Australia whether it be for political, military or whatever reasons." They said those sorts of things

11:30 much the same. That gave us a pretty strong impression that they were keen about occupying us here.

**We might move on, we will come back later to Changi and go into lots more detail. I would like to move on to when you got transferred to Burma, if you could tell me the circumstances**

12:00 **surrounding your transfer?**

Being in Changi we got to the stage that life was pretty boring. We ran schools as I mentioned before, and we had frog races, anything to keep us occupied, we were basically bored and when they told us there was work party going to Thailand, we thought this is a great change

12:30 that will pass the time of day it will all go pretty quickly and we would be happy. Off we went, we get down to Singapore station and there were these rice trucks about twenty five feet, there was twenty five of us in each of these hot steel trucks. We thought this isn't going to be too good. When they closed the doors up this wasn't too good at all, it got very hot, too claustrophobic and we were there for five days. It took five days

13:00 to get from Singapore to Ban Pong in Thailand. We moved along slowly giving away to Japanese trucks and whatever. We were the last in line. We had very few toilet stops, we had very few wash stops, we had very few drink stops. Food was erratic. If you pulled into a station and they had some rice there you were lucky. I remember at Kuala Lumpur we had rice but

13:30 it was pretty sour and it was still rice and we were hungry so it didn't matter. It was pretty tedious trip. I think a lot of us afterwards we got suppressed claustrophobic feelings; it was pretty fetid and pretty smelly. No washes and things like that. Some of us then had these feelings way afterwards, well

- 14:00 when we were back home. I had some sort of cold sweats for a long while. I went to the psych doctor and he told me it was because of that and once you brought it out in the open, it was OK, I never worried about it since but it started from there. That was a pretty rugged one. We were then in Thailand, we shunted off on rail trucks to the foot of the hills the mountains
- 14:30 where the road began and then we started. We marched up, firstly we started off on a bridge building gang at a place called Wampo at the beginning of the railway. We were pile driving so we had this great long stack of strings on a pile driver and we would pull this driving thing up, the Jap would say, "Ichi nees,
- 15:00 see go and drop" and we would all drop that and then we would pull it up again. Ultimately we would put in the poles. When that finished we then moved on to Conduit, K3, K2, K1. K3 was ultimately later known, only when we got back, as Hellfire Pass. At that point in time it was K3. I worked further
- 15:30 up the line to what we called Conduit 2 and then there was Conduit 1 where the British were. K3 was fairly rugged, it was the deepest cutting and I think they recruited the lousiest and the worst Japanese guards that they could get from the mad mongrels. The Black Prince and then there was Silent Basher.
- 16:00 He used to get up every morning and the boys lined up for work every morning, the Silent Basher used to go and hit each one in the chin just to let them know he was the boss and to motivate them to work.

**Did he ever make eye contact?**

No. Not the way I see it. I wasn't there but others were and

- 16:30 they were belted every morning before they went to work, it was a huge cutting. We were on the same sort of work, but on a cutting not quite so big further down. It was after awhile the artillery regiments were somehow allocated to K3 that was just a casual appointment or random appointment. We went down to the next cutting, the work was the same except the guards were
- 17:00 placid ones because it wasn't so steep and it didn't have to be built in such a great hurry. I got into strife there a couple of times; I learnt a lot of lessons.

**What were the conditions like there?**

The conditions would hardly bear talking about, they were very as far as tents and things were concerned we slept in ragged old tents or attap [matting made from coconut fronds] roofed huts,

- 17:30 which usually were full of bugs and it was pretty lousy. Food was down to three saucers of rice a day. One at breakfast was all mashed up we used to call it pap, you just keep on boiling rice and it turns into a starchy gooey mess, that was breakfast, a spoonful of that. We were allowed to take a little binto box,
- 18:00 we took this little box, our dixie and they put a spoon of ordinary rice in that and maybe you got a bit of radish or dried vegetable tops and that was your lunch. Then at dinner time we had exactly the same thing. We were getting down in weight; some of us were half our normal weight. We were still required to work just as hard. The work was in,
- 18:30 it involved sledging away, we drove a metre steel bar into the rock and you did that by belting it with an eight pound hammer and one guy moved the bar around while the other belted it. The bar had a little end on it so it would eat into the rock
- 19:00 and when we all got down about a metre or so then out comes the bar and they would dynamite it all. For the next hour or so we would have rock carrying, we would lift these great hunks of rock over the edge of the cutting, in the front or end of the cutting and then we would start again.

**What sort of hours did you work?**

We got up at dark and back at dark. Over there

- 19:30 it was actually twelve hours between daylight and dark.

**Very tough.**

We were non-stop for the whole daylight. Sometimes they would even, in Hellfire Pass they had bamboo flares and worked night. They would work the same team; they would just work them another four hours in the dark.

- 20:00 The camp was normally three to five kilometres away from the railway so we had to march through. That was always mudding so we got ulcers and trench feet. Most of us didn't have boots either, we were all bare footed. The boots didn't last forever and once they went there was no replacement. We got case hardened feet.
- 20:30 Until the monsoons came and then of course it was all mud and slush so they softened and that is when the ulcers started. We had all sorts of cures for ulcers.

**How did you cope with conditions like that, did you have plenty of mates that you could talk to and laugh with? Did humour come into it?**

Yes. The Australians are good at that.

- 21:00 Australians are good mates. One great lesson I learned was the importance of mateship. It was really great. All the fellows together, Aussies are all the same, even the present generation, they all looked after each other and they were all close together, if anyone was in trouble no matter what happened someone would come into to help them. Sometimes even
- 21:30 fronting up to the Japs for them and getting a good belting yourself, they worked together well. We adopted a saying, "Teduppa." It is what we have got now; we had got this condition where we have all got a lot of tolerance. You will find most of the guys are pretty tolerant and you will find they developed that because they were in a situation they couldn't do anything about. Couldn't improve it, we couldn't do anything about it. So we used to have
- 22:00 a Malay expression, "Teduppa, what the hell" - you can't do anything about it so why worry. That was the way it was. There were times, time and time again coming back from work and we were pooped and someone would start singing, someone would say, "It's a long way to Tipperary...." and the next thing we would be singing. The Japs used to get a bit cross about all this
- 22:30 they thought well a bit impudent. We used to sing and we had humour galore and they would always come up with a joke or two and they could see the lighter side of things, although the work was pretty, it was extremely heavy for the young builds that we had then, pretty light on build,
- 23:00 light on strength, they still were all pretty happy and it wasn't, it is going to be over soon and it is just a matter of putting up with this and then we will be home again. It will be over quickly, and hopefully the malaria bug might miss us and we mightn't get the cholera and we mightn't get this and that, we lived
- 23:30 in hope and we lived in this sphere, what the hell can you do about it. It showed a lot of character, young Australians and that happened to be our generation, but I honestly believe that any young Aussie in the same condition would probably behave the same way. Probably there would be amongst them the scallywags and those who had good sense of fun
- 24:00 but above all without even thinking or talking about it there would be this mateship. We never used the word mateship, it only came into being in retrospect when we got back home. It was mateship got us through and everybody said "Yes." Everybody helped everybody else, Australians helped other Australians. We wouldn't help outsiders; I suppose we would, but it mainly
- 24:30 applied to ourselves and anti-tankers at that.

#### **What other nationalities were there?**

There were Dutch, Indians, a lot of Indian a lot of Dutch and a lot of British. The Australians generally stuck very closely together. I know that was the beginning of our regiment, our regiment still sticks together. The same people and the same experiences.

- 25:00 That was a bond and that bound us together. We didn't bond easily with the Dutch nor the English strangely. We were thick and thin while the war was on, we were like brothers. Once the war was over they had different standards. Hygiene, different social standards, different relationships between officers and men. We were close to our officers, Aussies were very close to their officers, they were the
- 25:30 same, there wasn't any sort of superiority with ours, they were all humanitarian if you like, most of them, one or two kicked over the traces, but they were put aside. One or two were very keen they went at a later stage. What happened was that when we got over there the officers and everybody would pool all their money and their resources and then divide it amongst the sick and
- 26:00 everybody. The sick didn't get paid, we got our ten cents a day for our work, somewhere on the line, but we never saw it, it went into canteen funds sickness, the officers got higher pay, they got rate for age pay but some of them, most of them pooled it, they might have taken a small percentage first, but they pooled the bulk of it. Some of them decided, and they were entitled to,
- 26:30 they would go alone and because those guys they were living, they hadn't lost the weight that we lost and they were living quite well on foods that they could buy from the natives. They weren't terribly popular. As you can imagine. Otherwise Aussies got on very well together.

#### **This is all great stuff; I am going to move along a bit so we can finish this general life arc**

- 27:00 **we will come back to Burma, if you could tell me a little bit about when they moved you to Nagasaki and the circumstances around that?**

When the railway was finished and joined up I went up the far end of it at Burma and worked as a fettler and then when the whole thing was completed, they then moved us

- 27:30 back to Changi and from there we went on an old cargo ship 5 to 7,000 ton maybe, we called it the Bioki Maruichi being the Japanese word for sick. They piled us all on. They had it all laden with rubber, tin and kapok all the spoils of war that they were going to
- 28:00 take back home and on top of that on the decks and things they put 1,000 prisoners, 300 in each of the

holes roughly. That meant we were batted down into those holes, we were there for three months. It took us three months to get there; they zig zagged from Singapore through to Manila on to Nagasaki. We were headed to Nagasaki, we didn't know that at the time. The point being

- 28:30 we were crammed in, when we first went in, the only way we could fit 300 into the hold was your knees apart and the next person sat spaced between your knees crowded like that. That was for three months. Virtually we got pretty smelly, pretty fetid, pretty stinky The toilet was outside and that was the only chance for a breath of fresh air.
- 29:00 A banjo box which was sort of strapped onto the outside of the ship on the outside with planks well apart do your business and back. There was a guard there to make sure you didn't stay too long. The attraction to the fresh air was pretty strong but you had to get back into this hold pretty quick and then the next one takes his place. It was a pretty rugged sort of a trip. We got
- 29:30 to Manila and there we saw the first armada, not the first armada, but the first one we had seen was anchored. There were enormous battleships and cruisers and all there and one of the officers came into meet the captain of our little boat, he was an old fellow but he said to us, "All Australia go.
- 30:00 All ships, Australia go, you go Nippon those ships go and take Australia." It was either the Coral Sea or the Midway Islands I am not sure. These ships, we had six cruisers in Australia and we looked at this enormous array of battleships all in Manila Harbour and thought our little six cruisers are not going to do too well against that lot if they ever get down there.
- 30:30 Anyway thanks to the Americans at Midway and at the Coral Sea they didn't get there. We went back and when our turn came we stayed in Manila for about a fortnight or ten days and when another convoy formed. A couple of destroyers, a couple of ships. There were three ships had British
- 31:00 prisoners and one had Aussies. We got outside the harbour next to Corregidor. At Corregidor we were attacked by submarines and there was a submarine fleet there that we didn't know about, anyway they bombed or they torpedoed a lot of the ships in the convoy. The old Bioki was such a wreck of a thing apparently they thought
- 31:30 well they preferred something else so it got through. It was one of the few that got through and in the end we got through that torpedoing and then we struck a typhoon. The old Bioki wasn't too well reinforced against typhoons, so it rolled and rocked and in the end it got through. Apart from a big hole that was on the side the captain came along and stuffed it with a big tree trunk
- 32:00 and blocked it up but it got through to Mogi and from Mogi we went to Nagasaki. There we were taken to the Mitsubishi Shipyards. The life in Nagasaki was very stringent, very controlled. Firstly we were very happy to get out of this ship, that was a great relief but when we got
- 32:30 to Nagasaki we found that we were more constrained than perhaps we had ever been, we had to get up every morning and straight to work in the shipyards. The shipyards again they had all the police and guards and Gestapo and if you didn't work, if they found you stopped work. Once I stopped work, it was as cold as charity, Japan in spite of all it gets cold winds from the monsoon and it was
- 33:00 freezing. I was rubbing my hands and a Nip [Japanese] Gestapo, Kempetai [Japanese Military Police] caught me, knocked me down kicked me. "No work sabotage." Sabotage was the penalty paid for not working so we had to do four more hours at the end of the day on one of their tunnels. Carrying rocks from the tunnels and taking them to the sea. They were tunneling all over the place and that had great significance,
- 33:30 we didn't know it then they were the tunnels they were building for their own defence. They were what they call their prairie dog tactics. They used to put people in them, they would go out and attack and then they would go back into their tunnels again. They would attack from all directions. That was one of their defenses. That was one of the tunnels we were building, when that was finished we went back to crane slinging, we were riveting,
- 34:00 we were welding, and plate gang. There were about 10,000 ton ships and they were putting out one a month.

#### **Did you still have your mates around you?**

We were still the Anti-Tank Regiment. There we were working with the Dutch, the Americans were in the camp, they had a lot of American prisoners and a

- 34:30 lot British prisoners but the Aussies stuck together like mud to a blanket.

#### **Food was similar to what you had?**

Food was terrible. The rice got lighter and lighter. While we were in Japan we were pretty well starving the rations got very light.

#### **How was your health at this time?**

I was lucky right through. I escaped dying.

- 35:00 Once I thought I had cholera and when I was in Japan I had pneumonia and they put me in the hospital to die, but I didn't. I didn't do anything about it, they didn't have any medication or anything they just said, "He is sick, he can't work he can't do anything." We were about half our weight. I got down to about 7½ stone. Again my body,
- 35:30 got over it and back I went and ultimately we went back to work again. From there on it was eight weeks before they dropped the atom bomb they moved us because they had run out of steel because of the American blockade and there was no steel to build the ships, they said, "These fellows, we are not going to leave them here." so back we went to the coal mines. They sent us to a coal mining area at a little place called Nakama.
- 36:00 At Nakama, most of the boys went down the mine, this coal mining which was a pretty rugged sort of existence. I didn't go, I was too weak and my problem was that they put me onto the garden party and I looked after about ten others in much the same condition as I was. We had to walk three miles
- 36:30 to this little hillside, tucked away outside the camp. We were heavily guarded and away we went. That is where we saw Nagasaki go up. At that point in time all the planes were bombing, the Americans were bombing the big cities and the little P54 hedgehopping and bombing all the military installations
- 37:00 we heard, this day, we heard the sirens going and we looked over at Nagasaki and we saw this huge big orange and white flame. One of the fellows said, "Crikey, Nagasaki is copping it this time." We didn't know anything about atomic bombs. All we knew was they were getting a good belting.

**You saw the atomic bomb.**

Yes. Again it was just a big cloud of smoke

- 37:30 billowing over the horizon. It was billowing orange and white. Like a big cauliflower. Yes sure, "Nagasaki has got it, whose turn next?" It wasn't long after that that peace was declared.

**How long did it take before you got home?**

Another three months after that. That was,

- 38:00 the point was up until then the Japanese had decided they were going to eliminate all prisoners, they didn't want everybody about that would give information about the treatment they imparted to prisoners, they wanted to eliminate them all and there was an edict out that all prisoners of war were to be eliminated on 15 September. That was
- 38:30 15 August the atom bombs dropped on 7 August [actually was 6 and 9 August] and they surrendered on 15th which was a month before we were supposed to be knocked off. That again was lucky for me. I was just ahead of trouble. Again lucky. With that when the war was over, we went walkabout,
- 39:00 the guards disappeared, we got a little bit of retribution in our own funny way. We never took any brutal action; we might have taken subtle action. One of the boys was pretty smart, Peter Dawson, he had little arm bands designed in Japanese, [General] MacArthur's Disarmament Force, they were called.
- 39:30 We had these bands and we used to stop all the trains and get all the officers off and de-arm them and we would have this big pile of swords and guns and whatnots, we got all our souvenirs that we wanted. I still have the sword that I took from an old Captain on board.

## Tape 3

- 00:34 **The war has been declared over; could you tell me about your journey back to Australia?**

Yes. We were about three months, we lived in Nakama for quite a few weeks, the

- 01:00 Americans dropped food drops to us and they said, "Don't move until we come and get you." Well that is what we did, we just stayed there. The GIs [General Infantry] came and picked us up, they said, "Prepare to move, you are moving out of camp today." We didn't have much luggage, in fact we didn't have any. Then we were trucked, went through to Nagasaki, we went on a train and then from Nagasaki we went
- 01:30 to Nagasaki after it had been bombed. It was like one huge untidy paddock. It was flattened. Just a blob of metal here and there where there obviously had been a steel building. The whole population had been incinerated and it was absolutely flat. We went through to the embarkation area where the Americans'
- 02:00 banana boat, it was an aircraft carrier, The Speaker, and firstly we were disinfected, we went through a big disinfection tent and we threw all our gear out and went through this spray and came out and we were purified and then

- 02:30 we all got new GI uniforms and there were these wonderful ladies. We hadn't seen a white lady for 3½ years, it was beautiful and they were offering us strawberry milkshakes and things like that. Well this is unknown, they were lovely people and very attentive. That was great. We went on The Speaker
- 03:00 and from there to Okinawa. Okinawa, we were bedded down for a week there. The war was still on there. The Japanese had burrowed into these hills and they were still fighting they didn't have any communications back to headquarters so they didn't know they had surrendered. They didn't know anything. They were all dedicated
- 03:30 to fight to the last person anyway, they were still fighting. The Americans were blowing them up and blasting them out of these tunnels. We were ready to go and along came this typhoon, another one of these Chinese typhoons. It really rocked the place, it blew hell. It knocked a lot of the ships over; it blew all the stalls over
- 04:00 it was a tent city up until then. We were in huts, they survived but our planes which were just outside on the runway, they were all B29s Flying Fortresses and they were just blown off the runway and ruined. That meant we couldn't get home because we were flying home from there. That had been the plan. From there we just had to wait
- 04:30 until they brought in a new fleet of these planes. There we were in these new planes, they were just stripped B29s so it was a cold as cherry, not heat no nothing. It was up there and it was fine. We got from there to Clark Field and at Clark Field, Manila we had a whale of a time. The American people had all these service people and
- 05:00 the ladies and all that, they were tremendously helpful. We had one long queue, through the canteen, we lived on turkey and cranberry sauce and roast tatoes [potatoes], until we were almost bloated. The fact that we were down half our normal weight with three months of normal good tucker we still got back to our normal weight and were beyond that. We weren't conditioned,

05:30 we had blown up at bit.

**How did your bodies handle proper food again after you had been living on rice? I have heard that some prisoners of war who went back to normal eating they couldn't hold things down.**

It was quite the reverse of when we went onto a rice diet, on the rice diet we were constipated on going back to normal

- 06:00 food it was the other way round. It was very tricky. Again somehow the desire to eat was a bit overwhelming. We would take that risk even though we might have had to put up with the inconvenience we preferred that to...

**You didn't care?**

We didn't care. The Americans were very kind to us and they looked after us very well. From then on we came back

- 06:30 and then we came back to Sydney and we were disembarked in Sydney, that was a good trip. Again we were well fed, and it took about three to five days to get back from there. I don't know how many. When we got to Sydney we were off-loaded, there was no reception party,

- 07:00 we went to Ingleburn I think and we were told that we would be transferred to Melbourne, we would get the rail truck to Melbourne. That was the whole thing then, there was no reception or anything, we didn't expect anything, we virtually surrendered, we didn't expect to be glamorised, there was nothing brave or courageous that went on about our existence, we were there to defend Australia but sure,

- 07:30 but I said we didn't win so we didn't expect an ovation or a reception when we got back, so we just again took it as it came, we went to Ingleburn, we were equipped we got new clothes and outfits, we were back to Australia then. We got Australian outfits.

**Did you have a sense of pride about having survived?**

No, I

- 08:00 don't think we did. We were obviously, we expected to all along, most of us did, I don't feel we felt proud or whatever, we were pleased we were happy to be home and it was all over and that was a great feeling. In terms of pride, no we didn't

- 08:30 sort of feel that we had contributed a great deal at that point. When we got back to Melbourne we were welcomed in by our families, our folks knew we were coming so we trained down and got off at Flinders Street station and we bused and we went around the city and I met my sister for the first time again. Mum and Dad weren't there but they were at my grandparent's place, who lived in Melbourne,

- 09:00 we went around a couple of times and there was a little bit of flag waving, mostly from people's relatives and from then onwards we got back to our families I suppose for the first five, ten years we settled down quietly, we didn't stir or make too many ripples. I settled down trying to living ordinarily, I did my studies

09:30 and got myself hopefully a bit qualified for life ahead of me, it wasn't until five years later that I married, but I felt that I wasn't ready up until then.

**You went to uni [university].**

Yes, I did Commerce and Personnel Management.

**You finished that course.**

That was in my calling from then onwards,

10:00 again it followed through from the Defence Department as a clerk. In the personnel department. I liked working with people and I liked working with Australian companies. I am very proudly Australian, I love Australia. Still do and I love the freedom we have got. It was to me then that my life was terribly important. I regarded life as important, I regard myself as terribly lucky, I was just one step ahead of them all the

10:30 time. A lot of fellows didn't have the constitution or whatever so they are not here now. I got through it all and it was sheer luck I was just one step ahead all the time. In life I went back to I worked with Australian companies, I would only work with Australian companies. I worked with Felton Textiles for twenty years and I became the chief personnel guy there and then I worked with, I moved over to

11:00 the National Safety Council, that was good fun and the last twenty two, twenty three years was with the Australian Consolidated Industries. Neither of those companies exist now, they were Australian companies and they were proudly Australian and people were proud to work in them. I was and I loved the job. I had the job between management, the unions and the men it was good fun, tricky sometimes

11:30 but good fun. No way known would I have done any differently if I started out all again.

**Do you think about the war much now?**

I have been writing books and when you are doing that. I think about it in a constructive way. Just recently in this last book I have been thinking about what is the best way of summarising the whole of the war, the whole of the Japanese invasion.

12:00 So that it is interesting to the younger generation so that they can know about it. Get a good understanding about it, because it is sixty years ago and it is nearly forgotten about. It is in danger of slipping away from memory altogether. In the book I have tried to make it readable so that young people are interested in it and say that did happen.

**Fantastic.**

And then they make up their own mind

12:30 what they want to do.

**That is really great Colin now we have a broad sketch. Let's go back to your home town where you first were born and brought up if you could tell me about that. What sort of town it was**

13:00 **give me a bit more detail about that?**

Coromby was in the middle of a wheat farming area. The German population when they came out they migrated in 1850's settled in three areas. In Wimmera, wheat and sheep, Hamilton was sheep, Hamilton was apparently German for sheep, and the Barossa Valley. Our folk settled on a property near Minyi.

13:30 The film The Flying Doctor was made at Minyi. Our farm was just outside of that, it was wheat and sheep. I don't remember a great deal about it, I know only that it had the biggest bull in Wimmera, my father used to tell me that. After that I was only there for a few years and then we went back into Melbourne. From Melbourne I went to a very elite girls' school

14:00 **Girls' School.**

Shelford Girls' School which is very elite school.

14:30 It wasn't really a school, it was a pre-school kindergarten I went to. My sister used to take me there and look after me she went to Shelford. Ultimately when I got big enough to look after myself I went to Caulfield Central.

**Why did your family relocate from the country to Melbourne?**

Yes it was a bumper year in 1921/22 and they had good years and he retired. Dad retired from the land, the land went partly to him and partly to his brother and then he retired and he thought he would probably retire for keeps in Melbourne. Apparently, they didn't have a lot but £1,000 was a lot of money. You could buy a house for a thousand pounds.

15:00 He didn't have quite all that he thought he might have had, so he took a job with Vickers Aussie Tractors. I used to go there Saturday morning and see him at work. He stayed there for about four or five years during the Depression years assembling these tractors which were imported from England

15:30 I used to go there on Saturdays and cook their sabs for them. I used to get fourpence halfpenny sabs, one for the uncle, one for Dad and two for me. They would have it for morning tea. After that I went to Caulfield Central.

**What age were you when you went to Caulfield Central?**

I would have been six, straight after Shelford. It was preliminary, I was probably backward or a bit slow, so I would have been six rather than five.

**What sort of kid were you? Did you do sports and hobbies as a young boy?**

I would say I was a

16:30 pretty quiet sort of a kid. Pretty ordinary, pretty typical of kids of that time. We were interested in cricket, football. Footballs we used to make out of cigarette packets because we used to play street football. I didn't get into too many brawls but I used to like boxing. I liked self defense. I think we had the usual cigarette cards, I used to collect cigarette cards

17:00 and all those things. I was interested in stamp collecting. But other than that I don't think I was anything extraordinary. I was a kid that you probably wouldn't notice in a crowd.

**Did you have any particular little mates that you used to hang out with?**

Yes, plenty of friends then. Next door neighbours had young children. A young fellow about my age, Tom Brewmore, he

17:30 was about my age and we had a street full of young children, we were all friends. It was good. It was just something we took for granted and enjoyed it. I am sure in a crowd you would have just been one of many.

**At school**

**18:00 did you have any subjects that you particularly liked or excelled at?**

No, I didn't until I got to Horsham. At school, school was just something you had to do and you had to go through as far as I was concerned whatever they taught me, well you never did any homework in those days this was at

18:30 Caulfield Central School, I tried to learn and remember what they told us and we had reminder sessions but other than that school was just something you did. I didn't have any sort of career ambitions or anything like that. I don't know that I consciously liked it but then I started to like English. We had a great English teacher. Miss Tyson. She loved poetry and

19:00 English and she loved words and she would tell us how great the English language was and in the end it rubbed off she was a brilliantly teacher. She didn't know it. She wasn't what you would call a very attractive lady, she was in her 30's or more when we did our two last years Leaving Honour Certificate

19:30 in English. She was just one of those persons. At that point in time I liked English words and language and poetry and then from there onwards that sort of took me to people. I liked working with people so I was lucky to get a start in the Defence Department.

20:00 The staff and industrial department.

**Did you do any writing at school, is that where you developed a taste for writing?**

We didn't write the same way as you do now, we had history and essays and things like that but nothing other than that you just didn't do it. It wasn't until afterwards, the last ten to fifteen years that I have come into it. Since I have been on my own

20:30 I have been looking for interests and things and this one is sort of revived and it is there and I enjoy it. Of course I have a computer, without a computer these things are not that easy. With a computer writing is made a heck of a lot easier.

**Then you moved to Horsham is that correct? What were the circumstances for that move?**

That is interesting.

21:00 Again it was just one of those fortunate things. We were happy living in Melbourne and my aunt stayed in Horsham and living there and she was working in a frock shop, in Madam Griffiths it was, she was an English lady and her husband was a major in the British Army and they wanted to go back to England for a holiday. They had to have someone to look after the shop. So Mum

21:30 was a general farmer's wife she was jack of all trades. Good at mothering and good at cooking and knowing not a great deal about fashions but she decided to go there and eldest sister loved doing things decorating, interior decorating that was right up her alley. They were there temporarily to look after the shop in Horsham

22:00 while madam went over to England and we moved and went and stayed in our own place in McPherson

Street and that was a weatherboard but nice and comfortable. The Griffiths decided to stay in England and they started to bargain around, would Mum and Dad like to take the shop over

22:30 Dad was a farmer with great big farmer hands and as strong as a Mallee bull, not ideally suited for working in a ladies' shop but the long and short of it he did. He did all the bookkeeping and the accounts. He used to skate [boast] to me sometimes, he said "You think I am a bit rough and tough" but he said "I have put my hand up more women's skirts than any other man in Horsham." He was doing that when he was doing the price lists.

23:00 They liked it there, it is still in the family now, that same business passed to her sister and it is now to her child Dianne. Dianne is now running it, it is still there but it has moved with the times. It is modern and popular; it was always a little bit up-market.

**Were you glad to be back in the country after being born in the country?**

Yes

23:30 In those days that was shooting quail and duck and rabbits. I loved all that, I love nature. In those days Shooting ducks and quail and rabbits that was all part of life. We never shot anything that we wouldn't use to eat. There is nothing more delicious than roast quail the way mother used to make it. And the same as with duck. Later on

24:00 I moved with the times a bit and I see that is not quite in living in accordance with harmony with nature. I don't have any firearms at all they have all been handed in.

**How did the depression affect your family, were you without food? Did you have rations?**

24:30 No as I said before. After the war

**No during the 30's.**

No rations, there were some that were hard done by; they were the poorer people who were unemployed and didn't have any means of support. That was pretty rough because there weren't pensions and those sorts of things to help them in those days. They were on the dole and that was looked down upon.

25:00 They were the ones who experienced the worst. The fellows who were in the mushy middle they were OK. Our expectations weren't high. We didn't mind eating milksops. Bread with milk and sugar over it as a sweet. It was fine, but we had it. Those things we learnt to love

25:30 I don't think we ever complained about food. Our food was potato pancakes, or plum sago pudding or whatever, very simple, again these days they would be down the bottom of choice.

**Did you still have roast dinners?**

Yes we used to have roasts. They were always roasts, not of lamb, but of hogget or something that was bigger and older which was cheaper or we would go further

26:00 **Or quail?**

Or quail. We had a lot of quail and rabbits, very popular, it was beautiful.

**Chooks.**

I enjoyed shooting and I enjoyed quail shooting, those things were luxuries and they were good and game was very popular in those days. We had a lot of rabbits. There wasn't a plague then, not quite, they were bad and a nuisance and a menace

26:30 The hares were as much as a plague as the rabbits and they used to have hare shoots and things like that.

**Did you have your own WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s [chickens] and eggs?**

Yes even when I was in Melbourne I had a WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK pen. We always had our own WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s. On the farm we were pretty well independent there.

27:00 I had an uncle on a farm and I used to go up there on holidays and he was a great sport and he didn't have any children of his own so he virtually adopted me while I was up there. I had a great time with him, I learnt all sorts of country things. Riding horses, shooting and shooting foxes and what have you.

**You mentioned Horsham High there was a**

27:30 **history teacher that had a big influence. Tell me a bit more about him.**

He was typical of the time, he was the President of the Australian Native Association and they had as their policy: keep Australia white because we believed then that Australia, that it would be better if we just kept it to ourselves for the future generations. He was the one who told us about the Japs and he said that "Japan is a

28:00 very hard pressed, it can't supply enough food for its people, hasn't got its own resources they have to import them, Australia is a very attractive country and they could well be looking to us because we would be the solution to their problems." He used to talk, teachers were easy they used to talk more, they loved Australia and they were proud about being Australians, they loved our pioneers

28:30 they talked about our history. Mostly our history was pioneering history. We did British history as well because we were part of the British Commonwealth. Old Hank was our history teacher and Geography teacher and he was also our sportsmaster. That put him number one anyway. I was keen about sports, running and athletics. Old Hank

29:00 he used to all pretty well emphasise this, it would come over so much so that it impressed me that it was for keeps, we didn't quite know that it was going to be our generation that was going to meet up with them. It could have been any generation further down the track, it was just game luck.

**Did you have any girlfriends at school or at that**

29:30 **age?**

I suppose I was pretty ordinary there. The whole attitude toward life was different then, we respected girls, we respected sex and all those sort of things that was virtually for marriage and of course pre-sexual arrangements were frowned upon because you never know you might get someone pregnant and then you would have, an awful thing that we had a lot of social disease.

30:00 There was always a possibility of that. Between respect and fear we sort of had a very different attitude toward sex. I would say a lot of the younger people then, we had fun, we enjoyed life we had fun together dancing but it was a sort of wholesome sort of relationship.

30:30 It was friendly and fun and we had high respect for them.

**Did you go to a co-ed [co-educational] school?**

Yes I went to Horsham High School, and that was co-ed, we didn't even think of it as co-ed, just State School. The girls and fellows just mingled together, it was a

31:00 very, very natural sort of relationship.

**Given that you were studying history and that sort of subject, what awareness, political awareness did you have of the situation in Europe during the mid to late 30's?**

That was interesting,

31:30 I mentioned earlier that I was keen of saving stamps, I had a pen friend in Germany, Hans Roloph, we used to swap stamps and we used to correspond and he would tell me that he was joining the Hitler Youth Movement, this was about 1935/36 or so and he would send all these photos of him

32:00 in the Youth Movement and Hitler Movement and he had a high regard, naturally, for Hitler but at this point in time I just saw the whole thing emerge, didn't know it was ever going to be a threat, but he rose from there and became a member of the airforce, Luftwaffe, and he became a member of that and it finished up in

32:30 Russia, actually I lost track of him until I went back there, I had taken all the letters I had gotten with me, the police were very cold really, anyway they traced him back and he had been killed in the war over Russia. He alerted me, in fact he used to send these photos over and we would write and correspond, he was a hell of a nice guy but

33:00 when Hitler came over he converted him to something that was a bit different. We were aware, but we never thought of another war coming over after the first one. I wasn't really expecting the war, the only thing was that I had this bug that Hank planted into me said one day you will have to look after those Japs, they will come here, he was sure about it.

33:30 **Speaking of the German aspect with your name being German, did you cop any flack for having a German Surname?**

It certainly did in the war, but I wasn't here for that, a lot of the Germans well, they still spoke German

34:00 and mostly all Lutheran, they went to Lutheran Churches and so forth and some of them were a little bit outward and they heiled Hitler but because I was born in Australia anyway, and I had certainly a German name and my parents spoke both languages and I refused to speak German,

34:30 I wasn't going to do that no matter what. When we got into the army, the fellows asked me my name and it's German, they said right, your name is Baron, they nicknamed me Baron. I was called the Baron from then onwards and from that we were all one and one together. I never

35:00 copped any flack for the German origin in the war years. By then we had climitised and eliminated any problems.

**You clearly identified yourself as an Aussie?**

Oh yes. We never talked about, in fact all my mates never talked about other than being an Aussie.

35:30 **What about your father and his experiences and a German immigrant?**

My grandfather was the immigrant. He spoke German and could hardly speak any English.

**Your father was born here as well?**

My father was born in Minyi to. On the same farm.

36:00 He was not the age for the war, he was too old to go to World War 11 and too young to go to World War 1. He was in an occupational guarded job, he was a farmer, essential industry,

36:30 he spoke German, of course you learn German at school and he spoke German but didn't encourage us to talk German by talking German themselves. In church they spoke German and used to have a German church service, we used to be dragged along, whether you liked it or not but it was family business to go to church but we didn't understand a word of it and we would have to sit still for discipline. That was very strong too.

37:00 Little kids ten, twelve would have to sit quietly for an hour, without rolling marbles down the isle. It was fairly, well strongly disciplined. We could do it.

37:30 **Were you particularly religious as a young man?**

The religious side of my life is interesting to me, but no I was brought up strongly with the Lutheran Church, in the war years I began to wonder. It was the war years that made me think, I couldn't understand why all this was happening

38:00 when I learnt about omnipotent and so on. Kids were getting knocked over and we were dying, there were a lot of us, seven thousand Aussies died over there and this was happening around us and everyone was praying but nothing was happening and I sort of questioned this which started my concerns about religion and my questioning about religion,

38:30 I couldn't understand why for instance, people who had done nothing other than look after and be loyal to their country would sort of die over there. They would pray and go to their padres pray "Please protect me, look after me" and the next thing that would happen was the padres would

39:00 be at the funerals, saying the same sort of thing. It didn't sort of ring true, but the thing that was happening was that there is something in life that is important and there is something that is creating you so there was a belief that nature was the creative force and driving spirit of life. That is where I am now. I firmly believe that and that meets

39:30 all my needs and I am happy with that. I couldn't work out really why if Germans were mostly Lutheran, England were all Anglicans, Australians were a mixed batch of Presbyterian and who had the Italians who were mostly Catholic, each would pray to the same God for deliverance during the war thinking they would be on their side.

40:00 Then whose side was he on. I felt if the Jews were murdered, four and a half million of them, were massacred, slaughtered, they were his chosen people and look what happened to them. And so all those things tended to confirm in my mind that maybe it wasn't on.

40:30 So I'm happy now with my own thoughts which are mine and no one else's.

**OK we might just finish that tape.**

## **Tape 4**

00:33 **Colin, what did you do when you matriculated from school?**

Firstly, I got a job and I decided that I wanted to get tertiary qualifications. University days were pretty exclusive in those days. There was only one university and I thought I would like to do that. So while I was with the Defence Department

01:00 I took on a commerce degree on a part time basis. I think that was one of the best things I did because that enabled me when I came back from the services to join the university go back again. They were very selective in who they thought might get through because most of us were a bit gar gar having spent 3½ years away we were unsociable animals and were not very sociable,

01:30 we tended to stick very much to ourselves and the people were told, "Don't disturb them, you might stir up some nasty memories and things like that."

**I was referring to just where you went after school. I know you went to the uni after the war but we will get to that point a bit later.**

02:00 **I am wondering about your first year at uni after you finished school, so we are talking pre-war at this stage.**

It was only one year and I was keen about football, and I played football and I did most of the things you could do at uni then it was mostly part time studies because I was working at the Defence Department

02:30 that I found was interesting and it was within my ability to cope with it, so that made me pretty content. I didn't join too many of the societies. There were quite a few. Politicians, Greenwood and a few of these people who made their name later on in life, I tended just to do the subjects and hop back into the barracks and do my

03:00 job there until the war.

**Could you tell us more about your job at the Defence Department?**

That was good fun, I enjoyed that. It was in the staff department just keeping records of everybody but also in our group a Colonel Viney he was a temporary clerk, acting, and his job was to

03:30 sort out these wayward ideas that people would have about how to win wars and he virtually worked under me as clerk, because I was permanent and he was temporary. In a way we worked together I finished up boarding at the same house as he did. We used to walk to work together and we would chat and we would see

04:00 along the town he would ride a horse, Colonel Viney used to say "Good morning Brigadier." he would say "Good morning Colonel." and he would be a temporary clerk back in the barracks. He had this business of culling out the strange ideas that people had about getting bombs to drop straight and how to fight the enemy with bombs full of bees

04:30 and way outlandish ideas, he was a great guy to work with and he was, also finished up back on Lord Gort's staff in the end once war was declared. He went from temporary clerk to that he was a nice guy. He helped me a lot in my thinking in those days.

**What lead you to working there, what prompted you to work?**

At the barracks?

05:00 No choice. It just so happened when you sit for these exams you all got numbers and then they print out a publication and send you a copy of it with your number on it, I might have been about fifty or something like that. Whatever vacancies occurred for graduate positions then you take your turn and I

05:30 could have been in a different department altogether. Again it could have been luck or coincidence that they allocated me to the Defence Department, staff and industrial.

**It was part of the war effort.**

No it was standard practice. Every year all the Public Service departments put in for their quota for graduates or those of matriculate students or

06:00 whoever did their final year matriculation. Those were all listed and they allocate them by number and it just so happened that mine happened to be there.

**Can you tell me where you were when war was declared or can you describe the circumstance of that day or evening when you heard that Australia was at war?**

With Germany? That was when

06:30 Mr Robert Menzies [Australian Prime Minister] declared war, I know exactly where I was. It was at the St Moritz ice skating with Ernie McIntyre. He was at St Kilda footballer, he and I were great cobbles [friends], again through work and we were skating and they stopped the skating for this important announcement to make and there it was Mr Robert Menzies saying

07:00 "Britain has declared war on Germany; therefore we are at war with Germany." No one questioned it, so we just assumed we were at war with Germany. And that was it. It wasn't until quite a long while afterwards, a year before Japan started, to December 1941 that they invaded Pearl Harbor and then that was a

07:30 whole different ball game. That was us that were involved not England.

**What sort of went through your mind when you heard that announcement?**

Not great concern. We had the AIF [Australian Imperial Force] and it wasn't our way, it was England's probably I thought that it would have been left to the

08:00 AIF and I am pretty sure I would have been very reluctant to volunteer for that, for their wars. I thought

I wasn't going to fight other people's war but if it is ours and a bit closer to home that was a different matter. I don't think I would have ever enlisted if it had not been for Japan coming in. You talk about the evil of Hitler and all that

08:30 it was an unwanted thing. Same as with Iraq, it is not wanted but I definitely don't agree with fighting other people's wars. We should be looking after ourselves and we can do that quite well I believe but I felt our first priority should be us and we can get our young people whoever they be to

09:00 build our own so we can keep out other people who think we are very attractive and would like to sort of tackle us. A lot of those people are pretty unscrupulous, there are a lot of nations still unscrupulous and it could be if you look at their cultures, they wouldn't have any pangs, a beautiful country like Australia. It must be very attractive to them. I think our first priority should be us

09:30 and our defence.

**What was your parents' reaction to the news?**

Strangely it was pretty neutral they tended to think that was the sort of thing I should do then because at that point in time, Japan was threatening, Australia was beginning to look as though it might be involved so they sort of

10:00 felt it was fairly natural, they gave me a little celebration. They were in Horsham, I was in Melbourne, when I went back to Horsham, we had a little celebration. Went and had a few drinks with Pop at the pub and with friends and celebrated.

**This is the time of your enlistment.**

Yes.

**What I was actually asking Colin what was there reaction to the news that Australia was at war?**

10:30 I don't think that they got terribly excited about it, I think they took it a bit for granted and it didn't seem to involve us, so they weren't terribly concerned about it. I don't think they would have talked about it and they would have been concerned about it, but it was outside their area of control, so they

11:00 probably wouldn't have done much about it. I think it was fairly typical of a lot of people's attitude it was just one of those things, maybe certainly we will rally and do our best for Britain our mother country, as it was then, the Commonwealth of Nations and they would look after us. If anything

11:30 happened to us we always looked to them. We had always gone and helped them fight their wars and we tended to think that if we got into trouble then they would come and help us and in the meantime we would go and help them. To the extend that we can. Again it was the AIF that were asked to go and they were people for, had volunteered for overseas service. Not everybody had.

**When did you**

12:00 **join up?**

I was outside Spring Street, outside Parliament House and there was a parade and the AIF guys were all marching past I thought, I was by myself, I remember I think I just thought, "Gosh it is getting close and maybe I should do something."

12:30 I felt if anything, I felt that it was something that was right to do, no more than that. Again I had in the back of my mind no doubt, the threats that old Hank had said and that was "Japanese fellows are going to take your country unless you look after it and you might be the generation that has to." They were some of the thoughts that went through my mind. With that I just went straight back to barracks and then

13:00 told Captain Cooper I was enlisting, he said "Go up to Parkville and do your stuff and away you go."

**I believe there was a captain you met that influenced your decision?**

Yes that was Captain Cooper who said

13:30 "In defending the place." he said, "Look, if you want to join a good regiment a good group of country people." because he knew I was from the country, he said, "The Anti-Tank Regiment they have twelve, fourteen Numurkah boys there and there is a lot of country fellows there." he said, "In fact it is mostly country boys there." He said "You would fit in well." With that advice I took it and they also said "There was in those days opportunities." again he wouldn't know,

14:00 but what rank you would move to, he said "There are courses and classes you could attend and maybe they would send you to Canberra or somewhere like that but they were all in the offering." Once you got into the regiment and you saw the people you were with and at that point you made the decision to stay with them. There was no way known that I was going to let fate or anything else change it. I was just going to follow wherever I went and do whatever I was told to do, volunteer for nothing became one of our

14:30 slogans. We just went where we were told and did what we had and from there onwards life panned out. For me whatever the rank, it was the lowest rank in the artillery, it was good for me. I am still here.

**How did your parents react to you enlisting?**

They were OK. I think they felt he would have to go.

15:00 They saw it as a duty when there was this influence then that maybe there was a possibility. The Japanese didn't declare war on Australia, they didn't declare war on Pearl Harbor either but they didn't declare it in Australia, so we didn't quite know whether we were at war with them totally/partially or whatever. We never knew what the little devils were up to.

15:30 In their mind as far as I think they had us pretty well in our sights. They would have come down. I think a lot of people felt a little bit the same way, maybe they might be invading Australia, they were hovering around us all the time. Once they got down here in the Pacific they started to hover around, that was a bit uncomfortable. We never knew what they had in mind. We thought we did, ultimately

16:00 they told us what they thought and what they wanted.

**You enlisted in the army and what happened next, did you go to Puckapunyal?**

Yes we did our training in Puckapunyal. It was fairly intensive, it was mostly

16:30 developing discipline. It was what you would expect. We went on bivouacs and we practiced army drills, gun drills and things like that. I was only there for about five months before we were moved over on the Zealandia

17:00 to Singapore.

**When you first arrived in Puckapunyal, for training, what were your initial impressions of the place?**

It was a typical army camp at the time. I wondered around and I didn't quite know where the Anti-Tank Regiment had been assembled so I was directed by people and I see this great red haired guy

17:30 standing in front of one of these huts. I asked him "Where is the Anti-Tank Regiment?." He said "You are speaking, right here mate." I said "I am joining; I have been enrolled in Anti-Tank." He put out his great big freckled paw, he said "Put it here mate, you are in it now." He was one of the guys from the Numurkah mob, Cliff Moss, and he is

18:00 a sole survivor to this day. He is still about. He has an Order of Australia and he has a special medal for services. Cliff Moss, a great big red faced red haired guy, wonderful guy. The fourteen of the rest of them were all there and I was with them and immediately you had a feel that this is where you are going to be because they were all young people, the same age, the same attitude,

18:30 they were all country people and you just had that comfortable feeling with them. You made up your mind from here on this is where I am and that is what happened.

**Can you walk us through that day a bit, were you shown where you were supposed to sleep and given a tour around the place, what happened when you first arrived?**

I went into the orderly room, Sid Brown, he asked me my name and

19:00 when he asked me where did I come from, and I said "Victoria Barracks." he looked at me and said "A silvertail [a rich person]." He thought I was forced in there to do some general training and move out. I think that is what he thought anyway. From there on I was asked all my particulars and he signed all that off, then I was told to go down and get myself

19:30 hessian palliase and from there go down to the stable for straw which I did and lumped it back and popped it in the hut anywhere. It happened to be right alongside Johnny Jackson who was an aboriginal. He was one of the few aboriginals in our regiment; we had a Maori and a couple of aboriginals. Johnny was alongside me, he was on one side, I think Des Dawe was on the other side. We then became very friendly, Johnny he was a marvellous guy, marvellous right throughout action too. He almost took me over. He had been in the army, he knew all the ropes and he knew all the tricks of the trade

20:30 I slowly learnt them from him. He knew when about what time we would get into the sheds for our shower and shave and what time they would be vacant and how much time before we had to line up for parade. "Hey Finke, the blankets are not straight there the boss will be onto you." He was a great guy.

**He took you under his wing.**

Seriously did, he was only a little fellow.

**Was he from Melbourne too or Victoria?**

21:00 No, he wasn't from Melbourne, he wasn't from Numurkah, I don't know where he came from.

**How did you settle in, how did you adapt to the army conditions and food and that sort of thing?**

I suppose like any young fellow in a new group. It wasn't a thing

- 21:30 that you sort of had to think about, things sometimes in life just happen and you go along with them, it was a bit like that. You learn to work with people to talk with people. If anything I was a little bit disadvantaged in the fact that I had gone to uni because I sometimes unconsciously used words that they wouldn't use.
- 22:00 I didn't swear as much as they did at the beginning, at the end I knew all the words and I did, don't worry. At the beginning I tended to be a little bit sort of, not unconsciously, not the same as a country boy had been. In the end there is no doubt about it I finished up the same way and you couldn't have told the difference. I was aware then
- 22:30 what they used to say, "Albie Broderick, you think you are a shiny bum." Meant that I was a clerk. He was a rough rugged labourer and he was as tough as army boots. I was designated as a shiny bum because I was a clerk and had a slightly, maybe different level job
- 23:00 than they had. On the farm where they didn't sort of identify much because they took it for granted what they do on a farm. Shiny bum meant a different sort of thing, maybe there was a little bit of that, I just overcome that naturally.

**What were your instructors like, your superiors?**

Great they were,

- 23:30 well there was Aussie Rudolph, he also sort of supported my nomination for the Anti-Tank Regiment because he was from Horsham, he was a captain, he was great. Our major battery commander, great man. He was a fellow who had a natural sort of feeling for Aussies and our Sergeant Major
- 24:00 Laurie Maddock, he was brilliant, he was like a go between. He was like a personnel manager between the troops and the officers. He was good, he was strict, he was a good disciplinarian and he had us all doing the right things. Our officers, troop commanders, Ken Dumbrell and Bob Sedden and those boys they were great, they looked after us well. They trained us
- 24:30 well they knew the things we could do and couldn't do. They were certainly not aloof. They weren't like the British officers who went to Sandhurst [Royal Military College] and special colleges and learnt to be different and that made them different because the people under them they followed instructions a bit outlandish. We didn't follow instructions easily but our officers knew that. They would give you a job to do and
- 25:00 you do it your own way and you had better be safe about it and you better keep these points in view. I think that was the big difference between Aussies, who were regarded as undisciplined and the British who were tightly disciplined. We did tend to think for ourselves. Maybe that had something to do with our survival. If you are told what to do and you are in a camp. Over in there I saw a camp of British, three hundred,
- 25:30 British people in a camp and they were dying at about seven or eight a day, they didn't quite know what to do, they didn't have any officers, so they were left there without things to do. Now I don't think that would have happened with Aussies because we learnt to be independent, we learnt to think for ourselves and we had to sort of face situations ourselves and I think that is the whole difference between us. In life generally, in Australia,
- 26:00 we have to solve our own problems and that certainly was true then.

**Can you describe a typical day at Puckapunyal?**

The first thing that comes is at the end of the day when we finished we went into the mess and we would have a few beers, I always enjoyed that. Basically you would be foot slogging it, you

- 26:30 would line up and you would have your meal. The meals were pretty straightforward down the mess hut and from there mainly in the morning we would have a plate of porridge we had nicknames for that prunes and custard and stuff like that.

**What time did you have to get up for breakfast?**

Not too early, not too late

- 27:00 about 6.30 or 7 the day would start and off we would march. Then we would go off for a route march around the hills and then perhaps stop for lunch of biscuits, bully beef or something like that, sometimes they would have a hotbox, they would bring the food around to us if we were a long way away from the camp. We would march off again. I do remember at the end of the time it was always good fun.

27:30 Good comrade, lots of jokes and lots of laughs, it was a pretty pleasant environment all told. With our pipers we became a bit spick and span. We were a bit slip shoddy before but we learnt to be a bit spick and span and our discipline improved and I think our knowledge our abilities, soldiering abilities improved.

**Did you**

28:00 **have theoretical classes too like classes in the classroom.**

No, not normally. If you were nominated to do a NCOs' [Non Commissioned Officer] course or something like that, which I did a course in and that was quite good too. Then I went to a series of courses over a period of a fortnight or so, that was to equip you in the event of need.

28:30 Which never arose in my case.

**Did you have PT? [Physical Training]**

Plenty of that. We were all for fitness because being young to we started off pretty fit. We would have our PT ops where you step out and step out and touch the ground, and then double around the parade ground a bit. Apart from that, no.

29:00 **You talked a bit before about the weapons you trained with, could you elaborate on that the different types.**

We had machine guns, Lewis guns, Owen guns and then we had our rifles, we had rifle drill

29:30 we would take our rifles apart and keep them all polished, we would do all that. We would have our special days when we were supposed to strip one of these machine guns. We would strip it and reassemble it, and so forth that happened. One or two of our people were brilliant at it. I am not mechanically minded,

30:00 I had to struggle and I could never get the things in the right position, in the end when we were firing them it wasn't so bad. We didn't have Tommy guns then we had Tommy guns when we were in Singapore, Malaya.

**Were you issued a gun at Puckapunyal that you were able to keep?**

Yes, you had your own 303 and you looked after it. It was yours.

30:30 We had rifle inspections officers used to go down the line and inspect all the barrels. Put your thumb on the other end, the breech, so it reflected the light up through the barrels so the officers could peer down and see if there was any dust whether you had cleaned it that morning. You learnt to look after your own guns and things and that became

31:00 a daily ritual as part of your normal life.

**Growing up in the country you had already had experience using fire arms?**

Yes that was a big advantage. Most of the boys had all been shooting and thought nothing of it, rabbits, foxes and what not. Shooting in the country wasn't thought of as a special thing it was just taken for granted. If you lived in the country

31:30 you were good at shooting. It did help particularly firing and aiming.

**What did you do when you had time off during training, did you go to the local pub or....?**

What did we do when we had time off? I don't know that

32:00 we had all that much time off, but I suppose we did. Our lives were pretty busy, they were pretty full planned and I suppose if anything if we had a day off or a weekend off you usually went home and we had free travel. It meant going down to the city back to Horsham for me and I know in those days the trains were always pretty busy. I know you were lucky not having a seat and not having any

32:30 rights to a seat because you were free traveller you would sleep in the corridors. I remember often standing all the way from Horsham to Melbourne. We would go home and have a good time. I suppose in part of all our life, those who didn't enjoy it Saturdays and Sundays were good days for having a pot of beer and good fun with your friends. Good drinking time.

33:00 **Did you have any special girlfriends at the time?**

Special. No, I didn't. I had a lot of friends that I liked and a lot I spent a lot of time with, I can remember them now, they were all pretty girls. They were all girls that we respected because I had two sisters and they had friends and their friends became my friends so we saw a lot of each other.

33:30 One lovely doctor's daughter, her name was Marge, her second name was Feltsted, she was lovely and we were both keen. Brooks he was a headmaster and he was a colonel in the Armoured Car Regiment and he was also our headmaster. We put on a school play and for whatever

- 34:00 reasons he picked out Marge and he picked out me and he put on a play called the Queen of Hearts and made tarts. Marge was the Queen and I was the Knave of Hearts and we were playing opposite each other. That was about the greatest thrill I ever had. I had a lot of good friends on the ladies' side, on the girl side,
- 34:30 and they were all very friendly and we never had any sort of leaning one way or the other.
- So training at Puckapunyal are there any incidents or stories you would like to relate regarding that time? Any funny moments?**
- We did have a Sergeant Don Moore,
- 35:00 he just recently died, he was a bit way out and he liked to do the unexpected thing. Come New Year's Eve he decided he was going to have a muck up parade. Everybody goes, instead of being nicely dressed, we go dishevelled and loose ties and army boots and he had a dog called Boka
- 35:30 and it was a bulldog he inherited from another regiment and it had been their mascot and they left for overseas so Rory acquired this and of course at night time when it was frosty he was the only one who had warm feet because the dog used to sleep on his feet at the end of the bed. He decided to have this muck up parade.
- 36:00 He got this big water tank, big paddles and they belted it up and we marched onto the parade ground and he wanted us to march past the colonel. The colonel was good hearted he took the loyal salute and there we were all slovenly marching along and dressed up and off we went, marched past. He gave the salute and off we went. He knew
- 36:30 It was the sort of thing Rory got up to. Other things happened but I don't quite remember anything else.
- Did you enjoy drinking beer? Did you ever have some rollicking beer occasions?**
- I was one of those who enjoyed his beer, even then. We used to have a lot of fun. It was a cheery time, the boys were always quite chirpy and you could always think of something
- 37:00 happy to say. They were happy times then. When we left when, the night we left was when Strab[?] Christy had his 21st birthday so to make sure everything was fine he got a couple of nine gallon kegs to have a 15th battery do [party]. So he put on these two kegs
- 37:30 and of course we all got full as fiddler farts [drunk] and it was a great experience and the next thing, everybody prepare to move and they decided because it is secret and it took until about 11 o'clock that night to move us all out. We were all happy as sandboys, out we go to Dysart Landing. We all piled onto this truck we had to pile all our stuff onto the truck, we had to pack everything. We had got warning before hand that there could be
- 38:00 soon that we would be moving off but on this occasion it happened and he called everybody out and we were happy as anything, that is why we had a very happy trip between Dysart, that is Seymour and Melbourne. We were all pretty still under the weather.
- You were on your way to....?**
- On our way to Singapore. We marched silently through Melbourne, down to the pier, onto the old
- 38:30 Zealandia and on our way. No one ever saw us leave.

## Tape 5

- 00:32 **With today I am interested in getting back to some of the information you have provided previously. I am interested in your pre-war life to start with, I would like to start with the First World War and its impact on your family.**
- 01:00 **When I say your family, I am also speaking of your extended family, your father's generation.**
- Grandparents.
- Grandparents. What I would like to start with, could you tell me apart from your immediate family, your extended family like your uncles or whatever, anyone**
- 01:30 **could you tell me any stories about that?**
- Only that my grandfather came out in 1850, he was German, he migrated from Germany it was religious, they were being persecuted there, and they came and settled down in the Wimmera area. They were wheat farmers over in Germany and they settled down in Wimmera and that was fine. They survived the First World War without being

02:00 interned and the same as with the second but they still held to their German traditions. They spoke German, it wasn't appreciated by Australians generally but they attended Lutheran churches who spoke German and had German services.

**Your father didn't see action in the First World War?**

No, he was in a protected industry, age was a problem to but

02:30 he was a farmer and they were essential industries.

**What about any of your uncles or relatives that were actually involved in the First War?**

No, none of those. There were some distant relatives who perhaps went overseas but I think it wasn't a war they were particularly keen about because they were from Germany; it was mainly against the Germans.

03:00 **Like recent migrants you could say within a generation they have come and settled in Australia and they have some links.**

My father was born in Australia.

**You said you have some distant relatives; could you give me an explanation of that?**

We respected him, his name was Harry Tepper. He was an ex-service guy, all we know was he was an ex-service badge and he was very

03:30 respected by all of us in the family and I think there was another one too, Hoof. He had his badge and medals. In those days we were pretty close to the first world guys because I was born in 1920 which is only one year after. My youth was there and I sort of looked up to these fellows and most the family highly

04:00 respected them.

**And you said they were distantly related. How were they distantly related to you?**

Through my mother's side I think they were cousins of my mothers. I think.

**So they had the Germanic origin as well.**

Yes they were all Lutherans.

**And they were all ANZACs [Australian and New Zealand Army Corps].**

Yes they turned out to be ANZACs. They served in France they may have served in Gallipoli, I am not sure about that.

**How were they with their heritage, did they speak German fluently?**

04:30 Yes.

**They did. They were in the Australia and New Zealand Army Corps as well.**

Yes.

**Very interesting. I am also quite interested that your father was not interned or under some sort of government scheme. I noticed that some Germans were interned in the First World War.**

And some were in the Second World War. A lot in the Second World War.

05:00 They were some that came out from Germany, they were bundsmen, they actually came out because of the persecution of Hitler.

**What is a bundsman?**

They call themselves bundsmen. They were a special group like Mormons, they were escaping. They spent a lot of time in Egypt and then they spent time in Australia. One of them, Theo Vagner

05:30 was interned at Tatura and they taught him skills in engineering. He became director of Transpect [?] which were a heavy engineering company. He learnt his skills in the interment camp.

**Did they ever tell you about their experiences, did they find any difficulty fighting against the German Army**

06:00 **did they have a common sort of cultural blood?**

No, we never talked about it.

**Do you think they were sensitive about that?**

Not really.

**In retrospect.**

In retrospect maybe, but they wouldn't know if they were shooting their own cousins would they.

**But they spoke German fluently?**

Yes. They did speak German. It was my father's generation so

06:30 they were all second generation German, so they were brought up with German parents.

**I understand quite a few Germans ended up changing their names as a result of the persecution in a sense that they underwent in public as a result of the hostilities and the propaganda that was displayed in society at the time.**

Well I think Schmidts would have become Smith or something like

07:00 that. There were a lot of names that were so close, it was a lot easier to sort of swap across and I think it was more acceptable then. I don't know that a great number did.

**It is very interesting you have retained that name and clearly had it going back from your father's before**

What Finkemeyer? Well it used to have an 'r' in it. It used to be Finkermeyer

07:30 The German pronunciation is Finkermeyer but Finkemeyer is a lot easier and a lot quicker. I think I adopted that so that was as near as I could get. I never had any qualms about being a German, except at school and then I didn't really worry too much about it. They used to call me a Hun, then there were wogs [foreigners] and so forth, what the heck. It was all part of the group.

**Were there any other kids who were of German**

08:00 **descent at school?**

At school. No not that I remember.

**You were the only one.**

I was the only German but there were Greeks and of course they were wogs.

**Were they called wogs then?**

Yes. They didn't take umbrage at that any more than I did being called a Hun,, that was my nickname

**Those Greeks at the time, did they have parents or grandparents that fought with ANZAC troops**

08:30 **in the First World War?**

No I couldn't tell you that.

**Another thing is that you had also outlined that the church, the Lutheran Church they were watched carefully.**

Yes I believe so.

**Can you explain, can you tell us?**

Only they were

09:00 prevented, or encouraged not to hold German services during the war years. I am not sure if they can speak German and inspectors can't speak German, they were encouraged not to speak German and I think outside with other people they didn't speak German. At that point in time the German language was fairly common amongst them. When they met each other they

09:30 would speak in German. When they met someone else like and Australian they would revert to English. I think they were encouraged to do that, in the churches as far as I understand they were prevented from holding services in the German language. They got down to the stage they used to hold alternative one in German and one in English. They said during the war "Stick to English."

10:00 I think there were one or two Germans, young fellows who were red blooded. I can remember one instance a young fellow jumped up a flagpole and he lowered the Australian flag and put the German flag up. That caused a furore. I don't know what happened to him but he got a lot of abuse from the Aussies and I mean a youngish

10:30 boy.

**When was this?**

This was in the Second World War. Up at Rapanyip.

**Second World War, and you also said veterans also attended the mass services of the Lutheran Church. World War I vets of German origin.**

Yes.

**Attended the church services. Did they come often?**

Yes, they were a pretty closely knit group. They were a fairly strong financial group too.

11:00 Pretty wealthy the Germans.

**What I mean are the veterans. Like you said your distant relatives served.**

They were on the land and so they were self-contained, pretty affluent people. The Lutherans did stick together very closely.

**These are veterans of World War I.**

There were only a couple that I knew about because there were only a couple.

11:30 **I would like to move towards your training. You outlined beforehand that you trained in Malaya; you had a six month stint there training. Was it six months?**

Yes that is about right.

**When did you arrive again in Malaya?**

About April I think it was. I enlisted in

12:00 December of 41, we were in Malaya 41, and 42 we surrendered. In 40 I enlisted about December/November that was when I joined the Anti-Tank Regiment and we did training here in Australia until April and then from April about we were in Malaya doing jungle training, it was fairly extensive.

12:30 **What were the Malayan jungles like?**

Pretty thick and pretty hot. Pretty impregnable. There were a lot of vines and things then, very different from now. You would see little kampongs now and again, little native villages and the jungle came right up almost to the road and they were thick and very heavy. We used to do our route marches on compass through the jungle.

13:00 Things with a parang [machete] you would knocking down all these little trees so that you could work your way through from A to B whatever the troop commander had in mind.

**Did you have your equipment on at the time?**

Yes.

**You would have full equipment on at the time, infantry equipment would it be?**

Infantry equipment. No, shirts and long trousers then because of the jungle vines and things.

**What was your standard rifle?**

303 then. At that point. Later on we got Tommy guns and Brens and

13:30 Owen guns.

**So you had them by the actual Malaya period?**

Yes.

**You had Owen guns as well.**

Yes. Each anti-tank crew had a machine gunner as well as each of the others all carried their own rifle.

**Your anti-tank weaponry,**

14:00 **you said before can you give me an outline again of the type of weapon you actually had when you were training?**

Well there were two pounders that fired a two pound shell at high velocity and it took a crew of five and it was breech loaded but it was a big shell and it went pretty well straight but it travelled,

14:30 it was very high powered and it would go straight into a heavy armoured tank. With the Jap tanks it went straight through the armoured piercing shell, went straight through. We also had high explosive shells that just had enough to sort of penetrate the inside of the tank. Inside the tank they flattened and went around it and they were devastating to the tank. In other words they didn't go through they stopped in the middle and flattened out and then

15:00 they would go round and did their damage that way.

**How big were these shells?**

They were pretty long shells. The gun was difficult to manoeuvre.

**How much did it weigh?**

Over a ton.

**Did you say five men for this crew?**

There was the gun layer, then there was the sergeant first who directed

15:30 the target and looked after the crew, then there was the gun layer, he sat down and manipulated the gun to whatever target and distance he wanted and then there was an ammunition number which was me. I handed the ammunition, I got the ammunition and I gave it to the loader and he loaded it and that was a special technique

16:00 and then of course there was the driver. There could have been a machine gunner. The machine gunner was generally one of the ammunition numbers.

**When you say machine gunner, he had a Bren gun?**

Yes he had a Bren gun. Tommy gun and Owen gun was the one I missed. We got Owen guns toward the end.

16:30 **So this training was fairly intensive for six months. Was there any sort of anticipation that the Japanese were going to be at war with the British in the Malayan region?**

Yes I think we were aware of the fact that there was a possibility in this time, a strong likelihood that the Japanese might invade but we still had this conception that they would come

17:00 from the south, a naval attack. Instead of that they were a bit smart, a bit cunning, they came down through the jungle but it wasn't really through the jungle. That is what the British thought they would do it but they came down the trunk roads. They road their bicycles, they came down in great numbers. 120,000 I think ultimately. They didn't come through the jungle

17:30 they just came through the roads, of course that is the obvious thing to do. There again the British had this thing that rubber trees were sacrosanct. They were there for rubber and tin and they were terribly valuable. They said "Even through the war years don't cut them down." With the Japanese coming down the trunk roads the only way you could build a road block was by chopping these trees down, so they would fall across, but we weren't allowed to do that and they had rules that we had to sort of

18:00 conform to which is a bit crazy.

**This is during the actual retreat you couldn't put road blocks up with rubber trees?**

Not that sort of road block. You couldn't cut a rubber tree down.

**So even when the area was sure to be taken over by Japanese they wouldn't allow that the officers.**

We had the same thing with the sultan's palace in Johor Bahru, when we got down that far we were down to the Causeway and at that point

18:30 the Japs, the sultan was a friend of the British and he was also open to the Japs a bit and he allowed his palace to be occupied by the Japs. They occupied it and they had a balloon over the top of the turrets and you could see these Japs looking across for their field

19:00 artillery, they were observation posts. We could see them from the shore of Singapore and we weren't allowed to fire on them. Because it was the sultan's palace and the sultan of Johor was someone who was very special. The British said "No." that was the sort of attitude they had. No you can't do that, we couldn't. There they were, they were actually directing the artillery from this observation balloon up there.

**That's amazing.**

It is amazing but that was the British attitude. They were sort of very casual about it.

19:30 They lived a great life military, majesty, they had their whiskey stingers, they still had their little shindigs in Raffles Palace and they lived almost in ignorance of the war.

**This is the British officers you are talking about.**

Yes.

**That is very interesting, I wasn't aware of that before.**

I think you know they were

20:00 and I think that was the whole trouble with the fall of Singapore that everybody thought that it was impregnable but when [General] Wavell got there and he did his inspections checking out he found there were no fortifications at all north of Singapore, this was the trouble. It was all south against an incoming navy. North of Singapore and up in Malaya there were no fortifications, no defenses made at all.

20:30 In the end as we were coming down we made our own. We did it with wire and things like that. It wasn't terribly effective but in Singapore it was a little more open so that if we had wire and so forth we had to get through this. They used to attack in the Banzai, attack if they saw wire. The first ones would get machine gunned down in the cross fire, they would get machine gunned down,

21:00 they would form a sort of a mat over the dented wire, the next ones would come down, they would be machine gunned, and then the final ones would come across anyway with their Banzai charge. I don't know whether they were brave or indifferent. They were certainly prepared to die for the Emperor.

**I want to go back to your actual first combat engagement in Malaya. Where were you first stationed and deployed?**

Well I will tell you

21:30 about our regiment. Our regiment was to form a line not far up into Malaya at Muar and Gemas. We were with the 2/29th Infantry Battalion. As the Japs came through our job was to stop any tanks from braking through our lines. At Gemas, that was our first contact point,

22:00 that was Sergeant Ken Harrison's gun crew and they shot eight tanks attacking and a couple of carriers.

**Armoured personnel carriers?**

Carriers as well. Then the general he moved across to Muar. At Muar we had Clarrie Thornton and Clarrie Thornton then had his gun crew there and his job was to protect the 2/29th which was

22:30 again facing the Imperial Japanese guards, which were the trump Japanese troops. They were pretty ruthless too and they were also very strong, the thing was that he then had to protect the 29th from the tanks that they had

23:00 firstly. There were three and then another couple along the road and he positioned himself right on the corner so he allowed these tanks to sort of get side-on to him and when they were side-on he gave them a burst of high explosive and went straight through. It stopped them in their tracks but they kept rolling forward a bit. The next two came up and he got them but by that time he had woken up that he had needed high explosives so he got cans of high explosive ammunition, and he

23:30 pumped those into the fourth and fifth tank and then he turned on the other three and he knocked those out. He got the five tanks on the road.

**They had no infantry support the Japanese tanks?**

The infantry, the Imperial Japanese Guard, they were around but they were not on the road they were in the jungle coming down toward the 2/29th, they were all around our group. Anyway then a couple of tanks

24:00 came out of the jungle, three came out and by that time Clarrie knew that they had him sighted so the long and short of it was he turned on them and he knocked those three out. So he got eight tanks in a row. That put the Japanese off a little bit. They didn't attack the lines with tanks anymore after that until they got to Singapore.

24:30 **Well they almost did.**

When the Japanese first encountered them, the Australian infantry that was at a cutting at Gemas and the Japs were coming down this trunk road on their bicycles, and there were hundreds of them, they were riding six abreast. Bennett saw this as a great place for an ambush

25:00 and he with his troops they mined the bridge and then they lay in ambush as they went through the cutting so they let them come through until they were through the cutting and the bridge was loaded with fellows on bicycles and they blew the bridge up. Of course Japanese went sky high and then in the cutting they mowed down as many, I think there was about seven hundred Japs were mowed down,

25:30 who were in the cutting as they were trapped in the cutting. They allowed some to go through and then they chased after those but by the time they got to them they were ready to attack with their bayonets, so they had a bayonet attack. Heavy losses with both sides there. The point was, that was the first time that it really hurt the Japanese. It was the first time they really stopped. It made them think a little bit.

**Seven hundred Japs sounds like**

26:00 **a massive defeat.**

Yes but you will find these numbers go like that right throughout. The numbers are thousands and things like that. It was a defeat but it was their first big defeat. But again there was a lot of work to be done. We went down through Johor Bahru and across the

26:30 causeway we stationed ourselves opposite the sultan's palace. Waiting for the Japs to move across the causeway between Singapore and Malaya. We were waiting there until they ultimately invaded. We moved down a little bit before the big invasion but they came through in their thousands. They came through, I think 30,000 at once.

27:00 Initially they were sitting ducks and we had a killing ground but then as they became more and more in numbers and they had their bargers they landed over and they outnumbered us and then they sent another lot over. They finished up they had another 10 to 20,000. 50,000 Japs would have landed on Singapore in the end. We had already moved back a bit.

**Before we get back to that, you**

27:30 **were actually stationed in the first encounters at Gemas. Where was your first combat experience?**

My first combat experience. They were attacking me all the time but with their planes, were circling around I was bombed once when we were coming across a pineapple plantation we lost our truck it bogged down on the other side,

28:00 jungle all around and a pineapple plantation in the middle with a road through it we had to get across. So my first encounter with the Japs was when we were going through this jungle they attacked. Had our gun behind a Scotty armoured car we had to, he said "I will take your gun across." we all clung on the outside of it while he raced across. Well going around was two Jap Zero planes

28:30 just going round circling this area and bombing every troops and every truck that went through. They circled round and pointed down to us and dropped their bombs and I still have a bit of a scar where I got some shrapnel. Our guy put his foot down and straight through and we got through. The first encounter that I was involved in was when we got to Singapore.

29:00 We had our gun position and they were the Gordon Highlanders and they were being attacked by the Japs in a big rubber plantation and our Sergeant Jim Cooke said, "Well look come on, we will go and help these fellows." The sergeant of the crowd, he was of the Scots, he was a colonel. He had his walking stick in one hand and his rifle in the other and he was directing all these people

29:30 against the Japs. The Gordon Highlanders were wonderful people. They were there and we joined them and we were in the trenches, big water trenches and we were in them and we were firing at the same group of people I had a 303, one of the boys had his Bren.

**So you were firing with your 303?**

I was hoping that I was straight, but I don't know because everybody else was doing the same thing. That was my first encounter. I

30:00 often think back, I think you know, you probably knocked off a few but you are never sure about it so I don't get too upset about it.

**I want you to try and turn back the clock a bit. You are in that rubber plantation right now. I want you to try and basically give me the freshest sort of image you can think of? You are going back trying to get more detail out of this situation.**

30:30 **What were you feeling? Tell us what was going through your mind?**

You asked that before, I don't know. I just think that we were, we weren't afraid that was for sure, we had that funny feeling that we would get back. It was a duty and it was something that was what we were there for and I don't think we felt exhilarated

31:00 but we were trying very desperately or I was to be straight and to be right and this colonel was sort of directing us and you could see the Japs moving through the front of the plantation and we would fire one and reload and fire, fire.

**How far were they from you?**

About seventy yards I think.

**So that is getting fairly close then.**

Yes fairly close. I don't

31:30 think I could hit anything very much over fifty yards. It might have been fifty to one hundred yards, I look at it in terms of this block here and I suppose it was twice as far it might be one hundred yards away. They were firing at us and we were firing at them but in the end the Gordon Highlanders outdid them and they finished. They stopped and there was a rush, there was no more there.

**The Japanese attack was actually stopped?**

32:00 Stopped at that point.

**They had to retreat.**

That was the end of that and then we went back to our gun. We were mostly looking for tanks along Bukit Timah Road. We finished up at Buena Vista Road. That was where I had my second, that was the next day or so, it was the 13 February and we had our

32:30 gun placed ready, again defending it against tanks, attacking tanks, and we were being sniped at by Japanese snipers. These were in the rubber trees in front of us. We built our little foxholes in front of us.

**This is when the Japanese have actually broken through the defenses?**

They were, it was a steady flow, we didn't seem to hold them

33:00 at too many places anywhere along the Singapore front we tended to keep on fighting what we called a rear guard action. Most of the time and when we got to Buena Vista they were still all around us and firing down at us, so Hugh Cook said "Well come on, we will get our high explosive shells out." so we were firing our high explosive shells at them and blasting the rubber trees and them with it hopefully. We

33:30 were engaged in again, in fire, cross fire and that was when they fired down on me and hit me in the shoulder. That was the 13 February and that was before the capitulation. I went to hospital.

**With the Japanese in the rubber trees, you could actually see them?**

Yes you could.

**How accurate was their sniper fire?**

34:00 Enough to knock me out. I think we were holding our own again.

**Was your position exposed?**

Yes it was exposed we were on a roundabout, yes it was it was out in the open. We had a big shield in front of the gun, so we were pretty well protected against rifle fire, against mortar it is not.

34:30 We were on the roundabout, I had dug enough there so a body could lie in it, just use it like on the rifle range and I was firing as I saw them and we were trying to defend ourselves. At that point I moved out of the war I went into hospital.

**You got shot in the shoulder?**

That is where my

35:00 luck started because later on we found the bullet stopped about an inch from my spine. A little bit more pressure or height and I wouldn't be here.

**A lucky man.**

The luck of the day.

**So when you finally retreated into Singapore from Malaya and the Malayan front was essentially abandoned because of the retreat. What was your impression then**

35:30 **of crossing the Causeway, was there an impending feeling of defeat?**

No, there was certainly no feeling of surrender either because Bennett had said, "We will fight until the bitter end." and I am sure all Australians were quite prepared to do that. They didn't think it in terms of not being here but we were certainly keen to fight.

36:00 No thought of surrender on our side at all and when we heard about that a couple of days later, we were very distraught we thought that we had let the company down, the country down, to surrender is a pretty undignified sort of thing to do.

**There were 120,000 troops in Singapore?**

Yes there was

36:30 a....

**That is a fair amount of troops, why do you think they couldn't sustain or repulse the Japanese assault in house to house fighting in Singapore?**

I am not a general but I was a gunner and my feeling in retrospect was the British didn't really try hard, they didn't really rally as though they were being attacked and so a lot of those were

37:00 just inoperative they didn't sort of take seriously to the war.

**Yes.**

Then again there were 35,000 British and 7,000 that is 40,000 people who just arrived as reinforcements and had no sort of military organisation to direct them where to go so that they just stayed in Singapore and they caused all sorts of problems because there was grog [alcohol] about and then there was this business about the Japanese getting closer so then

- 37:30 the evacuation ships were being rushed by, not only the civilians, the women and children but the service guys whether it be from a desire to carry out their duties to escape and get back to their home and be of some use or whether it was because of a bit more scurrilous they were trying to desert and get out of the place, you would never know which was which but there was that chaos that happened
- 38:00 in Singapore. That reduced the effectiveness of the numbers. The numbers don't seem to mean too much at all. There were over eighty to one hundred thousand of them and they were coming down very positively very strongly and I think the powers to be got together and they had a chat and they decided that without water if they left the Japanese rampage through Singapore there would have been,
- 38:30 they would have been murdered. They were a very callous group at this point in time. They were as Bennett said, "They are well trained soldiers, they are efficient, they are not superior nor are they inferior." Once we thought they were inferior but he told us that wasn't the case he said, "They are not superior nor are they inferior but they are well trained, they are good and they are capable and at the same time they can be brutal and callous." Brutal and callous was their Shinto approach and they were that way. And at this time
- 39:00 they were really worked up and they would have played hell with Singapore.

## Tape 6

- 00:36 **With Singapore we were talking about before, you basically didn't encounter any tanks particularly.**

Our gun crew didn't. There were quite a few who didn't, we had twenty odd gun crews I think. There was only three or four of them. They caught one of them,

- 01:00 copped a couple of them on Singapore Island as they were coming up Bukit Timah Road, but basically I think it is pretty true to say that no tanks penetrated our lines while the anti-tank guns were there. It tended to, we thought that it stopped them from using tanks because none had been successful. On Singapore they used tanks and one of

- 01:30 the guns crews got I think a couple and then from then onwards as we withdrew our lines got weaker but I don't think they used tanks any more after that.

**So you didn't feel a sense of worry that things were looking a bit precarious?**

No, I was in hospital for the last two days.

**No before that when you were actually engaged in combat.**

No. We felt we were trained

- 02:00 and we would do our little bit. I think that is true of most Australians. A lot of the British troops, the territorials and the Argyles and the Southern Highlanders they were all geared up to fight. You might look at it that half the troops were keen to fight and didn't know anything about what was happening in Singapore. It was only in retrospect we found out what was happening. What
- 02:30 the British troops, the Indian troops a lot of them went to water, they sided, they were conned by the Japanese to join the greater South East Asian co-prosperity thing and they a lot saw that as an opportunity. They saw that as an opportunity as a lot of them were not mad keen about the British and a lot of the Malays weren't mad keen about the British. The Malays were on
- 03:00 offence a bit and they were happy to go either way and then when the Japanese came, obviously superior, in they then went and sided with them. They then got their white and red flags out and waved them. The whole of Malaya wasn't all very pro-British. But the British that were on
- 03:30 Malaya and in Singapore and were fighting, you would say they were flat out to do their darndest as we were. No one, any of those groups who were fighting thought of surrender. By that time I was in hospital anyway and when it surrendered everything became so quiet. It was all roaring up until then and then suddenly it was all hush, quiet, a big silence. Then that was the end of it.
- 04:00 We were told that Singapore had capitulated, surrendered, honestly we were all pretty disturbed about it because that wasn't a great honour to have to surrender.

**You were in a sense of shock you are saying.**

No, not shock but just disappointed we didn't do our job, we didn't achieve what we were sent there to

do.

04:30 To protect Australia from the Japanese by holding out at Singapore so their supply lines would always be in doubt as long as Singapore was there. Singapore wasn't the strong naval base it was made out to be. I understand instead of having a great long reinforcement of cruisers and that sort of thing there were hardly any battleships

05:00 stationed there at all just a couple of old cruisers which were not that terribly capable. A few destroyers, it certainly wasn't the impregnable island it had been made out to be. It was a myth more than anything. The English sort of perpetuated the myth and lived with it. They sort of didn't see it

05:30 as a great danger.

**What happened when you surrendered, what was the process you had to go through when you actually surrendered in Singapore?**

They told us to line up our guns, our Anti-Tank Regiment were instructed to line up their guns at Tanglin Barracks which is alongside the Botanical Gardens. I was in hospital at the time and because I was

06:00 alone I was in the English hospital, I decided to go out, I was a walking wounded anyway, to go out and find our regiment. I was walking through all the rubble and there are bodies and God knows what all around, the Japanese were plodding around through just round and about, they just ignored me completely. They didn't take any notice of me. I thought it's crazy

06:30 they are mad blighters at one stage and here they are just strolling around, they just ignored us.

**Were you with your crew?**

Not then, I was looking for them. I was in Alexander Hospital, the British artillery was stacked alongside it, they were firing alongside it and we were often bombed. No wonder because the artillery was alongside. After that,

07:00 then I thought I have to find my boys so I went back to find them. I found a Military Police guy and he said "You're anti-tank are up here at Tanglin Barracks, through here, through there." so I kept on moving and ultimately found them. That was great because they thought anyone who hadn't assembled had been knocked off anyway. When I was there all my mates were very keen to see us. It was a great reunion. They had lined up

07:30 their guns and their rifles. Most of the fellows threw the bolts of their rifles into the lily pond and the gunners took the main firing pin out of the Anti-Tank guns and threw them into the lily pond. The guns were the delicate part of the operation and it would be pretty hard to replace. The guns, while they were handed over, they were pretty well US [Unserviceable].

**How did the Japanese react to that?**

08:00 They didn't know, you couldn't see it. You can't tell if a firing pin is missing on a gun or not when you inspect it. That's the gun and that's the main thing and they just sort of assumed. I don't know that they came down and inspected them, I don't think they did, but had they inspected them they wouldn't have noticed it, they were an intricate part,

08:30 they are inside the firing mechanism, they are a pin that slides in and out, very carefully engineered, they just took them out and threw them into the pond. That meant that the guns couldn't have fired without replacing those pins and those pins would be pretty delicate, a difficult thing to replace. That was one little thing on our side, we thought at least they can't use those guns against us.

**What was your view of the**

09:00 **Indian troops that did fight alongside you and were loyal? What did you think of their fighting capability?**

I am not really qualified to talk much about that. I do know there was a few of them we saw racing through us. I was on guard one night in Malaya and one of them approached us and I stopped him, halted him and, an Indian,

09:30 and he said he was a "Transport driver." I wasn't too sure so we bound him up and put him under a tree and then others came through and we held those up too. In the end, we thought, they were retreating, they had thrown their rifles down and were trying to work their way back to somewhere or other. Again they didn't give us the impression that

10:00 they were valiant or terribly geared up to defend Malaya.

**Were they treated harshly?**

The 3rd Indian Division I understand they sort of turned over when the Japanese were first up in the north of Malaya to Kota Bharu, they sort of turned in then.

**I understand that these divisions would have had British officers**

10:30 Yes I think they did, but in spite of that these things happened.

**Was this after they were captured that they decided to...?**

This was during action.

**That is what you heard when you were in Malaya.**

No I am sorry, I only heard about the 3rd Division surrendering after the war.

**You weren't aware of all these things at the time.**

No

**All right so**

11:00 **your first internment camp was at Changi. How did you arrive at Changi, what happened?**

We had to march from where we were down to Changi about twenty mile on a hot dusty stinking day, it was just day after day after the war, so there was a deathly smell of war. It wasn't very pleasant but the Japanese had already

11:30 sort of taken umbrage, vetted their hatred against the Chinese and they had already sort of slaughtered hundreds of Chinese. At that time they called the Chinese Communists, or the Japanese regarded the Chinese as Communists, we thought, and they had as we marched down to Changi through the city they had these great stacks of bamboo sticks with their amputated

12:00 heads of Chinese on each one of these. It was a rather gruesome sight. It sort of gave us a feeling that these blokes are pretty rugged, pretty brutal. Just about on every corner they had these double rows of heads. They must have massacred quite a few thousand of them.

**This is on the way to Changi?**

Yes. On the way to Changi, that is what stands out. What also was the fact that

12:30 the Chinese generally were very helpful to us. We didn't have many guards on our column of prisoners marching or struggling to Changi but the Chinese were amazingly good they would give us water, they were alongside the road. If the Japs saw them they would get a hell of a belting but they still did it, they would give us a glass of water because that was all we had to get there. It was a hot stinking dry day

13:00 **There weren't many Jap guards you said.**

No, there were some. We were pretty well marching with a minimum. They would be in sight if you looked around but that was about as far, we weren't closely guarded.

**How many were in this march, a few thousand was there?**

10 to 15,000

13:30 I suppose.

**The entire march.**

Maybe more. Maybe the, all the British and Australian people. Ultimately it would have been all the British and the Australian forces that were there would have been somewhere along the march. Probably on the same column on the same day. They would have filtered into Changi in their own way for days, I guess

14:00 there would be new troops coming into Changi. Changi was under British control, the Japanese didn't really guard Changi. There was no guards inside Changi itself. We put up our own perimeter fence and then we were inside there. Virtually we were told that was where we were and no one at this point in time

14:30 could fathom out ways of escaping because they had the ships and all those sorts of things under control, so it was very difficult to talk about escaping. The Japs must have known here we were altogether and it was only on a barracks square incident when they were forcing us to sign non-escape document we all had to sign and the fellows refused to do this initially. They thought we won't do that it is our duty to escape, so they

15:00 refused but then after all the Japs came in and they herded us in what we call the barracks square incident when they had the whole of 125,000 that were in Singapore, they herded them in the barracks square, fenced them up and kept them there. They kept them there for a few days until they decided that we would sign these non-escape documents because it was under duress, they said it doesn't count.

15:30 **What does this document mean? If you did escape what would happen? What significance did it have?**

It was just a statement of honour that you promised not to escape and they wanted it from every service guy.

**So what would happen if someone did escape, I am sure there must have been attempts to escape?**

They shot them, no question. They did that as prisoners of war when they caught them, we had

16:00 eight anti-tankers who, Tanbaya was on the Indian side of the line on the Burma side, from Thailand to Burma and at Tanbaya it was pretty close to Burma and it was close to India, they thought that they could do their job and escape this way. They escaped for a while but they were handed in by the Burmese

16:30 who had been offered a reward for capturing any POW who attempted to escape. They returned them five days after they attempted to escape and then the Japanese office, the camp officer, he shot them the next day.

**Did you know these chaps?**

I knew the guys. There was eight of them and they, it was quite a big

17:00 thing because the fellows were pretty brave and Varley was in charge of the A Force and he was ordered to witness their execution and he had us make graves for them with posts behind the graves and the padre, one of the padres was instructed to be witnesses. The padre asked

17:30 the Japs whether he could sort of issue the last religious rites to these boys. He wouldn't have a bar of it, he wouldn't do that he said "No." They weren't allowed to talk to them at all. The boys when they were lined up they were very cheerio to each other, they wouldn't be blindfolded and cheerio to the boys to brigadier and the padre and then they were just shot.

18:00 They were young fellows, eight of them all attempting to do their duty as soldiers and we have forgotten all about them. Now we never hear anything about them.

**Did you lose any of your friends within your actual your unit? Your specific unit? The actual gun crew?**

18:30 I was 15th battery.

**With the 15th battery, were there people trying to escape?**

No I don't think so. I think the way the original forces were formed did have some relationship to batteries. I think there were 13 batteries. 15th battery further up the line, they went up earlier

19:00 to Ban Pong and they started the line from the Hellfire Pass end, from the [(UNCLEAR)]. Mostly 15th battery but we still had 15th battery fellows in A Force but there wasn't any of them involved in the attempted escape. One of our officers Ken Dunbrill, he was in A Force

19:30 Tommy Widdislow, the entertainer he was in A Force. So we had 15th battery force in A Force but I don't think any of those were in that group that were shot.

**What was Changi like? The quarters where you slept? Could you give me a description of that please?**

They were officers' quarters. The only thing was there might have been 30,000 the territorials, but we had 170,000

20:00 or so of them, so we were sort of crowded in. They were nice concrete floors where we slept and crowded in these areas. We were relatively unharrassed, the Japs weren't inside the camp, our own people organised

20:30 ourselves and we organised our own entertainment, our own sleeping and living way and social activities and things. We ran concert parties and frog races and all these interesting things. Food was the problem, we didn't control that. We had scrounge parties and work parties used to go outside the camp. We used to put a white flag up with this Japanese character on it

21:00 they wouldn't sort of stop us so we went outside and we sort of raided the native quarters and we had coconuts and whatever we could scrounge. We would scrounge our own firewood from outside. There was one place where they were breeding fish, huge fish. You would go in there and these fish would leap out and you would go back

21:30 with a great basket full of fish. The work parties outside were OK and in fact it was always good to get on a work party because you could associate with the outside world and perhaps do a little bit of trading on the side with one of the natives.

**So you weren't supervised by Japanese guards?**

No.

**So you could escape?**

You could have if you could find where to go and how to get away. We weren't

22:00 clever enough, I know I wasn't, I couldn't work it out. Again, there were Japs around on a wide perimeter I suppose but we didn't see them all that often. Yes you could have escaped if you could have found a way of doing it. On an island where you are surrounded by water it is pretty hard to work a way out. I don't think anyone

22:30 in Singapore tried to escape but when we were on the railway, yes if they saw an opportunity they would go but once you start firing and knowing that any attempt at escape means certain death. It was a pretty strong deterrent.

**What was your impression of the Japanese, here you are coming into contact with them outside the**

23:00 **battle field? What was your impression of the Japanese?**

Those that we did see, who did come into camp from time to time were pretty officious, very arrogant and certainly later on in Thailand they were really brutal and they were rough as bags and they hated us but in Singapore

23:30 they went around very aloof and very self-assured, I suppose you would call it cocky. We had nothing to sort of skite about it we were pretty lowly people, we had surrendered. Of course one thing the Japanese don't do is surrender, you commit 'hari-kiri'. Somehow that wasn't an Australian characteristic, it wasn't mine anyway. So they

24:00 despised us, they were despicable about us. I remember on one occasion they still showed their brutality, it came out. We had a work party which was to dig a great trench out on the beach at Changi. We did this, I was on the work party, we dug this great hole and then we saw the Japanese coming with trucks

24:30 loaded with Chinese and the Chinese were all bound with wire, they always wore black pyjamas, there were dozens of them on each truck. They drove the trucks past. As we finished digging this hole, we didn't know what it was for, in fact we had no idea what it was for, we were prisoner, we had to do as we were told.

25:00 We quickly gathered that the Chinese would be massacred and they marched them out into the water and another work party came after them and they had the job of bringing them out of the water and putting them in this big trench that we had dug.

**When you say marched into the water.**

The Chinese that were bound they were marched into the water and they were machine

25:30 gunned in the water.

**In the sea?**

Yes, it was on the beach.

**How many Chinese were machine gunned in this incident?**

I would say there would have been hundreds.

**You witnessed this, them being machine gunned.**

I wasn't on that work party the following ones would have seen them and then they had the job of dragging them up

26:00 I remember some of them saying they weren't all dead but they were badly wounded and they had to pop them in the trench.

**So POWs were ordered to bring in the bodies?**

Yes.

**You never had to undergo that sort of....?**

I didn't do that, no. The next work party they had the job.

**Did you ever witness any killings?**

26:30 **Any Japanese guards killing any POWs or Chinese?**

No.

**You never witnessed it.**

I would have remembered it if I had.

**How would the Japanese know if say one man out of the work party decided to escape? How would the Japanese know that if they let you do what you wanted inside the camp, how did they monitor things how did they keep track of whose who and what's what?**

We were counted every night and

27:00 every morning we had line ups and we were counted and when we went on work parties we were much more closely scrutinised then. Every night we were counted and the Japs at that point of time, one of the Jap officers would come to each group and ask for the rolls with the CO of that group of people. Our CO was in anti-tank and we would line up

27:30 and count and so forth, and at that point, yes, I am pretty sure the Japs would go down the line and see that it corresponded what the CO had said on the roll.

**So they would have a roll call?**

Every night.

**Everyone would be called outside and they would individually counted?**

We would line up in threes or fours and he would go through and he would check the roll off

28:00 The CO of that particular group of people.

**How long did your roll calls go for?**

Well in Changi it wasn't so bad because we were responsible for the initial number but once that went and we got into Thailand in the work parties where the Japs had to count them, you would say roll call might last an hour

28:30 in Singapore and Changi we would have been half an hour.

**When you speak of Changi it sounds like it wasn't as bad as what was yet to come in Burma and Thai Railway.**

We all have our own opinions about that, I was there for a year before I went to Thailand. We ran our

29:00 own entertainment, we had our own theatre, we had our own church services for those who wanted. We had schools, we had football matches and frog races.

**What are frog races?**

There were big huge frogs

29:30 **You would actually literally get frogs?**

Frogs yes. They were very well run, they had stewards, it was very well organised the frog race. The owners would have these frogs. They would knit a little singlet for it and then the next thing that would happen the owners would have this race. There would be bets on and then the next thing they would get them started.

30:00 They would start off in a ring; the starting stall was a bucket. They would put the frog under a bucket at least half a dozen frogs there. When all the bets were taken the starter would say all bets laid, "Right, start the race" and off they would go. The starter would lift the bucket up. The frogs would be palpitating like frogs do

30:30 and someone would say "Whoosh" and out he goes and the first one over the line was the winner. Well one frog kept winning all the time. When one of the stewards picked it up to examine it he pricked his finger he had a little drawing pin tucked away under the singlet. Every time he landed the drawing pin stuck into him and it would be a big incentive for him to take another leap. He was the favourite. He was disqualified in the end. They barred him from racing frogs at all.

31:00 That was entertainment. Food was light, life was a bore, we were waiting for time to pass but everybody sees it differently. Changi has a reputation of being an unsavoury sort of spot but for a lot of us it was home away from home. For those who went over to Thailand it was in a different class altogether.

31:30 Again it had a hospital. When you were in hospital you had sheets and you had a bed that was pretty good. I was an instructor for a little while and I had a little group of people we used to meet every morning after breakfast, after our can of rice, rice, rice that was pretty sickening

32:00 We would get together and have a talk about this and that. I had my little outlines and away we would go. They knew as much as I did about it so it was always a good chiac [tease] session. We had a great concert hall, great entertainers. We had impersonators, Buster Deagan, even those fellows out here were entertainers

32:30 Frank Rich he called himself out here, he worked on one of the radio stations. He was over there and he

put on wonderful performances. A bit humorous, we lived pretty contentedly at Changi and there weren't any Japs inside. The last film we saw showed a lot of Japs inside and a lot of things that we sort of didn't see happen. I didn't see them happen when I was over there.

33:00 Changi was, we were there for 3½ years, that was bad enough anyway, but they weren't belted around, they didn't have too much of a bad time but the problem was boredom and the things that arise from boredom. That is the way I see it.

33:30 **As a result of this boredom you were motivated to organise schools and concert parties.**

Yes, the officers did that and they did well. If you were religious they had a church service for each denomination and the schools, we had libraries and in the end the schools were going to give Changi

34:00 Certificate of Merit and it might have counted when we got home, as far as I see it, it didn't eventuate. But they still attended schools. Concert parties you couldn't get in, you had to have a ticket to get in because they were so popular. There were lots of good padres and lots of people who enjoyed their padres and some of the padres were great scouts, they had a good sense of

34:30 humour. Likeable fellows. Otherwise, I think that is a fairly straight impression of that. Again it is my impression because I wasn't there all of the time, I finished up in conditions that the Japs had access to us, they could show us just how much they really thought about us and they certainly despised us. They had a racist hatred

35:00 against us and they just loved belting hell out of us whenever they got the chance.

**Tell me something about Changi University. I understand that was one of the terms used there. Was that something to do with the schools there?**

I didn't see this university, it must have been after my time but the school was set up and they had libraries and there were some pretty clever people amongst the officer ranks.

**This was in the POW camp?**

Yes in the camp.

35:30 what they intended to do they intended to have university qualifications and things so even at our level when we were doing instruction they had hoped that those boys might sort of qualify for a merit certificate or a certificate to higher education. I guess they were a group of people who talked about all sorts of subjects. They had people who were experts on agriculture, experts on

36:00 timber, and all those sort of things. Every one of the officers came from occupations which were professional and those people could relay their main strengths onto other people. It was just a group of people who were able to pass on their knowledge to others.

**What about rumours in Changi?**

36:30 **That must have been the place rife with rumours.**

Yes, well we looked forward to it. Not so much the first year but rumours were where you suffered from mind loss and in the end it got to the stage where we were careful about it. All news was, there were a few fellows with radios there and they hid them in the most common places. That was either in the shoes, hollow out

37:00 the shoe and put a receiver in one end and perhaps the operating part on the other and just leaving them lying on the bunk somewhere or in a broom head but when the operators would listen to the news they wouldn't write it down because if you were caught doing that, that was punishable by death,

37:30 or you certainly be very strongly tortured to by the Kempetai, they would see that as a means of contacting the outside world, that was deadly. The operators ran a great risk but when they wanted to pass the information onto the people in hospital, they always wanted to pass that on first, they were in need of a little bit of a morale booster, so you couldn't sort of say

38:00 "Here, take this note over. This is the news, the Germans have knocked off the Russians." or somebody and this whatever or "Somebody sunk so many different ships." that guy would be the runner. By the time he got to the hospital, it was about 2 kilometres away he would be thinking these fellows don't want to know about that, I'll just leave a little bit out there a bit this and a bit that so

38:30 it would get through that the Russians had overcome the Germans and the next thing the fellows are saying "Hooray, this is good." make them all feel good. Because of that the line lost from one person to another to another. They would then pass on the rumours to the fellows outside the camp who were outside the hospital and it would get more and more distorted. In the end we are winning the bloody war and we will be out. The Americans will be here, the Yanks will be here in two ups and we will be all free and

39:00 off we go. Rumours were a great boost to our morale.

## Tape 7

00:35 **We were discussing before, the points of rumours in Changi and how rife they were and how they would get circulated. You have basically outlined that a lot of people assumed that the war was actually going well when in fact that period is quite a dark period in the allies**

01:00 **41/42.**

It was just that the carrier didn't want to sort of give much disappointing news. That happened a lot but we had to be terribly careful that the Japs didn't twig on it, twig to the fact that we did have these radios hidden.

**How would you get information from the outside world? How would this seep in?**

Through the radios.

01:30 The ABC [Australian Broadcasting Corporation] they had their radio and they would tune into the ABC and get the news from the ABC on the war. Those who owned the radios they would hear the truth and they would know what happened and they would pass that on to a runner, the next guy. They wouldn't pass it on themselves only to one man. It would save him from being caught so the runner

02:00 then would pass it onto other people maybe some of the officers, the officers would tell the fellows and so we would go there. But each time it is told you get this line lose a little bit of interpretation and little bit of a difference we won't say anything about the fact that one of the British ships was sunk or the British regiment was wiped out and will leave that bit out and someone else puts something else in

02:30 and away it goes and that is how the rumour starts. You finish up with a story quite different from the one that started with but it serves its purpose. Rumour or truth it is not that terribly important because it all had the same effect that it was, that we needed this boost to morale and

03:00 got it through our rumours. Always it was favourable we could blow it up. I do remember quite well at Changi the British were coming to relieve the Americans had taken back Pearl Harbor and they had done this and they were going to relieve us, it gives you a bit of hope, particularly when life is boring that is when you need a bit of a kick on.

03:30 **How often was life boring when you say that I mean you say you had nothing to do?**

As a POW in Changi it was. After that, no you look back we worked as much as six weeks without stopping, without a day rest. We wouldn't have minded having a day with nothing to do where you just sit down and do nothing that would have been nice. It was only mainly Changi in those early

04:00 days, that life was a bit that way for us. I know that later on Changi changed a lot and the characteristics changed. I don't know whether the Japanese finished up by being inside Changi or not I wasn't there all the time but I don't think they were.

**What kind of labour would you be assigned to do in Changi?**

From Singapore, while we were

04:30 stationed at Singapore our work parties went into Singapore to handle all the goods on the wharves and things. There was a lot of food, a lot of rice, meat all this work, this stuff in the freezing houses. Miles and miles of godowns and they were all chock a block with food and household ware and all these sort of things at the time

05:00 they had to be unloaded and taken into Singapore somewhere or other., Of course the boys then that is when they started to scrounge and it was too attractive to just sort of unload a box of bully beef or herrings and tomato sauce or something like that or Nestles condensed milk to sneak away a tin if you could do it. Of course the fellows just loved to scrounge but if they were caught again

05:30 they were pretty well belted around. Sometimes if you were caught doing something pretty bad they would send you to the Kempetai who had their quarters out from Kranji. They had little cages and if it was bad enough they would put you in one of these. They would keep you there for weeks cooped up in a cage for some misdemeanour that we had been caught for but

06:00 otherwise, that was one lot. Those boys lived pretty well; they were able to scrounge their supplement to their rice diet. On another party we were on building their memorials and things. This was at MacRitchie Reservoir. We built a road around there and then we were transferred from there onto

06:30 Bukit Timah, building Bukit Timah which was a big memorial, a big totem pole with our glorious dead tattooed on it. On the road that was where we first came to encountered a very aggressive officer who really, we thought we would perhaps lose our lives. What happened was we were,

07:00 with a little Jap and we were sent up the road to do some fettling and get the road balanced but we were away from the work party. Now every couple of hours we would get a smoko [a break] so the fellows blew a bugle and we sat down and had a smoko. On this occasion we were sent a long way away

from the main group and we missed the smoko

07:30 and we were sort of waiting to hear it, so we said to our little Jap, "What about a smoko?" He thought awhile and a little bit later we said again, "What about our smoko?" He thought the time must have elapsed, by now we were just out of hearing range, he said, "Right, oh sit down." there were two of us Des Dawe and myself. We sat down and then all of a sudden a Jap officer came past, we didn't notice the officer car,

08:00 we just stayed seated on the rock. The Jap officer jumped out most irate, "You no work!" the little Jap was trying to tell him about the fact that the smoko had been called and we had missed it and he had okayed it. The officer wasn't going to have a bar of that. He stood us up,

08:30 Des and I and the Jap in front and he bared his sword and he started flashing it around. There was a big guava tree, he knocked a branch off and he was going and we thought, no way known, this is the end because those blokes had complete authority. He was an officer, he had authority to do whatever he wanted to do. He could have easily said we were bludging [being lazy] or whatever; we were in an absolute cold sweat. The little officer guy

09:00 in front, little Jap was desperately trying to tell him "I okayed it." he was trying to tell him, but he bashed him with his gloves.

#### **The officer hit the soldier?**

Yes, we were still there, missing us by fractions and he would put the back of sword on your neck and the long and short of it was the little Jap still tried to tell him and

09:30 pushed the Jap aside and stomped back into his car and drove off. You have never seen two more relieved guys in all your world. By that time we were covered in perspiration. We thought we were pretty lucky to escape that because they did have the power to what they wanted to do. He could have knocked us off and he could have said anything and no one would have disputed him.

#### **Did the Japanese officers speak English well in Changi?**

No not all.

#### **How did they**

10:00 **communicate?**

We had to learn Japanese for the main words for drill words and counting the main drill action was all in Japanese. Some spoke English. They had interpreters because they spoke through interpreters but some of the senior officers could speak English but they tended not to, they tended to work through an interpreter. The interpreter,

10:30 one interpreter was a Yank, this was in a Singapore work party and he was an American and he had been at school at Harvard or one of those places and because now he was an interpreter for the Japanese Army. He used to always have a little bit of a soft spot for Australians. We had

11:00 boxing matches and he used to referee the boxing matches. He enjoyed refereeing; it put him back in the States. One day we were working on the Bukit Timah memorial we had a lot of petrol, petrol of course was very saleable, the locals would buy it, they would pay anything for petrol so

11:30 a petrol racket started and the Yank found this out and he said "Well, no this has got to stop." The boys were making hay and the sun was shining and making a few bob on the side and enjoying that. The Yank said "It has got to stop." He came round to the camp we were at and he had the senior officer with him, the colonel for Singapore with him

12:00 and they drove up in a little MG [sports car]. He singled us out and he said "All these fellows we have got all the names of the fellows engaged in the petrol racket. Step out." Reluctantly, one stepped out and then two stepped out and he checked them all out. He asked "How many gallons a day were sold?" Some said two, five, some of the guys who were running steam rollers used to draw five to ten gallons each day for the steam roller. Well,

12:30 of course that all went onto the market. He singled out about ten people and he said "That is enough." and so they were singled out and taken to headquarters for punishment and while he was doing that one of the guys had milked his little MG, just drained the petrol out of it, so by the time it stuttered to the guard house it was,

13:00 it stopped because of the fact it had been milked by one of the boys while he was checking the others out. They worked through the interpreters.

#### **What about discussion topics for instance you are spending a long time in Changi over twelve months, you could talk about a lot of things,**

13:30 **you could philosophise even, was the topic of sex approached?**

There were three topics that we weren't allowed to talk about. We didn't talk about them much. There

was sex, religion and politics; they were sort of unwittingly barred from general discussion. Mostly we were one track minded,

14:00 food and then the next think that happened was the consequence of food which was bowel actions. They become pretty important. If someone was writing a diary as Vic Christie did every day there was a little comment about food. We had light rations; a little bit of fish stew and had the squitters all day. Or had the

14:30 Johnny Trots there was always a reference to a bowel action. So food and everything that went on at home, the lovely roasts we used to have or whatever bread baking you could always talk about them until you could smell them, that was always a popular area for discussion and the same as for

15:00 food, bread and those things. Sex, no. Escape, yes we would talk about escape but life generally we would talk about the Nips. There was always plenty to talk about but nothing about sex. Anyway sex was pretty well out of the question because A) our diet didn't allow us to get too excited anyway

15:30 and secondly we never saw a woman until we got into Thailand and then we saw the natives. Then there were the times when the Japs themselves had their own women come up and they had special houses and provisions for them but they weren't available to us. Besides I don't think we would have been worried too much. Our diet had control of it. I think

16:00 sex and food which primarily the main drives, sex was subjugated and food became paramount.

**Basically at Changi your diet was monotonous, it was poor**

16:30 **in nutrition but it was better than that you were going to experience at the Thai/Burma Railway.**

The boys had time to settle down. We still had reserves there, we had the canteen and we could buy the local sugars and then the cooks themselves if we pooled all the money, the cooks could buy extra rations like fish, dried fish

17:00 sometimes they would get Goolamalacca[?] or we would get jams and things like that and they could sort of make little doovers and give us a bit of variety. They tried pretty hard. They got pretty good in the end. We finished up we had rice coffee and they had

17:30 puddings made of rice but fried with pumpkin sauce over them. They could do quite a lot but it never happened up in the railway line.

**What led to you being transferred to the railway from Changi?**

They appointed us in

18:00 batches. We formed forces and they just nominated so many to a force, A force, B force, Don Force, I was with Don Force. I think there must have been about 1,000 to 1,500 people and as they were requested by the Japs they were formed in Changi and then they were sent down to either by ship or by rail to

18:30 the work place in Thailand..

**What happened when you first arrived? Which town did you arrive in?**

We went from Singapore it took five days to go up in the rice trucks to Ban Pong was in Thailand. I think we had a cauldron of rice, it was ready for us it was waiting for us.

19:00 It was the first decent feed we had in five days because the others were very irregular. We got to Ban Pong and we had our meal and as soon as that was over off we went straight onto the line, they didn't waste any time.

**Where were you quartered? At the**

19:30 **Thai railway?**

Initially we were out in the open and it rained like hell and then when we marched from Ban Pong to the foot of the mountains at the beginning of the railway there they had these big huts that would house about fifty people each. Just bamboo slats

20:00 full of bugs and a bamboo cover. Bugs and lice that was our problem over there.

**What sort of bugs are you talking about?**

Little bugs, blood suckers they were, stink like hell. If you ever laid down they went boof, out of the slats and into our bodies. They would fill their bodies with all our best vitamins. They stank and they were itchy little things. Then of course there were lice,

20:30 ordinary lice, they were thick in these places. We tried our best to get rid of them when we could settle down and had time to spare but then again that wasn't too often. It was pretty, roofs were reasonably

leak proof but not entirely. Sometimes you would finish up in your spot just under a hole in the roof and of course you would get soaking wet.

21:00 They were pretty basic pretty rugged.

**What sort of work did you do?**

There. Well we were building bridges firstly and after that. We were building bridges firstly with pile drivers, we were building alongside this bridge at Wampo and then when that was finished, it wasn't a major job, we went onto the cuttings

21:30 to excavate these cuttings. That was pretty hard, that was solid work. There the boys had to build, dig the cutting by building a hole with a great bar and turn it around and an eight pound sledge hammer

22:00 **We were talking about the work routine and the equipment.**

We used to have to get the bar and twist it around and every time knock it and that would take perhaps 1½ hours to get the bar down a metre and from then onwards they

22:30 would blast it, put a stick of dynamite down and blast it and then it was rock carrying from then onwards. That was pretty hectic heavy work. After that we would then build trestle bridges between the two cuttings, hills to hills. The valley would then have to have a little bridge in it so we would build a trestle bridge,

23:00 and the trestle bridge was made from logs and things from the jungle. We would cut them down and drag them into position, put a couple of dog spikes in and up and up until we got it level with the path we made in the cutting.

**How big was the path?**

It was about wide enough to take a truck that would be about four or five feet wide and the same as the top of the bridge.

23:30 five or six feet wide.

**Six feet to take a truck?**

Is that too short?

**I didn't think a truck would go through.**

The bridge was five feet anyway. That just took the sleepers and the rail and away they went.

**You would have to make pretty sturdy bridges then wouldn't you?**

Yes but sometimes they would collapse. There was on one occasions there was a house, what they call the

24:00 pack of cards bridge, it was a big bridge about ¾ of a mile long and it was three high tiers they would be twenty or thirty feet high between two big cuttings and the whole lot just collapsed. The whole ¾ of a mile of it and of course then they had to get all the POWs and everybody like that to

24:30 rally us all and they put ropes on and we all had to heave it up and in the end it was impossible. We had a couple of elephants as well. Slowly but surely we heaved ¾ mile of this whole bridge up upright and then they decided it was rickety and it wasn't going to take a truck so we had to then fill it in with soil and make an embankment out of it. Looking at the job

25:00 it was going to take, it was going to take years to do, but you would be surprised how quickly the whole job took. That left an impression with me that there is a job, it looked impossible, we worked on it and in a few weeks we had this whole embankment built. It was built over the bridge so it would be secure. It left me with the impression that all these jobs which looked impossible

25:30 if you tackle them you will get through them and you will complete them.

**You mentioned elephant. How did elephants come into the picture here? I know Thailand and Burma have elephants but how did the Japanese get access to these elephants?**

They would have hired them from the local natives but they used them, we used them for

26:00 hauling the logs. They were great log haulers, they were very strong. We used to say one elephant equals thirty prisoners of war. Either we hold them, it took thirty prisoners to drag the logs out of the jungle or one elephant. An elephant could do it quite easily. They were shrewd the elephants. One incident that on one occasion myself and another fellow

26:30 were allocated to help the elephant. Elephants were pretty strong. So every time it came to an obstruction, the elephant would pull it through and suddenly it decided not to, it got wise and it stopped. It knew that when it stopped we would lever the log off the obstruction or stump or whatever,

it kept doing this and we thought we were in for an easy day, working for an elephant,

27:00 it was going to be great but it kept getting harder and harder. One of our guys said "This has to stop, we have to be wiser than elephants." so he got in front of the elephant: "You great lolloping thing, pull it off yourself." The elephant just sort of waggled his trunk one way or another. He said it to him again "You great lolloping

27:30 thing, pull it off yourself." He stood there with his hands on his hips and the elephant just looked at him with his beady eyes and lifted his trunk and went whoop. Angus went straight flat into the mud. The Japs laughed, we nearly peed ourselves, the fellow on top, the elephant rider he laughed like hell and the elephant just stood there with beady eyes as to say you can get stuffed. From then onwards every time we would come against an obstruction he would

28:00 stop and he would just sort of and we had to lever this thing off. They were shrewd. We worked with them on Thailand quite a bit for log hauling. They had a harness and you attached the log to it. One elephant could do it quite easy pull a log up. Whereas it took thirty of us to do it. They were strong. There were quite a few. At each camp there would have been

28:30 some of them.

**They were used regularly for that work. Another thing is also that how long did you actually stay in the Burma/Thai Railway?**

Fifteen months. From the beginning to the end.

**The Allied High Command was bombing the railway at one stage.**

29:00 **That is why at the latter stage. Were you around at the time?**

No, I was in Japan at that time. When the railway was completed in Thailand I moved with our guys that got through, it was only a small group about twenty or thirty people, we then went back to Changi, we were trucked back and then from Changi we were part of a bigger group, we joined one thousand mixed POWs

29:30 Aussies on a little ship called the Bioki Maru, a little ship about 10,000 tons or thereabout, we went we were shipped to Nagasaki and that took three months, we were battened down and ultimately arrived in Nagasaki.

30:00 **I want to explore the Burma/Thai experience with you as a POW. You also stated that the Japanese treatment of the POWs was excessive, it was far more brutal than that of Changi. Can you explain some incidents that you personally underwent?**

Firstly I think the reason was that

30:30 the Japs themselves, they seem to run their show on brutality, on corporal punishment. They have a one star private, a two star private, a three star private and then a commander. Each of those who are senior can belt the ones underneath them. So the three star can belt the two star, two star can belt the one star

31:00 and the one star had no one else to belt except the prisoners of war. They all had this dislike for us, they certainly showed their racial hatred, I thought, for us and whenever they got the opportunity they would take us on. They had it built into them that to get things done you had to belt people. They seemed to enjoy it. On the railway they were pretty brutal, they had a free hand and quite often

31:30 a senior guy would be a two star private and he was there without any officer or any of his own people there and we couldn't touch him so he could do what he darn well like with us. Now some of them were pretty rugged. I remember on one occasion I was working reasonably well, anyway this chap came up and he belted me with his rod. They all had rods. This is a lesson I learnt

32:00 I said "Oh get nicked." the word was a bit stronger than nicked. Anyway he must have understood what I meant and he went mad, he belted hell out of me and then he got me on the side of the road the cutting and this they loved to do, they had all sort of variations of it, but to get a big log, put it between your legs and you sit back on it

32:30 and they give you a rock to hold. This is pretty painful. Your leg's nearly falling off and the rock is high above your head and as soon as you lower it, wham you get another belting. They just waited for you to lower it a little bit. If you dropped it they really got stuck into you. They would belt you until in the end you lost consciousness. And they would push you over the side and you would wait there until your mates finished work and they would

33:00 come and got you back to camp. They did a lot of that with officers, they used to torture them. They would make them hold their hands out with their face into the sun, after a long while of course your arms fell and of course that time bang.

**They did this to officers?**

Yes to officers. They weren't stopped from belting officers or sergeant or anybody,

33:30 in fact they used to like it more. If they had good reason to get stuck into a sergeant than an ordinary rank this was good for their ego. They would do the same with the officers; they did it with Weary Dunlop, who was one of our most senior officers. They only went so far with him because they weren't too sure where his authority began and ended but they would still belt hell out of him. That was their answer, that they would

34:00 take you with their what we used to call their metre measuring stick, their rod which they always carried.

**Did you ever try to fight back or did you....?**

I didn't no. I learnt my lesson when I spoke back; I said from then on I shut up. Aussie Rudolph a friend of mine from Horsham, he was a captain, he was in charge of a group of people and he misunderstood one Japanese

34:30 and he didn't salute, the Aussie thought he meant smoko and anyway he didn't salute, he meant salute he was coming onto the job and they all wanted to be saluted, Aussie didn't salute he got stuck into Aussie and

35:00 he sort of belted hell out of him and then he drew his bayonet out and went to knock Aussie over, stab him with his bayonet but Aussie just managed to get out of the way, luckily, the fellow then sort of

35:30 did it a couple of times. He said the word that Aussie understood for salute and he salute and he got away with it.

**Japanese guards, what sort of life did they have? In Burma/Thai Railway what was the life of a**

36:00 **Japanese guard?**

I don't think it was a bed of roses exactly. I think they were soldiers and they had a responsibility to make us, to get us to build the line and to do the cuttings and to do the job. I think they saw that as their duty and they were prepared to put up with it. Probably a bit better than fighting war in China or

36:30 Malaya, it wasn't what you call a tough job; it was a bit of a sweet cop [easy task]. You could belt hell out of these bloody Australians and the English as much as you like and get away with it and vent your own feelings from that angle that was OK. In terms of their life, there were villages, native villages places like that and they could sort of sojourn there. Other than that they

37:00 lived well they had good food, they had good tucker. Later on they had these comfort girls which came down from Korea, I heard they were Korea girls. They were lovely kids. They used to swim down. We used to get a little bit excited some times as much as we could anyway as these comfort girls would have their bathing activities. They always bathed in their sarongs, they didn't

37:30 swim in nothing. But again it was nice to hear their girlish chortles. They had those. Apart from that what else could you do in the jungle even in their job? They had a good feeling that they were superior. We were the people who surrendered there, they were a great feeling of superiority and here we are,

38:00 they had us under them. I would say they would all be farmers and so forth when they got back to Japan. The job that they had then was quite an adventure quite an opportunity for them.

**Did anyone develop amicable relations with any Japanese soldiers like friendly relations?**

I suppose amicable to a degree. Yes.

**Any good examples you could remember?**

38:30 One guy was quite good, he was old Rubberneck. We went on one party with the Japanese fishing. They used to dynamite the rivers and then we would a couple, Broder and me, we would go in and when the fish had been dynamited and they were floundering around get them and put them in baskets. Poor old Rubberneck was much maligned by his own people. He had a funny neck,

39:00 his head was here and his neck was there, he still got into the army, he was maligned by everybody. It was because of his deformity he was a bit friendly with the Australians, he was a bit friendly with me. I would say, "Give us a cigarette or maybe a little bit extra fish to take away." On one occasion he was throwing the

39:30 dynamite, we didn't throw the dynamite thank goodness, because he did, he had a lead on the dynamite and then the plug and when it burned down enough he would throw it in and of course boom up it would go. On this occasion instead of going into the middle of the river it was just on the bank, where we were standing, so everybody hit the ground friend and foe alike, about half a dozen Japs in the party with poor old Rubberneck and of course he dropped it,

40:00 and it dropped in the shallow water of course it went off. They abused hell out of him and they got stuck into him but when they looked down in the shallows there was a great shoal of mullet like fish and it was just teaming with these dead fish. Of course he was a bloody hero then. All the way back he was very chatty with us, arm on the shoulder and gave us a great big basket of fish.

40:30 No, in terms of being friendly with them, no we weren't, but we got on well with some of them. One or two were OK.

## Tape 8

00:35 **We were talking just before about Japanese guards and the way they lived in the operational, conducting duties as guards of POWs. Can you also give me their sense of humour; you obviously had to interact with them on a daily basis. Give me some, any**

01:00 **interesting perhaps some funny incidents, perhaps a sense of humour it would have to be in a way, how they related toward the POWs?**

I think this is interesting because the book I have given you tells some of those incidents on the lighter side. When I first talked to the fellows about the lighter side of life they said they said, "There wasn't one." When they thought about there were a few.

01:30 We were building a bridge at a place called Kinsayok and it was a trestle bridge and we were hauling these logs into position and there was one guy who we called Skull, he was a blighter of a chap, we used to keep away from him as much as we could. He was big headed fellow and he was like a big wrestler

02:00 and strong as a big Mallee bull and arrogant as billy he would swipe you, if you got near him he would bang you with this rod of his. We were building this bridge this day and we were on the top trestle and hauling this log up, there were five of us on the rope, a rice rope hauling this log up and suddenly one of us slipped and the rope

02:30 slipped down and it hit Skull on the head. If it hit him anywhere else it probably would have killed him. He was OK. We suddenly let the thing go and got ourselves other jobs and we went up with the nail gang and hammering gang and disappeared. Skull tore up the side of this mountain with a great dash he had his

03:00 stick waving in the air and he was going to blue murder everybody, anyway he got up to the top and there is a smaller guy in the regiment called Dagwood Daney, he is only about the same size as Skull and he is hanging onto the rope loyally and he is the only one there, the other five of us had gone. Skull looks at him and oh great smiles across his face, number one, number one, he thought he was going to get killed.

03:30 He goes up to Dagwood and puts his arm around him and walks him down and gives him the whole afternoon off, half a can of sugar and he sits with him all afternoon chatting and gnattering just idolising this dam Skull, who was expecting to be murdered. It was one incident that we thought was pretty humorous. Otherwise happy times, interesting times.

04:00 Not that many come to light. No, I think it might cover it.

**Only one incident.**

I can't think of anything at the moment.

**I was told briefly that you met a Japanese guard who was an Olympic basketballer.**

04:30 Yes.

**And knew English.**

And didn't say a word about it. He was one on our way down when the railway was finished we went to a holiday camp on the railway and we spent two weeks there with this Jap who what did we call him,

05:00 he was an odd character and he liked totem poles and things like that. He had a little hut all by himself; he was the only one looking after us, and about five Dutchman at the camp. It was an old English camp and we walked into there, he then knew that the Japanese had to work each day, we had to go down, we had to get

05:30 a billy can a dixie of white river sand to put outside his little caboose. We would put that down and he would get his list out and he would tally us out as we dropped this bag of sand that would be our day's work for the whole day. He was sitting there and we were just talking away and we would do our own thing, we had a few concerts, Dutch concerts,

06:00 we sang Waltzing Matilda for the Dutchmen and it was all good fun and this old Jap guard, he was a medical sergeant, he would overhear us and he never said a word whenever we lined up for our daily check and our tally each morning, he would never speak a word of English, we all had to perform in Japanese and we just assumed he couldn't talk English,

06:30 we were perhaps a little bit free in our language but particularly about the Japanese when we were talking about them. When we were scheduled to get back to Singapore he then gave us a little talk in

perfect English, "You are the chosen people who have been chosen to go to the land of the Cherry Blossom where the huntsman doesn't shoot the wounded bird." I don't know what that meant but that is what he said.

07:00 He said "A land of snow and beauty and you are the chosen few." And then he said he was in the Berlin Olympic Games in 1934 as a basketballer, captain of the basketball team. We were all a bit taken aback; we were all trying to think back what we had said in front of him that was pretty abusive. He didn't seem to take any umbrage.

07:30 They were a bit sneaky; he was a sergeant in the medical corps.

**Was he goodhearted towards you?**

He was so goodhearted, our day's work was to go down to the river, swim in the river all day as long as we brought back this little dixie of sand and as we brought it back he would mark us off the roll,

08:00 we were fine, we were all numbers, didn't use our names, I was 2385, I think, I would give my number and he would tick me off. That was our only contact. He just used to sit outside his little totem pole like an Indian chief and watch us and look at us and he understood every word we were saying.

**You must have been quite shocked?**

08:30 Yes we were at the end.

**That is a rather unusual incident strange as war itself. He was suggesting that in code that you were going to Japan, Nagasaki I understand you were.**

He knew we were going to Japan the beautiful country, the land of the cherry blossoms and the huntsman doesn't shoot the wounded bird,

09:00 where people are nice and kind are thoughtful. When we got there we found out quite the opposite. Because Japan was sort of suffering at that point in time with a bit of retaliation from the Americans, they hated us.

**When you say retaliation you are speaking about the bombing over....?**

That and the actual victories they were having in the navy. By then Guadalcanal and

09:30 the Philippines, they had victories there.

**So the Japanese population were aware of this, is this what you are saying?**

No. The Japanese population were aware of the fact that the Japanese were being turned back home I think and they were being bombed. When we got there they were being bombed by American bombers. I think they were attached to Taipan or Okinawa or somewhere down there by then.

**Before we go to Nagasaki that episode there,**

10:00 **I want to ask you one or two questions about your experience on the Burma/Thai Railway. Did you come into contact with any other wildlife? Apart from elephants?**

Yes, all of it.

**Tell us about it?**

It was an experience for us there were pumas at night time, gibbon monkeys

**When you say pumas, like leopards?**

Black

**Black panthers.**

10:30 Black puma. On one occasion we had killed a yak and they had thrown all the offal into a pit. Our camp was again fairly openish camps and the toilet, the toilet was a trench in the ground and it happened to be near the pit where they had thrown the offal, I and another friend went up for our toilet run and we heard this roar. A big

11:00 black panther. Thank God he was more concerned with the offal. There were chimpanzees. I can remember on a march over a road to Hintok Road Camp and when we were marching up the hill and around. We were taking supplies from our camp to the camp on the other side of the mountain range which was called Hintok Road Camp, that we were just walking along a single path and all of a sudden just above us was a chimpanzee

11:30 sitting down on this tree and looking down at us, he was unperturbed. He was still there on the way back. Those and chimps, no snakes, we had plenty of chance particular when we were with this sergeant the basketball sergeant at that camp we were able to wander around. We looked through the jungle we saw all the monkeys and baboons.

- 12:00 and things. In fact we learnt a little bit from them. There was a tree across the river we were camped on the side of a river, and there was a tree on our side of the river and a school of baboons and things on the other side and they made a bridge by swinging, and the other baboons used to crawl across them until they got to this tree. On this tree was a lot of yellow fruit. I didn't know if it was edible or not,
- 12:30 the chimpanzee they thought it was great. At that time we learnt something. It was a lovely fruit. They thought if it is good enough for the chimpanzee it is good enough for us. For a nature lover they could have enjoyed it very much. I enjoyed seeing what I did of the wild life there. Elephants were all in captivity.

**You must have had wild elephants.**

- 13:00 White?

**No wild, maybe white.**

No, I don't remember seeing any wild elephants but we could hear these cougars at night. And night life at night Everything, before nightfall, peacocks and all, they would have their weird cries the baboons would have these weird cries. It is like pouring wine into a bottle of, a full bottle, plug, plug.

- 13:30 The baboons would go to town and there would be a hell of a noise just before sunset. As soon as sunset happened it would be deathly peaceful. The only thing you could hear every now and then this sort of coughing sound of these cougars, and you knew they were all around. It wasn't like it was in Malaya. Malaya before action every now and again

- 14:00 a native would be taken by a native tiger. Over there I don't remember any of us being attacked by a native animal, but they were there.

**Do you remember seeing tigers?**

No, I never saw a tiger in Malaya but I did see this cougar.

**What about Burma/Thai Railway, what about then?**

I didn't see any tigers there. Cougars were the main ones, they are a big strong looking animal and I am sure they,

- 14:30 if they had a chance and they were hungry they might sort of be interested in us.

**You basically got from that episode Burma/Thai where you were shipped up to Japan to Nagasaki. You landed in Nagasaki, was that your first stop?**

Yes, after three months, it took us three months, we went via Manila and at Manila we saw one of their big armadas anchored and coming down toward

- 15:00 Australia. I don't quite know whether that was the Midway Island or one of those after it, it was an enormous fleet of ships. Two or three great battleships and they must have been 70,000 tons and a hell of a lot of cruisers. Just chock a block full of ships and one of their officers came to meet our captain, he was an old fellow, he might have been a relative,

- 15:30 he came over and he told us that this armada was going to take Australia. He was quite sure about that. We thought there is no way known that it couldn't succeed we had nothing down here. That didn't give us a good feeling.

**He spoke to you in English saying this?**

Yes, in terms of, he said

- 16:00 "You go Nippon, Nippon fleet take Australia." He spoke in pidgin.

**Tell us about your voyage from Philippines to Japan. Was it boring?**

Boring, no we made our own fun.

- 16:30 The Australians were good at that. We were all battened down, there were three holds. We were battened down in the forward hold and then there was a central hold and one in the rear. We were under a fellow called Rory Newton. He was in charge of the Australian contingent. In the front hold we were all crammed together, we were very tightly pressed and three of us in a hold

- 17:00 in a 10,000 ton ship, we were all cramped together, we were all itchy but we decided to play a game. We used to play animal, vegetable and mineral and then we would have quiz sessions. Anybody could think of somebody a singer, Caruso of someone like that you would build a question around it. It didn't really matter what the answer was so long as you asked a question. Everybody would argue about. We would be arguing

- 17:30 and virtually we made our own fun and games but we were pretty regular about it, we would play these games pretty well every day and we got expert at it and it tended to sort of fill in the gaps a bit. Occasionally some of them had a book like Shakespeare or one of the classical books and if you were lucky enough you could get a lend of one of those

- 18:00 and do a bit of reading. Mostly all of these books they were all made of, and a bible, nice fine rice paper and if you were able to get a little bit of hank bush tobacco, you needed something to roll it in, well you tore out a page from this book and you rolled it in the page. If you had one on loan you had to be sure you returned it back. That only meant you were reading through the story you got so far and then of course the
- 18:30 next two pages were missing. You finished up reading say A Midsummer's Night Dream and you would finish with Hamlet but that didn't matter, it was something to read and something to do. But otherwise tempers did tend to get a bit frayed, particularly if you wanted to go to the toilet. You had to go to the toilet through the group up through a ladder and the toilet was a banjo box tied over the side of the ship.
- 19:00 You got a little bit of fresh air which was always a good thing but whenever you were moving through everybody used to get a little bit nitchy and snitchy, we got by, we tolerated one another in the end. We all stank, we hadn't had a decent wash until we got to Manila and we had a wash there and then we didn't have another one until we got to Mogi. Which is every six weeks.

**Six weeks of voyage.**

Three months.

- 19:30 **From Manila to Japan.**

From Japan to Mogi which is near Nagasaki, a port for Nagasaki, that was three months under cover.

**You mean from the Philippines to Japan to Nagasaki.**

Going out from the Philippines we were attacked by a squad of American submarines, they had a wolf pack there.

- 20:00 There was a wolf pack of the Pampanito, the Barb, the Swordfish and the Queenfish and they were patrolling the sea lines between Singapore and Japan and playing havoc with their convoys as they went up and down.
- 20:30 With ours we had three ships load of Englishmen and ourselves and a couple of oil tankers and a couple of other cargo ships which I don't know about. As we got outside the Corregidor Island they attacked us. Of course they attacked the oil tankers; they must have attacked the British. Our old ship looked so derelict they left us and we got
- 21:00 through that. The next thing we get just outside of Japan and we strike this typhoon. The old ship, it was old, it was battered, it was rusty, rivets popped and the gear on deck broke loose and rocked and again I thought there is no way known it can get through this. The captain called for some volunteers to keep the steam up so its nose,
- 21:30 it could keep into the wind, his crew were pooped apparently. A mate of mine, Des Dawe and I, we volunteered and we stocked this furnace all night and got a bucket of rice each so that was worth while. In the morning we found ourselves in the lee of a great big volcanic island. All was well and from there we got onto to Nagasaki from Mogi to Nagasaki and then we worked to
- 22:00 in the ship building yards.

**You said you got attacked; you were obviously inside the ship at the time so you couldn't see it.**

No, we could see the flares and we knew it was happening because we could hear it.

**What were the sounds like?**

Pretty vicious,

- 22:30 one of our ships ultimately did get attacked. When the torpedoes struck there was a great roar and of course a flash of light, you could see the light, reflect in the hold and we knew that there was a great depletion in our fleet because after that we sailed alone. How many sunk I don't know. They probably would have broken convoy,
- 23:00 gone their own way, whichever was the safest for them, those of them that survived the attack. I would say there were ten or twelve; there might have been seven that were sunk.

**Everyone was....**

Tense and teed up. Again you resign. We looked outside I said to Rusty "There is no way known, maybe we might get through because we are such

- 23:30 an old hulk." When we were hitting the typhoon, I had a look outside when I had my turn for the toilet and waves and wind was whipping, I said "There is no way known you are going to survive in that." In the end you were resigned to not being here. Had we sort of turned over or had anything happen there

was no way known any of us would have survived in that typhoon.

24:00 Again we got through. I said earlier in the piece it was my luck I was just one step ahead all the time.

**You said these huge waves what sort, what size?**

They would be thirty feet, enormous things. The old boat was just rolling backward and forward and up and down and the wind was just whipping the tops of the waves, it was just like a strong wind, strong force.

24:30 Again you couldn't live in it, that was for sure.

**You felt certain that your ship would sink with these massive waves?**

No I didn't feel certain about it, I just said if it did, there was a good chance it would and that is why I volunteered to go down below, I don't like the bottom of a ship very much. I just said to Rusty "There is a good chance the ship will get through, if we got outside and it sunk there is no way known we would survive.

25:00 in that sort of sea." We hoped and hope got us through in the end.

**You landed in Nagasaki. What was your first impression of Japan like. Did you know you were in Japan?**

Yes we knew we were in Japan, it was beautiful. We went from Mogi to Nagasaki on a train and it was a third class velvet seat

25:30 train, we had to leave the blinds down but I had a window seat and you could peep. Nagasaki and Japan, my impression was gee we are lucky to be here and then as we went through it was beautiful. I can remember sparkling waves on lakes and things and all these statues and temples and it was just so beautiful.

26:00 It impressed me. It was so good to be here and so lovely to see it all. It was then a beautiful country.

**What sort of work did you have to do in Nagasaki?**

We worked like billio [very hard]. That was one of the toughest jobs we had. That is where the guards really took over and they really showed how much they didn't like us. In the camp we had a bloke called Bokogo and he knew

26:30 how to intimidate us easily, he was rugged and as tough as hell. The work we did was building these ten ton cargo ships and our jobs between the Australian POWs were drilling, welding the plates together, reaming the plates to take the rivets, riveting and then

27:00 I had a job as a plater, a sling carrier. We used to locate the slings and take the plates on the actual position on the boat and then the fellows would rivet them, and then weld anything that had to be welded. We worked hard. You dare not stop or the Gestapo were onto you. If you stopped for one minute that meant that you were then engaged

27:30 in sabotage. If you didn't work it was sabotage.

**You were saying Gestapo, you are saying the Japanese police?**

The Kempetai.

**You called them the Gestapo.**

Well they are Gestapo.

**That is the German name for the secret police.**

Yes, they do the same job as the Gestapo. They would be third down the list. Firstly there was your own sergeant, the guy who looked after you, the

28:00 camp guard, naval police and then there was the military police, and then there was another military police level and then there was the Gestapo. They made sure you did your job if you didn't you had to do this extra penalty work hollowing out their tunnels which they were actually using. We thought they were for munitions or something or stores but they turned out to be what they called their prairie dog tactics, they were building

28:30 their own defenses so they could hide them and shoot back and hide in them. Either that prairie dog or phantom wolves.

**What about the sergeant you had who was supervising you, what was he like? You said you had harsh**

29:00 **treatment there, so**

We did have harsh treatment

**Was he particularly disliked? I would imagine.**

The sergeant I had was one who could have well contributed to saving my life. He was a nice guy, he was a good guy. He never spoke to me at all, he never said a word. I was very weak, very light on and I wasn't any good to his

29:30 gang, I couldn't do anything so he indicated to me that I go into a little metal caboose welded out of ship plates a little cabin and he used to indicate to me to get inside there. While the job was on he would open the door and he would indicate I go into this caboose and he would just leave me

30:00 and when lunch time came he would just give the caboose a bang with his hammer and I would sneak out with a rope I would have steel rope over my shoulder and out I would go and join my mates for lunch and then again he would beckon me back into the thing again. When he went out I would go in. That was how he saved my life. He knew I was pretty hopeless and pretty useless. That was an act of kindness that

30:30 he was prepared to take. A risk as well because if he had been caught he would have got a belting as well I guess. Of course the good die young. What happened to the poor bloke was he was on a night shift and he was doing some work on the docks and slipped over the docks and he got killed. This is what I heard afterwards.

31:00 No good Japs.

**You were working for Mitsubishi Ship Building for a time?**

Yes.

**Nagasaki was a major ship building area.**

Yes I think so.

**Were there a lot of projects being built at the time?**

There was a very big dock

31:30 yard they were building as many as three or four of these ships at a time. They had dry docks and everything sort of there it was a huge complex.

**These were military ships you were building?**

No they were cargo ships.

**Merchant marine sort of thing?**

They were about 10,000 ton cargo ships and they were putting out about one a month, it was a big centre for ships I would say. In the

32:00 end they ran out of steel as a result of the Americans and the blockade they couldn't import any steel they couldn't, they were pretty short of resources anyway. They sent us down in a train to Nakama and that is where we went coal mining. This is only eight weeks before the bomb went off and the war finished.

**Eight weeks before.**

About that. Again lucky just in front of it.

**It is amazing.**

32:30 **What about rumours in Nagasaki, how did that work as a difference to your experience in Burma/Thai Railway?**

We had no rumours other than those we invented. There was no way known any one could have a radio over there in the heart of Japan. We knew very little, we could only judge and we could talk about it. At that point of time when we were there then, the Americans were bombing.

33:00 Doolittle and his tribe were bombing the major cities and their pursuit planes, B54 [B52s], double tail things; they were hedge hopping bombing military installations and railway centres. We could see all that.

**You could see the planes going past?**

Yes. They knew when we were marching, so sometimes they could see

33:30 a Jap guard on either side, they were two hundred feet above us and they were skipping down and hedge hop, they could see us and I am sure they could identify us because whenever they saw our little column which was about twenty people and a couple of Japs they would dive down and they wouldn't open up and do a turn and off they would go. That was very heartening. We would tell the fellows about that

- 34:00 and we knew from what was happening that the end was coming close. We knew too the Jap on the gardening crew, he could speak a little bit of English, he was happy to get us to work I think and happy to get free labour. At camp we had to dig this huge pit that they told us was an air raid shelter for us because they bring up this high octain
- 34:30 petrol, fuel, I think eight drums of that and we all started to wonder what that was for. What happened was when I got back to the garden party the old Jap guard, the one in charge of the garden party he said "Nippon say all Australian prisoners finish on 15 September."
- 35:00 In other words they were going to do away with all prisoners of war on 15 September and that was an edict right throughout wherever there were POWs. They intended to do away with us all. What happened we were up on this garden party on 8 August and we see this huge big cloud, air raid sirens belting around and this huge big
- 35:30 cloud of white and orange and looks like a huge cauliflower over Nagasaki. We were about 60 kms away and one of the fellows said "Nagasaki is really copping it this time." we looked there. We didn't know it was an atom bomb, we had never heard of it. We could see it was really getting a hell of a hot do. Back we went to work.
- 36:00 Because of that they surrendered on 15 August that was one month before the time destined for our execution. Luck was with me and with all of us.

**When you were taken to Nakama, how far was this from Nagasaki?**

About 60.

**60 kilometres or 60 miles?**

Our measure was miles then.

- 36:30 It is nearly Melbourne to Bacchus Marsh.

**You would have seen Allied air activity before.**

Yes a lot of it. Huge flights of B29s flying over.

**You didn't see the Japanese air force trying to intercept them or fight**

- 37:00 **any air battles?**

No.

**Never.**

No not then. I think the history of it was that they were waiting until the actual American air invasion force. America had every intention of invading them and they were waiting for the invading forces to come near and then they were going to play havoc. Until then they held their reserves, they held their fire I understand.

**What about**

- 37:30 **anti aircraft fire against the American planes, was there a lot of that?**

No. The bombers were out of range. There was sometimes you would see a few exploding, you would see the explosions but they were well below the height of the B59s, [B17s] the Flying Fortresses. The little hedge hoppers you couldn't shoot those they were flying 200 or 300 mile

- 38:00 an hour about 100 feet or 200 feet above the soil. They were just all over the place. They wouldn't fire at these, I didn't see any firing.

**So how did the Japanese guards around you react when they saw huge formations of bombers?**

They hated it. As soon as we marched to work all the women and kids would spit and throw stones and dust at us. They would call

- 38:30 out what they meant I am sure it must have been interpreted "I don't like you." They were bitter and they were scowling and the kids used to pick up stones and throw at us. At that point in time we were in neutral gear. We were so used to abuse and being knocked around, you tend to not to be too concerned about it. When we came back the same thing happened.

- 39:00 Still sort of scowling. The kids would line up and mum and dad were there to encourage the kids to pick up the biggest rock they could find.

**I expect now you probably have a different perspective in a sense that you probably realise where the anger was coming from at that stage of the war. You would probably realise that the bombing that took place was fairly severe of Japanese cities?**

No.

- 39:30 We didn't know, we wanted it to be severe. We knew there was Kobe and all the major cities had been bombed anyway and firstly Hiroshima and then Nagasaki, well we didn't know that they were completely eliminated. They were scorched to the ground. When we went back we went through Nagasaki. Anybody there would have been incinerated.
- 40:00 There was nothing there, nothing to see. It was like an untidy paddock, it was all reduced to rubble.

## Tape 9

- 00:35 **We were talking about the air raids at Nakama as you were stationed. Nagasaki was that raided by American planes when you were stationed at Nagasaki?**

No. There were towns that were because the whole of the atmosphere over Nakama and the whole of Japan I guess was hazy

- 01:00 and sometimes on a hot day the sun was red. Like a red ball of fire it had been like a red ball of fire for the last week or so, so we knew it had been getting a very heavy pummeling, it must have been. Sometimes there would be small installations and sometimes they would be big cities but there weren't any big cities other than Nagasaki within our view.

**Nagasaki was that a beautiful city?**

A great

- 01:30 beautiful city like Melbourne.

**Was it very picturesque?**

It had all these big buildings in it. When we first saw it we were very impressed. When we came through it for the first time it was early morning and we only saw the buildings and we were impressed by the, differently built than the Australian skyscrapers. It was big and a lovely big city and we were very impressed with it all.

- 02:00 It wasn't there when we came back.

**It must have shocked you? What was the reaction, can you walk us through what was going through your mind and also what was the reaction of the Japanese guards around you when at that moment when you first saw the A-bomb?**

No one really

- 02:30 knew what it was. No one really recognised it as being significantly different. It was a hell of a bombing and they got a copping but when you are eighty mile away you wait for the reaction and the reaction took quite a while to get back. In fact there was no reaction, we didn't think about it again until 15th when they said they had surrendered and they had surrendered because of these two bombings, Nagasaki and Hiroshima.

- 03:00 Apart from that it was just another bomb but it was a big one.

**Did you hear the blast?**

No.

**Something of that scale I thought maybe the blast could be heard.**

Yes, I thought that too but I can never remember specifically ever hearing it.

**Any of your mates with you say they heard it?**

No they never talked about it.

**They never talked about it?**

No, they talked about the atom bomb, yes. They never talked about hearing it.

- 03:30 There is lots of rumblings going on all the time, lots of bombs being dropped right, left and centre.

**All the time this is happening?**

Well, they were bombing the big cities and they were bombing the military installations and anything they think is bombable and they make a hell of a noise. You get a noise exploding sixty mile away you were never quite sure whether it was close or sixty miles away. We never distinguished it.

- 04:00 **In retrospect now, how do you feel about the dropping of the A-bomb now? Now that you know it was the atomic bomb?**

Atomic bomb or not, if it hadn't been dropped you wouldn't be talking to me. In retrospect I believe that it saved millions of lives and sure there were 70,000 in Nagasaki and 80,000 Japanese killed in Hiroshima

04:30 Japanese killed instantly and that is 150,000 that is chicken feed to those killed in Burma and it is chicken feed to what would have been killed if they hadn't been dropped. There were 14,000 Aussies that wouldn't have got back, 60,000 British another 60,000 Dutch who wouldn't have got back,

05:00 they would have all been murdered or done away. That is on that side. On their side they had, the Americans had great plans to invade Japan and they were going to put their whole forces there. There would have been millions of people that would have been involved. There would have been millions of Japs who decided to, one million people will give their lives for the Emperor and Japan. One hundred million

05:30 then people were all prepared to die for their country defending it. In that something like thirty million of the elite guard, there was their own home guard, every man was armed with sticks if they didn't have a sword they had a stick, if they didn't have a stick they had a machine gun, they were all prepared to fight to the last man. Millions of lives, so in the terms of the way I see things

06:00 that was a small price to pay.

**So you feel even still that if the Allies did invade Japan they would have lost millions of men?**

Yes. The Allied Army would have lost many because Japan had reserved all its planes, a lot of its Kamikaze planes, and everybody was either a human, they were all prepared to do something suicidal. Human bombs or human underground

06:30 frogmen. They had these motor boats which had a bomb at the head and they were all ready to go, this time instead of going for the big ships, the war ships they had it all organised they were going for the troop ships. The whole fleet of troop ships that were going to invade Japan, their attack would have been direct toward them in a suicidal way. There would have been

07:00 millions of people killed. That is my opinion. Instead of say fifty thousand. If you look at it in isolation it is quite different but if you know the whole pattern it is a small price to pay. When your own life is involved in it and you know darn well if it had not been dropped then I wouldn't have been here and you wouldn't have been talking to me. That makes a big difference.

07:30 **Basically after the Nagasaki bomb how long was it before you were repatriated to Australia?**

It was three months. The Americans let us know firstly by drops of pamphlets and things they said "Be ready, we will come over tomorrow and we will drop food. Food supplies, medical supplies and clothing." We all dolled ourselves up as

08:00 American GIs and we looked pretty smart. We had tobacco, they looked after us marvelously. They dropped all sorts of things. Even in our army gear we thought we were luxurious. They did that for three months and then they said "Don't move until we come to get you." That was an order which we obeyed. We stayed there and found our own things to do. We went walk about in Japan and some fellows robbed banks, some of them robbed the brewery, some of, did all sorts of interesting things.

08:30 **Robbed banks.**

Yes, one of the guys robbed a bank.

**So wouldn't the Japanese guards still have some authority?**

No, the Japanese guards went to ground, they disappeared. On 15th we never saw another Japanese guard other than those we held up in the trains. The Japanese just evaporated.

**You are saying there was some sort of anarchy as a result of the surrender.**

09:00 They just didn't want to be there because they were frightened of repercussions I guess. One fellow, our sergeant returned to get something he left behind, they disappeared first and then he came back to camp. The boys at that time point in time, peace had been declared, the boys grabbed him and they threw him into the local drain. The drains in Japan are the sewerage drains, they are open and they irrigate their paddies with the, well they did then,

09:30 sewerage and stuff. They thought "What can we do to get back at this guy?." so all they did was dump him into the sewerage and held him under with a large bamboo pole until he spluttered and spattered and then we let him get up like a drowned rat and he was up and off and we never saw him again. That was our retaliation, that was about as far as we could go.

**This particular man you did your friends did that to, did you take part in it as well?**

I did, I was on their side.

10:00 **What role did you play?**

Bob Moore instigated the plot. He said "Into the trench with him." so we grabbed him and put him in

there. From then on we had our retribution and that was enough.

**This sergeant was particularly disliked, was he?**

Yes.

**You already knew of him.**

Yes.

**You said the guards**

10:30 **evaporated what did you do then? You were given orders?**

We were free. We didn't, we went walking around viewing, looking for food mainly. We opened our store and found it was chocker block [full] with rice and dried vegetables, one of the boys we took a truck down, we got an army truck easily and went down to Mogi and raided the brewery and of course brought back a truck load of grog,

11:00 on the way back he thought we would have a barbecue so he knocked off one of the farmer's yaks and the farmer cleaned that, so we brought that back. We were all sick as dogs when it was all over but it was good fun while it was happening.

**Strange way to end the war wasn't it?**

The point was, it was another three months before we finished but then again some of the boys went over and one of the fellows was pretty smart, Peter Dawson, he got little

11:30 arm bands made for us in Japanese saying "General MacArthur's disarmament group." So that meant that we were number one, we then took over from the Jap guard and we were the authority and of course whatever we said went. When the trains came into one of the little stations nearby Nakama we all stopped the train and boarded the train with our arm bands, and went up and down the train and anyone who had a sword or something we wanted

12:00 we grabbed that and put it on the station. In the end the station was a big pile of weapons and swords, I have still got one sword that I took. I took that and I am keeping it. The reason I say that there are a lot of indications that we should give them back because they have the names of their family on it. I am not that enamoured that I will let them enjoy it again.

**You are saying that**

12:30 **what was the disposition of the Japanese people after the surrender? They were throwing stones at you.**

They went to water. It was a complete turn about. We were in a village so we would wander around the village but the people had onions and things like that and they didn't mind giving us two or three onions or pumpkins or whatever might have been there. They turned around completely

13:00 and I guess showing that they could be neutral. We didn't have any problems from then onwards. They were inclined to give us fresh vegetables and things like that if they had them. Knowing that we were all pretty skinny, we were all down about half our normal weight, we slowly had to put it all back on but it was amazing how quickly we did put it on.

13:30 **You basically enjoyed the new found liberty you had, what took place next, you went around the Japanese countryside, you visited places,**

14:00 **got food, enjoyed yourselves?**

And didn't come into any conflict situations at all with them.

**That is interesting. I am surprised that there were no Japanese soldiers who still....**

They were about but there was no retaliation, the Australians didn't want to retaliate, we were pleased it was over and our hopes had been fulfilled, we were alive, we were all happy about that. We were all happy about coming back to this lovely country of ours. Freedom we were just so lucky to retain.

14:30 **When the first allied or American soldier landed in Nakama, what happened?**

Well we gave him a great roaring cheer. He was a GI in his jeep. He said, "Hi guys, get ready to move." We gave him one great cheer. He gave our officers their routines and I think we must have gone down to one of the railway stations near Nakama,

15:00 we railed back into Nagasaki and that is where we suddenly realised something about the atom bomb. There had been rumours circulating about the atom bomb. As we got near it say twenty or thirty miles nearer the side of all the hills the windward side where the bomb had exploded, they were all scorched, there was nothing there.

**It was black.**

Yes absolutely black. On the other side it was all right, on the lee side. It was OK.

15:30 That was the way until you got into Nagasaki. When you got into Nagasaki at the railway station, where the railway station was I suppose we then walked from there to the wharf and that is when we went through Nagasaki to the wharf. We were disinfected and then we went onto the banana boat, the aircraft carrier

16:00 and from there onto Okinawa and then on our way home to freedom to this lovely place.

**You must have heard about the huge battle that took place there?**

We heard about that, they were still there. There were still fleets massed there that were on their way to attack Japan. Their plan was to assess the whole of their forces, their air force and their

16:30 both fleets at Okinawa but after the bomb had been dropped they evacuated some of them but there was still a sort of peace keeping force there. They got knocked around by the typhoon that happened later on, they were all settled there and in fact the war seemed still to be going on because a lot of the Japanese were in tunnels and didn't know they had no contact with headquarters,

17:00 they said they would fight to the death and they were still doing it when we got there, that was three months afterwards.

**Really the fighting was still going on, skirmishes?**

Yes, because there was no communication with their headquarters, they were living in tunnels. The Americans were still fighting, they were using flame throwers and things like that to burn them out.

**You must have heard of Sugar Loaf Hill?**

17:30 **Have you heard of that battle of Sugar Loaf Hill?**

No, Hot Rocks on Mt Hirogema. No, what was Sugar Load Hill?

**I think it was on Okinawa. There was a famous battle I believe in Okinawa.**

18:00 It was a bit hilly.

**It was a famous battle where the Americans made eleven attempts to take these set of hills.**

That was Hirogema. It was a hill. That was Hot Rocks.

**So you got back from there to Okinawa and from there you went to where?**

To Clark Field in the Philippines and then we stayed there in our fattening pens, beautifully looked after by the Americans.

18:30 Introducing us to all the new song hits and trying to get us a little bit oriented towards civilisation again. They looked after us extremely well. Strangely enough we put on weight quickly, without exercise and so forth. We all had the jimmyies [diarrhoea], but that was a small price to pay. We stayed there about a fortnight or three weeks. There were still signs of a

19:00 some sort of a revolutionary group. I think they must have been communists or something. There was a little bit of care. We were virtually confined to barracks; we weren't allowed to wonder much. We didn't want to anyway. From there we flew from Okinawa to Clark Field and then at Manila

19:30 we were on another ship, The Speaker, and we were on that back slowly to Sydney.

**When you got back to Sydney you saw the city in the horizon, what was the feeling going through you? Walk us through that?**

You have no idea. What great excitement, a great cheer went up. It was so lovely to see the Heads and to get there and

20:00 it was a great feeling to be back home. There was no one to welcome us of course, in those days, we just disembarked and we went to Ingleburn and we were refitted out, we had all our motley American stuff that they dropped to us on and they just refitted us with Aussie stuff. They gave us a new outfit and the next thing they said "Bunker down for the night." which we did

20:30 just in beds around in Ingleburn and from then we came down. We didn't see anybody at this point in time and then we went on a train. We were trained down; it was a double train it only went half to Albury. We changed at Albury because it was a different gauge, and no one was there to meet us and then we went on the next train. At Melbourne our relatives met us so it was quite a good welcome back. We circled the city a couple of times and that was that.

21:00 The next five years everybody forgot about it, nobody talked about it, ten years went by and now fifteen years and suddenly we started to open up about it all. For the first ten years it was hardly spoken about at all.

**Why was that?**

I don't know, I just think we didn't want to. You see we didn't win it and we were still a little bit ashamed, we weren't sure about ourselves. We had been through the problem of POW life

21:30 but that was our concern. We hadn't done anything heroic, we hadn't done anything terribly courageous and so we didn't expect anything. I think the others thought we were all a bit odd, we had been out of circulation for 3½ years and they are a bit queer. Be careful what you say to them, besides they might be too sensitive. Some were and some weren't. Most of us I think were

22:00 able to take it and nothing more than what we expected. We didn't expect a tumultuous welcome and we didn't expect a great to do about it and that is what happened. People were happy, we were happy and we tried very desperately to get back into the situation again. I spent my life, the first five years and ten years getting back to normal civilian life.

22:30 Family and so on.

**Can you tell us what went through your mind, walk us through it when you met your family in Melbourne? The first time in so many years.**

Mum and Dad and my sisters. I liked my sisters more. I was more pleased to see my younger sisters than anybody. I didn't see my eldest sister, I don't think she came down, she was in Horsham. The relationship between Mum and Dad was,

23:00 we had every respect for them, we loved our relationship but the treatment was different, we didn't expect Mum and Dad to be there, we didn't expect big fusses to be made. That was the way life was and it was certainly when I saw Mum and Dad. I don't think they were at the station, they were at my grandparents place in Green Island and I met them there and my grandparents were there and it was a great

23:30 hugs and kisses. They were also the ones who had a lot of problems because they didn't hear about me for nearly three years and they didn't know that I was dead or alive until the war was over and somebody intercepted a message from the Japs in Japan saying "Colin was alive." so that was the first they knew. For 3½ years I could have been dead and probably that

24:00 was the way they looked at it. They had to put it out of their mind, so they didn't talk about it too much. When we got back it wasn't a great thing, you hear nowadays when the boys come back from overseas now all sorts of sky rockets and jumping up and down and it was great but things change over sixty years and relationships change. Whilst we are all happy in each era,

24:30 we were happy about it, we are happy to accept it now that life has changed and let people be recognised.

**In retrospect, you have had a fair number of decades to think about your experience, reflect and as you say change in relationship, changing**

25:00 **views, the view of life has changed. What do you think about the Japanese people now?**

My opinion is not like Weary's, I didn't like them and I certainly learnt to realise that they hated us, they hated us with great rational hatred and they belted us and I believe

25:30 that those sorts of culture is deep seated in them. I don't really see any reason why they should be changing, why they would change. I am sure if given the opportunity again it could still surface. That is not the attitude everybody else feels but certainly if you have been through it and you have seen the culture at its worse you realise you wouldn't have done those things but they do and you bet your bottom dollar that they won't change.

26:00 I am not forgiving in any way. I learnt a lot of things and I know I got a lot of attributes from being over there and being captive. I learnt mostly how to relate to our country and how much I love it and that we have to defend for ourselves and these sorts of things. I want to see it dearly protected against any possible invasion in the future and in my opinion it is

26:30 quite likely that there might be another invasion in the future. In which case it would be an all out go anyway. We have to look after our own hides.

**You think it is quite possible that the Japanese could again one day come back?**

Well, that is what they told us. Their ambassadors told us and there is plenty of evidence that they intended to get it this time. I know there is plenty of evidence on the other side too. On my side the fact that they did tell us. The ambassadors

27:00 they said, as a foundation, almost the first thing I heard about them coming back to Australian in Buka Timah. They said, "For you the war is over, for us it will never be over, it might take one hundred years but one day Japan will own Australia and that is our ambition but for you it is over. Whether we take by political reasons, economic reasons or war reasons." he said, "One day Japan will own Australia."

27:30 That was the things they told us and that was the things they had in their hearts. Whether different

hearts have arisen now and people think differently I don't know but I have seen no evidence of it.

**Do you think the Japanese Government now should apologise for what has taken place with the POWs in World War II? This has been a contentious issue for sometime.**

28:00 **As you would well be aware.**

They don't admit if of course, and they like to sort of bury all history of their brutality and all the atrocities that they committed at Sandakan and in other places and the death march and all those places. There is evidence that things that they would like to erase from history forever. Those things they tend not to announce, they tend not to let their own population know about the brutality. Well I suppose you don't

28:30 sell your dirty linen but I do think they have to be honest about it. I do think they are unscrupulous little fellows and don't really ever try to tell the truth. Their own nation lives in a deception that they are nice fine gentlemen but the truth being that they are scallywags. I do think if they opened out it would do my feelings a lot of good, if they would say, "Yes, we did that,

29:00 we did all those things that was another generation and we don't think that way any more but we are sorry for what we did." If they said that I think I would feel a lot differently but right now I have still got those same feelings I had about them, well right since we last contacted sixty years ago. It hasn't changed for a lot of guys. Again some fellows with religion and different aspects are more forgiving than I am.

29:30 I still feel strongly, yes, your last question was "Should they say they're sorry?." and I would say I would certainly appreciate it from my point of view that they did admit that it did all happen and it was there and it became part of history so all our younger generation can prepare themselves to gird their loins to make sure it doesn't happen again.

**INTERVIEW ENDS**