

Australians at War Film Archive

William Coates - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:30 **We'll just go back as far as your memory allows, and talk about your childhood.**

Well, I felt that our family had been involved in war or in the preparation of war since my earliest days. My father had been in the First World War

01:00 in France and Gallipoli, and my youngest son has just retired after thirty years in the Australian Army and I had an uncle who was killed in France, William Hicks, after whom I was named, William Hicks Coates. When I was eleven years of age, quite unexpectedly my mother died, and my father had arranged a trip around the world to study neurosurgery.

01:30 So I found myself on a ship going to England and the strange thing happened that when we arrived at Toulon in the south of France we heard that Doctor Dolphus, the president of Austria had been assassinated by the Nazis and the French Navy were mobilised and there was a suggestion they were going to the war, so we were all put in our cabins.

We'll wait for it to pass, we're going to get a lot of that.

02:00 And we were sent to our cabins because the French fleet might have been going out, and we went through the Bay of Biscay blacked out in case we might have been submarine. I remember we got to England on bank holiday in August and nobody gave a thought about the Nazis, but on the other hand after being in school in England for a little while I went over to Paris with him, and when we were in Paris he took a taxi and we travelled right through the battlefields of France.

02:30 He would say, "Oh I remember this area and I remember that." One funny thing happened was, we went to Bailleul, which is a city in the north near Brugge, and he said to me, "When I was billeted here during the war a young Belgian boy used to sell us newspapers." So he got the taxi to go to the mayor's office in the mairie [town hall] and to his amazement, out from the mayor's office came a man and he saw my father and he said

03:00 "Monsieur Albert, Monsieur Albert!" He was the mayor himself, from a little boy selling newspapers he was the mayor in Beyer. So then we went on to see the grave of my uncle, which was a very moving thing, killed at the age of twenty-three in 1917. And I would add to that by saying having seen that grave in 1934, fifty-eight years later and my youngest son was a major in the

03:30 Australian Army attached to the British Army of the Rhine, we travelled over there and we saw the grave. And recently he was a lieutenant colonel by then, attached to Australia House [London], he took my grandson Tom, so all of the generations have been and seen the grave in France. That was quite an experience for me. And

04:00 then later on in our trip we went to Germany and I remember going to Strasburg where the Nazi fellows came on board and we were struck by the fact that they were very gentle to us, very kind to us. We would go to bed at night and there was stormtroopers marching through the streets. So by the time I came back from that trip I had seen a lot more of the world than the average young Australian boy had and to that, also, most Australian men and

04:30 women didn't understand what was going on in Europe. I was encouraged to join the cadet corps from the very early days of my life at Scotch College. I remember in the junior cadets, we had a big stick that we carried as a rifle and all of the non-cadets used to call us broomstick warriors. But then we got into the senior cadets and we were starting to learn how to shoot with a .303 [rifle],

05:00 and as a result of my knowledge of what went on in the First World War I knew a lot of pre-war history Germany. And I knew that a person called Field Marshal Alfred Von Schlieffen had given a plan to the Kaiser that when they had to fight Russia, France and Germany that they would rush through Belgium and get to the coast, that was the Schlieffen Plan.

05:30 Well whilst I was at senior cadet camp down at Frankston the war was going on. And one of my friends

there was David Monash Bennett whose grandfather was the famous General Sir John Monash and he had read all of the newspapers. Some boy walked in with the newspaper. And he said, "The French [the Germans] have reached Abbeville!" which is near the coast, near the [English] Channel and both David Bennett and I said, "The Schlieffen Plan!"

- 06:00 And nobody knew what we were talking about. I will just add a little bit to that as far as David Bennett is concerned. Three years later I was in Finschhafen with my first tank battalion, I was in the intelligence section, and I was told I had to go up from Finschhafen up to a place called Jevivang, which is almost this side of Sattelberg, which we were going attack in a few weeks time. And I went up this track all by myself and there was a big crash on that side and a
- 06:30 big crash on this side and I realised they were mortar shells coming over. You didn't hear few like that. And I was a bit frightened I suppose but I kept on walking, and suddenly I heard a voice, "Bill Coates!" And I looked up and it was David Monash Bennett and he was serving in an infantry battalion. And
- 07:00 of all of the people in all of the world to see, I always thought it was the Schlieffen Plan and Sattelberg at Finschhafen. Anyway after that my father had been sent to Singapore as a surgeon to the 10th Australian General Hospital. And he sent me to the university to do medicine. And I pleaded with him, I said, "Dad I want to join up." "No, you need doctors in a long war." All of this
- 07:30 sort of nonsense. And however he came back during that year when I was going on to eighteen, he had to bring back Sir John Latham from Singapore who he had operated on, and he finally gave in and he signed the agreement that I could join the air force. So just after my eighteenth birthday I presented myself down to the recruiting office and to get into air crew was
- 08:00 extremely difficult, it was a whole day or two days that we were looked into in every way. And eventually I was thrilled to pieces and told that "Yes we have accepted you," and I was sent down to the Number 2 ITS [Initial Training School] at Somers. And if you were very clever you became a navigator, but if you were not so bad you became a pilot, and if you didn't have much brains at all you were
- 08:30 a gunner. Anyway I was picked as a pilot, and I was thrilled to bits; issued with boots and cap and all of the rest and we ran around the place thinking we were tops. A terrible thing happened to me then, I should have been sent onto initial training school but the Japanese had made it very difficult for us to get across the Pacific to Canada to complete our course. And I fell. I was on guard duty one night and I went back to my room and I fell from a very
- 09:00 high two-level bed and I woke up in hospital. Suffered quite a severe injury to my skull, brain. And I was examined medically and told I was not capable to go on air crew. That shattered me because all our lives we were thinking of flying and bombing and whatnot.
- 09:30 Looking back on it, I can say it probably saved my life because the 28 course that I went on, only two out of ten of my contemporaries came back. However in those days if you were in aircrew and something like that happened to you, you had the option of going onto ground staff or be discharged, and I didn't want to go into ground staff having been in the
- 10:00 aircrew stage, so I elected to be discharged and went back into civil life. A week or two later just before Christmas in '42, I went into an army recruiting office and I was accepted, I may say I didn't tell them I had been in the air force. I was worried about that for many years afterwards, however I was accepted to go to the
- 10:30 2nd Armoured Corps Training Regiment to be in fighting vehicles. First of all it was at a race course in Bendigo, and then it was a while later we were all moved to Puckapunyal. I was designated to train as a wireless operator/loader in fighting vehicles. And in our unit in Puckapunyal we had General Grant tanks, thirty-five millimetre [gun],
- 11:00 seventy millimetre [gun] and coaxially-mounted fifty calibre Brownings [machine gun]. It was quite interesting work. I remember at one stage there was a little two-man tank, tiny thing like this with a driver and a radio operator, and I was selected to be the radio operator in the tank and we were selected to go onto the range and we were to act
- 11:30 as the target tank. It was quite an honour really, got a message to say a thousand yards, so and so and I would tap my driver and we would start going up and down a thousand yards. And then if the fellows up in the General Grants would start firing the fifty calibres at us at five hundred and fifty rounds a minute. And they would, diabolical really, because inside of the tank there was paint and each time a bullet hit the tank it chipped off a bit of the paint and it was like
- 12:00 living in confetti, and looking back on it, the sound must have been pretty awful. It was quite an experience. And I became extremely deaf not long after the war and I think Veterans Affairs or the repatriation department thought that it had been affected by that situation. Anyway another thing I remember about that was that suddenly a number of my contemporaries were sent over to the armoured corps in Western
- 12:30 Australia and I wasn't selected and I went to my officer and asked him why, and he said, "Well, Trooper Coates you have only done five months' initial training." I dare not tell him I had done six months in the air force.

So what would have happened, if they had known you had had six months in the air force what would that have meant for you in the army?

- 13:00 It would have meant, you couldn't go anywhere in any of the services unless you had done your basic six months, well I had done my six months in the air force, but I joined the army and didn't tell them that, because I had been discharged unfit. But a little while after that, the officer in charge was good to me because there had to be two tank crews, a driver and a skipper and a radio operator
- 13:30 and they had to be sent up to the School of Artillery in Holsworthy, New South Wales, to do the tests of the AC2, the Australian-built tank which was in course of production, it wasn't ever completed. Anyway this AC2 had a twenty-five pounder, short barrelled twenty-five pounder in the turret. And I was the radio operator. And the first thing that happened was I didn't
- 14:00 know anything about fusing twenty-five pound smoke shells. So when we got out onto the range and there was a big group of officers and what have you up there, and I got into the tank and the first terrible thing that happened as I netted in [established himself on the radio net] and got everything going properly, so as soon as the tank engine started, my radio stopped. So we had to use this sort of thing. And then my
- 14:30 captain said to me, the skipper said, "Fire a smoke shell a thousand yards." So I got the shell and did something like this as best I could, put it up the chute and bang! I had fused it for five hundred yards and smoke covered the whole of the officers standing there which wasn't a good example of what we should have been. However it was an interesting experience to go up there. In troppo [tropical] battledress
- 15:00 and a Smith and Wesson thing [pistol] on our arm, we though we were pretty good. The only other thing I can remember at Puckapunyal was one day me and two other fellows decided we would go and have a meal in Seymour, we had never done that before. Anyway we were sitting up in the hotel eating our meal and there was an officer sitting over in the corner with a lady friend and the manager of the hotel came over and
- 15:30 said, "I am sorry, you men, you're going to have to leave." And I was a bit foolish I suppose, I thought, "Be damned, I am not going to leave!" Next thing we know some military police came in. We ran like mad out, caught, put into the old gaol in Seymour which later when - was a medic I knew very well.
- 16:00 Taken back to camp. Next day a warrant officer I knew well came to me and said, "I think you're in a bit of trouble son. You're being charged with refusing to obey a lawful order and command, attempting to evade close arrest." And one or two other things like that. Well the chief of our unit was a man called Colonel Darcy Francis. Darcy Francis was an English officer and we knew that if you were two days
- 16:30 AWL [absent without leave] you got twenty-eight days in the Fiver [Five Towns], which meant I thought I would be in gaol for three months for this. Anyway I was a bit worried and I used to attend the Salvation Army meetings to get a bit of support for my worries. And we came up before Darcy Francis and he said, "Trooper Coates, you seem to be leader of this trouble, tell me what happened?" and I told him what happened, and he said, "Did you see any other officers there?"
- 17:00 "No sir." And he said, "Well that's where you're wrong, there was another officer there and he rang me and told me what happened. I don't want this sort of thing to be happening to my troops in Seymour. Don't go into that hotel again, Trooper Coates." And he said to the sergeant-major, "Reprimand," and we walked away free. I would have gone to the end of the earth with Darcy Francis.
- 17:30 Back in Puckapunyal, eventually about ten of us were told we were being sent to the 2/6th Armoured Regiment in Queensland. This was a great thrill to us to get to a unit. When we got there we found out the 2/6th unit was one of the three units in the 4th Armoured Brigade and it had just come back from the fighting in Buna, Sanananda.
- 18:00 They had Stuart tanks. So we were very happy to be in this unit, and we found out a little bit more about the brigade. The 4th Armoured Brigade was an amphibious brigade and it was comprised of the 2/6th Armoured Regiment, the 2/9th Armoured Regiment and the 1st Tank Battalion. It was commanded by Brigadier Denzel Macarthur-Onslow. And I remember we were paraded before the brigadier one day before we went on leave and he said, "Remember men, you are 4th Armoured Brigade and therefore you will behave yourself
- 18:30 whenever you're on leave in Brisbane." So it was a bit of a thrill to be in a brigade that was pretty pukka [British colonial]. Not long after I joined it about six of us who had come up as reinforcements came back from leave in Brisbane and we were paraded before a colonel and he said, "You men are leaving us today, we're sorry about that. I can't tell you
- 19:00 where you're going, all I can say is that we are all very jealous." We suddenly found we were on a troop train, three days later we were in Townsville, went straight onto the wharf, and straight onto the troop ship Westralia.
- 19:30 **Can we just hold it there, and go back and pick up a bit more detail of those early years, it is really great what you're telling us, we just want to go back and get a bit more detail. We are interested in what experience you had in the cadets before you joined the air force, and why**

was it that you were so keen on joining the air force?

20:00 Well I think in those days nearly all of us wanted to go into the services and the most exciting service was aircrew. I can't describe why but it was the apex of achievement if you were going into the services. And the terrible part of course is that we were a pretty select group, aircrew, a lot of

20:30 fellows had been to university and fellows like myself who had been through and matriculated, et cetera. It was a pretty select group of Australians; I think we were probably the elite of young Australians at the time. And the tragedy was, of course, the 28 course which I was in, by the time they got through Canada, they went into the 1943, the softening up of

21:00 Germany and the bombing campaigns in Germany 1943 and it's tragic to think that twenty thousand of them never came back, terrible loss, and I remember several of my contemporaries, when I got to Canberra to the war memorial I see their names there, and I think how sad it really was.

And when you had the accident you were training at Somers was it?

Yes.

And you were discharged

21:30 **because of the accident, were you able to put up an argument at all?**

No putting up an argument, I was just ordered this and that. And I can understand, the medical officer who examined me and made the decision was a great friend of my father, a contemporary of my father and later on in my career I knew him very well. And he did that for the right purpose, I had extreme, I had some problems with

22:00 my skull several times thereafter, and it may well have been due to the fact that I had concussion, I don't know, I was just told, "You can't fly," and that's that.

And during your school years had you had any involvement with the cadets or?

No never had any problems at all, I was a very fit person.

22:30 **So during that time you said you were really keen to join the air force, how were you able to pursue that before the war? Was it a hobby in any way for you?**

What did I do?

In terms of flying, wanting to fly?

Well before the war, I had left school that year and I got a job at the Victoria Barracks. I got a job in the inventions department, run by an elderly sergeant and all sorts of people used to write in with all sorts of crazy ideas,

23:00 if you did this you could kill forty thousand Germans, blah, blah. And one of my jobs was to go through these things and hand them in to my boss. So it kept me occupied for a few months and suddenly one of the other fellows working with me whose father knew the secretary of the Air Board, I think he hurried our call-up a little, and so suddenly both of us found that we were being called up for Somers. That's how it happened.

23:30 **Now you told us a bit about that trip to Europe, how long were away for?**

We were away for about nine months.

So your father was furthering his education there or?

Yes my father was a surgeon in Melbourne but he was studying neurosurgery, and he took a year off to go around and study with neurosurgical units in Europe, England and America.

24:00 The thing that happened to me on that trip which was interesting, looking back, was that he would go away and he would be away for eight or ten hours, watching operations or assisting in operations. He would just give me so many francs or so many marks and I went off by myself at that age. And I went on Cook's tours in Paris for example and I would arrange to go to Versailles or arrange to go on the tour of Napoleon.

24:30 And then when we got to Germany he would give me marks and I used to go off to the Deutsch museum and the famous museums in Europe in Munich and I had a very interesting time there, in this day and age I would have been told, "Billy, do this and that." I just went off on my own.

So how old were you at this stage? You must have been young?

I had just turned eleven.

25:00 **You must have learned a lot of independence and responsibility?**

Oh very much so because my mother had just died and my father had arranged to do this trip with her, and she died the 13th of May 1934 so he took me instead. So for me it was a strange

25:30 experience because my father was always one who was inclined to get on with life et cetera and he put me in a situation where the average boy would never be put into and I am damn glad he did. Because I saw a lot more of life in Europe than I would ordinarily experience.

You said that you and your father were treated well in Germany and the stormtroopers marching on the streets. Do you have any other recollections of that time,

26:00 **and things that you saw that perhaps suggested the direction Germany was headed in?**

I don't think so; we saw the Nazis there. I don't really think it led me to change my views of what was going on at that time. On the other hand, I was well aware that they were there and

26:30 as life went on after I got back, when I was back in school and problems arose with Czechoslovakia et cetera, I was very well aware of the situation. I had seen the Nazis and I knew that they were pretty strong, and I knew that war was inevitable. And I was worried sick that my father would be going to another war. Little did I think that he did go to another war, little did I think that I would go to war, but that's the way it was.

27:00 **Did you father talk much about his experiences in the First World War?**

Oh yes that's why I was so interested in the whole thing. I heard from my earliest years about the First World War. My father learnt French and German, taught himself French and German in Egypt before going to Gallipoli, and when he got to France in the First World War he was put into the intelligence corps and he was involved in

27:30 espionage. Used to go as a stool-pigeon [informer] into German prisoner of war camps things like that. So that he never stopped talking about that and I sort of grew up in that atmosphere. And strangely enough apropos of that he was involved in that sort of intelligence work, I remember in the 3rd of September 1939, prior to that he had given me a big sheet,

28:00 all of the order of battle of the German army in the attack on the Hindenburg line and I kept that in my possessions and on the night that Chamberlain [British Prime Minister] announced we were at war with Germany, my father came up to my room and said, "My boy, where are those German things?" And I showed them to him and he said, "I might be on their list, we are going to destroy them." so we went downstairs and burnt them.

28:30 I was disappointed, but that how intense he imparted knowledge to me. There is another strange factor, apropos to those things, where we lived in Toorak at the back of our place was the home of Sir John Monash, who I mentioned his grandson David. And my father went over there one day and I remember he came back to me and he said, "Sir John's

29:00 son-in-law came down and showed us through the general's museum." And he had said, "You will be interested in this, Bert," this thing that we had destroyed. And my father said, "Yes I have seen them before, as a matter of fact I made three of them: one was for the General [Monash], one of them is in the Canberra War Museum and the other one belongs to my son Bill." I was very involved in

29:30 hearing the talk of war, Germany and the rest of it.

And what was on the document you are talking about?

It was a sheet with all little badges on it, all of the badges were the regiments. In his work in the intelligence section, he had to produce them you see? He said he did three of them. And years later one was in the back of our place, and on the

30:00 3rd of September 39, he made me get rid of it because he thought that if the Nazis came out he might be on their list. I don't think he would have been, but my father was like that.

If I can take you back to the Depression years, I am just wondering if that had an impact on your family and if not what sort of things did you see?

Very much so.

30:30 I remember the Depression terribly. By the same token, my father had graduated in medicine, as a matter of fact I was two years old before he graduated. But when he got out and was practicing as a young surgeon he was doing very well relatively because unemployment was fifty percent, sixty percent. So working the way he was as a young surgeon we had a very

31:00 nice home in Hawthorn and I was sent to a public school, what we now call a private school, Scotch College. And I may say when I was seven years of age when I was sent to Scotch, and all of the other kids had their mothers bring them and I was just given a fare, "Go to school." I arrived at Scotch College by myself, no mother. I was made to be independent from the word go. But I remember that the Depression

31:30 was an awful situation. Our particular family was comfortably off that we were, my parents were employing other members of the family that were unemployed and there was always somebody to take my sisters for a walk, somebody to teach us to play the piano and all of this sort of thing. The people

who were surviving the Depression

32:00 were helping the other people who were in trouble. The Depression did have a big effect on me.

What sort of recollections do you have of Melbourne itself, the city, the culture as opposed to what it is today?

Not much. I remember being taken by my maternal grandparents on a tram from

32:30 Camberwell into the city; when looking back on it it was probably because the Duke of York had visited Melbourne. And this was quite an experience of course. I remember being taken to the top of the Manchester Unity building I think it was, to see him at that stage. It was quite an event. I don't remember much about Melbourne except at

33:00 Scotch we would be taken as a great privilege to see the tallest building in Melbourne which was the fire brigade up here. It was a different city altogether. I must say when I came back from London and Paris it was a pretty ordinary sort of place.

So are you saying that you had a sense that your career, you were hoping it would

33:30 **take you away from Melbourne?**

Not at that stage I don't think. It wasn't until I came back from the war that I felt that international life would be what I would like to be. I always had in the back of my mind a little bit that if there was a department of foreign

34:00 affairs I would like to go into that because I had been encouraged to study languages, and I can say myself I was talented in French and German and I found that there are very few opportunities for that sort of life in Melbourne, but that's another story. I eventually became a staff member of the World Health Organization but that was years later.

34:30 When I was in New Guinea they were going to take the first intake into what was the Department of External Affairs in those days, and I was asked to sit an exam when I was in New Guinea and I was taken down to Lae to sit this exam and I remember distinctly that the first question was, 'What do you know about the Bretton Woods agreement?' And I hadn't seen a newspaper for a couple of years and so I just couldn't write anything and I wasn't selected.

35:00 When I came back to Australia, I did have the opportunity of doing any course that I wanted to, my father was still disappeared, we didn't even know if he was a POW [prisoner of war], well I thought well he wants me to be a doctor, I will do medicine. But my first yearning was to go into the international life as I enjoyed it.

When you came back from

35:30 **the European tour how were you able to maintain those interests, now that you had in foreign languages and culture?**

As a matter of fact a guy called Freddy Katz came out, he was a refugee from Nazi Germany, two or three Jewish families came out and began at Scotch College and it was wonderful for me because I

36:00 used to try and practice my German on him. I think that was quite a factor in those days, people coming from outside into Australia, it was very important to me to have that contact. I also, a friend of mine who later did medicine and he and I used to go to meetings of the Alliance Française [French language and cultural society], and the Alliance Française became very unpopular during the war in Melbourne because they were Vichy.

36:30 However I used to go there, and I used to go to a theatre in Exhibition Street that used to show European films, so right through my older schooling career I always carried with me the things that had affected me in my trip to Europe.

So there were means for you to continue that contact. Did Melbourne feel like,

37:00 **obviously today it is a very cosmopolitan city, was there any of that aspect at that time?**

No nothing, that's just it. I can't remember the name of the old theatre there, but we were eccentrics if we did it. there weren't very many non Anglo-Saxon people in Melbourne. Although strangely enough my friend David Bennett, he

37:30 was a Jew because Sir John was Jewish; and one of the interesting things, looking back on it, at Scotch College there was no such thing as problems between WASPs [White Anglo-Saxon Protestants], Jewish people or anyone. The only thing I do remember is just after the war when the Italians and Greeks were coming and opening up fruit shops in

38:00 Glenferrie Road, Hawthorn, some Australian fruiterer put a sign up, 'Buy here before the day goes.'

Very witty.

There was a little bit of that going on. But totally different feeling to what we are now. Multicultural

country.

38:30 **At Scotch you talked about your talents for languages, what were your academic strengths and were you into other activities as well?**

Well my academic strengths there, my final year at Scotch was European History, French History, French, German and English. I didn't like Physics, Chemistry and Maths, I wasn't interested in that, bit of a nuisance for me

39:00 because my father turned around and said, "You're going to do medicine." And that was that. But no, my main - probably because I had been taken to Westminster Abbey, I had been taken to Notre Dame and things like that I was interested in world history and language.

Was religion a factor at all in your upbringing?

39:30 Very much so, my family, the Coates family were Methodists in Ballarat. Strangely enough half of them were Methodists and half of them were Anglican, Church of England. But my father's father was a local preacher; he was president of the Victoria local preachers' association. We were brought up, church every Sunday morning, Sunday school every Sunday afternoon,

40:00 as a matter of fact I found it a damn bloody nuisance, and I remember later on when I was about fifteen, we were living at Toorak and we transferred to the Anglican Church, the Church of England, and I was confirmed by the archbishop, at St John's Toorak. And one of the great things that resulted from that was that I could go to eight o'clock

40:30 communion and I was free for the rest of the day. Religion did play a big part because we grew up in that atmosphere of Methodism. No alcohol, they all used to smoke, all of my uncles used to smoke but well a bit peculiar actually, I remember when my mother died an aunt was looking after us and used to say to a friend of mine, "Oh his father drinks beer,

41:00 of course Dad only drinks lager." All a bit peculiar in those days. A lot of hypocrisy. You asked if religion played a big part, it certainly did. Scotch College was a Presbyterian college, and we had services all of the time and whatnot, but there was no religious intolerance. For example I was in the debating team and I was sent up to debate against Xavier [College].

41:30 And I remember distinctly going into Xavier and shown through the home and I saw a billiard room, and I thought, "A billiard room!" Dreadful, almost like seeing a bar. The Catholics were a lot more liberal than the Presbyterians.

41:58 End of tape

Tape 2

00:30 **So Doctor Coates if you don't mind telling us that story again about post World War 1 and John Monash?**

At the time I was interested in language, my father had told me that when he was in intelligence corps, he was paraded before General Sir John Monash and Sir John said that if he liked he could arrange for him to attend Oxford University and arrange

01:00 a job in the British Foreign Service or secret service or something like that. But my father said to me, no although he had been interested in languages he primarily wanted to be a doctor, but because he was interested in languages it became an interest in my life, and I enjoyed international life,

01:30 preferred it to what I could call Melbourne. For example, after the war one of the first times I travelled was to New Caledonia, Noumea, and I found that I was speaking French for the first time in a long time and it felt wonderful to me.

Why do you think your father was so adamant you do medicine?

02:00 Well I don't know, he thought medicine was the most important profession. I would say, "I want to do law." "Oh you're wasting your time, there is only one profession, medicine." And that was that. I couldn't convince him anyway. He used to let me do the subjects I wanted to do at school although he would say, "You will have to do extra work in chemistry."

02:30 So in my hours when I didn't have to do my ordinary work, he made me sit in on chemistry class, and I didn't know what they were talking about and I remember at one stage I had to sit an exam and I got ten percent. I was laughing stock, but still he wanted me to be a doctor.

Can you tell us a little bit about what you remember of your mother?

03:00 My mother was one of quite a nice family, Hicks family that lived in Camberwell. My grandfather worked in the customs department and used to be out on the ships doing all of the customs work, and

my mother, there were five girls in the family and they all married well. I do remember my father telling me

03:30 that one of the aunts married a very successful business people, another had his own business, blah, blah. My grandmother was very upset when she found out my mother was going to marry a medical student, although my father finished up probably the most successful of the lot. Just an ordinary middle class family.

04:00 **And what memories do you have of her when you were just a young lad? Brothers and sisters?**

I had three sisters and my father married again after the death of my mother and I have a half-brother, he did medicine. My sisters did nursing; one became a teacher. They are all married with children of course.

04:30 **And how did all of the siblings get along? What was the atmosphere like in the house in the early days?**

Well it was difficult because my father had the difficult problem of bringing another woman into the family as a mother and I think it was difficult for her. I remember many

05:00 years later just after my father had died, his book was being presented in St Kilda Road by the Governor and all of the rest of it. And as we walked out the door she said to me, "Bill if I had my time over again I would never have married a man with four children." Wasn't easy, the life situation wasn't easy. Also of course the fact that my father went straight off to the war and left her to look after four members of the

05:30 family including her little son. So it wasn't a very easy time. The general atmosphere in the family was fifty-fifty, my eldest sister younger than me, we had a greater problem than the younger ones because we had known our mother, that's about all I can say.

06:00 **During your years at Scotch I take it you were also in the cadets is that correct? Can you tell us a little bit about that?**

Well I told you I was in the junior cadets and the 'broomstick warriors'. The cadets played a very important role in Scotch College because Scotch had a very fine tradition in the First World War, particularly Sir John Monash was the

06:30 great hero, and we were never allowed to forget the things our forebears had done. So I enjoyed that corps, we used to go down to Williamstown Range and all of that sort of thing; go into camp, I enjoyed it very much.

You talked about the broomsticks as your rifles, when

07:00 **did you first get your hands on the real thing?**

In the senior cadets. Used to have a .303 rifle, take it in the tram coming to school, it was nearly as big as me, the bloody .303. We were, it was good military training.

So what else did that initial training involve?

Every week we had a parade in uniform,

07:30 march up and down and I can't remember what else really we did. But it was every week and then we went to camp every year, played a very important role in our lives that's all.

Were there students that didn't take part?

Oh yes we were the minority, the majority didn't join the cadet corps, I don't know why. I think probably one

08:00 reason was that some of the boys' fathers hadn't been to war and some of them had. Most at that time, most of the Australian population had been to the war or somebody else close had been to the war, that's how important it was in the 1930s. So if your father had been in the war he tended to encourage his son to be in the cadet corps, that's how it happened.

So you had a pretty good sense of what was going on

08:30 **on the other side of the world?**

I did but most of my contemporaries didn't. One reason was that in distinction from today, very few Australians could go overseas because you had to go by ship and to go by ship was expensive. So only the people with a bit of money, it was five weeks to get over to England. When you think today,

09:00 you can go to Bali or travel anywhere you want.

Do you need to break?

No something going wrong with this, it is probably something here, but it is right now. No Australia was a completely different place, very isolated; we still had the White Australia Policy of course, but in the

- 30s, the aftermath of the tragedy of
- 09:30 the First World War, sixty thousand dead in a population of four million was terrible. Everyone had known or had lost someone killed, every family had. Growing up in the 1930s, it wasn't strange to join the cadet corps. We never thought too much about what it was going to lead onto, but we
- 10:00 began to realise that war was around the corner.
- Do you remember when war was declared, when Menzies actually came on the radio and said that war was declared?**
- Menzies didn't. Chamberlain did. Chamberlain said we are at war with Germany, then Menzies came on and said, "Britain is at war therefore we are at war." We had no problem with it. We were a colony of Great Britain.
- 10:30 **And what was your take on that, you had seen the world did you feel that that it really was a matter of the mother country?**
- Well I just felt we have to be at war, British war and it was natural for us to say, "Well that's it, we're part of it," we always had been, and no question that we thought much about it.
- 11:00 It was a shocking sort of feeling, because my worry I thought Dad might have to go, I didn't really think much about me having to go and then eventually it dawned on us that our lives were going to change totally.
- So you would have been sixteen?**
- I would be,
- 11:30 1939 I would have been sixteen yes.
- So what were the initial repercussions of that, your father had been in the First World War was he?**
- Well one thing that was strange was that the time the Battle of Britain was going on, at Scotch in class, somebody would walk in the door and say, "They have shot down three hundred Nazis." This was in our mind all of the time, we were telling, we didn't know
- 12:00 that we were going to lose the war which we nearly did. We were told that the RAF [Royal Air Force] had shot down so many, in was our minds all of the time.
- So when did you put your name down for air force?**
- Oh not until, I was told I had to go to Auburn College and do medicine and it was at that time I knew that I couldn't
- 12:30 do medicine, no maths and no physics and all of the rest of it. And I made my mind up, if my father had been to the First War and the Second War, I will have to go to it. I will have to go to war it is my duty to do it. Never thought of anything else and I wanted to be a pilot.
- 13:00 **So you were too young to, you were able to enlist but there would be a waiting period?**
- As soon as I was eighteen I went along and I was selected and we were put on what was called the aircrew reserve. We had a little badge because you had to wait probably six months or longer before it was my turn to come into the system. And then I was sent down to the
- 13:30 South Yarra post office, had to go down there once a week and do Morse Code because in those days the postmaster knew Morse Code and so we had to do that, but we were still waiting but we had a badge on because if you got on the train and people would say, "Why haven't you joined up?" But we had a little air force badge, but that never happened.
- Did you see any of that white feather stuff?**
- Not really.
- 14:00 **So how realistic was your view of what you were heading into, I mean you heard all of those stories, I mean we have spoken to a lot of people who were really wide-eyed and were going to see the world?**
- No my feeling was that I am going to join the air force and I will be sent to Canada and from Canada I will be sent to England. We never ever thought what did happen was going to happen, that we were going to be shot down over Germany.
- 14:30 Only two out of ten came back, but we didn't seem to think of that. I often have wondered really since, if I had finished up a pilot of a Lancaster [bomber aircraft], I think to myself I wonder really could I have coped, because a lot of people didn't cope but I suppose we would have coped,
- 15:00 didn't think about it.

Can you tell us a little bit about the specifics of the training during that six months you had with the air force?

Yes it was very much like going to the university. First of all we would have a section and we would march, Guards standard of discipline. We would march from one lecture room to another lecture room and each of us

15:30 were given a time, "You're in charge today." So I would have to be responsible, "Left, right." And we were really spot on. When I joined the army, it was never as spot on as we were in aircrew, and this business of having to take charge each time we walked around and having to act as corporal or sergeant was quite strange, and when I was discharged I

16:00 managed to see that my recommendation, my record read, and I am not skiting [boasting] now, 'Very keen, very capable and a good leader.' And the only way they could find out I was a good leader was that I was good at, "Left, right." And that's what they trained us in, discipline. But most of the work was sitting in doing mathematics. We had schoolmasters, squadron leaders and whatnot lecturing us and we had a very good course

16:30 in maths and aircraft recognition, all of those things. It was very good training.

So were you able to, did you get up in the air any flying?

No this is when I was still at ITS and I was waiting to go to EFTS, elementary flying [training] school. I didn't get there, I was discharged not to be a flier, broke my heart.

17:00 We were at ITS about eight or nine months there because we were waiting in what they called the pool. Waiting to, so the fellows ahead of us could get to Canada to do the training.

So how long was it once you were told?

Oh probably a month.

17:30 **That must have been a pretty rough time?**

I was very distressed indeed, couldn't do anything about it, that was it. When I got out, I had been recommended by the professor of French; he said, "If you ever need help let me know." And I did apply to the ABC [Australian Broadcasting Corporation], I have forgotten his name now, they didn't want anybody so they said, "Join the army." And I did and I never regretted it.

18:00 **So you have told us a little bit about that and the 4th Armoured Regiment?**

The 4th Armoured Brigade.

The 4th Armoured Brigade, sorry, and you have told us that you were training in tanks; you were trained as a wireless operator/loader if I am right?

That's right.

Again can we get some more specifics on that, when you first got into a tank what was the experience like?

Again it was

18:30 hard to believe really because I had read about the tanks which were something very new in the First World War and I found it a bit strange to think I am really in these tanks. And I was being trained to be a radio operator and I enjoyed it very much. "Able, baker, charlie, dog, easy, foxhound [phonetic alphabet]," how, "Report my signals, over,"

19:00 and he: "Your strength's five [radio voice procedure]." It was quite interesting really.

That was, what did that all mean what you just said?

Well A B C: 'able, baker, charlie, dog, easy, foxhound', it's not, they have all changed now. "Act, bed, charlie, dog" used to be in the First War.

19:30 "Able, baker, charlie, dog, easy, foxhound," when you were talking into the radio you didn't say A B C, you said, "Able, baker, charlie, dog, easy, foxhound." And netting into the headquarters and you would "Repeat my signals, over," and they would repeat what you said to confirm that you had sent the signal, you see. I will tell you one strange thing that happened there at Puckapunyal. We used to get sent out sometimes on trips for the whole afternoon,

20:00 we would be told we were going to go away for three hours and my job was to see where we were and report back to headquarters where we were. But what we used to do was, we used to go out in a big truck, we would take our radio in the truck and we would find a little quiet pub, and we would take the radio and put it on the bar. "Report your - " And we would work out where we should be

20:30 and we would be there the whole afternoon. It was quite fun if we weren't found out. Occasionally some of the boys got a bit too much grog [alcohol] onboard, I remember coming back one day and one of the

fellows had a bottle under his arm and the officer said, "What's that you have got there, soldier?" He said, "A

21:00 bottle of lemonade for my mate, sir." It was quite interesting work in the armoured fighting vehicles.

So you said earlier on that in the Methodist upbringing and at Scotch, drinking wasn't a big factor but now you're saying in the army grog played a bit of part?

Not very much really,

21:30 no I don't think so. You had a few beers if they were available, but we were training pretty hard and we didn't become alcoholics. But naturally enough I mean we were in the racecourse in Bendigo, we were in the 2nd Armoured Corps Training Regiment up there, we did know a place that would sell alcohol after hours if you knocked three times.

22:00 And we would go up there have half a dozen glasses of beer and climb over the fence and go to bed. No different to all young people of that age.

Now the complexion of the war changed of course when the Japanese got involved, did that happen when you were at Pucka or?

22:30 Now the Japanese War started in 1941, I was then at Puckapunyal. My father went to the war early '41, no the Japs came in before I joined that, before I even joined the air force because we couldn't get away in the air force we couldn't get to Canada because the Japs

23:00 had closed over. So the Japanese War came in early in the piece as far as I was concerned. That of course was a terrible shock. My father, we were told when he was over there for twelve months before Singapore fell, he came home for a week or two on leave and I walked around the garden with him and we were told that

23:30 there were Hurricane [fighter] aircraft were coming out there. And I said, "Well things don't look bad up there, Dad?" All he would say, "They're not too good, son." That's all. And of course he went back and three weeks later he was a POW. Singapore fell.

He had been there for a year before Singapore fell?

Yes he had been senior surgeon the 10th Australian Hospital.

24:00 Just before the fall he was to be appointed to consulting surgeon to the British Forces in Singapore, but then Pearl Harbour happened and he was evacuated as a specialist from Singapore to come home, but they were bombed out and arrived in Tembilahan in Sumatra. Lucky to get there,

24:30 because the boat they were on was sunk. And then they disobeyed orders and stayed in Sumatra and were captured by the Japanese and finished up on the Burma Railway. This was all, we didn't know what was happening back home.

So what was the very last you heard about your father?

We just heard nothing,

25:00 we didn't know whether he was alive or dead. It was an interesting thing, where did I first hear he was alive? I will tell you. When I was in the army in Finschhafen, just before the attack on Sattelberg the medical officer came up with the unit, we were only a squadron up there and the medical officer came up from Milne Bay. Did I tell you that? No I didn't. he came up to me

25:30 and said, "Oh, Trooper Coates." And I didn't know he knew who I was. He said, "My wife has sent me a letter up from the Melbourne Age [newspaper]," and he handed it to me and this is what it said, 'Lieutenant-Colonel A.E. Coates and somebody else MLA [Member of the Legislative Assembly] are known prisoners of war.'" And that was the first time I knew he was alive.

26:00 And I thought to myself then, he is a POW up there, I wonder what he would think of his eldest son sitting with the Japs a few hundred yards up the road. That's how I first found out he was a POW.

And at that stage how much did you and really Australia know of the treatment of POWs?

We knew nothing.

26:30 I don't think we knew anything really until it was over. We didn't; and then of course at that stage when it was over, he was in charge of a ten thousand bed hospital, Nakom Paton in Thailand. Weary Dunlop was second in command at that.

27:00 And Lady Mountbatten came down and saw them all, and that's when it came out the terrible things that had gone on at the Burma Railway and Changi and all of the rest of it.

We'll just go back to Pucka, you explained about the communications,

27:30 **what other duties did you have, you were a loader as well?**

Nothing really I was just purely radio. Nothing really, it was boring in a way, all we wanted was to get away to the war. And we were all trying to get to the armoured division in Western Australia. As I say I was lucky I didn't go there because nearly all of

28:00 them just stayed there for the whole war, I was one of the lucky few from Puckapunyal who got up into the 4th Armoured Brigade. I was very lucky, I was in C Squadron tanks and we were the squadron who saw most of what went on on the Huon Peninsula. We didn't do much else, it was just learning how to use a tank, use a radio and it was very interesting change for me

28:30 and I quite enjoyed it.

And how important was teamwork on the tanks?

Oh very much so, see you had a skipper, had a commander, a wireless operator/loader and a driver, the driver was down in front of you and the skipper was standing here like this. And you were very much a team.

29:00 **So when you trained up to Townsville and you had been training on the AC2 is that correct?**

2nd Armoured Corps Training Regiment at Puckapunyal was sent up to do the test on the AC2, that was at the School of Artillery at Holsworthy in New South Wales and we just went to Sydney and stayed two or three nights in Holsworthy, School of Artillery, but they didn't teach

29:30 me how to fuse a twenty-five pounder which was a bit of a nuisance. That was just an interesting little adventure for us really. There were two crews, one from the armoured fighting vehicle school in Puckapunyal, and one from the 2nd Armoured Corps Training Regiment. There was only six of us went up and did the official trial of the AC2.

So you told us earlier, you were basically told you were

30:00 **going overseas, were you given and specifics as to where you were going?**

No. We knew we would be going to New Guinea but we didn't know where we would be going, what part of New Guinea we would be going to. We were just put on to LST, landing ship tanks, and

30:30 suddenly found we were arriving at Milne Bay. I remember it was quite meaningful for me because I learnt so much at that stage about the Battle of the Coral Sea. And I thought to myself we are going across the Coral Sea now and I thought about where this great battle was that saved Australia.

And what was the mood and morale like

31:00 **in general as you headed off to New Guinea?**

Pretty good. We were terribly excited really to be going into a war zone; morale was very good indeed.

And how well prepared do you think you all were?

Well the thing is

31:30 I had only been with that unit just a short time. It was a very well trained unit the 1st Tank Battalion, we used to call 1 Aust Tank Battalion; and the 1st Tank Battalion was really the full name of the Royal New South Wales Lancers. And that badge I have got up there is the badge of the Royal New South Wales Lancers and it was supposed to be founded by Lord Carrington

32:00 back in the 19th century. A very proud unit based very much on Camden on the south coast of New South Wales. And the colonel was Colonel Glasgow, son of General Sir William Glasgow of the First World War, and my OC [officer commanding] was Major Sam Hordern of Hordern's, Sydney [furniture retail company], a

32:30 well known name. It is a very well trained pukka unit. But what happened to me was, the landing day was pretty grim actually, you want me to tell you? I remember we arrived there in the middle of the afternoon, we still had rifle and pack and all of this thing, a week before we had been in Brisbane. And we had to climb over, I remember climbing over the

33:00 ship, I wondered how the hell I would not fall over because we had to climb over and go down a rope thing onto a small boat to take us ashore. And when we got ashore it was a very nasty coral area, and I remember we all developed severe diarrhoea, dreadful diarrhoea. And we were told it was due to the water on the ship

33:30 or whatever it was, the fact was that we were not well. And of course we were not acclimatised for a hot climate and we were all dehydrated and there was nothing for us to drink or anything like that. So our first impression of New Guinea wasn't too good. And during the evening we were told that

34:00 we had to unload some trucks that were coming off the Westralia. And I remember very well thirsty as all blazes getting on a truck and we were told, "This is the officers' mess stuff coming through." And there were boxes of tins of pineapple, and I remember getting a tin of pineapple and doing this with my bayonet and it was delicious. That was what we faced when we first got there.

- 34:30 The next day we were told we had to march to our camp. Well I have never - it was one of the most exhausting trips I have ever had in my life, hot humid, we were not acclimatised to it and carrying a rifle. What on earth for, God knows, marching along and an officer came along in a jeep and he took my rifle and carried my pack and rifle; he didn't carry me though. And so I marched on like this and when we got to the campsite
- 35:00 we had to put up our tents. No camp. So we had to put up tent flies because the whole time I was in New Guinea I never saw a full tent, the tent fly, the upper part, that's what we had. And when we put up our tent flies, we could smell an awful smell and we suddenly realised that Japanese killed had been buried only about six inches to a foot off the
- 35:30 cover, it wasn't very pleasant, but that's how we arrived in Milne Bay.

And so you had only been with the unit a short time?

We were in the 2/6th Armoured Regiment one minute and then we were on a troop train on the 1st Tank Battalion.

- 36:00 I was paraded before Major Hordern at that stage and he said, "I see Trooper Coates that you are interested in intelligence work." "Yes sir." "Have you had any training?" "No sir." "Well from now on, you're understudy to the intelligence corporal and that's your job from now on." So the rest of the time I was with the tank battalion, I was in the intelligence section.
- 36:30 **So was that in Brisbane or was that in Milne Bay that you were told you would be?**

In Milne Bay. Because we just didn't know anybody in the unit because we were one minute 2/6th and next minute 1st Tank and we didn't know anybody in that until we arrived in Milne Bay you see.

It must have been a very challenging experience for you, being transferred to that unit and the weather?

- 37:00 Oh very much so and I had been trained as a wireless operator and from then on in, I had nothing to do with armoured vehicles actually, I was in intelligence. And by the time, we spent about a month or two in Milne Bay before we moved on to the more important things. But as soon as I was put into intelligence section, I had to go and start to study intelligence work. The intelligence corporal knew more about it and I had to study
- 37:30 situation maps and sit reps [situation reports] and all of these things and learn really what intelligence work involved so it was another career for me really and I enjoyed it very much. But it wasn't until we left Milne Bay that my army career became interesting.

Well it is interesting to me that you were thrown into intelligence and it sounds as though you had a very short time to get up to speed, can you just explain a little more detail those

- 38:00 **things you were learning about intelligence?**

Well for example, I was set a problem to discuss the difficulty, intelligence problems that would be involved in the capture of the Vunikanu Airstrip in New Britain and I would have to go through and try to learn what troops were going, what

- 38:30 was happening, totally new world. And I would have to try and find out what was around the Vunocarna strip and all of the rest of it. It was all theoretical because the Japanese had Vunocarna airstrip, but that is what I had to try and learn in my new path of army life. Interesting, later on, for example, I had
- 39:00 to study the, it was thought that we may be going into the attack on Lae. I had to find out all about Lae, where the river was and where this was. Even today I can remember that Jennings, Jensions, Whittakers were the name of three plantations of the side of, I always felt that I knew more about Lae than I did about Melbourne.
- 39:30 Learning all of the things that would be important if we moved in there as a unit you see? In an attack, that's what intelligence work was.

So why do you think you were handpicked for that?

Well because I put when I first joined the army in Camp Pell here in Melbourne, "Why do you want to join?" "Because my old man had been in intelligence." And they said, "We don't need any of those son, we'll send you into armoured."

- 40:00 So when Sam Hordern, Major Hordern must have known we were going to be on our own at some stage. We didn't know. The unit really didn't know that we would be right away from the base so that intelligence officers were all separate. We were going away, we did go away as C Squadron and the only intelligence person in C Squadron was the intelligence corporal and I was made understudy to the intelligence corporal.
- 40:30 In effect what happened eventually was that he took on the job as intelligence officer and I was really intelligence sergeant because we didn't have any of those, they were all back in Milne Bay so it became a very interesting study for me. Maybe he knew I had done a year of medicine, failed of course I don't

know. He wanted somebody else because he must have known that we would be away somewhere
41:00 and he wanted two people not one.

How many in the squadron how big was the, okay.

41:12 **End of tape**

Tape 3

00:30 It's something that is probably not understood and not known is things that to me are just obvious but if you weren't there you would have no idea what we did experience in Milne Bay, what Milne Bay was like. One of the things that staggered me after I left New Guinea when it was all over, I never saw a house. I never saw a

01:00 thing relating to anywhere, it was jungle. There were no shops or nothing you could call a town, I never saw anything like that.

So describe for me

Are you taping this now?

Well describe for me what was there when you arrived?

Well when we arrived on the coral beach area and we had

01:30 diarrhoea and it was very miserable, we were just marched, I described that, flat country, no buildings, no shops, nothing to indicate we were in a town for example. We lived on bully beef and biscuits and there was very little in the way of plant life. We were stuck in a certain small area. We had been told then that the Battle of Coral Sea

02:00 had taken place some twelve months before. We didn't know at the time that it was a very courageous attack on behalf of, and one of the first defeats the Japanese had had when the Australians went into Milne Bay. But Milne Bay is a closed book to me, I have no real recollection what it was like, I never saw any buildings, never

02:30 saw any civilians and never saw anybody else from any other unit. It was just a staging place, looking back there was probably a town of Milne Bay but nowhere near we landed. So Milne Bay is a closed book to me. Just that we got over the ship's side, went ashore and finished up in a bit of a camp that was not really a camp in the true sense of the word. I have got very little recollection of Milne Bay.

03:00 **Were there any other forces there?**

We didn't see them; we had no contact with them. There must have been other units there at the time. But in New Guinea very rarely did you have a concentration of troops because in jungle warfare there was a tendency for small groups to be working, not in contact with each other. So not

03:30 until the attack on Lae when the 7th Division went into Lae and the 9th Division went into Finschhafen. Places like Milne Bay were just a staging point I suppose. I have got very little recollection of New Guinea until I got north.

So tell me now about when you got your orders to leave Milne Bay and

04:00 **where you were going after Milne Bay?**

Well I would say that it turned out that my squadron, C Squadron, see there are three squadrons: A Squadron, B Squadron, C Squadron. C Squadron had been selected to go up to part of New Guinea that was going to be attacked by the Allied forces to kick the Japanese out. We didn't know at the

04:30 time what this was going to mean. But looking back on it we were fortunate, the squadron, the others they just stayed in Milne Bay. They stayed there indefinitely; they replaced C Squadron months later up north. So what happened was one day we personnel from C Squadron were told we had to get onto a landing ship tank, an LST, and we were told that we would be going somewhere, but we didn't know where we were going.

05:00 We just got on the LST and it was a bit exciting, it was a bit of a change anyway. I remember standing in the bow of this thing and talking to an American sub-lieutenant, the equivalent to a midshipman on this American ship. And I remember him telling me terrible things that do with their American counterparts, how they treated them badly,

05:30 it was just interesting to meet somebody of another part of the world. What happened then was we took, I think we probably travelled a day and a night and suddenly found out that we were being landed at what we found to be Morobe. M O R O B E. This is where I had to do a lot of

- 06:00 intelligence work because it became obvious that we were going to be part of an attack on Lae. The area of Lae, so that's when I had to learn Jenson's, Whittaker's and all of this sort of thing. So we landed in an empty area, nothing in the way of shops, in villages, no buildings of any kind. We landed at Morobe.
- 06:30 We settled into a bit of a camp and I kept on my work trying to learn about Lae and then when we had photograph indication, about two or three hours after we got ashore at Lae we heard a bang, bang, bang, air raid warning. And we didn't take any notice because that had happened every day down at Milne Bay and nothing had ever happened.
- 07:00 Suddenly Japanese aircraft came over, and I knew what the Japanese aircraft was because when I was air force I had learnt aircraft recognition you see? And I knew exactly, that's a Nakagima knacker. And the reason I knew it was a Nagakima knacker was the aircraft had two fixed wings. And they looked like testicles and when we
- 07:30 were training we used to say, "That's a Nagakima knacker!" And I remember seeing this and I saw the pilot and all of the other fellows were standing around like this and I said, "That's a Jap." And one of the others said, "It's on fire!" and I don't know why it was, I said, "I am sure that's machine guns." And I am sure they were they were machine gunning us.
- 08:00 So about three came and swept over us. This was our first introduction to fire and it was a shock because this was so unexpected. And I lay down on the ground between coconut palms and this is what I said earlier, they were coming up behind me and I thought, "God, if they hit me it will go right up my arse." Anyway
- 08:30 there were no casualties, the Japs came through about three times at tree top level, but to us it was our first introduction to war, which I have never forgotten. And then a week or two later, it was just a small area you see, no other personnel there except C Squadron, no other units or anything like that. No buildings or anything to suggest it was a town or anything like that.
- 09:00 And then I was ordered to go with two other fellows and do a reconnaissance south of our unit because they were a bit worried that the Japanese might have some hidden observers down in this area, that were observing and sending messages back as to what was going on in Morobe and Lae. So three of us
- 09:30 had to go through jungle and it was wet and strange really to be in the jungle like that. And eventually by mid afternoon we were very thirsty. We had something we could boil, tea. So we would dig holes and it was near the sea and it was in a swamp really and we could get up some black-looking water that we could make into tea and we would drink that. And we would look around and we were very much aware
- 10:00 that the Japanese might have sniper type people there, nothing happened. But in the evening we decided we would go onto a beach and there was a cliff going down there when we found either end you could get onto a nice beach. What we didn't know of course was that when the tide came in we couldn't get out, you couldn't climb up the cliff and you couldn't get out either end. It didn't matter it was fun really,
- 10:30 and I remember though that still a bit worried that there might be Japs around the place. When nighttime came ordinarily we would have all went to sleep but we decided that one of us had better stand guard. So one of us stood guard all night, nothing happened of course, but I do remember that I had been issued with an Owen Gun [light sub-machine gun], I had never fired one, we had never used Owen Guns at home. But I did fire my gun and I did this and suddenly the barrel blew up like
- 11:00 that. And looking back on it I was damn lucky that the barrel didn't blow back onto me. Anyway that was the end of the Owen gun and we got back the next day and we did our recce [reconnaissance], nothing much to report so.

Okay I just want to locate this? You landed at Morobe, which is south of Lae?

Yes.

So the patrol you have just told us about is at Morobe?

- 11:30 South of Morobe. There was a swampy jungle, I don't really know why we were sent but we were sent. And the story was that there might have been some Japanese observers there, what we were going to do if we found them I don't know, but it was a bit of a change, quite fun really.

12:00 **And how many of you were in the group that went on the patrol?**

Three of us.

So why did you end up firing the Owen Gun?

Just for fun I had never had an opportunity to fire one. I thought I would pick it up and go 'brpp'; see what it is like to fire an Owen Gun you see? Instead one got stuck in the barrel suddenly bulged up. I realised of course it is something that can happen in an Owen Gun and I was very lucky it didn't

- 12:30 blow back like this into me. I didn't fire the Owen Gun anymore. We couldn't use it anymore.

So what guns had you been trained to use?

I was trained first of all on a .303 rifle, I was trained in thirty-five millimetre tanks, seventy-five millimetre tanks, fifty calibre Browning,

13:00 What else? Smith and Wesson revolver. I never had at that stage, not at that stage did I have an Owen Gun. But I was very well trained. When I was in the armoured business, I knew a little bit about most guns and later on in my career the fact that I had been involved with Brownings, later on in my career I had a lot of experience with Brownings

13:30 stripping them and putting them back together again. Fifty calibre.

Do you mind me just taking you back? Back to Pucka; well I am just curious about the AC2 Australian tanks, can you tell us a bit about those?

At that stage in the war, it was decided that they would build an Australian tank.

14:00 Because all of the other tanks were American tanks and in 1st Tank Battalion I went to, there were Matilda tanks, see? These were a great difference to Matildas and the AC2 tanks were being made by BHP [Broken Hill Proprietary Limited], it was a beautiful tank actually, a smooth looking tank. It had a twenty-five pounder in the turret. I don't think they had a

14:30 coaxially-mounted machine gun on it, not when I was testing it. because they came out with AC3 after that, it was AC2 I was testing with. Just a short-barrelled twenty-five pounder, it never went into production, the war was too much over by the time it. It never went into production it never went into action, the AC2, but later when I have been back

15:00 to Puckapunyal I have seen one of the AC2 or AC3 down there on display. When I was sent up on trials it was quite a new piece of armament.

So was it similar to the Matilda or?

Well the thing about the 1st Tank Battalion was that the 1st Tank Battalion had Matilda tanks, the only unit in Australia that had Matilda tanks so that when it eventually was

15:30 used in the attack of Sattelberg it was the first time that Matilda tanks had ever been used, tanks had ever been used in jungle warfare. My first tank, the 2/6th Armoured Regiment at Buna Sanananda they had Stuart tanks, smaller tanks than the average tanks. Matilda tanks were quite different, they came in from the Middle East, they only had a two pounder and a three-inch

16:00 Howitzer and a coaxially-mounted Besa. So that it was a different type of armoured fighting than had ever happened before in Australia.

So what tanks went with you to New Guinea; did you take tanks with you on the ship?

Oh yes we went by ship. From Townsville for example, all of our tanks were put on the Westralia and they were all taken off the Westralia. All,

16:30 when we went up so we had the Matildas on board, and they went up to Milne Bay and they went up when we went up to Morobe and then later when we all went up to Finschhafen, the tanks went with us all of the time.

And how many tanks were there?

Oh about three tanks in a unit and twelve, I can't remember to be quite honest in a squadron, maybe twelve fifteen that's about all.

17:00 **Okay so going back to Morobe how long did you spend at Morobe?**

Well when we got to Morobe we found that we were on two hours notice embarkation. That is that the army had decided somewhere in Moresby or somewhere or other that we

17:30 may be involved in the landing in Lae, we were on two hour embarkation so we had to be ready at any time to move. After we had been there, it would have been in September or October 43, suddenly a Landing Ship Tank arrived at Morobe. And the unit had no idea it was going to arrive. I have read all

18:00 of this in our unit history, we weren't given any notice in advance. We knew we were on two hour embarkation, it could happen at any time and suddenly one morning an LST comes in, we had to go on board this LST and we had no idea where we were going or what was happening. So we all got back, and having been brought up on an LST we had to go on another LST, which we

18:30 did. An American LST, and in the meantime we knew that there was to be no landing at Lae because the 7th Division had landed at Lae and the Japanese had walked out of Lae without a major fight and so the Japanese forces were concentrated higher up which was Finschhafen.

19:00 So suddenly we found ourselves on an LST going north. We didn't know where we were going, the OC Major Hordern may have had some rough idea of where we were going, but they had no idea what we

were going to find as far as landing was concerned, no idea what sort of beach we were going onto. It was all strange but, when we started going up on the LST, we

- 19:30 got a signal, "All Australian troops topside." And we all go onto the deck. And then there is a message, "This is your captain speaking. The last information we have about where we're landing that the infantry had a perimeter of two hundred yards, you must be prepared to land under fire." I was
- 20:00 thinking to myself, "My God, it is another Gallipoli." It was unbelievable, the first we heard. And then a little bit later we heard, they announced that they had a submarine alert, it was dark by then. By this time we were approaching Langemak Bay where we were landing and there was no communication between the tanks
- 20:30 down below and the bridge on top, so several of us had to go down and somebody would tell me, "Start engines." And I would tell someone else, "Start engines." And somebody else et cetera. I wasn't very impressed with the situation because I thought, "If we get torpedoed I don't like being down in the bottom of the ship." So I was asked if I would volunteer to go up with the
- 21:00 sergeant with the Bren gun on deck. I said, "Yes sir." So there we are, a sergeant and me with a Bren gun, what on earth a Bren gun could do to a submarine, I know not. But anyway I felt a lot happier up there, at least I could swim. And then about eleven o'clock at night we slid up against a beach, which later we knew to be Langemak Bay.
- 21:30 And all that we knew was that around the harbour Langemak Bay there was heavy bombing going on, Japanese bombing going on. But we were totally blacked out, you couldn't show a light and we started unloading. The crew found that we were then told that the infantry could not send us an unloading party; they were too busy fighting
- 22:00 the Japanese. So those of us who weren't in tanks like me and ten or fifteen other fellows. We had to start unloading. And I found myself with a sergeant whom I had never met, because I didn't know this unit, and it was a sergeant called Karagheusian. Sergeant Karagheusian turned out to be the senior lecturer in French from the Melbourne University
- 22:30 and later on I found out after I met him after the war he was a consul for Paraguay or something like that. Well, Cara and I had to bundle diesel over the side of the boat and jump in and push them onto the beach, and I read in the unit history later that they were bombing like mad in Langemak Bay.
- 23:00 I was too busy with Karagheusian and people like that, too busy to know what the hell was going on. Later found out that they had great difficulty unloading the tanks because it was a coral beach and everything was difficult. And apparently Major Hordern was having great trouble, he was down in the front there, the captain of the LST wanted to pull out because he was frightened of the bombing and Major Hordern had to as best he could get him to wait. They got all of the tanks out,
- 23:30 all of our hard rations they didn't get off. Karagheusian and a few people like me did this business of trying to get what we could over the side. Just before dawn suddenly the ship's engine started and down the front of course there is a big ramp, we saw the ramp going up like this. And what happened later was that the ship's captain had decided that before dawn he was
- 24:00 getting out because he was worried he was going to be bombed out. And what happened was, and it is written in the histories, a few of us like me, the ramp was coming up, we had to jump off the ramp before it got up like this. I suppose I jumped six or eight feet into the water and we got off and then the LST disappeared. And somehow I got through the water and got onto the beach and I remember lying
- 24:30 on the beach and I thought to myself if the whole six-foot high Japanese Imperial Guard came down onto this beach there is nothing I can do about it. It was a strange experience. And the following morning, Major Hordern told me he wanted me to go with him in a jeep, and another officer and do a small reconnaissance;
- 25:00 we had no rations or anything like that. And Major Hordern and I and the officer we drove around a little distance from where we had landed and we came across a little Japanese camp. We got out and had a look at it and the fires were still warm which indicated quite clearly that when we had landed the night before it had been quite true, they
- 25:30 were holding a perimeter of two hundred yards. So that was my introduction to real war I suppose. Because we found then that most of our rations were still on the LST and we were allowed one tin of bully beef and one packet of biscuits per two men per day. So we had bugger all. And we had no tents or camp or anything like that.
- 26:00 But as a few days went by, we were moved elsewhere in Langemak Bay and we finished up, the American Seabees [US Army engineer] construction battalion people had put in a bit of a camp; and the officers in my unit found that the Japanese were taking too much interest from the air in those and we were moved again.
- 26:30 We weren't actually bombed, I can't remember any bombs being dropped on us at that stage but they moved us elsewhere. But at that time the 9th Division had been involved and the 26th Brigade

particularly had been involved in landing at Scarlet Beach and there had been a lot of fighting going on and the Japanese

27:00 were up on a road from Finschhafen to Sattelberg. And they had cut off some of the division up on that track and things were a bit willing for a while. We were just waiting of course at Langemak bay and then later we were moved over towards Finschhafen in preparation for the main attack, which was to take place sixty years ago today.

So you were waiting there, were you aware of what you were waiting for?

27:30 **Were you aware of the strategy? I am particularly interested about you as an intelligence officer?**

Oh yes we knew that we were going to be involved in the attack on Sattelberg, we were well aware of that. But it was hard enough really in that area to get enough

28:00 to eat. And we couldn't have a tent to sleep in, we used to hollow a bit of a hollow in the ground we used to call them a 'duva', and we would, you usually carried a gas mask and I found a bit of rubber about the size of that mat and I used to carry that with me and at night I would lay in the duva and if it rained I would put this over my head, that's about all of the cover we had. And also we found there that

28:30 the Japanese used to come over usually ten o'clock at night, aircraft would come over from New Britain and come over like this. Sometimes I had a bit of a tin I could sit on, you would get wet up to your knees at ten o'clock at night they would be going on to drop bombs on Lae and places like that. And at two o'clock in the morning they would come back again and there would be an

29:00 air raid warning. Strange sort of experience. When we got into, we got, I was still involved in some of the I [intelligence] work that was going on. We were really waiting to get organised into what eventually turned out to be an attack. At one stage we were sent into a flat area,

29:30 and about three or four hundred yards behind us there were three regiments of twenty-five pounders and an eighty-eight millimetre gun and we found out later there was a destroyer on the beach. And they were all firing at Sattelberg which was a high mountain area some kilometres above, and so they

30:00 were softening up Sattelberg. It was ghastly to be quite honest because it went on all day and all night. And the noise of the shells, particularly short barrelled twenty-five pounders which go bang! Not bong. And we had a pretty hard time there, and sometimes some of the shells would drop short, so not a very pleasant experience, but we didn't do anything else really. And under the sound of the shells, our tanks went up the track and got settled

30:30 in a place called Jevivinang, half way between Finschhafen and Sattelberg. They took advantage of the noise to stop the Japanese knowing we had armoured fighting vehicles. But not long before the thing happened, I think I mentioned I hadn't heard that my father was a prisoner of war and a medical officer came up and told me that he had had a message,

31:00 that his wife had sent up that Lieutenant-Colonel Coates and someone else were known prisoners of war. That was my first knowledge that he was still alive. And also around about that time, I don't know whether I mentioned whether David Monash Bennett had been with me in cadet camp and we both said, "The Schlieffen Plan." And I had to go up on the track one day by myself and to my amazement,

31:30 David Monash said, "Bill Coates." He was in an infantry battalion. So it was all rather a strange situation. But on the 16th of November, that's sixty years ago yesterday, I am talking now, I went up with him, with the medical officer in his jeep. And we were situated not far from the Japs with our

32:00 armoured fighting vehicles and that night we could even hear the Japanese, we could hear them chopping trees, and doing something like that; and I had a rifle of all things, I didn't have an Owen Gun but lying in the duva that night I put a bullet up my .303 and I

32:30 had a terrible feeling that the Japs must have known., they did know we were there we found out afterwards. And I thought they might come down early and give us a bit of a hurry up. It wasn't a pleasant evening. But in the morning, the attack was to start at 0700 [hours]. So at 0630, Major Hordern came up to me and he said, "I want you to go back now yourself to Finschhafen and be prepared to organise

33:00 the I [intelligence] work for another attack up the Wareo Road." So I then had to start wandering back again myself down that damned track and then I started to hear the dit, dit, dit of the tanks going into action for the first time, the first time the Matilda tanks had gone into action in jungle warfare. I was very frightened at that stage because I still thought the Japanese must have people behind us. So I would

33:30 walk down and wait for a sniper and then run like mad. And then carry on past Jevivinang on the way to Finsch and I just sort of sitting like this, I had nothing to eat or drink of course and suddenly I heard a voice, "Would you like a cuppa mate?" There was an infantry bloke down there, one of the nicest sounds I had ever heard in my life. I got back to Finsch

34:00 and that was the end of the fighting part. That lasted a little while and then it was all over and the unit

started to attack the north of Finschhafen, a part called Fortification Point. And we were attached to a different unit, we were attached to the 8th Division under Brigadier Cremor and most of my work came to an end because the unit was then.

34:30 **We need to cover that battle as well, I am curious about what your work was, when you got to Morobe and you went on the reconnaissance patrol and you knew that this battle was being planned for Finschhafen or Sattelberg, what was the work you were doing in intelligence?**

35:00 Well we were communicating what the officers wanted to do. For example I remember on one occasion I was ordered just as a trooper, I was ordered to go to brigade conference. Major Hordern needed to tell the senior officers of the brigade what he wanted, what to do et cetera, I was the one that had to go to brigade conference, even with my rank. That's the sort of thing that my job in intelligence was.

35:30 **Can you tell me what happened at brigade conference?**

Well first of all the guard said, "What the hell are you doing here mate?" and I said, "I represent Major Hordern." And I went in and sat there with officers of various ranks, I was representing C Squadron tanks and that was it. I can't remember what the order might have been, we need more of this or that. But my job

36:00 something like a secretary for the unit commander, that's about it.

So was brigade conference about planning?

Well planning, yes certainly. Brigade conference there would be representatives from every unit in the brigade had to come in and say what they were doing, what the present situation is, have they got enough food? Have they got enough? Brigade conference was in charge of the whole brigade.

36:30 So the brigade conference was called to get the whole thing together.

And how frequently did they have them?

Oh brigade conference might be held once a week. No more.

So just going back to the captain of the LST leaving before dawn at Morobe?

No that was at Langemak Bay.

37:00 **Sorry, Langemak Bay and you being left without provisions, what were you left without?**

Well most of our food was left without. A lot of our, for example I remember officers' small arms ammunition there was none, that was a very minor matter. But they got the tanks off and they got off enough ammunition for the tanks which was the main ammunition for the unit anyway. But they didn't get off

37:30 the food and things like that. We were left with very little food.

And ammunition for personal weapons?

Well we didn't have personal weapons.

So what ammunition didn't you get?

Well I think most of the ammunition they needed for the tanks.

But you said there was some they didn't get off?

38:00 See there was, I remember one small thing was they didn't get off the ammunition for the small arms for the officers. See I had a .303 at that stage, I can't remember whether I had ammunition for that or not really. The main thing when we left was that we got off the fuel for the armoured fighting vehicles and we got off the armoured fighting vehicles themselves and ammunition, but stuff like food we didn't get that off.

38:30 **I am just imagining that situation where you are genuinely under threat of attack, be it small attack or big attack things like having enough ammunition would be really critical?**

Oh yes certainly.

And pretty unnerving not having?

Well by the same token, we were not an infantry battalion who was always wandering around with Bren guns and things that you normally had in an infantry battalion.

39:00 As a tank battalion, we didn't have them things anyway. We weren't in a position if there was an attack by Japanese troops, well we couldn't do anything about it. We were not like an infantry battalion, we were a tank battalion and that was about it.

Another thing I wanted to ask, how did you get the tanks off the ship?

- 39:30 Well they have this ramp that comes up on the ship, they have to be just driven down the ramp onto the beach. Now what they found was that they didn't know beforehand what sort of situation they would go into, it was a bad situation in that one of the tanks, the second or third tank off got caught. And Major Hordern had to organise a rope around a tree that was a further distance away and
- 40:00 somehow or other they were able to get it ashore. But it was a very great problem to the tank crews and particularly to Major Hordern to get the tanks off at all but they did. They worked like hell and they were very lucky and they got all of the tanks off, the fact that they got the tanks off; it didn't matter too much about food and small arms ammunition but the main thing was taken off.
- This was, it was dark wasn't it? It was during the night?**
- 40:30 We couldn't use lights because there was bombing going on around the harbour, it was very black and not very nice circumstances. All I can say I can remember a hell of a lot but we were so preoccupied with getting the stuff off that you didn't worry about anything else.
- 41:00 **So the surface, you said it was a coral beach, it would have been difficult because it was dark to really estimate what the surface was?**
- Oh yes I didn't know I was on the LST, so what was happening that end of the boat didn't worry me because I had my problems with Karagheusian up this end. And like I said when you're in the army, you do what you're doing yourself and what's happening to somebody else, that's his business.
- 41:30 Reading through the records of the unit, they had a terrible time getting the tanks off and the other thing that Major Hordern was doing this at the same time that there was bombing going on in the harbour all night. As I say I don't remember much about the bombing because I was too preoccupied with what I had to do and that's the way it was. It was a bit of a mucked-up landing. The army knows that.
- 42:00 It was a bit of a mucked-up landing but
- 42:02 End of tape

Tape 4

- 00:30 **Okay we're recording again.**
- In the food business we were still on half rations for some time. But we were told we were moving away, we went away from the beach area of Finschhafen and we were given strict orders that we were not to touch any Japanese food. Because all around the place, you would find dumps of Japanese tinned stuff and what not. And we were told not to eat it because the Japanese might have made holes
- 01:00 in it and we would get gastro-enteritis and die. One day Sergeant Karagheusian and I found some sort of Japanese food and we said, "Oh bugger this," and we opened it. And it was the most delicious fish stew. And we sat there and all of the fellows were standing around like this waiting for us to collapse. We thoroughly enjoyed it and nobody else complained about it. And the
- 01:30 the only experience I have got with food, that was November 17th when the attack on Sattelberg was, but it got into December, just before Christmas '43. This is several months after what we have been talking about. A mate of mine and I managed to hitch a ride on a jeep down into camp, Seabees construction battalion people had moved in by then and we had a big camp where we had come in originally. And we
- 02:00 And on Christmas Day my mate and I came down to the Seabee camp and we were told to stand in the queue and we stood in the queue and there was a major in front of me and a few other fellows, a captain behind, it didn't matter about rank and we went down and we were fed with a beautiful feed of turkey and cranberry sauce, ice-cream and a cigar. We thought, "Thank God for the Yanks."
- 02:30 I might say that reminds me also we were on the LST going up to Langemak Bay when they had announced that we may have to land under fire, again they took us down and they fed us a beautiful feed of roast turkey and the rest of it and I said to myself, "The condemned man ate a hearty meal." Those were the stories about food. The Yanks really lived.
- 03:00 **We have heard lots of stories about this landing at Langemak bay, you were saying at the end of the last tape that it wasn't really well prepared?**
- Well nobody really knew, we did find out that one of the officers, a lieutenant had at some previous stage been sent down to the infantry people involved and when we
- 03:30 pulled up at Langemak Bay, lieutenant so and so was there, and he came into the water a bit and climbed up the ramp and he was the one who was able to tell Major Hordern what was going on. So there was a liaison and that had been going on well before. But it turned out that the officer was able to

say to Sam Hordern, "Well sir, blah, blah." That was the first thing that Major Hordern knew about the whole thing.

04:00 But the fact was that the beach that was selected wasn't a very good beach to land tanks but then you have to put up with that in the country you're dealing with like New Guinea.

So you were under fire, they were firing on the bay area where you were landing, were there infantry there as well?

Oh the infantry had already gone in. Two or three kilometres ago was

04:30 really the heart of Finschhafen. So Langemak Bay and then you moved up further to Finschhafen and Finschhafen was where the main attack, where the 9th Division had landed at Scarlet Beach and pushed the Japanese out, the Japanese then were further up towards Sattelberg.

That was towards August?

Yes, well it would be September.

05:00 **And when was it you arrived there?**

We arrived there September October because the attack on Sattelberg was in the middle of November. So we must have arrived about October to Langemak bay. It was all disparate in a way in that you couldn't say there was a unit here and a unit there, that's what I was trying to say earlier in Milne Bay.

05:30 The units were there but in the circumstances of the jungle and New Guinea, units seemed to work in small groups rather than a whole battalion or like that. A battalion would be spread over quite a long area. In the fighting in New Guinea was very much, for example you

06:00 could be sitting here, we knew the Japanese had a machine gun called the Woodpecker because it was 'dut, dut, dut', like a woodpecker. And you would be somewhere just in Finschhafen or Langemak Bay or something like that and suddenly you would hear 'dut, dut, dut'. And you would know there was Japs but you would never see them, because even if you were half a mile away you were a hell of a long way, not like in desert warfare where you could see for miles,

06:30 we could never see more than a few feet. That's was the difference with the New Guinea campaign. Down in Finschhafen it was quite open but you never saw another unit. You weren't in contact with other units it was very much an isolated group.

So I am just trying to get a sense of the period of time, from the time you landed at Langemak Bay to

07:00 **Sattelberg, which was November?**

Well we would be moving, we would spend a week, fortnight in a certain area and then we move across over a river or something like that and finally finished up, well we finished in that area where they were blowing the top of Sattelberg, there had been an artillery group there but we were separate.

07:30 It wasn't until after the attack on Sattelberg when we had time really to move around, and that's when we got to Fortification Point, I saw more of New Guinea than I saw prior to then. For example at Christmas time we went down, the Seabees had then come in. Eventually of course, after the attack on Sattelberg, C Squadron was replaced by B

08:00 Squadron so we were taken out of action. And we were in a pretty open sort of area, and I remember a mate of mine and I got well away from camp headquarters and we put our fly up like that and we found a little native garden not far from us and we found some nice little things that they grow and we were quite isolated. We ate together and we were just two of us together and it was a strange sort of existence. And at a later stage

08:30 we found that the tanks were all laagered [encamped] in an area about a hundred yards diameter I can't remember what part of Finschhafen it was, but I can remember going down there one day because I didn't have mates in the tanks, I was sort of on my own. And I was there and where the tanks were and I was with three or four of my mates and we might have been playing cards or something like that.

09:00 Suddenly we heard an aircraft coming, this was two months after the fall of Sattelberg and the Japanese aircraft came closer and closer until suddenly we realised it was coming straight for us. And I got under a tank, and two or three mates and me got under a tank and suddenly there was a crash and

09:30 to date I can remember. The tanks went like this and clods of earth came down thump thump onto the Matilda and a chap next to me was I said, "Hey - " I can't remember his name now. And he said, "Wheew." I thought he had been hit. And he was in a state of shock.

10:00 Jack Eckersley, that's right. "Jack." And we got out looked out and there was a hole as big as that room. The plane had dropped three bombs, one two three across the two hundred yards and didn't hit anything. But the nearest one was about thirty feet from us; one of the biggest frights I have ever had in my life. I found out later there happened to be

- 10:30 a shed on that hundred yard perimeter and our engineers had been using it as a repair place and that's what the Japs were after, that was a funny experience. Jack Eckersley, Jack. And the funny thing about that was, we had climbed under a Matilda tank, years and years after I was in the military museum in London and they had a Matilda
- 11:00 tank in there, this is about three or four years ago and I went over and had a look and it was that high, and I thought how in the bloody hell could we have squeezed under it, but we did. Anyway that was about the last of, there were one or two other things that happened, that was the aftermath, we had been brought out of action and replaced by B Squadron.
- 11:30 Because you know I have another story about another unit.
- Go ahead.**
- Well I went on for a while and I found that there was no interesting work going on in the intelligence section and I was still not really part of the 1st Tank Battalion because they had been down in Camden in New South Wales and all of the rest of it. I got on very well with Major Hordern but I didn't know
- 12:00 any of the others. And one day a mate of mine, another mate from Melbourne, we had been at Pucka together, we went down to the beach area of Finschhafen. Lo and behold we saw there were beautiful boats there, twenty-five ton trawlers and whatever, and we found out it belonged to the 11th Water Transport Unit. And I had been in my boyhood, my grandfather
- 12:30 had a house down at Portarlington and I used to act as deckhand to a fisherman. So I checked up courage and I went up and I saluted Wally Wall, that's right, apparently it was the first time he had been saluted in two years. And asked whether it was possible for us to be, "What experience?" I said I had been a deckhand on Port Phillip Bay and to cut a long story short
- 13:00 we transferred over to 11th Water Transport Unit. Fortunately Major Hordern was away, he was over in Port Moresby or somewhere like that and I didn't see him until after the war. I met him in the Toorak Hotel when I was a student. But I thought a change will be good and we were transferred over to 11th Water Transport Unit. For the first few weeks I was put onto a barge which was running supplies
- 13:30 to various parts of that harbour which was a big area there, Finsch, Dreger Harbour and Langemak Bay. A little while later I was sent over to be deckhand on a twenty-five ton trawler, which was marvellous. It was a south coast trawler from New South Wales. And the job we had was 11th Water Transport was carrying
- 14:00 supplies up from Lae up to where the troops were, they were fifty or a hundred miles up at Saidor. We were the only communication they had, the only way of travelling, couldn't go up by road there were no roads. So we were the transport from Lae up to Saidor. So I found myself deckhand on AS25 she used to be known as the
- 14:30 Silver Fin back in New South Wales a well-known twenty-five ton trawler. AS25 was 'Australian ship 25' in the army. My skipper was a sergeant and he had been a fisherman down in southern New South Wales. There was a corporal engineer and I was a deckhand. We had three native boys on board, there was a cook boy
- 15:00 and two deck boys, I was in charge of the deck boys. The boat itself was twenty-five ton, quite big. And it had a big cabin on it. there was a steering area like a bridge, and behind that was a cabin and the cabin had an area where we could sit and eat and there were four bunks for us to sleep. So that a different life started
- 15:30 for me. What we would do is we would receive orders to go up north to Saidor or something like that. And my job was to order the deck boys to clean the deck and it was a terribly racist situation those days because I was told I had to say, "Rousim [clean] down deck, me kick you long arse."
- 16:00 Pretty terrible. The other thing was that the boat had Browning machine guns. Twin Brownings aft and Brownings up forward and I had of course done a lot of this, my experience was in Puckapunyal, I knew all about Browning machine guns. And I soon taught my deck boys to strip and clean the Brownings. And I had a deckchair and I used to sit up on top of the cabin and
- 16:30 watch the boys work. Of course we had no toilet on board, just had to get up over the edge of the boat. And we had a small boat after, pulling it, and if you were very embarrassed you could go into that. It was a peculiar sort of existence. We would go up the coast carrying small arms ammunition and food to the troops.
- 17:00 And the skipper, we would have to do two hours on four hours off on the bridge sort of thing. And when we got to a hole in the reef, we would go through the hole in the reef into a quiet area inside. In what do you call it? You go through the reef into a flat area [lagoon] and I then would get a couple of grenades
- 17:30 and get my deck boy to row me about two hundred yards from the boat and I would throw out the grenades and blow up the fish, up would come the fish from the bottom and the deck boy would get out and bring them over back into the dinghy and he would row me back and we would give them to the cook. And we would have a beautiful meal of fish after that. And the other thing we used to do, we would get down to Lae, terrible thing really,

- 18:00 we knew where the American stores were, and we also knew if there was an air raid the native guards were always rushed off to the slit trenches. So what we would do if there was an air raid I would get my boy to row me across and go to the American stores and get a carton of Lucky cigarettes or they had beautiful hard rations, K rations
- 18:30 they used to call them, chocolate and all sorts of things. And we would bring it onto our boat and put it up forward we used to call the lik lik [little] aft. And we had good food. It was a very funny life I tell you.

How did you get away with doing the raid?

Oh it wouldn't worry us, because there wouldn't be any aircraft coming, you see we knew there was not going to be any bombs dropped. Bit racist again see?

- 19:00 We were told the Negro guards piss off [run away], that was one of the small advantages of being on a lik lik boat i stap [small boat]. We used to carry troops up, some officers used to come back. And I remember one day a major started to climb up to sit in my deckchair and I said, "Excuse me sir, crew only."
- 19:30 It was a funny thing. Occasionally we would get a bit of a fright, planes would come down and buzz us. Most of them would be American, but every now and then we would worry that it was someone else's plane. But I thought to myself then really it was a great war; I had a marvellous time on the AS25.

Why were the Americans buzzing you? Were they strafing you?

- 20:00 They would have been having fun you see. A Lightning [American fighter] plane, "I am going to buzz this bugga down there you see?" Just phwoosh, just to come down and have a look and frighten you. I do remember looking up from the deck one day and seeing a dogfight between Zeroes [Japanese fighter aircraft] and Lightnings.
- 20:30 That was earlier I suppose, later on the Japanese were out of the picture really. I do remember something else, I forgot that before the attack on Sattelberg, Major Hordern came back one occasion from Port Moresby and said, "There have been reports of the maltreatment of Australian prisoners. So from now on if you are likely to be
- 21:00 involved in the risk of capture, you're to carry two grenades on your person. One is to throw on the Jap and the other is to pull on yourself." There had been stories that the Japanese, cannibalism was taking place. Probably this is just propaganda that we heard. But I may say at the same time there were some 9 Div [Division] infantry people coming back with troops saying,
- 21:30 "Our troops went on there sometimes into Japanese sick camps and brrrrp. Just shot the lot." So there was strange things going on that we never heard of.

So this is around Finschhafen and Sattelberg?

Yeah this is around Finschhafen.

You haven't really finished telling us about the battle of Sattelberg?

Well I wasn't involved because you see just, the troops attacked at

- 22:00 seven o'clock in the morning, I was ordered back to start preparing for another attack at Sattelberg, Wareo Road. So I can't tell you what was going on. One of my mates was wounded that morning in his tank. I wasn't involved in the armoured fighting vehicles because I was in intelligence, so I can't tell you any more than what I have told you there.

Did you have to do any particular intelligence work for that battle?

- 22:30 Oh the preparing of it was done but really the intelligence work then as far as I was concerned was this communication work. That's why I had to go to, my work was secretarial work from then on. Communicating, acting as a virtual secretary to the OC.

So this day that you were on the Wareo Road, what were your instructions to do?

- 23:00 Oh we just had to work out where it was, how far it was. The Wareo Road attack didn't happen because after the Finschhafen thing was over the Japanese retired, they were out of the picture so the Wareo Road thing didn't have to go on.

So was this about locating the road and conditions?

Oh locating the road

- 23:30 and have all of the information like how many Japanese were supposed to be there. The planning of the whole thing. As I say it didn't happen because the Japs walked out. And the next attack was going on at Saidor which is a hundred kilometres north.

So I mean you were on your own there, you didn't have any protection was that scary?

Where?

Well for example on this Wareo Road?

24:00 No I didn't leave, there was no Wareo Road, there was a potential attack. There may have to be an attack up the Wareo Road. There was no road of course, there was a track. It was a word to say a part of that area.

I guess what I am getting at was were you in situations because of the work you were required to do where you were vulnerable?

24:30 Not really because the Japanese were quite a long way away then. The time when we were worried about being close to the Japanese was prior to the attack on Sattelberg but after that we would still hear 'dut dut' in the distance but it was just a small group of Japanese. In one's mind there was always the thought that maybe somebody would turn up but by and large there was no real worry about that.

25:00 We would still worry about bombing and Jap aircraft at ten o'clock at night and two o'clock in the morning; we had to be prepared for that sort of thing all of the time. But as I say

25:30 the rest of the time in New Guinea I was 11th Water Transport. I was a transport person then.

Sounds like it was totally different?

It was completely different in that we were a small isolated three of us on a small twenty-five ton trawler. And we were away from all authority. Sometimes we would call into Lae. Lae was our main headquarters really but we

26:00 were acting as an individual ship. And that's all. We were just on our own. And I never saw Major Wall again until we were leaving some months later to come home on leave. We were a group of ourselves and it was fun really. And I used to think to myself,

26:30 I can't imagine a more beautiful place to be living and working as I was on a twenty-five ton trawler. Lovely climate away from all of the dirt and the filth of New Guinea itself, it was wonderful. As I say, we used to carry an odd Jap prisoner. Sometimes a couple of Japanese prisoners we used to have to bring back

27:00 and we used to always put them in the dinghy out the back. They were always in a terrible state of starvation, sores all over them. They were in a terrible mess in the later stages of the New Guinea campaign, the Japanese. Not supplied. That was interesting to bring the odd Jap back. And we would bring officers back.

27:30 But then there came a time when we were ordered down to Lae and there came a time when the unit had to get on the USS Seaflasher, which is a troop carrying American, it wasn't a Liberty ship, the later one. And we came home to Brisbane I think and when I arrived back in Melbourne, Flinders Street Station, I was yellow with

28:00 Atebrin, malaria tablets, and I had a pack on my back. Got out here at Flinders Street and tried to get a taxi and I found they wouldn't stop for Aussies, they would only stop for Americans; they would never stop for us because we didn't have the money that the Americans had. So I had to catch the number eight tram out to Toorak. The family of course didn't know I was coming because you couldn't communicate.

28:30 And when I got home, I found that my sisters were going to a party run by a doctor and family that I had known before so they rang up, it was my twenty-first birthday and when they got to the doctor's place up in Balwyn they said I was home and they rang up saying I could come up. So I caught a couple of trams and got up as I was, in my jungle uniform and whatnot.

29:00 And I was quite an event for the party to come back from New Guinea and I may say that nobody knew what we were doing in New Guinea. Nobody knew, there was a tendency to say, "Oh you were lucky, it must have been nice up there in the tropics instead of our terrible winter." Because most of the communications were all issued by General Macarthur, "American troops doing this and that."

29:30 I remember I have got a letter here still that I wrote to one of my sisters and I said, "You might have heard of a little event we had here in New Guinea, the Sattelberg business." Of course they hadn't heard of that. They never heard anything about the New Guinea campaign, I soon realised that. And as I say the Americans, I couldn't get a taxi. At that stage, my sisters were all going out all of the time with American troops. My sisters went to

30:00 Merton Hall and nice schools, they never went out with diggers. I remember the first day after I got back, I managed to get some American gaiters, they went down over shoe and cut them down and polish and all white. And I got a hold of a beautiful English battledress jacket in jungle green. And I put all of this on and I came into town

30:30 and I went right around to the Mitre Tavern right here and with our overseas chevrons we thought we were kings, it was marvellous. And then I went on leave; I was on leave for about six weeks. And finally I was told every morning I had to report out to Camp Pell about half past seven in the morning and then

I was told I was being sent up to the engineer training team in

- 31:00 Kapooka in New South Wales. Nice camp and we were always told, "Tom Blamey [Australian General] owns this land, he has got his money invested in this land," et cetera. Anyway I was up there for a few weeks and suddenly I started shivering and whatnot and they put me into camp hospital, couldn't find anything the matter with me
- 31:30 and I went into Goulburn one weekend on leave and I got terrible sick. And when I got back it was obvious I had malaria and I was sent up to the 114th AGH [Army General Hospital] in Goulburn. And I was sent up there in a vehicle, about half a dozen of us there and I remember being driven up to the hospital and standing inside we were told to parade stand up like this and suddenly I woke up in bed.
- 32:00 And a sister came up to a junior nurse sort of thing and said, "Look I am taking over this poor fellow." I had a temperature of a hundred and five. I had malaria and later on in my life I had begun tests on BT malaria and the treatment was quinine, we had no other treatment but quinine in those days, they made your ears ring terribly. But I had a couple of other recurrences of violent malaria.
- 32:30 Eventually I was paraded and one of the medical officers happened to be a student of my father at the university, after the war I knew him very well. And they eventually said, paraded me and I volunteered my history in the air force and they said, "Look, it is time you went back to university."
- 33:00 So I was discharged then and walked out of Camp Pell. I remember distinctly walking out and passing an officer without having to do that [salute]. But I then went back to the university and studied medicine.

So you left New Guinea and water transport to go on leave and you didn't go back there? How did that happen?

Well, because the

- 33:30 unit went back and they would have to wait and see where they would go back to. 11th Water Transport was brought back, we all had leave and we had to reassemble and the engineer training centre, it was an engineer group you see, I was a sapper. And the unit was sent to reunite and then find out where they were going. The unit then went back to the episodes that were then going on in the north of
- 34:00 New Guinea. I can't remember the places now. It was whilst I was there that I became very ill with malaria. And they decided that with my air force and army history and the war was coming to an end, that I should go back and be one of the ex-servicemen to start at university again. That's what happened.

- 34:30 **So after, I am just wondering if we can go back to your time with the armoured tanks and after Finschhafen and Sattelberg, I mean how did you finish up that time there?**

Well that's when I went into 11th Water Transport.

I realise that.

C Squadron was relieved,

- 35:00 and would have gone back to Milne Bay and later on they may have been involved in one of the later final stages of the war up in parts of Indonesia, but I don't know because I went back with 11th Water Transport. I left them at Finschhafen. I don't know what happened to the after that.

- 35:30 **So they were relieved by B Squadron?**

B Squadron. But I don't think they did much because the fighting was over, the New Guinea campaign was very dramatic, originally of course it was Kokoda and then Buna and Sanananda, then there was the Huon Peninsula campaign, after that it was mainly a matter of mopping up. There was some attacking going on in parts north of New Guinea but most of

- 36:00 New Guinea had fizzled out by then. Buna, Sio, Saidor, I don't know much about what went on at that time. But the last main attack of the Japanese was probably Huon Peninsula, and 7 Div was involved. Inside a bit, earlier there was an earlier area,
- 36:30 Nadzab and places like that in New Guinea were going on at the same time with the 7 Div, and then 9 Div came over and did the Sattelberg business. What happened after that I don't know, I was out of the army by then.

So how long did you spend in the water transport unit?

About six or eight months and then we were relieved taken home.

- 37:00 When I got back to university I would say that sixty percent of the students were ex-servicemen like me. It was a time when so many of them were coming back. That was in 1945 so the end of the war was close, and my father came back from the POW when I was back doing my university course.

- 37:30 He had survived of course, and -

So had you heard any more news about him after the initial?

Never heard a thing, I knew that he was alive but I didn't know whether he would come home and that was one of the reasons I did medicine. I was offered the opportunity of doing arts/law and I could have tried to get into the diplomatic service.

- 38:00 But my father was still a known POW but not known whether he was coming home. And I thought, "Well he wants me to be a doctor and so I will do medicine," and that's why I did medicine. And he came home a little bit earlier, he was flown home very quickly because his mother was dying and he had been rescued. Of course he had been in charge of the big Mahkampatan camp in Siam
- 38:30 and Thailand, and he arrived home and it was quite a surprise to us all. I had just started my first year. But after the war I had other attachments to the army, for example when I graduated I joined the reserve of officers to start with, so I was commissioned so I could join the Naval and Military Club. But I also joined the CMF [Citizens Military Forces], the Commonwealth
- 39:00 military force, and I was medical officer to 3 Cadet Brigade and I used to go to camp and kept in touch with the army and enjoyed it for quite a long time. And then my youngest son went through Duntroon military college, so with him and his career I have been in contact with the army quite a lot. Never really
- 39:30 forgotten it. The Naval and Military Club, that's the hundredth anniversary of the Naval and Military Club. And it was quite strange then when I joined the club, when you walked into the bar - it was not where it is now, it was at the end of Collins Street - if you were a young member you were never left on your own and you would suddenly find a brigadier or air vice marshal would
- 40:00 say, "Come and have a drink, Bill." It was marvellous really. That kept us in contact with our war career. You still felt you were in the army and I loved being in the CMF, I used to go to cadet camp, camps down at Portsea and things like that.
- 40:30 I used to quite like it still. But I resigned from the club this year because the average officer would be six or seven years older than me, they're dead now and you don't have to be - and it has to be the case, having returned soldiers and ex-servicemen because they're all gone now, and so now the club is open to any gentleman or lady
- 41:00 that wants to be a member. Still it was interesting to be a part of it.
- 41:14 End of tape

Tape 5

- 00:30 **Doctor Coates I was just wondering if you can tell me about some of the people you worked with, some of your mates? The people who you remember most vividly? Friends? Superiors?**
- In the army?
- Yes in the army.**
- Yes both units were New South Wales based so that I only had a few friends but I had close friends who I was with really from
- 01:00 Puckapunyal and went up to 1st Tank Battalion with me. I had one great friend Sid Edwards who lived very close when I was living in Blackburn after the war. Sid Edwards had a business out there, he was with me in the army and we were great mates. There was two or three others. There was Don Calthorpe, he was known to me as Don Calthorpe but I found out later
- 01:30 he joined as Don Calthorpe when he was only seventeen and his real name was Don Tottee. He lived in Melbourne. And there was one other, there was three of us anyway, we used to meet every Anzac Day and we used to have a great time together. As far as the others, they were the only ones I really knew, because they were the only ones, we were reinforcements, we came from Victoria. I didn't have any really other close friends in the
- 02:00 other unit really. Don Tottee was with me in the tank battalion and he also went with me to the 11th Water Transport Unit so we saw quite a lot of each other, that's about all.
- Right, just curious to know how, you have told us about some of the work you were doing and some of the lighter and darker moments, tell me about the times in between, you were there for a great period of time, are there times when**
- 02:30 **there is entertainment?**
- Entertainment where?

This is in New Guinea?

Oh none, absolutely none. No private life at all in New Guinea, the nearest thing I had to a private life was when I botted [scrounged] a Christmas meal from the Americans see? One of the things that is difficult to explain is that I never saw anything in the nature of a town. Perhaps in Lae later on.

03:00 Mainly it was just army town anyway. I saw one native, I remember one stage I looked down somewhere and I saw a young female Papuan or New Guinean, naked, washing; and it's the only time I ever saw any local people from New Guinea, we just lived a totally separate life. Terribly difficult to explain. No town, no persons, no R & R [rest and recuperation].

03:30 We lived a totally army existence, with our own units as I pointed out. I never came in contact with other units. The 2/48th [Battalion] who were with us on the attack on Sattelberg, I never came in contact with them we only came in contact with 1 Tank Battalion. It was quite an isolated existence in New Guinea. It is difficult to

04:00 explain. For instance the people in the Middle East would go into the brothels in Cairo or they would be able to go across to Palestine and have R & R. We had none. Once we left Australia we were on our own in a different environment. And looking back on it it was a strange environment.

04:30 The soldiers in France for example well they mixed of course with the French people and in the Middle East our soldiers mixed with the people in Egypt and blah, blah. But we people who were in New Guinea, it may have been different towards the end of the war but in my experience of it, we were totally isolated. We may get letters sent to us. Not much not often, we were cut off from the rest of the world. When they asked me what the Bretton

05:00 Woods agreement was, I hadn't read a newspaper for eighteen months. It was a strange isolated existence.

Sounds like there is potential for a number of things, boredom for a start?

I was never bored because there were things going on all of the time. If I had been stuck in Puckapunyal I would be bored, stuck in Milne Bay I would be bored. Where we were in active service there was never

05:30 any boredom because there was something going on all of the time. We were mixing with a few mates we were with. Life went on, quite different to anything else I had ever experienced.

Is it possible for you to explain, when you weren't busy doing what you had to do, what would you do, obviously there was no R & R, would you make your own

06:00 **entertainment?**

I suppose some of the fellows played cards, I was never interested in that. I don't know what we damn well did to be quite honest. We got pretty close to our mates and we would talk about our previous life, there was always something ahead of us in the army, and more than that you were under orders to obey orders.

06:30 So that you were told to do this and that and you did, highly disciplined. I can't remember being bored. One reason of course, even through we weren't in the firing line, when I was in Finschhafen every night ten o'clock that's in the right season when the moon was right the Japs would come over and ten and come over and two again

07:00 even if they didn't drop any bombs, something to think about. There was something to think about all of the time.

So with the Japs coming over at ten o'clock and not knowing what was going to happen, there must have been a fair bit of stress involved as well there?

I don't think so, really I had only been stressed on several.

07:30 I was stressed as they started mortar firing me on the track. I was stressed when we were landing at Langemak Bay. I was stressed when they dropped a bomb thirty feet from me, and I was a bit stressed when they machine-gunned us. I don't think we were brave but they were events that happened and you just lived with it, the ten o'clock and two o'clock business,

08:00 they never dropped any bombs anyway. Occasionally they would have a couple of bombs left and they dropped on us, you just really accepted it was a way of life.

So it was just a matter of putting up with it, you have got a job to do?

And the other thing, I don't think I thought what am I going to do in the future? I hadn't given any thought to that. Most of us at my age we were in the bloody army

08:30 and that's bloody that. You didn't think of anything, you thought when am I going to get leave maybe. We were in New Guinea, we didn't get leave for twelve months there, that's all, we were lucky to get that. I would write the odd letter to my sisters back home. Day to day, living day to day.

And what would you say in those letters and conversely what were you hearing from home?

09:00 Nothing really, I can't remember what they wrote back. It was me writing to them more than them writing to me because they really didn't know where I was or what I was doing. They had no idea really. We were isolated.

09:30 I think more than at any other time in my life before or since, but we were never lonely because the camaraderie of the army life was such, particularly where we were, where there was something happening as far as a war was concerned, we weren't stuck in a base camp like Puckapunyal. We all talked to each other and what was going to happen next and that sort of thing, you didn't have time to be bored.

10:00 **So the camaraderie seems to be?**

The camaraderie was great. It was great. It is one of the things that I look back on with pleasure our relationship with other men. You never really talked about what you did before, someone might have left school at fourteen and others were like me, been to university. It didn't matter you were in the army and army discipline I liked, I really enjoyed it.

10:30 **Can you remember any instances when mateship, camaraderie really came to the fore, where it was a matter of looking after your mates?**

Well one was when we were bombed in Finschhafen after the battle had finished, and we got under a tank to protect ourselves, I felt after there was, we didn't talk about it much, but there was a bond between us. Well Jesus Christ we have been

11:00 through that. Unless you have had service life experience you cannot understand what it is like. But it is one of the great things I think about service life, that it brings you together from your own way of life in a way, and you accepted the fact that is going to be a damn nuisance that you have got to obey orders and do things you didn't to do, so there was no doubt a camaraderie about it which was good.

11:30 And so after the war just the three or four other fellows that came back and lived in Melbourne, to meet them we knew the whole thing and it was great. And when one of them died, I was very distressed, as a matter of fact I put - Lest We Forget - I put a column in the paper, Lest We Forget. I don't know what people thought this fellow was, but that's how it felt to me.

12:00 But they're all gone now. I used to find the camaraderie of Anzac Day was a big thing when we came back from the war; it was great. And then I remember when I was a captain in the RAAMC [Royal Australian Army Medical Corps] I went to Tom Blamey's funeral and this was great, you still felt that you were back in the old days. He wasn't just some former public servant, he was Tom

12:30 Blamey and you never dreamed of seeing Tom Blamey but his funeral was very important. I remember at that very funeral I was invited around to the headquarters of one of the regiments, around here in La Trobe Street and I remember I was a captain, full blown captain and it was funny for me to be in an infantry place

13:00 and for a time I was the senior officer and I wanted to have a leak and I felt very diffident about asking where the toilet was. And then a major came in, I had to say, "Yes sir, no sir." But there was a camaraderie about it, even after the war, I could never lose that. At one stage when I was in practice I met the Director-General Medical Services. Had something to do at a party or

13:30 function or whatnot and I was even offered the possibility of going back into the army and he more or less told me that with my qualifications, I would go in as captain but he said, "Look in a couple of years you will probably get a hospital, be a half-colonel [lieutenant-colonel]." And I was tempted to go back into the army. The only thing was I had four sons at that stage and they didn't pay very much. I have regretted it often, that I didn't go back into the army.

14:00 So that's what I can say about army life, I loved it.

Can I just ask, when you found out your father was alive in Burma I understand, did that have any bearing on the way you were subsequently treated do you think? Knowing that he was a prisoner of war and he was alive?

Treated by whom?

By superiors for example?

No superiors wouldn't be interested anyway. We were in an army

14:30 and that was that. As I say the only time this happened was a medical officer came up, the medical officer was with the headquarters in Milne Bay and the medical officer came up, and I don't even know how he knew that I was Sir Robert Coates' son, but he must have found out somewhere, maybe they saw it on my records. But no that wouldn't have meant a damn thing, my father was only a lieutenant colonel anyway, it wasn't as if it was Sir John Monash.

15:00 I don't think it had any affect on my career at all except I was discharged because they felt I should go

back, that's the only time it happened.

Well tell us a little bit about, I can remember what the name of it was, you wanted that move from C Squadron onto the boats?

Lik lik boat?

15:30 **The very first time you saw, was it an American boat?**

LST?

LST yeah. What was it that made you want to leave C Squadron, was it the pull of that or was it just that you weren't feeling satisfied with?

Oh, why did I go to transport? Oh well the main reason was that I and my great friend Don Tottee and whatnot, we were reinforcements to that unit and the 1 Aust Tank Battalion was very much a pukka

16:00 sahib [British colonial] unit, based around Camden and the rich people in Willung in Victoria, it is a western district. And as I was a reinforcement and went from one place to another place to them in New Guinea, I never really found any real feeling towards the unit. I felt I was a reo and then when the opportunity came to leave I was happy to leave.

16:30 I can't understand really, I didn't really feel that I was a member of 1st Tank Battalion because they had been for years training; I had been in another unit. I had been in 2/6th Regiment and Armoured Corps Training Regiment so when we came out of action and were just sitting down doing nothing, nothing to stimulate me, I took the opportunity of leaving that unit and joining another unit.

17:00 The older members of the unit would never understand that, it is the same as me, under other circumstances, things that I have been a member of for many years, I wonder why would anyone want to leave? But the opportunity arose and I was bored. That's when I was bored. When we were just sitting doing nothing really, and I saw the opportunity to be a deckhand;

17:30 it was great.

You were telling us about that work and you mentioned that you had to transport some prisoners, some Japanese POWs and they were in a bad state. Was there ever any communication or was that not allowed?

Not really, we were kind, we fed them et cetera.

18:00 We couldn't speak their language and they couldn't speak ours. They were just prisoners and I think the other thing that I always realised was that it was most unusual for a Japanese to surrender, usually it was a matter of kill yourself first. And it always surprised me that they got a couple of Japs down there. They must be going, I used to always think, they must be going through hell really to be

18:30 our prisoners. That's about all I can say.

So what would be the procedure there, you were transporting them from where to where and what would be the?

Well if we were up north somewhere and they had been captured they would be put on our boat and brought south to be put in a prisoner of war camp I suppose. But it would be a rare experience to have Japanese prisoners. We would be any place really that we

19:00 had much to do with it, we were the transport you see? If I had been in an infantry unit, I wouldn't have seen them, they would be dead or gone. So it was quite a strange experience for us on the boat to have a couple of prisoners.

So who would be feeding them for example, would that be the boys that you had?

Oh we would feed them, we used to keep them - they were stinking so much, we had a dinghy see? On the back of the boat. They stayed on the dinghy I don't know how, I don't

19:30 remember seeing it, but our cook, they would have pulled the dinghy up and given them food. Oh yes.

And were you ever transporting infantrymen or other members of the forces?

No we were only transporting officers. We would often find we would have a lieutenant colonel or a major, something like that who was going up to a unit or going

20:00 around New Guinea, that's all. We never had any troops. No ordinary troops no. I don't know how they were being transported then. I think looking back on it, the troops that were going to be used in Sio and Saidor right up the coast of New Guinea, they almost certainly went in by ship, same as how we went into Langemak Bay and we went into Morobe. That's what happened, but we were the only land

20:30 communication up that way. We carried their small arms ammunition and their food, and took the odd officer up, that's all. But we had no contact with the units.

You said that you had had some experience out on Port Phillip Bay with your grandfather, did

that make it easy to learn the ropes?

Not really. Except that I had been, I never got seasick and I knew how to manage

21:00 being on a boat. That's about all I can say, coming back at night and having caught twenty or thirty snapper. I was happy on a boat, put it that way. I was very lucky to have been brought into contact with a very fine older fisherman and he became very attached to me, and one day

21:30 said, "Like to come out tomorrow, Bill?" "Yes, thank you." And it was six thirty out on the bay. And when I said I had experience, it was a joke, just something to say. On the other hand, I travelled around the world on a boat to start with, I knew a bit about the ocean way.

So how much time were you on deck,

22:00 **what was the split between being on deck and being in port?**

We were on deck all of the time. See it was only a cabin where we slept and the rest of the time we were on the deck the whole bloody time. Looking back on it, you wonder how you survived without going insane. As I say if you wanted to open your bowels or have a leak you just hung onto the side of the boat and that's all, but you got used to it and it was a

22:30 different sort of life. There was no cabin to go into so you were out all of the time. You were either in the cabin part where you were steering the thing. The rest of the time I was lucky, I could get up to my deckchair, watch the world go by, watch my deck boys clean the machine guns.

You gave a phrase or two before in pidgin?

23:00 We all knew that yes, we picked up a bit of pidgin. Apart from those deck boys and they weren't Papuans, they weren't New Guineans. They came from some of the islands, which would now be a part of say the Solomons to Tuvalu or something like that, they came in. I found out that one of my deck boys was the son of a chieftain and he was a very

23:30 handsome good looking boy and obviously intelligent. But they came on and got those jobs, I don't know why. I don't know whether I mentioned, I found out later that our crew twelve months earlier had been working for the Japanese boats.

So what were your main ports of call then?

Well no ports of call really, we would be told that some units

24:00 were at some parts, I didn't even know the skipper would know. We didn't go into any towns, there were no towns up there anyway. But somewhere along the line there would be Sio or Saidor or places in between I can't remember now, we would pull in there, spend the night, take stuff on and take stuff off. Again it's difficult to convey the emptiness of

24:30 Papua New Guinea then.

So there would be small camps, you would be replenishing or taking stores from, so what were the living quarters like on land?

None. None. We lived on the ground that's all. I can't explain that. One reason was in Finschhafen for example, Finschhafen was part of German New Guinea before the First World War. One

25:00 of the few buildings that I can remember in Finschhafen, I found the remains of a German mission centre there. I found old German books, it was quite easy for me to see what had been a building, but that would have been

25:30 sixty years before and there had been fighting there. The Japanese had come into New Guinea first, they had cut things down and smashed, then we went in and smashed things up. So that originally what had been a little German centre was the only evidence I saw of a long term dwelling. You just didn't see, I can't remember seeing anything

26:00 you could describe as a town the whole time I was there, or a village. That's the only building I ever saw. Hell of a lot had been destroyed and it was an empty part of the world anyway Papua New Guinea.

What was the terrain mostly like was it jungle?

Jungle. Around Finschhafen there was a lot of kunai grass, kunai grass grows up about six or eight feet.

26:30 That track that I used to mention going up was largely kunai but away from the kunai there would be trees, coconut trees, jungle is what you describe it as. With kunai areas there were some open areas of land in-between with just lower grass and that sort of thing.

Did you see much

27:00 **of Sattelberg and that area as well?**

Sattelberg was only a name really. That's the other thing too, you can talk about, "I have to go up to - "

the other place I say which was half way, there was nothing there to see, but the top of that mountain was called Sattelberg. Same as went into Langemak Bay, nothing there to go into but it had to be

27:30 given a name. Same as if you came into Port Phillip Bay you would know you were going into something. There would be a settlement there, but there was no settlement in those areas. To me, Jevivinang was just an area. Nothing to say you're at Jevivinang same as Finschhafen itself. It was only after we got there that the Americans came in there and made a big base,

28:00 now you can say, "That's Finschhafen." They built those places, Lae of course, I knew Jennings, Jensions, Whittakers, there must have been buildings of course but I was never in Lae, I only came to Lae later on when I was with the small ships. But the Americans made those places like Finschhafen. When we went up there there was nil and three months later there were ships everywhere

28:30 and there was a whole port. But the Americans built all of that. Quite different. from the time I went up there until the time I left, it had changed from being jungle desert to being everything, do you understand what I mean. That was the American construction battalion, they were known as the Seabees and they

29:00 did a tremendous job. Put up wharves and God knows what.

You have told us a little bit about the Americans but did you have much contact with them?

None at all, except the Christmas dinner from them. Never had any contact with them, they weren't there fighting of course. The only Americans there were the Seabees and they were putting in ports so that

29:30 the further development of the war could go on. There were no American troops seeing action. They were down at Buna Sanananda earlier, there were American troops in there, and that's when they got a bit of a bad name. And they were told, "If you're going to fight, fight like the Aussies fight." That was early in the piece. The Americans were concentrating on, what was the place? Battle of Guadalcanal.

30:00 Going, huge battles they had going right up to Japan. We were really, the New Guinea campaign really was to some extent a sideline. Certainly after Finschhafen, I don't want to say that I was one of the last people to see action, that's nonsense, but it is a fact that after the Japanese had been kicked out of southern, Buna Sanananda, and then finally the Huon Peninsula,

30:30 then the rest of the New Guinea campaign and the campaigns up north. I can't think of the campaigns I know them well.

Wewak.

Parts of Indonesia the Australians fought in and many of them were killed and it was quite a tragedy that they were killed actually on a campaign that wasn't necessary. The main campaign was the Americans going up eventually to Japan.

31:00 I saw the Yanks of course on the LSTs each time.

So at the time what was your understanding of the strategic importance of the Huon Peninsula, what you were working on there?

I don't know. I think I can say all we knew was the Allies were winning, it was only a question of time. I just feel

31:30 now, again I don't think we thought very much about what was going to happen in the future, we just lived from day to day. It wasn't until I got home on leave that I think I realised, see we had no newspapers, we had no radio, we had no news from Australia the whole bloody time. We just lived from day to day in a strange world, an isolated world.

We're getting a good sense of that now.

32:00 **When you were travelling up and down the coast, with the supplies the small arms ammunition and food, had that been air dropped previously? Where was that coming from?**

That would have come up on ship from Lae. Lae was our headquarters really, and Lae was a big port then. So all of that stuff would come up from Australia and be stored in big storehouses, and that's how

32:30 they came in. We were the ones that were running the equivalent to air do you understand? In this day and age it wouldn't happen because you would have aircraft going up all of the time. We were the ones left to do the final stage.

So you were travelling north?

Always north, unless on the way back.

33:00 **So can you tell us, you did tell us earlier about coming home but we seemed to miss out on that moment when you found out that you were going to be sent back on leave as it were, can you tell us a bit more about the background to that?**

Well I came home on leave as I say on my twenty-first birthday. And when my leave was

33:30 over I had to report to Camp Pell which is near the sea. Report in every morning and be told, "No there is no order here for you, go home and have another day." Go home and take the girlfriend to the movies again. And it wasn't until one morning they said, "No you are being sent to Kapooka."

34:00 And what we were going to do from there I had no idea, not the faintest idea what would happen. I thought probably I would be sent back, the 11th Transport Company would be sent back, which it was, another part of the Southwest Pacific. But as far as I was concerned, I just had to wait there and take orders. That's one thing about the army you just have to be used to

34:30 sitting there, you do this and you do that. Otherwise you just sit there, "Yes sir, no sir, three bags full sir." And then it was that I developed malaria and that altered the whole picture.

Had there been any indication earlier in New Guinea that you had contracted?

Well we were all in a malaria area of course. But we were on Atebrin tablets the whole time trying to control it. I

35:00 don't remember people getting sick very much, again we were such a small group, not as if there was two thousand of us and a big hospital and a big camp. We were just isolated things and the other thing about malaria, vivax malaria, that it often doesn't happen until you have left the area. It is a funny thing, I was a malariologist later on and now I am talking as if I didn't know what was going on in those days, which I didn't. I know now,

35:30 the form of malaria I was suffering from affects the liver particularly. It comes back, you can have an attack and it goes away, and then another attack. Whereas falciparum, that is cerebral, malaria is quite different, if you survive when you get it you don't get it back. But vivax malaria is one that goes on like this and that's the one that I got.

So what were the symptoms of that?

36:00 The symptoms are high fever, terrible aches and pains, shivering, that's all. P-vivax, that's the normal one, is not fatal, it doesn't kill you but it's very distressing because it does come back. The other form of malaria, cerebral malaria, falciparum malaria you call it, that's it quite different. You can get

36:30 cerebral symptoms and get very ill and die. That's the difference.

So would you say that the Atebrin had been effective?

Well to this point. Probably while you are taking the Atebrin you are probably smothering the effect of mosquito bites up to a point but none of those things are foolproof.

37:00 So at some stage I was bitten by an anopheles mosquito and the [UNCLEAR] got into my body, I can't describe the pathology of the whole thing, but it wasn't until I got away from the part that I started to get liver things sending out more and more until it reaches the stage when you are acutely ill.

With the Atebrin, were there side effects?

37:30 No the only side effect with Atebrin is that it makes you yellow, yellow eyes and yellow skin, that's all. No other side effect.

When you were told you were going home on leave, how long had it been until that point that you had been in New Guinea?

About a year.

38:00 And what were your thoughts, did you feel you were destined to come back?

Oh yes I thought I was just going home on leave certainly. But again in the army in those days you didn't think ahead, you were just told to do this and you followed orders. I remember going back on the ship. Wally Wall, Major Wall, I stood up on the ship one day with him and he said, "I am going to give you a stripe; oh, lance corporal." "Oh, thank you sir." I just thought we were

38:30 just going home on leave and where we go after that well it was just in the lap of the Gods. Couldn't control anything when you were in the service.

So you were a lance corporal when you got back?

Well I would have been if I had gone back. It was a great thrill for Wally Wall to say, but as I say everyone who served in the service knows that it is a hell of a lot of boredom.

39:00 Unless you're getting in an episode which we were in Huon Peninsula but most of the service life is bloody boring, you just obey orders and that's it and you don't think about the future because you can't control it. You just do what you're ordered to do from day to day. I suddenly found myself on a train coming down, I think probably we went from Brisbane. I think we cut off from

39:30 Brisbane, the next thing I know I am on a troop train and a day or two later I am in Flinders Street Station. Didn't give much thought about what was going on.

You did tell us before about not being able to get a taxi, the Yanks having a monopoly on them; the family didn't know you were coming did they?

Didn't matter, it didn't matter a damn, in those days the Americans were so well paid and beautifully dressed

40:00 and the taxi drivers were crooks anyway. The Americans didn't know the difference between two pounds and fifty dollars. They could pay the taxi driver fifty bucks. But it was pretty well known that taxi people were rogues and they were only after 'do re mi' [money], and the Americans

40:30 were much easier to, they couldn't kid us, they couldn't suddenly tell me it was ten dollars when you know bloody well it was four. I learnt a lesson when I got home because I realised in many ways they didn't know much what we were doing up there because as I said Macarthur controlled the communiqués and nobody knew what we were doing.

41:00 End of tape

Tape 6

00:30 Although I didn't get a taxi, I do feel that when we got dressed up and came into town and went out, we did feel particularly proud. We really did, particularly if we had chevrons on overseas, come back from overseas service. You really did think you were a bit, you were pleased to be back really, proud to be back.

01:00 **And what was the reception from the public like?**

Good, saying that's, you come into town and you had the chevrons on, that meant that you had had overseas service. You didn't have to be respected, but they would say, "Giddy mate, where have you been?" "I have come back from New Guinea." "Oh." It was good.

01:30 **And what was it like seeing your sisters again after that time away?**

Oh yes as I said, I went to a party and all of the girls hovered around seeing the soldier coming back and all of this sort of thing, you thought you were pretty good.

And were you a bit popular coming back? With the ladies for example?

We were, but on the other hand they were nearly all going

02:00 out with Americans. No I had a girlfriend there that was living near me and in the last few weeks of leave I used to take her out every night to the village theatre in Toorak and kiss her goodbye and then next day I would be told, "You're not going today." So I would come on back. But no it was a funny sort of existence.

So had you met her, this is after returning?

02:30 Later on she was married with a family and I was married with a family. She was friends with my sisters actually, we used to live close in Toorak. It was a stage of your life.

So there hadn't been a sweetheart before you joined up or anything like that?

No.

03:00 **This is 1944 isn't it?**

Yes it would be 1944, yes.

And you said you had to report to camp didn't you?

At the end of my three or four weeks, five or six weeks or what not, I had to report to Camp Pell and they would say, "I am sorry there are no orders for you today, come back tomorrow." That went on probably four or five times. Just "Come back,"

03:30 "Here I am again," but the following morning you had to be up at Camp Pell by seven thirty in the morning. And then one day, "Yes, you're going to Kapooka." That's what happened.

Tell us more about that Kapooka?

Well it was just a big Australian area, engineer training centre. It was pretty dull and awful, not as nice as Puckapunyal.

04:00 Just a huge camp and I don't remember much what I did. Just sitting down waiting to hear what we

were going to be doing. It wasn't until I was hospitalised with malaria, I didn't make any plans for the future, even then I didn't know, I was very surprised when they said, "Go back to your medicine." It was something I never dreamed of.

04:30 But that's what happened. I would have hated to have stayed around Kapooka too long, the big camps like that, that's where you were bored, just waiting for something to happen. And so I was glad to leave Kapooka.

So you were hospitalised during that period were you?

Yes I was hospitalised at Kapooka first, just in a little

05:00 local unit hospital, then the next attack I had they sent me into the 144th General Hospital, and then I never went back to Kapooka, I was in hospital for a month, a month or six weeks I suppose. And then boarded out [declared unfit by a medical board].

So at the end of that period at the 14th Hospital you were fully recovered?

Oh yes I recovered I was on quinine for a few weeks.

05:30 I was quite well not knowing what was going to happen to me. I was quite pleased when they boarded me because I thought, "Well, I have had enough, I have had the air force and the army" and the war was nearly over, there was not going to be much happening in the future so I was rather glad when I was told to go home.

So where did that order come from?

06:00 Oh it would have gone through the army system you know going from this one to that one, and it would go through eventually to army headquarters and the army would say well the decision is so and so. Quite beyond the person really, you just sit there waiting to be told, "You are going to do so and so." And that is it. I was discharged again from Camp Pell and I went home and I know

06:30 I had a bit of money saved up and I had a holiday down at Lorne. Famous hotel in Lorne and I lived it up a bit for a few weeks and then I found there was such a thing as a Commonwealth Reconstruction Training Scheme for people like me, and I was told to report to the university and I could have done any course that I wanted.

07:00 I really wanted to do an arts/law course but I think I explained before that I thought I would please my father not knowing that he would ever come home. And I went to the professor there and he said, "Yes we accept you for the first year medicine." And that's what I did.

That was at Melbourne Uni?

Yes.

So when did you start your course?

07:30 I started in '45, I had already done a year in '41, but I left to join the air force so I had already done a year in a way but I was starting afresh to really do medicine. At that stage in 1944, my father came back from the war then and well I had a very intensive medical course. Looking back, I would have preferred not to have done it but on the

08:00 other hand I am glad I did. Because I qualified, in a course of two hundred and forty graduates, half of those were ex-service army men and women, mostly men of course in those days. And I was in the first ten percent, two honours in my final year. My father was the Dean of the Faculty of Medicine at that stage. He was chairman of examiners

08:30 and the time that I was to do my finals he went to England. He wanted to get away in case anyone might have said that I was helped by him in the exams et cetera. So that when I graduated he was in London and I remember as a matter of fact before the results came out, I took myself down to a place on

09:00 the Mornington Peninsula, and when I went there I went in as Mr Coates and an uncle of mine he was a pharmacist in Collins Street and somebody must have walked in and told him that I had passed and next thing he sent a telegram down, he knew where I was, the Dava Lodge, that's right, Mornington, and suddenly the manager of the Dava Lodge came and said, "I have a telegram for you, doctor."

09:30 Told I passed see? So I thought I had better drive straight up, I had my father's car, so I drove up and on the way St Kilda Road, I am passing where this Prince Henry's Hospital is now and I was picked up for speeding. I told him what had happened, I had just gone up to see if I was a doctor and he let me go. And I remember going up to the university

10:00 and seeing my name up there and what honours I had got and I sent a telegram over to my father to his bank in London, and I said, "Passed all subjects. Honours surgery and obstetrics." That's how he found out. But of course, graduating medicine is a tremendous thrill. And then I went on to the Royal Melbourne Hospital as a resident, I was his resident in surgery for a while.

10:30 And then I didn't know what to do. I decided I would go into practice and I went off and I paid the

equivalent today of sixty thousand dollars for the goodwill of a practice up in Edenhope, way up in the Wimmera. And I thought, "Well I will have to have a wife now." And I had met a girl

- 11:00 at the Alfred Hospital and I used to go out with her a bit, and I thought I am going to need a bloody wife. So I left the practice and came down here and I said, "I wonder what she is doing?" I hadn't seen her in twelve months. So I went out one night woke her up at two o'clock in the morning and said, "You're going to marry me." And she did. And I stayed at that practice three years during which time she had three children.
- 11:30 She had four in four years. Not my plan. St Patrick's Cathedral. Anyway then my father asked me to come down and specialise, and offered me the job as his assistant for three years, which I did but again I had to get out into practice because I had the four boys and I started a practice in Blackburn,
- 12:00 but eventually I went back to the country. I found that it was so expensive trying to organise the whole thing, I bought a practice in Nagambie, which is a beautiful part - and we had six beautiful years in Nagambie with four boys, and I had a very gratifying practice, I had surgical experience. I had my own hospital and I could operate and deliver babies. Very good practice it was delightful. I had a boat on
- 12:30 the lake and all of that sort of thing. The only other thing was that I was the only doctor for two or three towns and I was on call twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. Never had a holiday, one holiday in six years. The rest of the time was work, work, work. I couldn't make it a two-man practice and it was too big for one. So what happened was I decided I would specialise, I would take the
- 13:00 best part of an academic year off and I thought, What am I going to do? I don't want to be a surgeon, I don't want to be a skin specialist, I don't want to be an eye specialist" and I thought, "Well there are so many people coming to this country now by travel and migration, somebody has got to know a bit about tropical medicine." So I took a locum into my practice and I went up and did a course at Sydney University in tropical medicine
- 13:30 and an extraordinary thing happened. The chairman, the professor up there was a short term consultant with WHO [World Health Organisation] and one day he came and said, "Any of you boys interested in a notice I put up on the board?" The WHO were interested in staff members joining and studying more for the malaria education program. And I just wrote it down and I rang my wife and said, "Well hell of
- 14:00 joke but blah, blah, blah." Well a month or two later, I am back in my practice and in my surgery looking at piles or varicose veins or something like that and I get a telegram saying, "Pleased to inform you selected by Eastern Mediterranean region. Kindly advise us your earliest arrival Geneva." Well three weeks later, I was in Geneva. I put two of the boys in school in Wesley, I sold my practice and put my family in a
- 14:30 house down here and I was in Geneva. And I thought, "Well here I am, I am where I want to be." So from Geneva they sent me on a study tour of Ethiopia. I spent Christmas day 1987 in Nazareth
- 15:00 of all places in Ethiopia and it was run by a fellow who was a Scot and he celebrated Christmas where they're in tartan. And then I went back from Ethiopia and they sent me to the Philippines. I arrived in Manila about Christmas Day '69 and I had to spend three months at the re-education training centre, fascinating.
- 15:30 But I had done a lot of it, you see? This was organised by WHO people from all over the world, I had a great friend, an Englishman from what used to be called the British Solomon Islands, the Solomons. I had another great friend who was the son of the last Rajah of Lombok in Bali. His name was Doctor Djalanti, he was from Bali in Indonesia. So we had a very interesting time. Eventually when I finished they sent me to Kathmandu.
- 16:00 They sent me there as a malariologist and I was able to bring my family up there. After a few months in the malaria eradication training centre, they made me public health advisor and by general experience I became the public health advisor there. We never achieved much, but fascinating work it was with every nationality under the sun. And one factor that is consistent with my war service.
- 16:30 The Japanese government had formed a pilot project, farming project in southern Nepal and I was flown down in a light aircraft to spend a few days inspecting it. Well the first night I went into the mess and in front of all our seats there was a little bottle of saki and I thought this sounds promising. And when the meal started, there was about ten Japanese I suppose, the chap next to me spoke English and
- 17:00 somehow or other I must have told him that I fought the Japanese in New Guinea. And he said to me, "Oh my friend over there was in Imperial Japanese Air Force in Rabaul, New Britain." So I said him, "Well you tell him he might have dropped a few bombs on me." And a few minutes later to me he said, "Your enemy would like you to have a
- 17:30 glass of saki with him." And the whole time I was down, he was always known as my enemy. That was a very interesting period in one's life. After a couple of years I was sent down to Indonesia for a malaria program representing, I was responsible for Sulawesi (Celebes), Ambon and Moluccas,
- 18:00 Indonesian Timor and Irian Jaya. I lived in Jakarta for a year but then I moved over and lived in Ujung Pandang in Sulawesi. It was fascinating work of course travelling to all of these parts of the world. In

Jakarta I could order a long cold beer in bars in Indonesian but that's about all. But when I got over to Ujung Pandang nobody spoke English

- 18:30 so within a few months I became fairly fluent in Bahasa Indonesian. And at one stage in Makassar I had one of my sons with me, Michael he was there, and he was mucking around and he was going to the University of Makassar at one stage. And before I say it, I will tell you that during the war or after the war my father was sent to the war trials in Tokyo, and he gave
- 19:00 evidence for a certain Japanese sergeant who had been in charge of one of the camps my father had been in. and my father gave him a good write up, he said he had been kind to them and helped them. Well after that, when he came back from the war he used to get a Christmas card from this same Japanese bloke back in Melbourne. Anyway going back to Makassar, one night my car was missing and my son was
- 19:30 missing so I went looking for him and I found my car outside a nightclub. I went in there to read the riot act, "Just a minute Dad, I have just been with a Japanese boy, he is also at the university. And he told me that his grandfather sends a card down to a doctor in Melbourne." It was his grandson, the two grandsons meeting each other in Makassar,
- 20:00 sometimes it makes me almost weep. The extraordinary happening. Of course I said to my boy, "Okay." Actually I have got my father's book over there, and that story is in the last page of the biography of my father. What an extraordinary coincidence. "The Japanese boy said the doctor in Melbourne saved his
- 20:30 life at the war trial," and the two grandsons meet up there. Anyway that's the story of Indonesia. At a later stage, I left WHO. I had family problems that resulted from a number of factors, particularly in the Philippines, blah, blah, blah.
- 21:00 And I came back to Australia after some years with WHO. And I suddenly found I didn't want to stay in Melbourne, I couldn't stand the idea, and I was offered a job in Nauru in the central Pacific and I finished up as senior medical officer in Nauru for about three years. And that was fascinating because I had a good hospital.
- 21:30 I may say going back a little bit to Kathmandu, it was a very rewarding sort of place. At one stage the Crown Prince of Nepal was being married, and Lord and Lady Casey [then Governor-General of Australia] were the representatives of Australia. And I knew that my father had been associated with Lady Casey
- 22:00 in the war nurses' memorial in Melbourne and I saw a big procession going through, the elephants and what have you in Kathmandu, and I saw the Caseys. I walked up and said, "Excuse me, sir." And Lady Casey turned and said, "Doctor Coates we have been looking for you all of the morning. You have got a letter from your father." Well next thing I know was that Lady Casey went off and I arranged for Lord Casey and myself and the First Secretary to the embassy
- 22:30 in Delhi, I explained to the police that I wanted to go and sit on the other side of the fence on our own. So there am I sitting with Lord Casey and I would say, "That there is Major-General Shung Shadarna, he has just come out of gaol for sedition." I knew what was going on in Kathmandu. Next thing I knew, Casey took me into the hotel and he cross-examined me for an hour and a half of what I knew of the situation in Nepal.
- 23:00 Because there had been a big problem with India and China, and Nepal was involved in it. And Casey said, "Write all of this down." And my wife was out, took Lady Casey out to the bazaar, they bought some presents that they had to buy. And all of this time I am thinking to myself, the Governor-General of Australia, Lord Casey. Next thing I know, the British Ambassador had a reception and Prince Richard of Gloucester came out representing the Queen. And my wife and I arrived
- 23:30 at the British Ambassador's garden and Casey waved me like this, and my wife and I had to stand on the receiving line. "Doctor and Mrs Coates, Lord and Lady Casey, HM [Her Majesty's] Ambassador and his wife, and Richard of Gloucester." My boss who was an Englishman came up and I had to say, "Excuse me, Your Excellency, I would like to introduce you to doctor so and so."
- 24:00 Doctor so and so almost went, it was an extraordinary experience. Those were the sorts of things that happened. After that the Nepalese must have thought that I had some sort of contacts, because I was obviously friendly with the Caseys and after that I found that I was on the receiving end for parties for all of the embassies. I remember going to a dinner with the British
- 24:30 Ambassador and he would say, "Coates, have you met the President of Pakistan?" "No sir not yet." "Have you met the Maharaja of Jaipur?" "How do you do?" Quite an extraordinary situation. And I remember when we were leaving, the German Ambassador in Kathmandu arranged a party for my wife and I. You know the King of Nepal is
- 25:00 meant to be the incarnation of the god Vishnu, you see. And standing talking to the first or second prince, so there is the German Ambassador, me and the brother of the king here and somebody tapped the prince on the shoulder and he turned around to us and said, "I am terribly sorry, my brother has just asked me and I must go to the palace for dinner." And he left

- 25:30 and I said to the German Ambassador, "My God, it is almost Jesus being called by John the Baptist." Going back to the Nauru thing, it went along well and I had a lot of surgery to do and very interesting clinical work. But the labour government stopped our income being tax-free so all of the Australians had to go home because we weren't paid an awful lot.
- 26:00 So I went back and struggled around in surgery a bit, in medicine a bit in Melbourne, I married again in Nauru actually. The one that was here last night. I married her from the Philippines and brought her over to Nauru. And eventually having done a bit of work in various parts of Victoria, which never suited me very much, I accepted a job in Saudi Arabia and I had two years in Saudi Arabia.
- 26:30 Fascinating work again because I had Jordanian interpreters every day, which means that now I have a rather biased approach to the Israeli-Palestinian program. But eventually I had an interesting time. I had a vacation in Jamaica and Montego
- 27:00 Bay and a visit to London and New York, which were quite good. But I had a stroke and it affected my arm and they flew me to London and I eventually came back, I was in a hospital in London for six weeks. I could go out and go over to the military club over there and have a great time really, although most of the time I wore Saudi Arabian dress because I couldn't do up buttons and it was comfortable.
- 27:30 I must say the English contemporaries didn't like it very much, "Got your fancy dress on?" I came back to Australia then twenty years ago. I went back to Saudi Arabia, finished the contract, came back here and here I am now. But as far as that later is concerned, the major influence in my life is my youngest son. I was very pleased that he went through Duntroon as an army officer; it brought me back into the army environment.
- 28:00 I knew his officers, I knew Puckapunyal well, we would go down to Puckapunyal sometimes when he was in Duntroon, after he had been in Duntroon. And eventually he was a major in the army about twelve years ago and he was appointed to the British Army of the Rhine.
- 28:30 And I went over and brushed up my German, which was great fun for me. Stayed with him for some weeks and I took a journey across Berlin just after the fall of the Berlin Wall and went across to Warsaw and Budapest and Prague, tremendous for me to get back into the European environment, French and German. And a few years
- 29:00 later, he was lieutenant colonel and he was a military advisor in London, so I went over there. So when we were in Germany, he and I visited the grave of my uncle in France, and when he was in England I went over and visited him. But after I left, he took his son and visited the same grave so all of the generations have been to the
- 29:30 grave in Havre, France. Since then I have travelled a bit, I have been to Japan, first ship into Ho Chi Minh City [formerly Saigon]. One of the things that moved me a bit, I was on a Russian ship, it was the time of Gorbachev when 'perestroika' was coming up and it was moving because we were in the middle of the ocean on Anzac Day
- 30:00 and there were a number of ex-servicemen on board with me, and the Russian captain and his officers came down and saluted the Australian anthem on Anzac Day. It was very moving because we had been separate from the Russians for so long.
- 30:30 I have had a Phillipino family over there, I have been over to the Philippines many times. Here I am. Back in Melbourne.

So when you came back from Saudi Arabia did you retire at that point?

I retired then, I had had a stroke and I was extremely deaf.

- 31:00 I was made a TPI [totally and permanently incapacitated] veteran eventually and there wasn't much I could do, so I have been retired now out of medicine for twenty years. I still maintain my registration, I can write a script if I want to, I can advise people to send them somewhere but my profession I am finished with.

You said you went on a trip to Japan and you told us that funny story about your enemy?

- 31:30 Oh yeah, that was in Kathmandu.

What about Japan, how did you find Japan?

Oh I only called into Yokohama, I was on a ship and we called into Yokohama and I don't think it affected me one way or the other. After all, Japan had rejuvenated and it was one of the leading powers in Asia. Nothing more you can say, you are very pleased to have dealing with the Japanese.

- 32:00 So I didn't have any contact really with the Japanese on that trip. I think my Saudi Arabian experience was one of the most important because it became very obvious the problems that exist
- 32:30 in the Middle East. Israel and the Muslim states, that's so important and I learned a lot about the Whabi fundamentalism in Saudi Arabia itself. For example, when I first went up there we had in our hospital,

beautiful hospital in

33:00 Tabuk near the border with Jordan. we had a great living area where we had a swimming pool there and a movie area there and just not long after I went up there, they put a great big thing like that over the wall so you couldn't see the swimming pool to see semi-naked people, and they wouldn't allow us to see movies because they wouldn't be very nice. And we worked with an Australian nurse, sister in my clinic,

33:30 I couldn't go in the same bus with her down to do our shopping. It was becoming fundamentalist even then.

So that was happening while you were there?

While I was there, there was quite an increase in the strictness and I remember going down to Jedda, and they say Jedda but actually in Arabic it is Jidda, I was there with a Saudi doctor and he had been trained in Germany and when I went down to Jedda, he took me to an eating and drinking place that looked right out over the water.

34:00 And then took me back to his house, it was the only house I was ever invited to by a Saudi and when I got in there the first thing I noticed, he had a movie on with very strange movies from Egypt, next thing a girl came in, young woman came in, short skirt. And I thought it must be the maid or something, it was his wife. They were making sure to indicate to me that they were not going to take any

34:30 notice of all of this fundamental business, they were products of the outside world. But they were very rare. I also remember going into a supermarket down at Jedda and there were three or four girls there and I could see they were looking at me. And normally you couldn't do that, if you made an attempt to look at, oh no run away. It became obvious to me that they were taking their freedom to look at a western

35:00 foreigner in Jedda where they wouldn't be able to do that Riyadh, you see? I have learnt since that Jedda has been a much more liberal part of Saudi Arabia and they are the two experiences that I had which indicate that. Very fascinating part of the world to be in. I will say this about that, of course there was no alcohol, but it was it was extraordinary that in the supermarkets

35:30 there was an extraordinary amount of sugar sold, and everybody of course made their grog. Whilst I didn't I went to the odd party there and they would offer me a try and I said, "No thanks very much." I thought, "I am in Saudi Arabia, I will abide by the rules and regulations." But we were very close to Aqaba in Jordan and every two or three months a mate of mine and I, German origin but he came

36:00 from the West Indies, he and I would drive up in my car to the border and stop my car at the border, walk through the customs, there would be a taxi waiting the other side, he didn't even ask you where you wanted to go, he took you to a bottle shop. And then we would spend a weekend at the Holiday Inn and be able to sit down and have a glass of wine; it was quite different. And then two days later

36:30 walk out and across the border and back into "No booze, thank you very much." It was a strange existence but interesting.

So was that out of respect for the customs or a legal matter? If you got caught there would be trouble?

Well you would be kicked out of the country, be in very serious trouble. If we had any left, we would have half a bottle of something or other and we would leave it in our room.

37:00 And the people that looked after us, they would always have that. Quite an interesting period in my life. My interpreters were Jordanians and their parents of course had been Palestinians and had been pushed out by the Israelis, very intelligent young people and it gave me an understanding of what the major

37:30 problem is in policies against terrorism. One of the reasons, I went go into politics, but I have always felt that it was unwise to go into Iraq until you solve the Middle East problem, because until you solve the Middle East problem there is not going to be any hope of dealing with the terrorists. And as we all know, things are not going to well there because the Americans

38:00 have very difficult, to continue to back Israel at the same time work with the Palestinians. Anyway that's beside the point.

Can you perhaps tell us a little bit about what you were doing in terms of malaria eradication? What sort of programs?

Oh it was a very important program. The basis of malaria eradication program is that the anopheles mosquito, it will bite you

38:30 and then it will go and have a rest by sitting on a wall. If it is a normal wall, well he has taken away the malaria parasites from me, he can go out, have a rest, come back and bite you and give you the parasites from me. Well the malaria eradication consisted of spraying every wall in every dwelling in every town with DDT [dichlor-diphenyl-trichlorethane, an insecticide].

39:00 So that's what happened, it was an engineering problem going on, people spraying all of the time and it

was our job to supervise that. But it meant that as long as you kept the DDT there for a few years say, there was interruption of transmission, there was no more malaria. But the problem was that the WHO program was limited to four years and it was hoped at the end of four years there would be a basic health service

- 39:30 that could come along then and pick the cases and treat them straight away. Of course that never happened because the countries like Nepal didn't have the money to produce basic health services. My job in Nepal as public health advisor was to try and train young people, in China they call them barefoot doctors: semi-train people to go out as medical
- 40:00 orderlies into the country. I was supposed to establish a clinic in the Narani zone in Kathmandu, down in the south but when I got there, we had a big sign up, the Narani Health Centre. When I left two years later, the only difference was that the sign had fallen down. It was all a bit depressing, but that's what the malaria eradication program was. And it succeeded in controlling, not curing
- 40:30 but controlling malaria in many parts of the world. But then it fizzled out. I am not saying I was a genius but there were quite a number of scientific people that realised that the long term effect, without the health service it was not going to work. Well it hasn't worked, because malaria is just as big a program as it ever was. And one of the other problems is the use of DDT
- 41:00 after it had been used for some time, I have forgotten the woman's name who wrote a famous book about the dangers of DDT. It gets into water and stays there and causes all sorts of problems so they had to stop using DDT and there wasn't really an alternative that was cheap enough to be used in all of the countries.
- 41:23 End of tape

Tape 7

- 00:30 You would look across and there were young schoolgirls all dressed beautifully in school and we would say, "Look at those ten gorgeous girls, eight of them are gorgeous and two of them are not too bad." And we would say, "Back home. Look at those eight gorgeous birds. Two of them are gorgeous and the other eight aren't too bad." Oh they were beautiful women in the Philippines.
- 01:00 **We're recording, we can talk some more about the Philippines. What were the circumstances of meeting your second wife? Can you tell me about that?**
- Well I went out one night and I was introduced to her. She had been to university originally and she had left university and was working with a company
- 01:30 which was providing combos [musical groups] and people all over Asia, all of that sort of thing. The Philippino singers are very popular in Asia. And I met her this one night and I saw her two or three nights actually and I said, "What about coming out with me?" and she said, "I am not that sort of girl." So we kept on seeing each other for six
- 02:00 weeks I suppose. And then I found out that she was a highly intelligent girl and I became quite attracted to her, to be quite honest. And three months later, I left the Philippines. I made the terrible mistake of writing to one of my wife's friends and saying that I had been involved with a Philippino. Well my wife, first of all
- 02:30 she insisted on calling, well she must have been a bar girl prostitute which was typical of Caucasian women where any oriental woman is concerned. And I went home and we tried to get together, we went up to Kathmandu for a while but she could never forgive me and it was a problem. Of course, we were living this wonderful life with the Caseys and this sort of thing but of an evening when we got home from the marvellous party,
- 03:00 my wife would start telling me what a terrible person I was and all of the rest of it; and when I went home to bring her up there I said, "Lets finish with the whole business, lets start again." And she got off the plane at Kathmandu got into a taxi and the first thing she said was, "How did you get out of that little trouble you had in the Philippines?" "Finished."
- 03:30 We carried on for a couple of years.
- How old were your children at that stage?**
- Well, two were at boarding school in Wesley, the other two were with us at school in Kathmandu. So the younger ones were in their early teens, they were going to finish up, there were four at school. So anyway we were divorced, it was a very sad situation but, looking back, I realise that we could never have gone on in WHO because
- 04:00 my two elder boys at Wesley both got on drugs and when they came up on leave of course there was marijuana and whatnot growing in our backyard in Kathmandu, but even then we found that those boys had been involved in marijuana in Australia. Terrible part is that both of them have never got over the

drugs, one is in gaol now. I realised later

- 04:30 that having four boys within a year of each other because with two of them on drugs already, we would have had four at Wesley College, we would have had to have had a home down there and my wife would have had to go down and look after them. And I would have been left alone, it is one of the problems of international life. Very few people in WHO had the number of children so quickly as I had.
- 05:00 It made life a bit difficult. Over the years it has settled down. The tragedy was that my first wife about two years ago developed motor neuron disease, her husband had just died, and Judith, her name, the boys brought her down to my place in Ferntree Gully and she died in my house in Ferntree Gully tragically a fortnight after she came back. And I kissed her goodbye, I was the last person, and
- 05:30 the dreadful part was that the day that she came back into my house in Ferntree Gully, she was sitting on one of these chairs next to me there and my wife is Ludi see? "Ludi smokes, so I can smoke." Well she couldn't smoke and Ludi wasn't smoking then anyway. And then she said, "I want to meet Ludi."
- 06:00 She never said another word before she died, to me it was dreadfully tragic because she realised, she knew that I was back with Ludi and she knew my boys knew her and rah, rah. And she realised in her later life she had been silly coming to conclusions of what Ludi was and all of the terrible things I might have done. The thing that used to
- 06:30 upset her so much was the very thought that I would become seriously involved with a terrible bloody bar girl was just beyond belief. Anyway that's what happened with Judith, the last words she said before she died were, "I want to meet Ludi." And that's that. In my relationship now with Ludi we were divorced twenty-eight years ago, we were divorced twenty years ago, we married twenty-eight years ago.
- 07:00 And things didn't go well when she came out from the Philippines, she was very lonely, she actually worked as a secretary in a small practice that I had which was marvellous. But I had to leave that and go into a government clinic and she was left on her own and lonely, and I know damn well if I had given her a baby she would have been all right, but we were separated and she divorced me. And strangely enough, after I came back from Saudi
- 07:30 Arabia, I met her and we arranged to meet in the Southern Cross Hotel and there she was and we have been together ever since. But in the few years we were apart she had two girls, she had two children. Those children come in here every week, one is now twenty, she is now finishing a university course and the other is eighteen. I talked to her on the phone last night.
- 08:00 So it is a strange family set-up actually. My sons don't like it very much because they say to me, "You wouldn't marry anyone Ludi's age again would you Dad?" I said, "Why?" "Well if you did my children would have to wait until they are grown up to get their money." And they have had money from me, they have had most of my money.
- 08:30 But I will live with Ludi, eventually she is going to look after me when I require, I am eighty-one next birthday and I am getting to the stage, I will never go to a home, I will buy a house again for her and she will look after me. She is actually trained now at looking after elderly people, so that suits me fine.

So Doctor Coates, even though you were raised in an

- 09:00 **establishment family and in the mainstream, you have managed to veer right away from that haven't you?**

Absolutely. I remember my father saying, "Royal Melbourne Club." Well I used to be a visiting member of the naval club when I was in WHO every time I came back here I was a guest member of the Melbourne Club but I was asked to join. As a matter of fact, I didn't have the thousand bucks to put in at that time. But I couldn't stand it, it doesn't suit my temperament.

- 09:30 I am a stranger in this social environment, really. I have grown up in a very respectable family, but my lifestyle has been quite different.

A little bit of the bohemian in you?

- 10:00 I am not quite bohemian but I am international. I am I think further than the Melbourne University, the life in WHO was you were in Geneva or here or there, and you were mixing with every race, every nationality under the sun as equals. And when I came home, for example I don't know whether I told you when you are in WHO you are issued with a
- 10:30 laissez-passer, 'allowed to pass', a passport. So that you went through a diplomatic exit from any airport in the world, I was travelling around on the laissez-passer here there and everywhere. I got back on leave from Kathmandu, and I came to Tullamarine and I - "What's that?" "That's my laissez-passer." "Well we don't have those things here. Where is your passport, mate?" and I knew I was home.
- 11:00 And then I went into the Naval and Military Club the next day and, "Oh Bill, haven't seen you for twelve months, where have you been?" "Well as a matter of fact I have been in the Philippines and I have been in Kathmandu." "Oh well, you wouldn't know Carlton got beat last weekend would you?" I'm home. My father was a bit the same, even that he was Sir Albert Coates, famous all over the world but he never

quite understood why I wanted

11:30 to do what I did.

So can we talk about your father now? Why don't you give me an idea of who he was for you?

Well he was born into a family in Ballarat. My grandfather, his father was a post office worker, they were obviously English people who were more intelligent than they appeared to be because they all followed as,

12:00 two knights in the family, they all did very well, the whole family did well. My grandfather took my father away from school at the age of twelve in Ballarat. And my father was put into a bookbinder's, first of all into a butchers shop and then into a bookbinder's shop and he started reading copiously at a young age. And he went into the post office in a

12:30 way and before the First World War, this is quite interesting, for the First World War there was a young student teacher by the name of Leslie Morshead in Ballarat and he trained him to join, what was called the junior public and the senior public exams at the time. The senior public exam was the equivalent of matriculation. Now the funny thing was that after my mother died, Leslie Morshead by then was the manager of the Orient Line

13:00 in Melbourne and he arranged all of my father's trips around the world. But more than that, the same Leslie Morshead in the Second World War was Major-General Sir Leslie Morshead, one of the most famous generals in Australia [Commander 9th Australian Division at Tobruk and El Alamein]. So anyway that's how my father started, he was taught by Leslie Morshead, but had very little schooling. He went away to the First World War at the age of nineteen.

13:30 When he got to Egypt, he started studying French and German and Turkish and that meant that he went to Gallipoli and he was a medical orderly on Gallipoli, and when he got to France he had a strange experience. He was billeted somewhere and his knowledge of French and German was such that he was responsible for a spy being caught and he was transferred then to the intelligence corps,

14:00 the Australian Intelligence Corps. And spent the rest of the war in this rather fascinating existence of being involved in chasing spies and he was involved going in with Germans prisoners, listening to what they were saying. 'Stool pigeon' they used to call them. But then the thing was that I don't know whether I mentioned this before, at the end of the war Sir John Monash said to him if he would like, he

14:30 could get him into Oxford University and my father could join some section of the British, a service of some kind. But my father, his ambition was to become a doctor so he came back to Melbourne and he started medicine. And he used to have to work at night in the post office sorting letters for the first couple of years that he was working and finally he

15:00 was getting money from somewhere that I never knew, but the family eventually were helping quite a lot. And I was born two years after he graduated as a doctor and I am told that I was taken to his graduation and the Chancellor of course was Sir John Monash. And Sir John Monash tapped me on my head. I apparently have some other relationship with Sir John. But then he went, my father was very clever obviously

15:30 because then he did an MD, MS, master of surgery, doctor of medicine degree, and he became one of the founding members of the Royal Australian College of Surgeons, and was on the staff of the old Melbourne Hospital now called the Royal Melbourne Hospital. And he was starting to get interested in neurosurgery, and that's how he took me around the word studying neurosurgery. So that's how my

16:00 situation differed so much, my father came back and he, for some unknown reason, decided he would join. He came in one day when I was just seventeen. He said, "I have joined the army. I am going away to Singapore in three weeks time." And he was forty-six then and that was that. I was sent to university because the

16:30 situation in the family was not terribly good, five children had been left behind to a second wife. It was a bit difficult and he just said to me, "Go to Auburn College and do medicine." So with my background of histories and languages, it was pretty ridiculous but the war was there and there was nothing else we could do about it. So he went off to Singapore and not

17:00 long before the fall of Singapore he was to be appointed consulting surgeon to the British Army Singapore with the rank of full colonel. And two or three weeks later Pearl Harbour happened. And the army authorities at that stage decided they would evacuate a number of senior officers that they felt were technically valuable. They were worried at that stage of invasion and all of this sort of thing.

17:30 And my father was selected to be sent home. He told me that when he tried to get down on the ship that he was going out on, he was held up by British police; Australian troops were mucking around and deserting and God knows what and he had to go back and get written instructions that he was leaving under orders, which indicates that things weren't too good at the fall of Singapore.

18:00 Some of our troops were deserting and doing all sorts of things. So the story is that he was on a small boat that left Singapore and was going across Indonesia to Sumatra and the Japanese bombed and sank the little boat. And my father was landed up at a place called Tembilahan at Sumatra with a lot of

wounded people coming over the same way

- 18:30 as he. And he got across to the other side of Sumatra, he had to operate on quite a lot of these people, and the Japanese had already taken over and the Japanese were cooperating with him quite well, he operated under the supervision of the Japs and the Japs were quite happy. And then a boat came along and he was supposed to come home on that boat. But he decided rightly or wrongly, I sometimes think it was wrong because he disobeyed an order and the army
- 19:00 never forgave him for that when he came home. He stayed and was captured by the Japanese and was sent across to the Burma railway. He was senior surgeon on the Burma end of the Burma-Siam railway. Weary Dunlop was the senior surgeon in the southern end of the railway. When the war was coming to an end, the Japanese formed a ten thousand bed sick hospital at a place called Nakom Paton
- 19:30 in Thailand and the Japanese appointed my father as the chief medical officer and Weary Dunlop was his 2IC, second in command. And they were there until the fall and I remember my father saying that Louis Mountbatten came down and saw them all and helped them all. And I have just been reading his biography at the moment,
- 20:00 And Lady and Louis Mountbatten saw my father and he drove around quite a lot to the prisoner places. And strangely enough when he got home the Mountbattens came to Melbourne and there was a party given for them at Government House and Lady and Louis Mountbatten said, "Where is Colonel Coates?" and they had to get my father from Toorak. And my father and stepmother went over there and met the
- 20:30 Lady Mountbatten again. Anyway, after the war I was still doing the medical course and working terribly hard. I was living in the house still which was difficult. I only had three pound ten a week and I had to give thirty bob to my stepmother so I had two pounds a week to live on and I used to have to work during the vacations which wasn't terribly easy.
- 21:00 Eventually anyway, I think I mentioned before, when I was sitting my exams and my father was the Chairman of Examiners, my father went to England to get away so there wouldn't be any inference that I was perhaps favourite or anything like that. So I graduated medicine. My father then became, he was president of the BMA [British Medical Association] a couple of times; that was before we had an AMA [Australian Medical Association].

- 21:30 British Medical Association. And he became very well known in the Australian field really, he was a fine man, a wonderful man really, worked until he was nearly seventy, operating into his early seventies. I operated with him for three years as his assistant. Pretty hard on me but I learnt a lot.

Can we back track a little bit to his time in Burma

- 22:00 **as a POW and working in the hospital, can you recall very much that he has told you about those experiences?**

Well, it is all written down. Of course, the situation was so terrible that they had no proper instruments and no drugs or anything like that. But somebody got a drug for treating amoebiasis and

- 22:30 my father was given some and that saved his life. Things were so primitive, operating under terrible circumstances. Weary Dunlop was doing the same, a number of prisoner of war doctors in Burma - it has all been written up - it was terrible. I think my father was bashed up a bit by the Japs and that sort of thing. Weary Dunlop of course
- 23:00 was nearly shot on occasion and the whole thing was a disaster story. But my father being his age, I think it was probably a bit more difficult for him. Weary Dunlop of course was fifteen years his junior; he had been a student of my father before the war. I knew Weary then and when I was in Nauru, Weary came through and I had to get him to assist me in a case in Nauru so many years later.

- 23:30 **So when did you know that your father was coming home or did he just arrive?**

Oh well the war ended. I don't know whether we were give any warning, I don't think so, just suddenly told that he would be arriving tomorrow. When he did arrive, in his book, I get a little bit upset at times because he wrote he met the family, my sisters and his wife

- 24:00 at Essendon airport and there was Bill keeping the home fires burning. No mention of the fact that I had been in the war myself. Anyway he was an extraordinary man, he was a brilliant person. He had his faults,

- 24:30 some people thought he was a bit manic, and he was a bit manic, "Do this and that and the other thing." But his very career starting from nothing was an extraordinary career, and undoubtedly affected me very much in my life. I must admit I have regretted being a doctor sometimes. One of the reasons I went away was because in Melbourne I was Bertie Coates' son.

- 25:00 If I got second-class honours, I should have got first-class honours. If I applied for a job, I was Bertie Coates' son. And you know some people didn't like him, so I was affected in a way. But it is always the same, if you are the son of a famous person. There is a very famous doctor, I won't mention his name, in Melbourne had a son who became a surgeon and his father pushed him, pushed him, pushed him.

25:30 And used my father to try and push him to try and become a professor; and John so-and-so committed suicide on his father's farm. It is not easy being the son of a famous person and I knew this. And it was one of the reasons I went away to get away, I am Bill Coates, nobody knows anything about me.

So at what stage of your career did you work with him? You said you assisted him for three years?

26:00 When I came back, I went into my practice in Nagambie and he wanted me to go back and do a higher degree in surgery, so he offered me a job as his assistant and I had had two boys by then and I went and had a nice flat in Brighton, and it was quite nice and it was going to work quite well. But, not that I wanted to do the higher degree in surgery, but that's beside the point. But then my wife had a third child.

26:30 And that meant I had to buy a house, to buy a house you had to have a practice. To finance into a house which was far too expensive for me because you can't just go into a three-bedroom house and have a medical practice as well. So I had a very difficult time for about five or six years really, and that's why I went back to the country again. Had a very successful six years in Nagambie.

27:00 That's what happened there.

So you were working with your father at his practice were you?

No, he had a surgical practice. He had rooms in Collins Street but I used to go and assist in his operating and I used to collect his instruments; they were all left at Epworth Hospital so I used to go to Epworth Hospital and collect the instruments, we might be operating in any hospital in Melbourne and I would take the stuff over and then I had to go back and look at the patients in the evening.

27:30 I was his assistant. But it did mean that I had a lot of surgical experience; much more than the average GP [general practitioner]. That was very important to me later on, first of all in Nagambie I could operate. I could do an appendectomy or all of those damn things. I knew my limitations. But when I went to Nauru, I was the only surgeon on the island so that I had to do quite a lot of

28:00 very good surgery, I was able to say well I will fix this up and that up and I will be able to fly this patient down to the Royal Melbourne, I had a good connection with the Royal Melbourne in Nauru. So that that experience with him for three years helped me very much in that aspect of my life. I was trained in a lot of, I mean in those days you were an obstetrician, you delivered babies, you looked after coronaries,

28:30 and you opened bellies, those days in country general practice you were doing everything, exciting and interesting work.

So you didn't get additional training to be a surgeon apart from the work with your father?

No I didn't do the, I couldn't take three years off to be attending lectures and things like that. I had a family. I had to work. So I eventually had to have a practice of my

29:00 own so that I was never a specialist surgeon. But when it came to a point, I was able to do that work without an FRCS [Fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons] when I had to, do you understand?

So what was it like working with your father? How comfortable were you?

When I was working for him as his assistant it was good, I was just his assistant and that was that.

29:30 But he was very cruel to me when I was a resident at the Royal Melbourne, I may say. Because on one occasion I had to do a below knee amputation and he had a fellow who later became a very famous vascular surgeon in Melbourne, but this vascular surgeon didn't like my father and we were going away doing this amputation. And I knew damn well that the main thing was you had to get this

30:00 popliteal artery, the artery you stop it, and I am dealing with this damned fellow, he was fellowship and all of the rest of it, "Oh your father's - " and "Come on, finish it." Well I knew it wasn't right. Well the next morning the wound had swollen up, it was bleeding and my father came around, "Get to theatre, mid thigh amputation. Going to have to take it off there." It wasn't my fault.

30:30 So we got to theatre and he got about a dozen students around the place and I had to start and do an above knee amputation and my father said, "This man thinks he is a surgeon. He doesn't know anything about surgery, and he now caused this patient instead of having a below knee amputation to have an above knee amputation."

31:00 He would never dream of doing it to anyone else but me, he would never do it to any normal resident and he did that and I never forgave him. Bastard. And that sort of thing did happen. My father is keen on telling students how careful you should be and to avoid this, but it wasn't my fault. But he did that. On another occasion, we did surgery on a case where an

31:30 ilioectomy and he had always preached to me the symptoms of obstruction after the operation. And at that time he wasn't talking to me for some reason, some family row had happened and he was just not talking to me. And I walked into the Royal Melbourne that night and this girl go like this and she had no bowel, she had had an ilioscopy blah, blah. And I called in the senior surgeon on the staff, and he said, "Oh no, it is post operative, no problem."

- 32:00 and I looked and I said, "I am sure she is obstructed." And my father happened to be at the Lord Mayor's dinner, tails and decorations, and I rang him, "Yes." I said, "Julia Sarge is obstructed, Dad." "What's the pulse?" I said, "A hundred and twenty." "I am coming up, get to theatre."
- 32:30 The whole Royal Melbourne is getting ready with Sir Albert coming up, he wasn't knighted then. The anaesthetist came in and he was a senior bloke in the hospital he said, "There is nothing to do; it's a post operative paralysis. Jesus, Bill I hope you're right." And we open the belly and there is six feet of black bowel, I was right.
- 33:00 Walked out of the theatre and he said, "Not many men would have picked that Bill, you saved a life." And I did. So on the one hand he was good, but he had been a bugger to me on the amputation. But then he knew that I was right and no one else in the hospital had been right except for me and if it hadn't been operated on she would have died of peritonitis. That's what my father was like, he was a strange man.
- 33:30 **Sounds like in some way you had to prove yourself to him?**
- Of course I did. Because foremost to him, medicine was the only profession. I suppose all men like that, I had to prove myself, I don't really know. But I know my father never really understood
- 34:00 why I wanted to live the life that I did lead. International life. Although he was famous overseas and he travelled to England regularly, Melbourne was his - he had grown up in an underprivileged society, worked his way through desperately to be what he was. I had been at Scotch College from the age of seven, with a comfortable house, comfortable home; we were relatively wealthy people.
- 34:30 So that I can't complain I was spoilt in a way. I didn't go through the stress that he went through, but that's the way it was. I can't complain.
- So do you think that he ever arrived at a point of accepting you before he died?**
- Oh we were very close,
- 35:00 I knew still that probably I had been through so much with him with my mother and all of the rest of it that we had a very close relationship. I don't for one moment think that he condemned me then, but I don't think he could understand why I wouldn't have preferred to have been a well known surgeon in Melbourne rather than what I had done. I know underneath that he understood.
- 35:30 Did I mention about the report by Lady Casey to the Cabinet? I mentioned that? When I met the Caseys in Kathmandu at the reception for the Prince Richard of Gloucester and Lord and Lady Casey and whatnot, when I got home my father said
- 36:00 to me, "Oh I received a copy of the letter that Lady Casey sent about their visit to Kathmandu. The official report that they put in to the Cabinet." And he said, "They said that they were helped very much by a brilliant Australian doctor." I don't know whether they put my name in. "Oh thank you very much, that was nice." Because we did get on very well with the Caseys
- 36:30 I must say. But my father never showed me the letter and never mentioned it again. But I know underneath that he was probably very proud. But if it had been something to do with surgery he would have been much prouder, he was like that.
- 37:00 **It would be good to know a bit more about your work overseas, well the fact that you worked in several countries for the World Health Organization, the actual nature of the work you did?**
- Well most of the time I was a staff member in a team responsible for malaria eradication in that country so I would be
- 37:30 working with engineers doing the spraying and all of that sort of thing. When I was the public health advisor, I had seven other people; I had an American nurse I had a British nurse, I had somebody to do with engineering or something like that, I had a group of people who were responsible to me. So that I had to look after what they were doing and advise them what to do. The other thing when I was
- 38:00 in that job was in Nepal and every country, people would be, what they call STC, short term consultants would be appointed from somewhere around the world to come and advise on something in Nepal and I had to take charge of those people and I had to take them all around Nepal. For example I had a professor from Bratislava,
- 38:30 in Germany at the time of the Cold War and this fellow came out and he was a specialist in, I can't remember what field. And I had to take him all around Nepal and show him what was going on. It was a funny thing, we used to entertain a lot at our house there at Kathmandu. And my two younger sons were at school in Kathmandu and I remember this doctor coming and he said, "Billy, come here,
- 39:00 I am a Communist, I will show you my Communist medal." Thing to prove he is a Communist. And he was making a joke of the fact that we were at war with Communists and he was a Communist. But that sort of thing was going on all of the time. I met some extremely interesting people. As a matter of fact, I took a load of French people down to show them southern Nepal,

- 39:30 and we were stopping near where we were going to stop the night. And the French doctor said to me, "Bill, stop. I am going to buy a cock we will have a cock for dinner tonight." And I thought to myself, we don't use that language. There are some funny things you can remember about living in a multicultural society.
- 40:00 That's the job I had there which was extremely interesting because I had a, when I was at Scotch I was taught a bit of chemistry that I had to attend and I was taught by a fellow called Torte Jamison, Mr Jamison had a long nose like a torte, you see, so he was always known as Torte Jameson. And when I was in Kathmandu his son came out as a short-term consultant in some scientific area, so I was there with Torte Jameson
- 40:30 and his son with me in Kathmandu. It was always interesting that sort of thing. Meet all sorts of quite famous people. When I was in Jakarta, I can't remember his name now, he was one of the most famous Australian scientists stayed with me for a weekend in Jakarta and we discussed the failure of the eradication program and all of this sort of thing. I had a very
- 41:00 interesting time not just in the field of malaria, but when I was in the other field; for example, I remember in Jakarta I was invited to a meeting with the director of infectious diseases. And I had been in the Philippines, I had read about a problem of an outbreak of dengue of some kind.
- 41:30 And I gave a lecture to that in Jakarta and I was then asked to become a speaker at another meeting. And that was fine, I enjoyed that very much, but I had a French boss, I didn't like that very much. He came back, he couldn't stand the idea of me being promoted so he took it over himself. And nobody went to listen to him. Things like that happened, but that's the sort of thing I did in WHO.
- 42:00 End of tape

Tape 8

00:30 **When you got to Delhi?**

When I got to Delhi as I say, I found it nice where possible to wear the local dress. And I indicated I was given an Afghan cap, which they wear in India as well in Pakistan. And when I got to Delhi I went into a tailor in the hotel and I got him to make me a nari suit, the high uncut silk

01:00 dress that the Indians wore. First of all they are very comfortable. And once I was in a hotel in old Delhi and I had to go to a reception for the lying in state, the President of India had died, and I went with an Englishman. And I put on my cap, I have still got it hanging there to be quite honest, and nari suit and I came up to them

01:30 and a big Sikh guard sent me that way with the Indians and this way for the English expats [expatriates]. And a little while later, I was in my room one night and there was going to be a Hindu wedding outside in the grounds of this wonderful hotel, there was thousands of dollars worth of lights and things like that and I am sitting in my room writing something. And there is a knock at my door and here are two Indian girls.

02:00 It turned out that the toilet was broken where they were and they were told mistakenly to come to my room. It was wrong you see, anyway I let them go into my toilet et cetera. And then, "Would you like to come to the wedding? It is my cousin?" "Thank you very much." So I dress up in my nari suit and I turn up at the wedding and I am taken in with the family, not with the expats. I am with them you see, I saw so much, I enjoyed that wedding so much, only because I was accepted

02:30 as one of them and not a foreigner, an expat. So that happened to me a number of similar situations in my travels and it was always enjoyable. On the other hand, I was wearing my barong togalo, the Arabian gear and my hotel, I was at a hotel in St Johns Wood, very expensive private hotel paid for by the Americans running my company.

03:00 They used to let me out, I used to go out, right next door to Lords Cricket Ground, they had a big pub, have a couple of beers. One day one of the waitresses came up and said, "You shouldn't be drinking that, sir." And I said, "I am not in my country now." And she said, "Oh, you speak beautiful English." And I said, "Yes, I went to school here." I felt very ashamed of that.

03:30 **But like you say it must have given you wonderful access to the people and society?**

Oh yes you become part of the country you are living in and that's what I loved. And it took me into places as an expat I wouldn't have been invited into. And knowing that there is a lot of racism still in the world and it is far better to be able

04:00 to mix with people in the same language and the same way that they live. They may be Italians. They may be Jordanians, they may be something. I always found that if I had a bit of the language and I understood the way they lived, for example, it was easier for them to accept me and I enjoyed it that much more.

So how did that impact on when you were actually

04:30 **working with local people?**

Each of us had a foreign partner, I always had a Nepalese doctor. He was my partner and we would get very close and you would get to

05:00 know how they worked and how they thought and you learnt a hell of a lot because you were working all of the time with that nationality. And if you were working in Ethiopia or working in the Philippines, you were working with one of that nation you became a part of that with them and you learnt a lot more than going there as a visitor for example.

So you were involved in any training programs?

Training programs in Nepal, I was involved in training young people to be,

05:30 in China they were called bare feet doctors. Training young people into understanding basic medical problems, when they should call, they couldn't call for a doctor because there were only about a hundred and twenty doctors in the whole of Nepal with a population of over six million. I was to try and organise something so that we could make as much use of what little medical care there was available.

06:00 Sometimes in Nepal in areas there way up in the mountains, there were young volunteers, maybe from Australia, maybe from anywhere actually working, nursing sisters for example, and I had to fly down and ask them if I could help and if there was anything they needed. In many parts of Asia that was still going on. Young people doing wonderful work but not getting

06:30 much kudos for it for example.

And what sort of illnesses for example in Nepal were sort of common to that country?

All of the tropical diseases, parasitic diseases, I can't go through the whole list but everything caused by mosquitoes, caused by all sorts of parasites.

07:00 I didn't come in contact much with that because there was very little. I have been to hospitals there and seen people carried in and they have been carried by somebody for three weeks to carry them from the village into the hospital. But we were made well aware that the general medical standards in that country were terrible, something we couldn't understand.

07:30 Our job in WHO was to help as much as we could but you couldn't do very much.

Did that include providing medicines?

We didn't provide any medicines. We were perhaps them try to find somewhere in the world that would help them, but generally speaking our job was limited to keeping away from the actual specific work.

08:00 **Was there research being done as well in those countries?**

I wouldn't know, not much in the way in the country itself. Those countries were so poor that they didn't have a health service and there is no way in the wide world that you can get a health service without a wealthy country.

So what would be the reason for various medical scientists coming to the country?

08:30 But they wouldn't do anything, you have got to have a laboratory and you have got to have things to work with.

What I am getting at, I am sorry Doctor Coates, is that you said that as part of your job with the World Health Organization was that in the countries you met up with scientists in different fields.

Oh yes they would come in to look around, the one that I was involved with he was a specialist in hepatitis something think that. But

09:00 he just sort of gave advice but, to be quite honest with you, WHO does not contribute much at all. It is a very nice job with tax free American dollars and you don't actually achieve much at all. As I say when I started my clinic, there was a sign up there and twelve months later the sign had fallen off, because it ultimately got back to how much the Nepalese

09:30 government had to spend on health services. They haven't. And well may the experts come around and say, "Well, you should have this and that." But then they go away and somebody comes around the next year and says the same thing. I left WHO because I found that as far as the malaria program was concerned, it wasn't going to work. It depended entirely on a time-related program at the end of which you had to have a basic health service., I knew they weren't going to have a basic health service.

10:00 It all fell to bits. At that stage I got disillusioned about it. One of the other things about WHO is I used to call it an Afro-Asian friendship society in a way because government normally in all of those parts of the world are told you can have two WHO specialists in such and such a field next year. So what happens is

- 10:30 that the average doctor in that country earns five hundred dollars a year and he goes onto twenty-five thousand tax free American dollars in WHO. So what used to happen, we knew what was happening, the director of medical services in some parts of the world, "We can put three blokes in Kathmandu next year, give us fifteen
- 11:00 thousand dollars and we will give you the job." That was happening. There was a lot of chicanery and that is one of the reasons now that WHO is not highly thought of when it comes to things like Iraq. You understand? There is a lot of funny business goes on in the United Nations. Situations such as the chairman of a thing on certain
- 11:30 difficulties with human beings comes from a country which is the worst example of that problem. I am not condemning the United Nations but it is not very successful in many fields. And in WHO for example, that malaria program indicated to me clearly that theoretically speaking it was going to work well, in the long term it was a failure.
- 12:00 But if you are earning twenty-five or thirty thousand American tax free dollars you don't worry too much and that tends to happen.

So what can you say you achieved or was achieved doing that work for WHO?

Not much, at the time we were controlling malaria and cutting down the number of cases and what have you, but in

- 12:30 the long term view it only came back again. And I will give you an example of how difficult I found WHO in one field. When I was working in the malaria program, it was decided in Geneva that because of the height and the humidity of the valley of Kathmandu there is no malaria, so when they put the program up, so many millions of dollars it is going to cost the Nepalese government because
- 13:00 we won't have to do any work in the valley of Kathmandu because there is no malaria there, so the government says, "Yes." And WHO says, "Yes." Then I have got a job in the valley of Kathmandu as public health advisor. I started to find cases of malaria in the valley of Kathmandu and I knew they weren't introduced, I knew very well that people hadn't been out of the valley of Kathmandu et cetera.
- 13:30 So I went to the chief of malaria that I used to work for. And I said, "PG, I have seen some cases in the valley." "Don't say that! Don't tell Delhi that, they will sack you." And that would have happened, if I had told Delhi the truth they would have sacked me because they don't want to know the truth. And I knew that certain aspects of WHO specialist services were a bit dubious to say the least.
- 14:00 I became disillusioned about it to be quite honest because it was a matter if you had someone moving from five hundred a year to twenty-five thousand US, you had to think very carefully, you might lose your job if you say this or do that. It is inevitable in the system we were working in.

Was there any other research going on on any other methods for controlling the malaria?

- 14:30 There was no research going on, that was the method, no point in doing research. Research was going on in every section all over the world, the whole story of malaria, how it is transmitted et cetera. But the control of malaria there was very little research to be done because we accepted that the DDT thing was the only method. And one of the reasons that was kept on was that it was the only method that they could afford to use.
- 15:00 The countries had to provide the money really so there was research going on in Melbourne, there was research going on all over the world but that had very little to do, there was no research going on in Kathmandu because the research had to be done elsewhere and the results had to come through Geneva. And the experts in Geneva said, "Yes this is what we'll do." A lot of people came to the conclusion, myself included, that after the problem
- 15:30 with DDT came up and the necessity to have a basic health service, I felt that our program is not going to work. And after I left, ten years afterwards the whole thing had fallen to bits. There were a few people and I knew a few people who came in, scientific experts that I met in Saudi Arabia for example visiting, we all knew there was going to be problems. At the time the
- 16:00 eradication program did marvellous things because whilst the interruption of transmission happened literally millions of people did not get malaria. So we did wonderful things in that but from the long time point of view it didn't work. You can read now that malaria in Africa is dreadful, frightful in Asia because we haven't found another way of dealing with the eradication problems. Mainly because
- 16:30 any of the solutions, like AIDS [acquired immunodeficiency syndrome] and things like that, the pharmaceutical side is so expensive the countries can't afford it. So I don't know what, malaria, the research of malaria in my time is now coming to the fore, malariologists all know that until we get a vaccine against malaria there is no hope; and we are all hoping. There are all sorts of scientific problems with vaccines
- 17:00 in malaria because of the parasitic changes and whatnot but we all know that until somehow there is a vaccine for malaria nothing is going to help. But that's the same with a number of tropical diseases. HIV [human immunodeficiency virus] for one, unless you can get very expensive pharmaceuticals in, they

are trying to do it now in Africa, trying to get the pharmaceutical people in America and whatnot to lower their prices.

17:30 It is very difficult.

So can you tell me about your work in Saudi Arabia?

Yes. I was a general practitioner in Saudi Arabia, on the hospital staff there were specialists in every field. On the other hand, because of tropical medicine and my field elsewhere I was

18:00 consulted on problems like dengue fever and that sort of thing. And non-venereal syphilis, which is another one, called berjo it is a disease in the tropical area. It is caused by the same parasite as syphilis but it is non-venereal it is not caused by sexual contact; it is a different disease all together. Well I used to be called in to consult on that, and apply my knowledge for what I knew on certain things

18:30 particularly on dengue and also in berjo. But mainly I was able to have a little clinic out in the desert, I would be driven out in the morning and I had a nursing sister from Western Australia and I had interpreters and this, that and the other thing. And I would have patients coming in with all of the ordinary conditions that I would treat, it was rather interesting. And the only funny thing that was the nursing sisters in the

19:00 system, the Whittaker system that I worked with were all Americans. And the American nurses don't like doctors, and every morning I would walk into my clinic and say, "Good morning sister," and she would say, "Good morning, sir." And, "Why do you call him sir?" We did it deliberately to everybody. I did a lot of travelling around.

19:30 I was also involved with infection control in the hospitals in the provinces. I was supposed to know more about that than the average doctor, you know, I had been involved in that. And they sent me on meetings, had to go to a meeting in Jedda on infection control and then they would send me up to Riyadh on something else, and I lived long enough in that system to know how to do things nicely.

20:00 "I am going to Jedda, I am going to Riyadh," this is to my boss, "Look it might be better if I do it that way." So I would finish up having two or three days on my own in Riyadh. But I found I did a lot of work like that. When I was in Nauru, I was asked on odd occasion to go somewhere and look for another doctor a replacement for someone. On

20:30 one occasion, they sent me to the Philippines and I had my Philippino wife with me, and I took her to the Philippines and we had to go to a beautiful resort up near where the Americans had the big base. And I ordered, I didn't go up by bus or anything, I ordered a taxi and we stayed in the best place and I interviewed a couple of doctors. When I got back they looked at my bill

21:00 and said, "God." "Well you don't expect me to go to the Philippines and go by bus do you?" but I had interesting work like that in doing that sort of thing. Also I was sent down to Western Australia into Perth to interview another doctor. And then they sent me over to Christchurch and on the way back they said, "Go back to Melbourne and catch the plane to Nauru." And I said, "Well if I stay until

21:30 Thursday I can pick the thing up in Fiji." "Okay." So I had a wonderful few days in Fiji. That's beside the point, how did that start?

You were in Saudi Arabia.

Yeah the work that I did was a mixture of general practice and the work that I had done in tropical medicine. Put together it was very gratifying, very nice.

22:00 And even with my own clinic out there, it was great to be there all by yourself, no pressure of having to see so many doctors to break even and all of the rest of it, you're still being paid. And one of the things I learn through all of that was that I loathe the fee-for-service system back here. And the only time I was really happy in medicine, I was on a good salary, I did my job and didn't have to send out bills.

22:30 The Saudi Arabian thing was very interesting really. Luckily I was able to get up, I went up the Gulf, up to Dammam on the Arabian Gulf and I was with an American doctor who was really an Egyptian. And we went up to a meeting, I met one of my friends from Melbourne at this meeting, general practitioners in Dammam, and we

23:00 came from Dammam by bus down south and this chap who was Egyptian speaking but American doctor. He taught me the words, "El Dammam." And down we came down to Dakhar, "El Dhahran." And then we came down to Al Khobar and I still think when I read this somewhere where something happened in Al Khobar, this fellow gave me a half an hour of saying these perfect

23:30 way of saying these words. So I saw a lot of Saudi Arabia. Birka of course is on the other side. And all of those places down the gulf, I saw a lot more than the average person did.

When was this?

This was twenty-two years ago. Work that out, I can't remember what date it would be.

24:00 **81?**

That's about right yeah. Very interesting time Saudi Arabia. I say because I was so well aware of the problem with Israel and the problem with the Palestinians. I used to go up to a place called Aqaba, which is south in Jordan and you can look straight across to Eilat in Saudi Arabia.

24:30 You are so close you see it. And right across where we were living there was the big peninsula that comes down. Occupied by the, I can't think of the name now, where the Israelis took over and left it eventually. But I became very aware of the problems between the Israelis and the Palestinians.

25:00 So I don't regret my stay.

So what was there public health system like at that time?

In Saudi Arabia, very good indeed because they had spent, there has been a lot on at the moment, they are not as rich as they used to be. But the time that I was there we had wonderful hospitals. Everything was perfect. I was in a hospital in Tabuk, which is in north Saudi Arabia, and whilst I was there they built a new one, which is twice as big. The old one and the new one, the new one would be three times the size of Royal Melbourne

25:30 and much more modern. Money was nothing; that was why it was so wonderful to work there. For example the staff were top-ranking staff, American, all over the world, all well paid. We were all well paid by them. Nothing was short, it was a wonderful place to work as far as supplies were concerned, hospitals were concerned. Wonderful.

26:00 Saudi Arabia was spending so much, free medicine to all of their people, free everything really, so now they are having a bit of trouble, they are worried they are running short of a bit of money and there is some social problems in Saudi Arabia. But when I was there twenty years ago everything was wonderful.

Well they have probably got a much bigger refugee population there now, and illegal immigrant population?

In Saudi Arabia?

26:30 **Coming from Africa, the point of Africa?**

No, oh very little in Saudi Arabia. See it is next to Iran, Saudi Arabia; Iran, Iraq, Jordan. It is pretty isolated and you

27:00 don't get anybody from Africa. They are very strict Muslims. It is a different place.

Yeah it would have been different back then.

But you never saw any poverty because they were so rich. They have got poverty there now one reads in the newspapers. Any tendency towards democracy is fraught with hazards because the place is really run by the royal family.

27:30 Nevertheless I couldn't fault it as far as I was concerned because the company we worked for was the Whittaker Corporation from America and they weren't short of dough; there was nothing short. It was fabulous.

So who is the Whittaker Corporation?

It is a big hospital supply run from America for supplying doctors and hospitals all over the world. The Whittaker Corporation, and the

28:00 hospitals all through Saudi Arabia are Whittaker hospitals, I was employed by the Whittaker Corporation, not Saudi Arabia. When I was sent with my talk, I was sent to the most expensive private hospital in London because I was working for the Whittaker Corporation.

So that wasn't WHO?

28:30 Nothing to do with WHO. Oh no, private company.

So you came back to Geelong at one stage didn't you?

Well I had a stroke-paralysed arm, and I went back, it recovered, it still doesn't work fine even now, but I was able to go back. I finished my contract.

29:00 I was sixty by then anyway and I decided it was enough and came home. That's about that.

So did you come back to Australia in between Nauru and Saudi Arabia?

Yes I did as a matter of fact. I knew

29:30 the Mornington Peninsula very well and I came back and I took a job with International Harvester. My father had been in charge of International Harvester medical side at one stage. And I took a job with

International Harvester and I found it wasn't enough for me and I got into practice at Portarlinton and I stayed there for several years, but I had to move into a clinic which I didn't

30:00 like very much. And that's the reason I think I packed up again and went to Saudi Arabia. But when I was living in Portarlinton with that little practice, my grandfather had a house there, that's where I used to do the sailing that got me the job in the war. I used to fish there you see off Portarlinton. I lived there really for some years off and on.

30:30 But I was never happy, I didn't like it much.

I was going to say it is such a contrast to what you had been doing in the previous years?

Exactly, I came back to a dreadful general practice in Australia.

Why is it dreadful?

Well you just sit in there, I remember, "Yes, Mrs Jones, what's your problem?"

31:00 "No problem, just repeat my tablets. Take me pressure while I am here." Because when I had been in practice before in the country I could be delivering babies, I was treating coronaries, I was opening bellies, I was doing everything. But the poor GPs today only refer work; write a script and refer you off to somebody else, that's the sort of thing that used to happen, that's why I went overseas again. I would never go back into practice.

31:30 I don't like it. General practice, even in my early days, was general practice, you had to do a bit of lots of things and you referred off things you knew you couldn't do. By the same token, you wouldn't send somebody off with a common fracture. But these days they have to because they have to fit so many cases in a day and working in a business and

32:00 its depressing I find. Quite different to fifty years ago when general practice was very interesting. On the other hand, we were taught to do those extra things. These days, I wouldn't deliver a baby these days, I would be frightened of being sued. That's how I feel in a few years.

We have only got a few minutes left of this tape, I

32:30 **am curious to know if you have reflected on your years that you spent as a serviceman and how those experiences influenced you to go on to do what you did?**

How did my army experience affect me in the rest of my life? Well I think it made me a more mature person.

33:00 Someone today, my sons for example, they have gone through and studied they graduated and gone into a job, they have never had what we had at the end of the war, the discipline of being in the service, being ordered to do this, that and the other thing. So I think all through my career, I have had in the back of my mind, "Well I might be fed up with this but after all it wasn't as bad as the army." Or other times I would say, "Well I am

33:30 bloody glad I have been in the army because I can deal with the situation." That's how I feel about it. I don't regret my army service. I think it was a wonderful training experience for a human being. You can criticise it and say the terrible things that go on in the army, but we were all disciplined, we all did things, we took orders and carried them out. I know my sons, except my soldier son, the -

34:00 That's all I would say, it helped me in life generally. Quite apart from the fact that I suppose, some of us did have the experience of being close to death, I don't honestly think that affected me too much. I just look back and think, "Well bloody lucky there I suppose."

34:30 But it did mean that a lot of us had things in common, with my mates for example we had all been through the same experience, wondering whether we were going to be alive or dead the next day so we had something in common. That's all I can say, that military service of any kind I think

35:00 completes a person. The other thing too is even in my later life, the fact that I was an ex-serviceman meant that, when I met the Japanese I met for example in Kathmandu, one of my great fellows that I had been working with had been the quarantine officer of the port of Leningrad in the middle of the cold war,

35:30 we all had something in common because they had had their war, they had been to their war in Russia and Europe and I had been to our war in South East Asia. Every part of the world, young people of our ages had one way or another turned up for dreadful wars in the First and Second World Wars. We had sort of something in common. I might be bull shitting when I say that but I really do think that

36:00 if you haven't been through a war, you haven't really experienced what people who have been through war have. We were lucky we didn't go through the terrible war of Passchendaele and the Somme, the dreadful war of France in the First World War. We didn't have anything like that. We don't know anything of having been pushed forward into machine gun fire and that sort of thing. So our war in the Southwest Pacific was a bit different to the

36:30 war in the Middle East and Egypt for example. They had scores of tanks and thousands - I remember I mentioned before when we had the bombing of Sattelberg, shells behind us for about a fortnight, and then the infantry fellows saying, "Oh that's nothing, you should have seen the barrage at Alamein, mate." Which is perfectly true; what we thought were barrages, the fellows in the Middle East had seen something we didn't even dream of.

37:00 That's all I can say. The war affected some people badly of course, some people never got over it, but as far as I am concerned I think it was an important part of my life and I don't regret it.

Was it the cause of your hearing loss?

Well I have got what they call mania syndrome

37:30 and I probably did have a little bit of it in my teens. But it didn't come on until about five years after I came back and when the army knew what I had been through particularly in the tanks in Puckapunyal and so and so. They thought that my eighth nerve, my auditory nerve had probably been damaged a bit by that and they took it over.

38:00 And they have been supplying me with treatment for my hearing ever since. About thirty years ago now with hearing aids and they have looked after me well. I don't think it caused my deafness but it didn't do any good, probably aggravated my eighth nerve. And also long term treatment on quinine could have affected it too.

38:30 **Finally you have had three sons,**

Four.

How understanding do you think they are of your wartime experiences?

Well I suppose this has to be included in this recording but my elder two who were sent to boarding school both of them

39:00 became heroin addicts. Very sad. The eldest son is over fifty now. I haven't seen him for many years but he had many years in gaol for heroin and armed robbery, things like that. Fine boy but it has been a terrible tragedy for the family. And my next son who is fifty next year is in gaol at the moment serving thirty-seven years gaol for armed robbery.

39:30 He has lived with me overseas, lived with me back home many many times and I didn't know until very recently that he had been doing armed robberies for a long long time. And also drugs. So they have been a very grave disappointment. Sometimes I am blamed because I left them and went overseas and they had to stay back at school

40:00 but I had no alternative. The two younger ones, the next one is a business advisor with AMP [Australian Mutual Providence society] and he has got four wonderful children. The eldest is about twenty-one now. And the youngest one reached lieutenant colonel in the army, done very well indeed. The two older ones have been a terrible problem, they have been a terrible disappointment. Whether it is my fault or not, I don't know. That generation was the generation of the 1960s,

40:30 the generation that came into the drug problems. And you know the history of this country, a whole generation of kids in the 60s started because, the ones five years later, I have got grandchildren a few years later, didn't, the two younger ones never dreamed of it, but the two ones at that stage they got on drugs. And the psychiatry report from the one who is in gaol now reported that Michael admits he was started on drugs at thirteen, so

41:00 that was the problem of that generation.

What were their attitudes to the Vietnam War?

Well they were too young for the Vietnam War. I examined troops for the Vietnam War. When I was in Nagambie I used to come down and examine the troops for the Vietnam War. I don't know what their views of the Vietnam War, my views of the Vietnam War

41:30 were of course that it was a bloody disgrace, I don't know what their views were.

What do you mean you examined troops from Nagambie?

When I was in Nagambie, I used to be asked to go down and examine conscripts called up to go to the Vietnam War because I was living there, that was in Seymour. I'd go from my town down to Seymour so I

42:00 examined a lot of these poor fellows.

42:02 **INTERVIEW ENDS**