Australians at War Film Archive

John Parncutt (JP) - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:38 **Begin at the beginning. Go back as far as your memory will take us.**

I guess my Dad, being a veteran of World War I, badly gassed, didn't come to Australia

01:00 until he finally met up with my mother, who was a war bride. They migrated, or came to Australia after World War I. I had one brother who died at a very young age and another one who died only last year. We built a

01:30 war service home in East Camberwell, the leafy suburb of East Camberwell. Grew up being educated at Canterbury Primary School, which I visited recently, and was most impressed to see it all over again. Then I went on to Melbourne Boys' High School and finished my education as far as it used to go in those days before I joined

02:00 an International Harvester company. That was a new revelation to me. I've lost myself for a minute.

No need to rush at all. Your mother was English. Your father was

02:30 an Australian. The family came to Australia in 1864. They imported, my grandfather brought out the Lion Rolling Mills, which was a steel rolling company. They established that in South Melbourne and back in what was Red Cross headquarters. It has changed dramatically like most parts of Melbourne.

03:00 **Did your father carry on with his father's business?**

Well, my Dad was very badly gassed, unfortunately, and he came back as manager of a chain of grocery stores as they were in those days. I'm not travelling at all.

03:30 Prompt me.

OK. So do you know where your father fought and which...?

He fought on the Western Front; he was part of a unit called the 3rd DAC, 3rd Divisional Ammunition Column. He was in charge of horses and donkeys and took

04:00 ammunition to the front line. That's where he got badly gassed and came back to Australia. So he and my mother decided they would build a house. It was in a War Service settlement in East Camberwell, as I say, and we grew up with a lot of good kids, all of similar nature where fathers had been active servicemen. I stopped there

04:30 as I said, right until I'd finished at Melbourne Boy's High School. Then got a job working for an international harvesting company. No sooner got the job, than war was on the go. I actually,

05:00 I rehearsed this, and it was easy when I rehearsed it.

Don't feel any pressure. I'll just ask some questions. We can stop any time. I'm interested to hear about that time. Obviously your family had

05:30 **major involvement in the First World War. Do you remember, did your father or your uncles ever talk about their experiences?**

That's a good question. I'm often asked a similar question. Always talk about the good times. My Dad was a character, and he could tell some funny tales about Egypt and places like that. No that's

06:00 about the extent of it in those days. One of the brothers was, his name being Parncutt, he was always in trouble getting people to recognise how to spell it. I went through the same for years, but it doesn't matter any more. He decided he'd stay in the regular army, and he was warrant officer first class.

06:30 Family albums include pictures of him with a big, white Busby hat. Then as the war went on, they gave

him the job of caretaker of Point Nepean Barracks round at the heads there. My brother and I were only kids at the time and every Christmas holidays, our one wish was to go down and spend time with him. The fascinating thing, he had his own home on,

07:00 am I talking too much about

The more the better. That's fine, John.

He had his own home still at Queenscliff on the top of the hill overlooking what is Swan Bay today. He used to have a tug called Mars, which used to take him and my brother and myself across the heads to Point Nepean where he'd spend his day, working there. Then he was transferred

07:30 to a beautiful old limestone house on the top of the hill in Portsea and he had a Clydesdale horse there. So every morning he used to saddle up the Clydesdale and my brother and I'd get into the horse and jinker, and off we go to Point Nepean. The uncle always used to provide meals and that where we went. He couldn't' believe that one day, he

08:00 took a dozen eggs over and my brother cleaned up the whole lot. I guess eggs and cholesterol didn't go much together in those days as they supposedly do today. So I hadn't been long working for International Harvester than my mates are off going to the war: navy, army, air force. In those days, you

08:30 did it for King and for country. I hoped it would work out all right if it happened again. But you were expected to do it, and you did it without argument. I wanted to join the navy first up, but Dad being ill in bed through gas

09:00 he wasn't very impressed, then I came up with the air force, and he wasn't impressed with that. Until finally, one day, a letter turned up in the post, which said, "You are required to report to Surrey Hills Drill Hall for examination for induction into the army." So that was the last thing I expected, and I didn't expect it would quite turn out that way. I spent…it wasn't all that much

09:30 time wasted because by then the Japanese were heading towards the Kokoda Trail, and Australia was trying to recall services, forces from overseas. It wasn't all that easy, because Churchill had his own ideas and Roosevelt had other ideas. So I finally got my call-out and

10:00 on the 31st December 1941 the army called me up for service. I didn't seem to mind at the time, but I always remember the first night I spent at Camp Powell, which is Royal Park, just up at the hill there, not far out of Melbourne. The old sergeant-major gave us each a palliasse being

10:30 actually a mattress sort of thing, made out of hessian. He said, "Go down the stables and fill it up. That's your bed." So we went down and sergeant-major went off calling people. He said, "Seeing as it's New Year's Eve, you can go home. There's a hole in the fence there, but don't tell anyone I told you." So I spent the night home, and my parents and

11:00 friends and relatives were delighted that I had to be back at Camp Powell before morning. There I was geared up with necessary bits and pieces. Coats that didn't fit well, shoes that weren't, Australia was not all that well equipped for such activities in those days. Our first place that we were assigned to

11:30 was Nagambie Road just out of Seymour. I went in to what was known as Boys' Town, the first 18-year olds called up. There were 364 of us went into this camp, which was on the banks of the Goulburn River. We started our training there in the bullring. We're there for several weeks, and then finally we

12:00 were assigned to units. I'd had no desire to be a foot soldier. The sergeant who was allocating duties said, "You wanna be in the artillery, do you?" I said, "Yes." So with that I was put into the infantry and eventually became a mortar man, which was a light, three-piece

12:30 artillery piece. They dropped the shells down the barrel and that's the way they went. I had 3 weeks there, joined up in the Mortar Platoon of the 24th Battalion. The next thing we knew…

You said it was the last thing you expected, to be called up for the army. What were you expecting or

13:00 **hoping?**

Well I was hoping I could volunteer. The air force was my first preference, the navy next because I had buddies that were in those services. But I wasn't all that keen on being a foot soldier so I was a bit disappointed when I got the call-up to go into infantry. It wasn't infantry at the time, but we should have known. It was known as Boys' Town. There were 364 of us I think it was, went into

13:30 the 24th Battalion. Things were getting pretty grim. The so-called Queensland Line [Brisbane Line] had to be defended, and that meant that with the Japs advancing over the Kokoda Trail, the thing was we couldn't get our troops back from overseas in time. We had to defend the so-called Brisbane Line. That was guarding

14:00 the population from Brisbane round the coast for a couple of hundred miles inland to Adelaide and they would let the rest of the country go. Fortunately it never came to that. I was into the 24th Battalion, and spent the whole of my army life in there, 24th Battalion and delighted I got buddies that are coming to

see me today that I was

14:30 with 60-70 years ago. The training; back to the training bit. The decision came that we'd have to move north. There's no point in staying, 24th Battalion, there's no point in staying in Victoria, so first thing they did, they shot us off to Euroa, 30 miles out of Nagambie, Seymour.

15:00 And we'd no sooner settled down to do some training there, than we got the message we had to go further north. So General Savige was the big shot, and he was a member of the 24th Battalion, and he's World War I. They said, "What transport do you need?" It's all very well for him and he said, "We shall do the job on our own little feet," which means we were going to walk from Euroa to

15:30 Bandiana Barracks, which was a big storage and infantry place to keep the army supplied with. We walked as far as Wangaratta and then we turned off into the Beechworth country and came in round the back way. So we did some training there. Then they moved us further north up to Maryborough. We

16:00 had night training and God knows what. By that time things were getting pretty grim. So the decision was made by those up above that we were in line to go overseas. So they brought us, the last staging camp was Caboolture staging camp, and after we left Caboolture, we were put on board the motor vessel Duntroon,

16:30 SS Duntroon. We were loaded late one night, and on the Duntroon in the Brisbane River, and sailed down the river in a brownout in the early hours of the morning. I'll never forget the brownout. I was no country and western fan here, but we had a

17:00 guy who sat on the vessel, we were up on the decks and he was down below, and he sat in front of the main mast and sang When our ship was up. Didn't mean a thing to me at the time, but I've never forgotten it since. So we were on our way and heading out towards Port Moresby. The ship was packed as you can imagine. I think there was 7 or 800 of my battalion on

17:30 board her and we headed for Port Moresby. One of the interesting things, the hospital ship Centaur, passed us on the way up. I had the job of manning a pom-pom gun, which was an ack-ack [anti-aircraft] aircraft gun. The Centaur, the hospital ship, passed us on its way,

18:00 as we were going north, it was going south. It was only a few months later that the Japs [Japanese] sank it, and it was a hell of a row. They've only just found the wreck in recent times. They thought it was another one. So it was off to New Guinea, and that was not all that bright a ship. You can imagine, the weather was pretty rough and there was guys sick everywhere, all over the place. You didn't get much sleep there.

18:30 You couldn't go and call on a nice nurse or something to hold your hand. So we headed into Port Moresby. No sooner we're in Port Moresby than the Japs started bombing the town, or the city, town I suppose you'd call it in those days. One of the first bombing escapades we were involved

19:00 in was a 100-bomber attack on Darwin. That's an incredible sight to see 100 bombers going over the top. We were stupid enough to stand up and look at it. Fortunately the airstrip was about a kilometre away, so it didn't seem so bad. So that started our life in New Guinea.

So they were on their way to Darwin for a bombing raid on Darwin when they

19:30 **flew over?**

Yeah. Well, I'm not actually sure of that. They bombed the hell out of Port Moresby and went on over some weeks. The Japs were starting to come over the top; never sure whether it was Kokoda Track or Kokoda Trail. If you heard an American, I think they called it the trail, if you're Aussie it's a track.

20:00 So things were getting grim. The 39th Battalion, which was a regiment of the 24th/39th, was called in to go up to New Guinea, the poor buggers had had no training at all. They were not wiped out, but certainly given a hell of a pasting. The next thing we knew, we were

20:30 being asked to prepare ourselves to go forward. So I had the first ride in a DC3. I always remember, American pilots they were, and the only way you got through and in those days the aircraft wasn't pressurised, at least that aircraft. So the American pilot had to take us over a place called the Gap. I can still hear the plane now. He had

21:00 two shots at trying to get through because the clouds were so low, he didn't know where the hell you were going. He said, "I'll give it one more go. If we don't make it, tough." But he made it fortunately. But when we went over on that trip, they packed us up with 90-pound packs. Normally an infantryman carries about 30 pounds. I think it's still about that today but probably by metres it's different. And we

21:30 were told to take everything we could get hold of. They put tins of SPC [Shepparton Preserving Company] fruit into our packs, and bully beef and that sort of thing. We finally arrived. Some of us arrived at Wau, and some at Bulolo. The instructions were "Soon as you get off the plane, just run like hell, there's snipers all around there" – the airport or around the landing strip.

22:00 **Where did you land, John?**

I landed at Wau. That meant another 30 mile walk up to the front where we were going. See, there was no such thing as transport in those days, not motorised transport. I remember we got hold of an old tray-top. I guess it was Jap, but it was two-wheel

22:30 go-cart or cart sort of thing. And then they finished, they…cause we had things like gas masks and packs that we'd never use, and tin helmets. We gave away tin helmets, because tin helmets once they clashed with the foliage, the Japs could hear. So we all, even though there was a chance you could get shot in the head, it was better to

23:00 take the risk and use the cloth helmet, like hat, rather than the metal ones. So at that point, the battalion was

23:30 split up. We were at a place called Sunshine became headquarters, and the companies were split up over 600 square miles. It was the task we were given was constant patrolling. It was later shown in the records that the Japs never had the blankest idea that there were only 1000 or 800 of us altogether. But we hung on there for 3 months and before the big

24:00 push on Lae and Salamaua. Where am I getting to?

No, no.

Stop me when you feel like it. Tell me what we want.

This is all important.

Is it reasonable enough, what I've given you?

It is. I'm hoping we can get a little more detail. If I can just

24:30 **take you back a little. From the time you were in Nagambie Road up to Euroa in Brisbane, what inkling did you have of what was to come? Were you prepared for where you were going? What did you know?**

No, we were 18-year old kids. An 18-year old in those days was a lot more mature than an

25:00 18-year old today, much better educated. A lot of the boys were pretty basic. Often, to get stuck in an infantry battalion, they would reckon you weren't good for anything else but a hell of a camaraderie gets built up. As I said, I've got mates that come to see me here from 70 years ago. I guess you didn't really stop and think what you might be going into.

25:30 We had that old "for King and for country." It was king in those days and we just believed that we should go. That's why, when I came home with application form for navy and air force, my Dad, who was in bed suffering from gas, couldn't believe that I would want to go to war. But the mentality was different in those days so he had no option but to let me go.

26:00 We went through Camp Powell, Royal Park, then on to Seymour and Boys' Town. That was known as Boys' Town, I think I explained that before because of the age. They were boys. No doubt about that.

What did the training consist of?

Bullring. What they call bullring. They'd have barbed wire stretched across

26:30 the ground and you'd have to crawl underneath it and the likes. They had, what's the word I'm looking for? We used to go out on night training into the country round which was all gravel country; the gravel pits that was in. The training was fairly severe. We had no

27:00 rifles, no guns of any note. We got some later on when we got to Albury, Bandiana. I can imagine some of those 8th Division fellows that were cut off in Singapore and the likes had nothing to fight with, went in with a rifle and 5 rounds, and that didn't last very long. So yeah, I know I'm not giving you the depth I thought I might be able to.

27:30 Where are we now?

We got as far as flying over the Gap and into Wau. What about leaving family behind? How was that for you?

That was. I didn't have a large family.

28:00 I only had the one brother. But those who lived around us were very close. The family had an old, beautiful playing piano, with the rolls on them. And we used to, my mother would find every reason possible to give me another farewell party. Whenever I came home, we always used to sing around, cause we didn't have

28:30 television and things of that nature, so you made your own entertainment in those days. No, we didn't have any great family send-off. It was all basically hush-hush all the things that were happening. Now I'm wandering off again. We got to Bandiana, to Wilby and that was the first time

29:00 they decided we'd have to go to Queensland then, which was three days it took, by train. And there was only one train line and the carriages were the most antiquated. They'd probably be wonderful in a museum today. They used to put the troop train onto a side and let any other freight train go through. So it took us three days to get from Bandiana.

29:30 We done a lot more training of course out in the field. Then three days on the train. We stopped at a place called Cougal, which in those days was the end of the line. No such thing as a one line through around Australia. So we were unloaded there. Stopped at a little town called Caboolture.

30:00 Not Caboolture, Jimboomba. I didn't mention that as we were going through places like Euroa and that, the hospitality that was afforded us by the locals, and they put on dances and things like that, was unbelievable. So when we got to Jimboomba, we were accepted by the, cause we were getting closer to the Queensland Line of defence.

30:30 We were taken into the folds of the families there, and stopped there until we came back and went on board the Duntroon. I think, no they didn't name it that. Troop ship.

31:00 Yeah, Duntroon, which had been an interstate one, so we're off. Backtracked there.

We can backtrack.

31:30 **That's fine. It doesn't have to be in perfect chronology. I've got plenty of questions. About the training, what was it like to deal with the important discipline?**

It was known as basic training, and it was pretty, well, basic training. Boys' Town was established for that reason to be,

32:00 it was actually digressing 24th Battalion belonged to the 10th Infantry Brigade. That training battalion at Boys' Town was part of that formation, which enabled the putting together. I think we were probably lucky in the lot. Some of those poor characters went over the Owen Stanleys

32:30 and with no training at all. At least we'd had training as they moved us forward over a period of months to get to the Queensland border, and then the movement across to New Guinea. I've explained to you how we had 90-pound packs to get us across the

33:00 Owen Stanley Ranges. I can still remember now, looking out the window. We only sat on bucket seats, metal bucket seats. That's when I say the pilot said, "I'll give it one more go." That's pretty frightening when you'd been over twice and he couldn't make it. But they had a lot of faith in the old biscuit bombers as they were called the DC-3s.

33:30 Got into Port Moresby. We're moving further north across the Owen Stanley Ranges, and we landed, I think where it was, at our headquarters at Sunshine. 600 square miles of land to protect. The Japs, later we found a lot of documents, the Japs couldn't believe there was

34:00 7 or 800 of us keeping about 10,000 Japs at bay, to use a word. The period spent there was constant patrolling and skirmishes and a few guys getting killed. We lost 91 altogether by the time the war was over. Killed in action. There were 2 or 300 wounded.

34:30 That's when after we'd done so much training there, so much patrolling I should say, the overseas AIF [Australian Imperial Force] units were returning to Australia. They were brought up along the coast for the attack on Lae and Salamaua. And we saw the Americans

35:00 and Aussies drop in on the Markham River so that they could cut off the Japs as they progressed up back towards where they'd come from. Jeez this is dull.

No, no, no. It will be even more interesting if we can get more a sense of the patrols that you did. Those

35:30 **skirmishes. Can you recall the first patrol you went on?**

That's a good question. Cause the jungle was so thick, the first thing you knew you're in an ambush. You had a forward scout, the main body of the patrol and a rear scout.

36:00 They'd always let the patrol through and then they'd pick off the last guy and start getting as many as they could. But often the patrol fights you'd have in that country, you hadn't the vaguest idea who you were fighting. All you were told was wherever you see a whisk of leaves fire. That was indicative that there was a Jap or whatever

36:30 had been firing from there. It worked, because after the skirmish was over, they'd often find bodies of what was the result of the action. What else can I tell you about patrolling?

What position would you normally take?

When I,

37:00 I think I mentioned I was made a mortar man when I first went to the, which was light artillery which they had to carry. Three piece. Then when we got up to Sunshine and the battalion headquarters, I was seconded into the Intelligence Section and I stopped there for the rest of our stay in New Guinea and what's it named. There was no such thing as road maps.

37:30 There were tracks. You didn't see all that many natives. You certainly didn't see any Marys [New Guinea women: meri in PNG pidgin], as they were known, cause it was always concern that a man that had been away from home too long.

Marys being?

Marys being New Guinea women. But see, they put those away, most of them. When you

38:00 got friendly enough with the natives, they'd actually do the carrying of a lot of your provisions and the likes. Until they had the Fuzzy-Wuzzy Angels [New Guinea male stretcher-bearers and carriers] as they were known, got to know you and they were wonderful guys carrying stretchers for wounded and that sort of thing. Until they got to know you and then it was fascinating,

38:30 you could be walking down the track with a bunch, carrying wounded, a Mary at the back and suckling a pig on her breasts. We thought nothing of it. So what happens in Parliament House here is not all that different to what happened 50 years ago. But we didn't see a lot of natives. They kept, I mean the ones that they

39:00 employed or that the Aussies used as guides and that were brilliant. They knew tracks left, right and centre. But there was no such thing as roads. I don't want to skip, but even when we went to Bougainville 12 months later, you at least had tanks and that sort of thing. Not that they were much good in the jungle.

How would you navigate your way around?

You had a compass.

39:30 I was an I [Intelligence] man, Intelligence Section and we would go out with patrols with a compass, you know the 360 degree, I don't know whether they're about these days. You had to stop every so often and take a compass reading and put it onto a piece of paper, which might have been a dirty old map, or something. It was primitive at its very best. We

40:00 would have to then get that information back, we got a little more professional at it a little later on, but the information had to get back so the next day patrols would know where the hell they were going, cause all there were these tracks that had often been cut out by fellows using machetes. So that was the only means you had to find out where you

40:30 were going was the lines on a compass bearing, and a drawing on a map. They were pretty primitive believe you me.

Tape 2

00:30 On to the big assault on Lae – Salamaua, and my own battalion getting together and crossing the Markham River in native canoes and the likes to get there. The dropping of the parachuters with light artillery pieces. Push up to that place you mentioned before, Dumpu. So it was

01:00 New Year's Eve of what must have been '42 because we'd been at action at the front, we were in the front for 2 ½ years altogether. There was a fair bit of whingeing starting to go on. You can't blame the blokes. And they left us on the edge of Nadzab strip, airfield, and we didn't know what was happening from there. But as it was New Year's Eve, and we had an American

01:30 Negro unit not far away, and did they make a hell of a racket and they'd fire guns and anything they could put their hands on. But the decision came that we were not going home, we were going up to Dumpu then on to Madang. So that was not very well received by the troops as you can well imagine.

02:00 So we went forward to Dumpu in the early part of January, must have been '43 I suppose. Then when we got to Dumpu, the fighting was pretty severe there. Shaggy Ridge, which is a famous battle, was going on and we were at a place called Spenlove Spur, was another major

02:30 action. We lost a few blokes got killed there. Then the Japs were on the run though; that was the important thing. We'd moved them. The next step was to go across Bogadjim, place called Bogadjim, this was pretty technical stuff, and then through to the coast.

So you're still with

03:00 **the intelligence?**

Yes, I was the rest of the war with intelligence. Right through to we went to the Solomons and the whole

bit.

You were a mortarman, how long was it before you were seconded to intelligence?

Well, it was the time it took us to leave Port Moresby to go over the Gap in the aircraft.

03:30 We no sooner landed at Sunshine when I was called up by the adjutant and he said, “We want you as a mortar man.” Knowing I had been associated with advertising and that sort of thing, there was some relationship too. So I thought, “I’ll give it a go. Something I’ll enjoy.” So I went into the Intelligence Section, and it was probably

04:00 as enjoyable a part as you can get in war. I did enjoy.

When you were patrolling the 600 square miles, that was with the Intelligence Section?

Yeah. You’d be attached to a company, A, B, C or D Company. Alternatively you could be down to a platoon, because there were three

04:30 platoons to each company and you could have section, so you could be responsible to the company commander and then work out with some of the patrols along the way.

What rank were you when you joined intelligence?

Lance corporal. That’s the best I could do. But because I was in a specialist unit, there was not a lot of ways of getting promotion.

05:00 No, I stopped as a lance corporal. I never became a general or anything like that.

What were you armed with on patrol?

I used to carry an Owen gun, which is an Australian-made light machine gun. The forward scouts for example would carry their rifles, and still the old 303 and

05:30 the occasional Bren gun, which was a quick fire machine gun. Might have been Owen gun like the one I carried, which was quite a fierce little machine. No, the best I could do was to become a lance corporal.

06:00 **Can you give us some idea of what those skirmishes you talked about were like?**

Yeah, that’s a good question. Cause you never know what’s, because of the nature of the country and the thickness of the foliage and that, you never knew what you were going into.

06:30 Nobody ever wanted to be forward scout, as you can imagine, or rear scout for that matter, because they’d often let the patrol through and then mow you down. The Intelligence man went along on major patrols just to make sure that we got some mapping done, so that if they had to come out again, they knew how to handle it. Yeah. But the section of the

07:00 square miles we just had patrols traversing the whole place so that the Japs thought that there were many more of our troops there than there actually were.

Would you often come into contact with enemy fire?

That’s a good question too. You could, because you never knew what was round the corner. That was it.

07:30 To be honest, I’m not sure I know whether I killed any Japs. But I know I had quite a few goes firing on patrols. But my role on a patrol was mainly to get the information back after the patrol because even the maps, when you took a compass bearing and you walked 200 paces, and that’s how the maps were done. Walk 500,

08:00 no not that far. You weren’t prepared to risk your compass taking you that far through. That was the only way we had because what you could see from Sunshine you couldn’t see that much, those were the only means of communicating and getting map-work done.

What were the other men on those patrols doing?

They were riflemen. Their

08:30 job was to kill. Basically that was it or if not to kill, to get through and relieve, or to hopefully…See patrolling was often just reconnaissance patrols, or alternatively it was patrolling to root the enemy out of a position they’d got themselves into. You never knew in the country you were operating in what was gonna be

09:00 next. But if you did get into a stoush [fight] often you could lose a few. But I was pretty lucky I guess. I never copped a wound, so; there were a hell of a lot dead, that’s the luck of the draw.

Were there times where you felt that could have been your last sentence?

Yes, particularly those where they’d let you along the track.

09:30 It was generally a straight track, and that's when you suddenly became aware to watch out. Yeah, that's when you started to think, "Am I gonna make this one through?" We had a rule; the Australian Army had a rule that you never left a wounded mate or a killed mate. You had to get him out one way or the other. That's why we only had two or three that were missing in action,

10:00 only because of the rule that we actually made sure that we found them. There were a couple of bodies we never found because it was a pretty murky old country particularly on Bougainville, which was pretty flat. So yeah. We often came back and thought, "I'm lucky I got this far." But I didn't get into some of the stoushes

10:30 like some of the real infantrymen and we had some top-notch, medal winner and God knows what, but the interesting thing, a lot of those were country fellows. Knew how to do with the…as if they were out on farm life. Never seemed to worry us as much as some of the others like myself, for example, because you never knew what they hold.

11:00 So I deem myself lucky that I spent 4 years in an infantry battalion, including that back in Australia. I was lucky.

So you think country boys and city boys coped differently? Or did they have certain skills that helped them?

Yeah. You always knew if you had a country lad with you.

11:30 He knew the way to do it, whether he swung an axe or he fired a rifle or whatever. By the time we started to get more experienced, some of the city fellows were just as experienced as the country boys. New Guinea was a war of patrolling more than anything else, so the better off you were with somebody.

12:00 There were cases where fellows were thrown into patrols, and because they hadn't been anywhere, just obviously walked into being killed because they didn't have the experience. But sometimes you got desperate. The patrol was that short you had to find someone from somewhere. One of the horrible things I remember was a sergeant we had. I knew him well. He just couldn't take it any more and he stuck his head over a

12:30 large log and put the barrel of the gun in his hands and pulled the trigger. He just couldn't go on. There were a few like that. When we got to Bougainville, being shelled, constantly being shelled, and the Japs had a habit of, once they knew your position, they'd fire 150 mm, that's about 6 inches, shell over onto your perimeter

13:00 once an hour. You never knew whether your name was on it. That's the way it went. So whenever you camped or whenever you took your position, you didn't stop on a road junction or anything like that, because you knew you were going to get into trouble. I'm digressing.

No, that's what it's all about, John.

13:30 **With those patrols, what was the most frightening aspect of that work?**

I think the most frightening aspect was when the first one or two shots went out from the enemy a way. You didn't have the vaguest idea, but then you knew it was you or them; them or you sort of thing. But after it was all over, that's

14:00 when you might have had the shakes and the likes. Wondered what the hell you'd been through. Yeah, that's about it.

Other than trying to plot a map for the infantry, were there other tasks that you were required to do as an intelligence man?

We used to have to check on the weather for the American air force. What

14:30 sort of flying conditions, cause for the first time in a long time, we started to get aircraft support. So we had to shoot weather reports back to brigade headquarters, and they would in turn send it on to the American air force, or our air force or whatever it might be, to make sure it worked. That was one of your tasks.

15:00 There were a couple of occasions where we were told to capture prisoners at all cost. A lot of the fellows had such a rough time; they weren't able to capture prisoners. But that was another one. We had to get them back to brigade headquarters, or platoon headquarters so they could be interrogated in what they were saying and said and would be fitted into the big map

15:30 as such. Those in the main were the tasks.

Were you ever able to bring back prisoners?

Yeah, we brought back about half a dozen, but that's about all we got back. Because on that particular watch I'm referring to, there was about 150 Japs were killed on it. It was a decent old stoush. There was one that wasn't ours, Slaters Knoll on Bougainville. I'm digressing again. They had such a fight there, they had 600 Japs were

16:00 killed. They had to get bulldozers in to bury the bodies. The stench was that terrible. So yeah, but that's talking about Bougainville. I haven't even touched the Bougainville part of it. After we'd been on what was known as the "Butchers' Picnic," that's where the 150 Japs were killed,

16:30 we didn't lose, we had a couple of wounded guys, I think that's about all. Then we got through to Madang, and Madang was a nice port with coconut palms mainly, plantations and such. We spent a bit of time there, then the battalion was given its marching orders to go home. So they put us on board a Dutch vessel called the Van Huyts.

17:00 She was a cattle boat, and she was as rough and tough as they come because we had a full boatload, shipload, and the weather was pretty rough, and there was vomit all over the decks and God knows what. You got no idea what that's like. So

17:30 the weather was so rough that a lot of the fellows that would suddenly get over the one side to try and avoid the rough weather. But the Dutch captain used to say, he'd stand on the bridge and say, "All those men on this side of the ship will move to the other side of the ship" just to make sure she didn't tip over. So we went back to Australia.

18:00 Settled at Watsonia camp, which is a signals camp out at, you know, where Watsonia was? And then as we'd been such good soldiers, supposedly, we supported a victory march through the city. That's in there, and that's quite

18:30 an event. Also on that particular occasion, we formed the 24th Battalion AIF Association with the pledge that we would look after relatives or next of kin of those who had been killed or those who were in trouble. That's been one of the best associations that has ever been run. It's getting pretty thin on numbers now.

19:00 We'd been away that long they gave us a month's leave before we went back. Then were shot up to the Atherton Tableland in Queensland for training, new training before we went overseas again. Finally, after that training, on a very nice part of the Australian landscape, they shot us over to

19:30 Townsville, and we're on the way again overseas.

Just now you were talking about a victory march

It was a fundraising march more than anything else. There's a picture in there of the fellows marching there. That was, the generals reckoned we'd done a good job, and

20:00 they decided to put on this march and cause anybody that has the opportunity to be part of a march after supposedly being a hero, it's always enjoyable. That's what it was all about. It was fundraising for bonds and that sort of thing more than anything else. That was the story.

Where was the march held?

In Melbourne after we were demobbed [demobilised] for the time being

20:30 at Watsonia; we were sent home for a month. Then came back, resettled at Watsonia, and then went, how did we get to. Yeah that's right. We went to Watsonia. I just can't remember now how we got.

21:00 Cause we sailed from Townsville. Oh we went back to finish our training, that's right, on the Atherton Tableland for 3 months before we were prepared ready to go to the Solomon Islands, in particular the island of Bougainville. That was a different sort of a war altogether,

21:30 wasn't patrolling, we were advanced down a road called the Buin Road. When we first landed on Bougainville, we went into a reasonable sort of a staging camp, and then prepared ourselves to go down the Buin Road, which was basically not much bigger than a dirt track.

22:00 They decided they'd give us tanks. That was most unusual to have. It was the 4th Tank Squadron, of which the commanding officer was Major Arnott, so the codeword for the tanks was "Biscuits." You might expect such a thing.

22:30 It was very nice to have the tanks, but they were very difficult to use in that sort of country. As we advanced down the road, we came past through a major site of action and there were 5 or 600 Japs killed in this particular spot before we took over from the other battalion.

23:00 Then advanced down the Buin Road. We had a frightening way of doing it. The infantry would advance, and the tanks would be behind, and then the artillery would throw artillery shells at an angle in front of the advancing infantry, and that is frightening. When you hear all this shrapnel

23:30 whizzing around you as you push your way down the track. But that was a different war altogether.

Still there are things to talk about prior to that.

Yeah, I think I'm getting a bit ahead of myself.

That's OK.

24:00 **The time you had back in Australia, how long had you been in New Guinea? Best part of…?**

2 years.

What did that time mean to you in terms of replenishing body and spirit?

It was a rather harrowing thought that you'd been there 2 years, and they reckoned it's time you went home, and then decided there was other jobs to be done that couldn't go, so yeah. Not a very pleasant

24:30 feeling, but we'd become a well-trained infantry battalion and old General Savige – he'd been in it in World War I – he wanted to make sure the 24th were out front there. He was good when it comes to life and death but he meant well. We

25:00 kept him as our patron after the war, up on a special pine tree, you know Wattle Park? Wattle Park's out on the Camberwell tram line. They put a tree there: Lone Pine from Lone Pine in Gallipoli which is related to General Savige and some of the things he did.

25:30 Again I'm digressing.

That's all right. We talked about the time patrolling New Guinea, then you said there was the big push and there was the stoush were 150 Japs were killed.

That was

26:00 pushing up towards the coast from Dumpu, which we didn't expect to go to, directly up what was known as the Bogadjim Road then left to Madang. That's where we rested for a while before we came back to Australia.

Can you give more details about that move?

I was the main I [Intelligence] man on that particular trip. I was working

26:30 in conjunction with the company commander. I had the job of getting all the logistics of what was happening like making sure that sitreps, as they were known, situation reports, was sent back. It wasn't very pleasant. It was known as the Butchers' Picnic.

27:00 This is not a good way to put it, but that's what it was. We progressed up the track and kept going at such a rate that we overran the Japs and we ran out of food. We were to reach the stage where each man, a tin of bully beef, you've probably seen the old Spam, one of those to six men, and green pawpaw was the main meal

27:30 of the day. So that was the task, to get rid of those Japs, which we did. But because we got too far ahead of ourselves, and there was a lack of food, we had to call for an airdrop. So they had to get a couple of biscuit bombers in. It was right on Christmas time.

28:00 Of all things, they dropped us Christmas puddings, Christmas cakes. If you imagine you've been starved for weeks and all of a sudden they feed you thick, rich, mother's favourite Christmas pud [pudding]; and there was some sick boys believe you me. Mother's rich Christmas pudding. That wasn't an easy task. The biscuit bombers, they had to hang on inside the fuselage

28:30 and kick the supplies out with their feet. Before that, the infantrymen on the ground had put down white crosses, which they carried, as markers so that the food could be dropped. There's always food gets lost, or parcels get lost. Don't make it. But it was enough to, not sure, make us crook, or make us better, but it was at least somebody was thinking

29:00 about us. But back before that, at a place called Naffa Creek, where we had troops stationed, our own troops there was this terrible flood came down from a place called Boana. After we'd been through this trip that I'd mentioned, we came back to Boana and I could not believe, trees with trunks wider than that table

29:30 that had been knocked over, and had turned themselves into dam-walls sort of thing. So the more the water came down, the greater the inability to move at a normal rate. So by the time we got down to our battalion headquarters, it just swept straight through, even through our fellows were on the site.

30:00 A couple of them got, casualties. I think we had a bit of Black Fever amongst them too. Of course you can imagine the quartermaster was horrified that all this equipment had gone, and he couldn't, or we couldn't, account for it. But nobody gave a damn whether it could be accounted

30:30 for, but I think he was retired out not long after that, so it didn't make a lot of difference.

What was the Black Fever that you mentioned?

Black fever, that was terrible. We only lost a couple of fellows but they, because they were able to get them back. It must have been native carriers that must have got them back to the AGH, that's the Australian General Hospital.

31:00 Buddy of mine who got, they fed him on ice cream. God knows where they got the ice cream, but that

was supposed to be good for the… We only lost a couple of fellows on that stunt. It's frightening to see water that's suddenly blocked up behind thumping great logs, and all of a sudden the pressure's so great on the supporting trees that down she comes. And when it comes down, well you've only go to see

31:30 some of the television footage to see how water when it's banked up, suddenly crunches through.

With the push forward and Butchers' Picnic, was that where you were able to take Japanese prisoners?

That was the state of it,

32:00 because we were moving so fast, and they weren't getting prisoners, that we had the ultimatum laid down on us, "Give us prisoners or else" cause the Jap was a cruel soldier. I know he was supposed to be a very ordinary soldier, but he was far from an ordinary soldier. He was a good soldier in his own way, but our fellows never had much liking for them as you can expect with so many of their own mates

32:30 killed. I've lost it.

Taking prisoners?

Yeah, we did. I think we got about 6 prisoners, but they weren't all that helpful in the information cause they'd been out for so long, or on the run for so long. New Guinea was just about over, cause

33:00 the argument was, there was always dissention with the generals of the Australian and American army about whether places like the Solomons and such should be bypassed so that they could go on to bigger things. That created a bit of dissention amongst the hierarchy. We

33:30 went along, and we were still getting the task to clean up the area. A lot of it, they could have bypassed, some of the Solomons up there, and saved a lot of lives. But unfortunately it didn't happen.

Was that an awareness that people had at the time?

Yes. The American troops got on fairly well with the Aussies.

34:00 There were some terrible cartoon-like things that were dropped saying that the Yanks were back home and the Aussies were out there fighting, and they were sleeping with their wives and God knows what. There were a couple of incidents where they actually drew bayonets on one of the Queensland stations and had an all-in go for a while. But those things happen.

34:30 **Sorry, the Japanese? Where did the cartoons?**

The Japanese were dropping comic-like strips, juts trying to upset the local fellows. That was all part of war. We had another organisation called FELO, Far East Liaison Organisation, which used to take

35:00 amplifying equipment out into certain areas where we were fighting; the Tokyo Rose sort of thing, which you may have heard of, where they play sweet home music and the whole bit. Whether it works or not, I'm not sure, but yeah. It's a long time ago now.

Those 6 prisoners, what was your

35:30 **role in taking prisoners?**

Just make sure that they got back to battalion headquarters. They would have somebody there from a higher echelon, and just pass them on. There weren't too many prisoners taken unfortunately, or fortunately, whichever way you like to look at it.

So I take it there were many more Japanese soldiers who would try to surrender

36:00 **themselves?**

Well, it came to the stage that they just weren't given the opportunity to surrender. The troops were moving forward and they had no facilities to look after them. They were short of food themselves. So it became a bit of a problem. But they didn't kill all that many deliberately, but there were a few

36:30 that. That's when the higher echelon stepped in and said, "No, we can't do that. It's not the right thing."

Did you see any examples of that?

Yeah, but I'd sooner not talk about them, quite frankly. Yeah, I saw several that I wouldn't like to have any discussion with anybody about. I think they're known about, but no good bringing up something that happened 60 years ago.

37:00 I was horrified as an 18-19 year old to see it happening. What you ask yourself is, "What is war?" You go to war to kill off the guy on the other side, and that's like talking about the rules of the game, but it's not quite that simple.

37:30 No, I've put that back of my mind, and I've seen it, but I didn't like it. Yeah, I can still see it now. Anyhow. Where are we? We're going down Bougainville are we? Or have you got something else?

38:00 **Places like Butchers' Picnic, I'm assuming that your intelligence duties were less important than just your being there as another troop?**

Yeah, it was higher authorities than me that had to make the decisions. I was there as the I man sort of thing, but the company commander was generally the one responsible

38:30 for such decisions to be taken.

After Butchers' Picnic, what happened from there?

That's when we went to Madang. And finally after 2 or 3 months resting up there, we came back to Australia. That's when I say we went to Watsonia and

39:00 then had the victory parade. Then went back to the Atherton Tableland for 3 months training with fresh equipment and fresh clothing and the likes, cause living in the jungle for a year or two, you don't come out smelling like roses.

How was your health after the 2 years in New Guinea?

We were no sooner in action in the Ramu in

39:30 the Markham Valley than I copped malaria. I was one of those guys that a mosquito had no trouble at all to find the soft spot in me. We had a CCS, a Casualty Clearing Station, where they put you until you could decide whether or not you'd

40:00 be send further back or you'd come good. CCS was a native hut with thatched roof, and the beds inside were nicely-rounded tree limbs that they put along a mainframe and a blanket was used to support it. For 6 days I lay on one of those

40:30 not having the vaguest idea of where I was cause once malaria got you, it was a pretty serious old disease. But I must have been strong enough, because they never sent me back. I was convalesced not far from the area there. It is one hell of a disease. I had a touch of dengue fever a bit later on, but I

41:00 was nowhere near as bad as I was with the old malaria. I can still see the hut now, with the thatched roof and the blankets sown, or whatever they used to hold them. You'd stay there for, cause we had that many with malaria at the time. As a matter of fact the battalion commander was so keen on…

41:30 he believed there was more chance of not having casualties if you looked after your Atebrin needs. Atebrin was a yellow tablet that they gave you a couple of times a day I think it was. But it turned your skin yellow. It turned a sallow yellow. And he used to make sure there was a parade every night so that the fellows had their tablet.

Tape 3

00:32 Don't let me interfere.

No, no, this is all about you interfering.

At the time I remember when they came to us; it'd been after, I mentioned Slaters Knoll where there was 600 Japs killed, that was their bulldozers that were used to, it wasn't my unit,

01:00 but they were used to, cause they had no option to 600 bodies to dispose of, they had to go into a trench and the likes. But we had no sooner been through that, or the other battalion had been through that action, than they joined us. And we had two squadrons, I think there were 4 tanks to a squadron, I could be wrong.

01:30 They would generally go forward with an infantry escort, infantry mostly, if they could, lying on top of the tank, and would have infantry in front of them to go through to the enemy position. But if they got jammed and couldn't move in the mud, we had a couple of classic examples where we got over this creek and

02:00 were having a good job digging the tank out. The ingenuity of the Japs, they had in front of us two sections, or two like curtains, and they had attached tree trunks, cut them off at the trunk and attached them to the foliage and the likes. And as soon as they saw the tank in trouble, they threw back these curtains

02:30 and whack-bang. One of the shells that were fired even went in the little viewing thing and when they go round they just – cause its heavy metal, not the sort of heavy metal you know about – the shells would whiz around inside and the two or three or four crewmen were just wiped out. So they were certainly wonderful

03:00 to have the ones that were brought, but they were not designed for the sort of country that we were

forced to operate in. Just like we had support aircraft, New Zealand Corsairs, dive-bombers, which were wonderful support to us. The war in Bougainville was entirely different to the war in New Guinea. We'd progressed on a little further and it wasn't as mountainous country.

03:30 The Corsairs would be called in; they would be under the control of the artillery officer. He'd call them in, give them a map reference, and they'd shoot down wherever and strafe down the road. Certainly you felt a lot better when you had that kind of support to just walking along with no support at all.

04:00 **So those map references were critical to everybody. Can you give more detail about how you created those maps and what information you needed?**

It was almost a 24-hour a day job, because we used to designate certain infantrymen to

04:30 support the taking of map readings and the information that would be ideal, so if we didn't have an I man to go in, the I Section was only about 8 or 10 guys amongst 7 or 800 altogether, therefore they would be given the job. It might be the patrol leader, and he'd have to bring back the information that there was an enemy position at such and such a spot, was manned with

05:00 two machineguns, or wasn't manned, just had infantry or the likes. Then you'd have the readings on the map. As we didn't have proper paper, we used to have to tear up old pre-war maps and actually draw. Say that the reference was 345 degrees say,

05:30 at 500 paces, or 400 paces, and that had to be stepped out. It's the only way you could do it. They got smarter and smarter the further we went, but that was the only way.

That would be stepped out on patrol?

Yeah, so you can imagine it would not be the best map-reading exercise, but it certainly paid off. They would bring them back at night,

06:00 the patrol. Then we had two or three fellows would go into the I tent and that was made up of a long trench into which you crawled with an old, what sort of lamp am I talking about? The camper's lamp, you know.

Kero?

It'd be

06:30 a rush to get into the tent. One of my good buddies, he's dead and gone now, gone to the great battalion in the sky, he always used to go crook that he was last man into the tent. It could have been a bit of a worry if you didn't make it there.

Why was it a rush to get into the tent?

Well, the Japs would be firing shells at us, dropping them over the top of us.

07:00 They'd want to get the information inside so it could be sorted out as to what they needed to know and the like. So by the time the patrol went out the next morning, they'd have pretty rough old maps, because we didn't have such things as copy machines or anything. But at least, if these guys knew

07:30 that there was an enemy position that had been encountered so far along the track or at such and such a map reading, that would help the cause. That's how grim it was in those days.

So you were mapping quite small areas. Did you have a larger map like the smaller scale maps that you worked from, that you referred to?

No,

08:00 you didn't move all that far and all that fast. Even with the tanks we could only get so far down the track before you'd have to consolidate and take the information back. So no, it was not a fast-moving war, although Bougainville and Solomons was a lot quicker. More happened there, but that was due to the assistance of the New

08:30 Zealand Corsair aircraft and the tanks. The Buin Road was constantly intercepted by rivers; fast-moving rivers. It would rain and they'd come down in no time. So they made sure if they were taking tanks in that they got them in fairly quickly. But the problem was, if they got into the middle of a creek or something, and they couldn't get out,

09:00 they had to throw their bridges over, and then a flail tank, as it was known, would go in with a tank that had flails is the word. But as they went round, it threw out, it knocked off any shells that were, or bombs that were in the ground. But then they had to get over the top. Yeah, it was a pretty clumsy old operation.

09:30 But it was nice to know they were there. We finally got to our destination and we were mounting the final attack on this Buin Road. Actually the war finished

10:00 not long after we were fighting there. It was the 15th I think it was: VJ-Day, Victory over Japan. As we

were transferring from one battalion to another, we started to find out information that there were 10,000 Japs down there. We only had

10:30 couple of thousand altogether. So it was probably just as well the war completed. Stopped. Otherwise we'd all probably have been completely wiped out. But this was another of those cases where we could have bypassed the Solomons and come to something else, but it didn't work out that way.

11:00 **Apart from the Buin Road battle in Bougainville, what else were you doing there?**

What else was we doing? Well that was pretty full-time job because we weren't moving all that far. Every time we came to a road junction we had to make sure we didn't stop on the road junction, because the Japs, having been in that area before we were, they had them all pinpointed. All the positions pinpointed.

11:30 So it was a pretty slow journey, Where the road had collapsed and it was all mud, they had to build corduroy roads, which as a pioneer platoon, specialist platoon in our unit, they had to go out and cut down trees and put them into the wet area so that the tanks could go over them or

12:00 alternatively the jeeps. We had a couple of jeeps by that time and we'd captured a couple of Japanese units that had transport. So, we were getting more confident I guess that the worst of the action was over.

12:30 It was up to us to make sure it happened. I was glad we got out when we did, because I was working with a company commander whose name was Ned Kelly. He never got himself killed, but he was a brilliant country lad, officer. That's when you saw real bravery in

13:00 those sorts of actions. They relieved us and we headed back from where we'd come on the road. They put us into a rest area for a few days before we finally moved back to Torokina. It was the place where we came in. I say in the book, if you can believe, we went into

13:30 Torokina in the first place, I'm digressing here again if you'd have gone to Torokina as we did, on the old Dutch Van Huyts and were then transferred down the side of the LCT, Landing Craft Tanks, which were those you could open at the front and you'd drive the tanks off or you put the people on and off, and we

14:00 had the job of climbing down the Jacob's Ladders, the rope ladders, and then getting into these LCTs and then going ashore. If you could have seen, I still see it now, the magnificent scenery of this white sandy beach all along the front and magnificent rainforest in the background. So that was a bit

14:30 more pleasant than some of the countries we'd been into.

Can you tell me more about the commanding officer that was as brave as Ned Kelly? What was his name?

He was the company commander actually. He came from the New England district and was highly regarded. We had several fellows like him.

15:00 He came from a good family. He was highly respected. He won the, what was it, the Military Cross? He was an officer so it would have been the Military Cross. But he was real devil-may-care. But he lived in New England in northern NSW, and he was highly respected by anybody of any strength in the town.

15:30 He died a year or two back. That's a sad part. The numbers are getting pretty thin now. You people are probably on just at the right time. There's not going to be many left, another few years. I know my own battalion's down now to about 150 and we started out with 1,200. It just shows you what happens. I do admire what you're doing, because after World War I,

16:00 you couldn't find out anything about what was happening to those around. There were that many of them were gassed and the likes. So it's nice to see that somebody is still taking an interest. I think the Veteran Affairs have done a tremendous job at looking after anybody that needs to be looked after. I must admit they've been very good to me with a lot of problems I've had. That's why I wasn't sure

16:30 I should even talk to you. I thought I was past it, but you've convinced me that I still can say a word or two. After the war even, I went up and visited him here, he and another officer, Lieutenant Siren who was a landmine expert. He'd been in and

17:00 destroyed a few landmines and the likes. Those two lived up in, can't think of the name of the town, beautiful country. But they've moved on.

You worked closely with him?

Yeah, on that particular occasion I was his intelligence representative. I used to make sure we got the bearings right, knew where we were going

17:30 and passed back information on the radio, the local radio between the battalion headquarters and the unit. But you had to be careful because most of the signals had to be done by signal wire. Because of

the nature of the country it was almost impossible to radio in those days. There'd be thousands of miles

18:00 I reckon, at least hundreds, of signal wire that was hanging. Every time they went out they had to lay signal wire. The Japs had probably come along and cut them up, so you wouldn't be too sure where you were. It was a primitive war by today's standards, but it was even nowhere near as primitive as World War I.

18:30 I came back after that episode and I was explaining the nature of the country. Then we went back to Torokina where we'd started and the Americans had a nice camp there, Camp Pendleton, which they turned over to us.

19:00 It used to have a weir in it. Every night we had to go and pull these thumping great logs up so that the water would not flood through the camp. We spent a few days there before they shot us back to Torokina and the base.

Why were you sent there?

The war was over for us. We'd been relieved by another battalion.

19:30 They often used to talk about R&R [Rest and Recreation] camps, which were generally 3, 4 or 5 days before they put you back into action again, because we were a bit more civilised in those days than we were in the earlier days. I hope you are able to understand what I'm saying.

20:00 **When you went out on Bougainville, you were going out on patrols?**

Yeah.

Did you go out as a unit with your company commander? Did you do this together or was it

Yeah you generally go out, he wouldn't be sitting on his own, he'd go out with a platoon, which was 30 men or, yeah a company commander would probably go out with a

20:30 platoon. There are three platoons in a company, so he might have one platoon with him, one platoon on the left flank and another one on the right flank sort of thing, so it was a bigger job that going out on units.

So he was leading your unit?

He was working to instructions. He needed me to get the information back,

21:00 if we found anything worthwhile.

What was considered worthwhile?

As we were on the move into enemy places, and action. For example the artillery that was put down was quite incredible, like a petrified forest after we'd been through, so anything we could find we had to try and assimilate into

21:30 informational value. It wasn't always that easy unfortunately. It was communication to make sure that information was passed back.

So you would see evidence of Japanese camps?

22:00 **You were looking for evidence of where the Japanese were, or had been?**

Yeah, they had been entrenched somewhere and you'd go through and hopefully you'd find a few machineguns or grenades or that sort of thing.

22:30 **Do you need to have a little break?**

Yeah that might be an idea.

Would you mind going back to the early days? We want a sense of the sort of person you were as a young man, your education

23:00 **and family. So who you were when you entered the army.**

23:30 **You were working in advertising before you went into the army? What sort of person were you? What were you interested in?**

I guess the war took a lot of things away from my life between the age, when I look back and see the kids today at

24:00 18 and less than, and I've got kids 52, 53. That seems all out of kilter to me. I still tell my kids what I think they ought to do and they say, "Dad, we're 50. Forget about it." So it changes your perspective in that way.

24:30 I had a brother who died at a young age of pneumonia at 6 months, which wasn't unusual in those days.

Then my other brother, he was 75, he died 2 years ago of cancer. That left me. I grew up in a fairly, I was gonna use the word staid, that's not the right word. My

25:00 mother being English and good church-going person made sure that we were brought up in the correct manner. We live in East Camberwell in a war service home. We had many, many friends. We had an old player piano that used to belt out noises. Particularly when I was at the war and used to come home, not

25:30 very often, for leave, Mother would always have somebody around for drinks, not that she liked to drink much, but for drinks or she'd make some cookies or some such thing. So it was a fairly close home life. I left home basically to go to the war when it was all boiled down.

26:00 **You had a very social life?**

Yeah. Yet, I'm not an overly social person today, which disappoints me on occasion. My brother, he was very open socially. I enjoyed my life, but somehow or other, because of the circumstances of war, and I only went to Melbourne High for 2 years because

26:30 my Dad was ill and I thought I might earn a few bob [shillings] to help the cause. It wasn't all that social a life. We were a very close family and we enjoyed it; in fact, closer than families are today in some instances. And the old player piano always played an important part in our social activities because

27:00 there was no such thing as television or distractions of that nature.

So you would have evenings around the piano?

Oh, yes. Cards. My Mum and Dad were great on cards, because you didn't have the diversions that you have today. Drugs were openly unknown, so we never had any problems associated with that.

What about alcohol? Did your father drink?

I didn't have my first drink until I came back from Bougainville when I was 22. It never touched my lips. Most of my mates were the same way. Occasionally we'd break out. Like when we came out of action the last time, I do tell a lie, it was the first drink I had then.

27:30 Because we'd been down in action for 9 months on the Solomon Islands, we were entitled to 2 bottles of beer per person per week. So the Americans gave us a thumping great portable refrigerator, and it was filled to the top with beer, so that started a few fellows on their way to drinking. But even today they're not, because I think the older you get, you

28:00 need less in that direction. No, I didn't have much of a drink at home. My brother didn't either. We enjoyed life and enjoyed a close family. My Dad being ill didn't help the situation. He went through hell with the gas. He lost one lung in France, and then when he came back the other one went on him too, so he was a real disaster.

28:30 Mustard gas. That's why I hate the thought of it these days, knowing what he went through. After, coming back from the war, I enjoyed life for 3 or 4 years, but then at 16 I was working with the old company that International Harvester for most of my life

29:00 and went from being an advertising assistant to a national marketing manager through public relations. In fact the first job I had at International Harvester was, someone said, "Design a screen slide." A screen slide today is a pretty basic sort of thing, but that's how I got into it and I stayed.

29:30 I was offered other jobs, but I still stayed there cause I enjoyed it. So by the time I was approaching 18, the army said the y needed me, so I didn't have much option but to go into the army.

Did you have a girlfriend?

Only casual girlfriends in the neighbourhood. Nothing serious. Didn't know a lot about what sex was all about in those

30:00 days. So a number of girls that lived in the streets nearby. We used to go, of all places, on holiday to Marysville and places like that, to guesthouses. Find some girls there of some interest. No it was different somehow in those days.

30:30 That was the basic early days. As my mother was a good Church of England person, we went to St Dunsans Church of England in Camberwell, and I was altar boy for a while, that sort of thing. Mother pushed it down our throats that much that by the time I got into the army, I used to try and avoid church

31:00 parades. I found them boring; of course I don't think I was different to a lot of others of my generation. The church never really got to know what was needed for the later generations and I think that's what didn't help it, I think. The army finally caught up with me, and that's when

31:30 that part of my life started. Not a lot of excitement there, because it all happened in a short time.

Why did you go into an intelligence unit?

They were desperate. No, the reason was that I was trying to go to some other unit.

32:00 I put in an application to transfer. That was all up in New Guinea. The adjutant, captain adjutant, said, "We need intelligence people. I can't let you go. You're stuck with it. You're gonna go into intelligence." Well, intelligence in what it was in those days was an offshoot of public relations and advertising and all those things.

32:30 It's developed a little since than, but basically that's what it's all about, so that's where I got into intelligence. It was a specialist job, and I think that's the only reason, because I knew what public relations and advertising was all about. I wasn't sorry; even now I've still got a couple of mates left that

33:00 were in the intelligence section with me. No other reason other than that. Intelligence wasn't all that known in those days in the army; of course it is today, intelligence is quite important, or more so. That's the only simple way that I got into it. Wasn't' any excitement that got me there, that's

33:30 about all it was. Don't be afraid to ask any questions.

34:00 **The company commander that you said was very brave, why was he brave? What had he done that demonstrated his bravery?**

You talking about the company commander on Bougainville when I was his I man. He was fearless. When he detonated,

34:30 this is what it was all about, he was quite extravagant. He came from New England. You couldn't help but look up to the man. He was one of those. And when I got the job of his I man on that trip down the Buin Road, I was happy to take it. It's like another buddy I've got that comes to see me. He was a batman. He was an academic. So wartime in

35:00 our time didn't look upon education in the same manner in which it's looked upon today. But people often say to him, "How the hell did you finish up as a batman?" He was batman to a company commander, not Clive Egan, the one I'm referring to. If a hole turned up, you stuck your head in and hoped that you'd last through. It wasn't

35:30 academics and lectures and a lot of things. The batman one was selected because he had a good academic mind. This company commander was shrewd enough, he was a very quiet captain in his own way, and he was smart enough to know that my buddy would be prepared to argue with him about action and where they might go and things like that. Rather than him have

36:00 to go and step back and talk to another sergeant. I didn't find that out until a year or two back, and I've known him 60+ years. That was the reason why he did it.

What sort of relationship did you have with Clive Egan?

Clive Egan? Only as an I man, I guess. Although

36:30 when I came back from the war and I was doing a lot of editorial work, I was on a New England district, northern NSW. I told him I was coming up there one day, so I pick up the phone and say, "I'm on my way up there. You'd better buy me a beer." And from that point on, we had a close relationship. But it wasn't anything out of the

37:00 ordinary except we're old army buddies and the other one, who earned himself a couple of high decorations. But that's how it was. You couldn't help it. Let's put it another way. We went to the war, and most of our friends had gone to another unit or some such thing, or had been restricted. In those days

37:30 you could be kept back if you had a job. My brother, he wasn't allowed to go because he was in the Commonwealth Aircraft Corporation, which was a protected industry. So you lost a lot of those friends. I was looking through a magazine I had the other day that my old company mate when I went off to the war, there's another guy whose name's not on it. Mine are. My name is on it.

38:00 It was a fragmented society more so. That's why I think I've hung on, or me and my friends have hung on to army relationships more than anything. I've still got good relationships with the business people. One of them came to see me the other day. He just lost his wife through cancer. Often I got caught up into this

38:30 because I'd been organising functions and that sort of thing, and got nailed for those reasons. Nobody else was fool enough to step forward and take on the assignments. No, I can't get to. I know what you're talking about. But it wasn't, there was not those relationships other than as I say the army has been incredible. The relationships. And there are not many of them left.

Tape 4

00:32 **Tell us about the 24th Battalion, who it was made up of.**

Yeah, I need to go back further, which I probably haven't explained. Before the war, there were militia units and the AIF called them chocos [chocolate soldiers], they don't…they respect them since, because a lot of them have done better than a lot of the AIF units,

01:00 but in those days, there were a lot of officers who had been in, were stationed at the YMCA [Young Men's Christian Association] or Worth Park in Melbourne the likes and were there for the uniform. So when the 24th Battalion, which dates right back to Lord Kitchener, it's and if you go up – I mentioned to Colin [interviewer] – if you go up to the shrine today, you'll find their colours hanging in the crypt at the shrine,

01:30 that's how far back they go, but they were trying to…we were known as the 24th/39th and the 39th was the one that got wiped out practically on the Kokoda Trail. And we were left with a lot of no-hoper officers who'd, as I say, been in it for the glamour and were getting, they were in their 30s and the likes, and that was pretty old, even in those days, for infantry officers.

02:00 So they weeded a lot of them out and consequently we started to get younger officers, still never got any of our own and who were, what's the word I'm looking for? Were promoted in the field, that didn't happen towards the end of the war but that was the reason the militia in those days was pretty ordinary, really.

02:30 And there was that hate by AIF units, so until we sort of started to move off and got up to New Guinea and earned a high respect as you would see in that book there, that's what sort of changed the war, so that my old battalion became one of the better units that fought in World War II. But we hadn't at that point been changed into an

03:00 AIF unit. See, in the early days, you couldn't…I couldn't join the AIF until I was 19. That was the rules of the day and then I couldn't go overseas until I was over 19, sort of thing, so it's like the numbering system too, if you had a VX number that means you were a volunteer, the X for voluntary, but if

03:30 you weren't, they didn't give you the X, you just were V whatever, so there was a lot of that nastiness went on and it wasn't until we got to New Guinea and they cleaned out a lot of the older fellas, cos we had a lot of old fellas, and old was 35, as I say, if you were in a infantry unit. So there was this sorting out and then we had old General Savige, who founded Legacy, and he'd been in the First 24th and he was soft on the 24th Battalion of our ilk,

04:00 our years, and he did a lot to help push us to become a top unit. But that's, Clive Egan, he came in – I don't know, he joined the AIF and was not posted. But when we got to Bandiana, Albury, they joined him and several others joined up and there was the likes of him coming in,

04:30 of his style, coming into the battalion that turned it into a top-notch battalion.

Was he a strict disciplinarian?

Yes, but not over the top. Egan was the sort of guy when you stood in front of him and talked to him, he had piercing eyes but very pleasant sort of a character. But you knew damn well that what he said, he meant, and you'd better damn well do it, but he didn't say it with any

05:00 hurtful way. He was the boss and he expected you to call and that's why so many of the fellas followed him and that happened with other officers we had. A few of them got killed before they even got that far, but that was, yeah in those early days it was all coming together with the officers and then getting rid of the rubbishy ones. I don't know whether that explains quite to you, what you're saying,

05:30 I don't think it has.

I'm just trying to imagine him in a battle situation or in a…

He was prepared to lead the troops, not one that was in the back row, you know. Because – I haven't got the pictures – but there's pictures of him standing, holding a machinegun and he looks like he's a soldier. Yeah, I was always sorry to see him go. But, yeah the army

06:00 was a crazy mix-up back in those early post-war years.

So was he a clever man when it came to strategies and leadership?

Yes. He had all those things. He became a major in the finish, that was an indication of how good he was, but it was men like him that

06:30 we needed, that we needed to follow, rather than some of that old dead wood that we'd collected along the way, party boys and the likes. See, our original commanding officer, he was one of those and cos he made us…no what was it? He made us do some things that we shouldn't have had to do as infantry soldiers and old General Savige would sack him, now you

07:00 wouldn't ever do that to a guy like Egan. Egan would tell him straight why he did it and whereas this other fella would be inclined to – and nice guy – but didn't have the guts to really be a true leader. To be a leader in the infantry is a pretty demanding sort of a deal. If the enemy gets the least idea that you've

got pips on your shoulder, well you've taken them off, you're a marked man, so and that

07:30 can often be seen by just how they present themselves in the field, you know, but somehow or other he was something special. I thought he was something special anyhow and I was very sorry to see him pass on. But he got the old big C [cancer] and when that gets to you, you're not…don't take so well. So I don't feel I've quite described what…

That's okay. There

08:00 **may be incidents that you recall.**

He was special though, as an officer.

So just going back, or staying on Bougainville and with the map, the intelligence gathering and drawing the maps, did you rely on the local, native people very much?

No because they were never there. The only reason that native people were there was to act as stretcher-bearers.

08:30 They were known as the Fuzzy-Wuzzy Angels because they were prepared to…they'd get a couple of saplings and a blanket and carry a man down, hundreds of – not hundreds of miles – but miles down the slopes and likes and you wondered how the hell they did it. But no, we didn't see a lot of them; they kept out of the road, except they were employed. Then we had several that were guides, who'd been presented with medals for their duties

09:00 and they took great delight in showing you that they'd won a medal and the likes. But see, New Guinea's going through the problem now that it's been let go and it's got corruption and God knows what, but it's coming along as a top country. Now somebody's got to go back and put it all together again, which is sad, but there's only corruption because they don't know any better, and if somebody puts out a million bucks, well they'll take it, with both hands. So that's

09:30 why we've got to sort those things out that; when you think of all the fellas that lost their lives in New Guinea and at the moment it looks like for no reason at all.

Before you went to Bougainville, you were in Lae, so we'll just go back to Lae.

No well we didn't…

Tell me why you were sent to Lae and what the circumstances were.

10:00 Yeah.

And what the operations were that you were involved in.

Well that was a major campaign that started at Wau – Bololo, where I said we flew in, and we gradually pushed our way up the back and established the headquarters on 600 square miles and established patrols so the Japs would think there were thousands there, in fact they did. But in the meantime, over on the coast, they

10:30 would…Americans had landed at a place called Saidor, not Saidor, something Bay, I forget, doesn't matter, they came in in barges, they lost half of them because they didn't pick the right way in and were knocked over by rocks and reefs and the likes. But they came up the coast towards Lae and then two other sister battalions of ours

11:00 came together, that was the 57th/60th and the 58th/59th and one of our own units. And they actually pushed into one of these pincer movements, we're talking about so they eventually took Lae and Salamaua and that opened up the road to Dumpu, they crossed the Markham, we went across the Markham in little canoes, and the river's about a mile wide, you know it's one of those, once the rains come it

11:30 really pours down. So one of the AIF units that had returned took Lae and the others were taken by the 57th/60th, 58th/59th which were part of General Savige's 15th Brigade, no it wasn't, 2nd Australian Corps it was, 15th Brigade was

12:00 looked after by Brigadier Hammer. I'm confusing you.

Tell me about the crossing, you said you crossed in canoes, the whole battalion?

If you looked at it, saw it on a map, all you see is rivers of sand coming down, cos the rains would come down that quick, you were never dry in New Guinea, you were always wet through, used to bucket down.

12:30 But we crossed the Markham River, which was at low level at that time, but normally it could be 20 or 30 miles wide when the rains did come down. So you had to make sure when you got across. So natives took us across in their canoes, the unit that I was with at the time, which was

13:00 yeah, we went across to Nadzab where there'd been the airdrop and they'd dropped light artillery and the whole thing, but that took the Japs away from Lae and Salamaua. And we stopped at Nadzab then

the decision had to be made whether we would go home, or go on.

13:30 Of course, the guys had had two years and it was doubtful to…they were looking for a break. So we slept the night on the strip and I mentioned the American Negroes were there, making a hell of a racket and firing off, I think they killed some of themselves, but that was not unusual. And the decision was taken early in January that we weren't going home, we were going on further and that's when we went up to Dumpu,

14:00 that you mentioned; they flew us up to Dumpu and we went into – with some other AIF units, which were starting to become available at that stage – flew into Dumpu. Then we started what was the Butchers' Picnic, the battalion or the company that I was with cos we had to try and stop the Japs from

14:30 getting through to the coast before we did, and there was another unit of ours that was there as well. I can confuse you with numbers, that's the problem. You understand what I'm saying? So that's when we pushed on this company. I was the I-man attached to that Don Company, D Company, and we got that far ahead of the Japs they were running them down that fast, that we had to

15:00 slow down a bit, otherwise, well as it was, we were out of food, we were down to six men to a tin of bully beef and green pawpaw as the vegetables. That was when we couldn't go any further and we had to get the drop of provisions and the likes, but as I say, they shot in all these rich Christmas cakes, because guys that have

15:30 been living on bully beef, the first thing they'd want to go for was Christmas cakes, with rather doubtful results. So yeah, and that was, we slowed down from there on and came back to a place called Boana which used to be a mission station. And then we

16:00 came back to our old battalion headquarters where they'd had the floods unfortunately and that was a hell of a mess and several guys had been drowned and scrub typhus.

Tell me about that again, where was that?

That was coming up from Lae, after Lae, Nadzab, then up to Boana and if you went on further, you went on right up to the coast to a place called Bogadjim and on to

16:30 Sio and then to Madang where we finally stopped at Madang.

So you were doing a lot of moving around weren't you? You came in at Wau, you did that big trip, from Wau, the 30-mile trip.

That's right from Wau – Bulolo into Sunshine, which was the battalion headquarters.

17:00 **And then to Lae, was that an overland trip to Lae?**

Yes, it was but that's the way it had to be done. But we went from Lae in aircraft to Dumpu, and then from Dumpu north to the coast.

So the overland trip from Wau – Bulolo to Lae?

17:30 Yeah.

So that was…

That was about three months while we guarded all this area of 600 square miles.

So that was the 600 miles, the patrolling all that way and you ended up in Lae.

They had the Buang River for example, there was a platoon of ours down there; the Japs thought there was a battalion down there. It was diversionary tactics basically. What it amounted to.

How do you mean?

18:00 Well, by diversionary, they wanted the Japs to think that they were there in large numbers and that they were heading up to Lae because that was when they were on the way to Lae this particular unit. So the Japs thought there were 1000 there when there were only 30 there. So they put on patrols and made fire, fired

18:30 rifles and God knows what to think that there were large numbers there and quite a lot of that diversionary activity was done in New Guinea because there just wasn't the troops and you couldn't move across the ground, if you moved across in large numbers you were just as likely to get yourself into more bother. So where have we got to now?

19:00 **I'm trying to trigger your memory of incidents and events that you might be able to recall; those really specific things that happen.**

19:30 Yeah, well see, I mentioned about the 600 square miles but I didn't mention…and I mentioned the Buang River where they

20:00 had so-called diversionary tactics and then there was the other part Markham Point; the battle for

Markham Point, and that was another diversionary being put on by one company of ours. Before they crossed the river, they had fierce fire-fights with the Japs and the Japs thought there were a lot more people there than were and we had a few killed in

20:30 that part of the world but Markham Point was another one of those that was all done while the big full overseas or AIF battalions, they moved in on Lae and Salamaua and we had my so-called diversionary plans at Markham Point and Buang River, and so the Japs thought that,

21:00 you know, we had thousands and thousands of troops and we didn't.

Can you tell me exactly how you did that at Markham Point, on the Markham River?

Yes, it's on the south bank of the…

Okay, so you're on the south bank and you've got X number of Japanese there and a very small unit of Australians, so tell me exactly what you did

21:30 **to create these diversionary tactics?**

Well it was just a case of setting up patrols and again making the Japs think how busy it was. Markham Point had been a problem to us for some time, it wasn't all that well manned,

22:00 but it was a fortress-like position, up high on the hill, and there was another, what they call Mount Ngaroneno, next to it that the Japs used to fly over the top and buzz us as they knew we were there. But it was just another patrol, I know it's hard to try and explain but that's what it amounted to.

How long did the patrol go for? How many days?

22:30 When it was pointed out that they were about to land the paratroopers at Nadzab, and the others, the Americans were coming up the coast to Salamaua and the other 9th Division troops were coming in, that's when all the activity started. So the Japs didn't know where they were. And a few of our fellas were lost but they at least, the Japs finally cleared the position, left Omogmum and we then could

23:00 cross the Markham River and go to Nadzab. We never went back to Lae, we went to Nadzab and then on for a night on the town at the airport was then up to Dumpu. You're wanting more personalised stuff? Not all that easy to…

I'm just prodding.

23:30 **Were you there, can you recall the paratroop drop? Can you tell me about that?**

I wasn't at Markham Point but I saw the drop. And there was a double-page spread in the local New Guinea Gold, was the name of the local newspaper. And there was this double-page spread

24:00 of the DC-3 aircraft, the old biscuit bombers, coming in and dropping the troops with light artillery and the likes and they just swept in and took the airport. And that cleared it and that airport today is Lae's main airport, it's a bit out of Lae, but that's where it is today. So yeah, there was that much going on in that particular action that was a major action.

24:30 You'll find a lot of writings on Lae, Salamaua campaign.

So they were dropping paratroopers, with…

With ammunition and light artillery and the infantrymen of course, to cover the guns that were being dropped as well, but they were only little short artillery pieces they were able to set up and scare the hell out of the Japs.

25:00 So that's when we headed, after that, it was Dumpu and Boana and all over again.

Early on, you'd been trained as a mortarman, were you continuing to be a mortarman throughout?

No, I only got the mortars, as they were known, because I said I didn't want to go in the infantry,

25:30 I wanted to go in the artillery. So the next best thing in terms of infantry is mortars, which you've got a base plate and with the barrel that slots in, comes up like that and then they drop bombs, 30 pound bombs, down into the barrel and you've got to get your head out of the road quick enough so that you don't get it knocked off, but that's what

26:00 a mortar is. They've still got them, still use them today, but they're not as big and cumbersome as they were in those days.

So were you continuing?

No, given the mortars away, they'd decided they wanted me in the I Section; no I gave the mortars away. I was still associated with them because I'd known a lot of them who'd been in the unit before, the Mortar Platoon, which is about 30 men

26:30 made up of half a dozen of these artillery units. There were quite some characters in the mortars. There was about five or six of them who'd just loved the grog and they were known as "the Grip." Always out getting full of some such thing. And then there was…I was a new boy in the mortar platoon and my other friend who turns

27:00 up here Thursdays, I'd been in the mortar platoon three weeks, I was one of the first of the rookies in there and he still holds it over my head. He came into the platoon three weeks after I did, and I was there handing out orders and he just couldn't believe, he's never forgiven me since, that

27:30 I just gave him a hard time, but I had the support of these other fellas. I got the name of 'the problem child' because I was the youngest in the group and used to create a bit of stirring along the way. But there was another fella we had in the platoon and each night they used to go down for hamburgers, down at the front gate, and it was a case

28:00 of drawing straws, they'd draw a straw and he never, ever knew it but he was…he had to win every time and he had to go down and collect the hamburgers. Then we had a very well-known artist, I haven't seen much of his work lately, but he was a conscientious objector; there was no way he was going into action in the army. And he used

28:30 to keep a guard of about six or eight people tied up while he would draw paintings all over the roof of the – they'd probably be worth a lot of money today if you found them – of the tent. So there was a few interesting sidelines to the…

Was this the Grip you talked about?

Yeah, the Grip used to – a tent had about eight men I think in those days, and I'd

29:00 have made up six or seven, number six and seven and the other one was a number eight and he's the one always got savaged and had to go and get the…I could never understand why he didn't wake up, because every night he got the job of going down to the front gate. There used to be a guy there with a mobile frying pan, maker sort of thing and he used to live at the gate there and they used to go down and get the

29:30 hamburgers.

Where was this?

This was back at Nagambie Road, right in the very early days, I'm digressing a bit there.

I'm curious about the Grip, these guys. Tell me more about the conscientious objector/artist. What was his name?

Yeah, someone asked me that the other day. I can't remember but he

30:00 never got a lot of money for his artwork but he was in all the art circles and knew anybody was of any note and such, but I'd have to find out his name, because someone else asked me the same question.

So he was drafted, was he?

Yes, he was drafted in the first place and he just hated the army. We had a few conscientious objectors that weren't going to follow the system, but

30:30 you didn't have much option. You went, or else. But there was a guard tent down at the front gate and you could sometimes…I had several times the job of doing 24-hour guard duty over him, not that I'd think he'd have run away or any such thing. But he was a good artist. But yeah, the Grip were made up, but they're practically all gone today, there cannot

31:00 be one of them left. But if there was ever any trouble they were always in the front of it and could they drink. They'd drink like it was going out of fashion.

Why were they called the Grip?

They were always in the grip of the grog.

And why did you have to do 24-hour guard duty?

Well that was the rule, they had 24 hours, you generally did four on, four off,

31:30 sort of thing, over the 24 hours. But he had to be guarded, 24 hours and it was the mortar platoon at the time I'm talking about had the job; and I was on the outside of the Grip, I wasn't in the Grip but they were lovely fellas, they really were great guys.

What would he do? Would he run away? What was he likely to do?

Well it's not far they could go because there were not that much in the way of transport in those days. So

32:00 I don't know what he would have done. But I think they finally court-martialled him and he did get out

but I was at a [(UNCLEAR)] auction a year or two back and I saw him wandering around there studying all the art, but his art was only bringing about $100 a piece so he obviously hadn't been all that successful, but he knew anybody that mattered in the art world.

So did

32:30 **he stay with the mortar platoon did he?**

Well, I don't think he belonged to the mortar platoon, he didn't belong to anybody at all, he was just this sort of hanger-on. But somebody had to look after him so different platoons had the task of minding him on particular occasions. And he didn't care, but he had these swooping great brooms that he used to put on the ceiling and the likes, it's a wonder the army didn't go crook, but I never

33:00 heard him, he's probably better left to his own devices than somebody trying to attack him anyhow.

Where did he get his paint from?

Good question. I don't know where. Perhaps he – there was always the quartermaster's store and they'd have paint for marking on parade grounds and that sort of thing – and he'd probably get someone to knock it off for him

33:30 I would suspect. But that's a good…I never thought of it that way, but I remember it, there weren't a lot of colours to it but they were definitely paints that he used, used brooms, don't know where he got the brooms, they probably came from the Q Store [Quartermaster Store] too, and he'd do his paintings on the ceiling. Long time ago.

So

34:00 **did you know any other conscientious objectors? Was that something that you were aware of? We've heard of people receiving white feathers and…?**

Yeah, I can't name the people but yeah, there were several that got the old white feathers deal, particularly being militia men that weren't AIF, because as I say, they were known as chocos, but that was

34:30 classified as a disgusting way, but it didn't take them long to find these guys were as good as any of them. But that's the way it goes I guess, but it was a terrible slur on militiamen at one stage, cos some of them had tried to change over to the AIF and they made some rule that they couldn't change over, so became a bit of a vicious circle and that was the sad part of those sort of situations.

35:00 **You said before that, in New Guinea, you had guys from the 39th Battalion after the Kokoda Track.**

We had…?

Some guys from the 39th, after the Kokoda campaign, is that right?

Yeah, well the 39th was originally back at Seymour and it became the 24th/39th. But then the – I'll complicate it further here – the

35:30 39th split off and went to the 2/24th Battalion, an AIF battalion, and they went overseas, that was a complete hotchpotch for a while. But the 39th, they were really done a raw deal, they finished up going over the Kokoda Trail with no training, with very little ammunition or rifles or anything.

36:00 There's still a couple of them left today but there's not many and on Anzac Day you see a couple of them about but no, they were the first ones ever sent in over the Kokoda Trail and had some terrible stoushes into which they became involved.

And yet some of them then went on to join the 24th and go with you to Wau and Lae or Bougainville?

Yeah. No, that's where I'll confuse

36:30 you again. There was the 24th, which was the original World War I 24th, there was the 2/24th, which was the World War II 24th Battalion then there was the one to which I belonged, which for a while they called the 3rd/24th, but that was the one that was split from being a militia unit into an AIF unit. And that's the one to which

37:00 I belonged. But oh, it was a hell of a mess for a while trying to sort out who belonged to who.

What I'm curious about is, that the time that you got the leftover guys from the 39th they would have been run pretty ragged, they would have been pretty exhausted after that Kokoda campaign.

They were.

37:30 **So how did it affect your battalion to have these men come in who were sort of war weary?**

Well, it was such a problem that in the finish they started to swap platoons from, for example the 2/14th

Battalion, which they put into our battalion and then they put a platoon of our

38:00 24th Battalion into the 2/14th and they thought it was going to be a hell of a mess, but as it turned out, these guys found out that they weren't as bad as they were painted and they mixed together very well and in fact we had quite a few of their officers and NCOs [Non Commissioned Officers] in the unit when we went away, but for a while it was a real shambles, nobody knew where

38:30 they were going.

I'm also interested in the way the psychological aspects of warfare were conducted. For example, you've talked about diversionary tactics, but you also mentioned before the Japanese dropping comics, that was in Bougainville?

Yeah, that's right.

So what was that

39:00 **all about and how were those tactics used to demoralise?**

Well they believed the morale of the Australian troops were down because the Americans were all back in Australia sleeping with their wives, so that became a what's the word I'm looking for, a tool to upset them even further.

39:30 Yeah, I can't think of the word I'm looking for, but that's, as I said, they had further…there were a couple of…they're never widely broadcast, but when their troops had got off one train at one station and there'd be another one at the other station and drawn bayonets and had a couple of decent stoushes there. But you never heard anything about that.

40:00 **Who? Australians and Americans?**

Yeah, because these supposedly home sleeping with their wives and they weren't, the Aussies weren't very happy about it all.

Did you see any of these?

No, never, only what I heard. But it was fact I believe that; no I never saw it myself.

Tape 5

00:31 **So John, just before you were talking about psychological warfare, but the sorts of things that Japanese intelligence were doing to try to subvert the Allied war effort, did that go both ways? Did the Allies do that sort of thing with the Japanese, drop leaflets or were there any tactics like that?**

Yes, but it was more the Americans. They had a unit called

01:00 FELO, Far East Liaison Office, and most of it emanated out of there. And they'd take out this amplification equipment and stick it out in the track somewhere and then kid to the Japs to come and give up and we'll take you home sort of thing. But I don't know whether it worked all that well, but it was certainly part of what they were trying to do to get them to give in,

01:30 because that's the time when they were on…they were starting to…like the Butchers' Picnic as I described it, they had them on the run basically, but because we had them on the run so much I think headquarters got a little upset that we were not taking enough prisoners to bring back. So

02:00 yeah. But in answer to your question, the Japs had been known to drop leaflets, it wasn't unusual, but I'm not sure whether they dropped them on Bougainville and the likes but they were worth a lot of money. They paid quite some dollars if they could get hold of some of those. But they were done in colour camera

02:30 comic strip form.

Being in the intelligence section, were you required to pick up any of the language, pidgin or Japanese?

Well, pidgin you were suggested that you…they used to issue you with a little book, friendly terms and friendly fruits and this sort of thing, but

03:00 it was after the war before they formed what they called the university and started to educate our fellas ready to go back to school, but no there was no training of the type that you're suggesting, if you wanted to find out, you had to find out for yourself.

Did you manage to pick up much, if any of the local language?

No, there was one little

03:30 book that you could pick up, what was it? I've forgotten now, Crosscuts or Pushim mi pullim mi [push me, pull me (New Guinea pidgin)]. No, it's gone but those sorts of things. A lot of them we used in the Bluey and Curly, you probably wouldn't remember the Bluey and Curly comic strips that used to appear in The Sun. Had quite a bit of it used to get

04:00 interpreted into that publication. But oh yeah, we had a reasonable smattering of it at the time, but the brain's a bit dulled now with such activities.

And you were talking earlier about the Yanks, how much did you have to do with them in New Guinea or Bougainville?

Not a lot, really. We

04:30 might have swapped lamb for pork or something like that and they brought Coca Cola in and supplied us with Coca Cola. Some of the fellas used to swap their bottles of scotch, which was not always scotch, but could have been Corio, but it was Corio whisky but those sort of things, and then there was a lot of guys that made

05:00 Japanese flags, which they could sell to the Americans at a decent price. It was, you know, one big piece of silk or something cut from a parachute that had been shot down by an aircraft with a red circle in the middle. And they used to bring big money. Then of course, you'd get the fellas who'd make souvenirs out of crashed aircraft and perspex out of windscreens

05:30 and that sort of thing and turn it into quite a neat little business. And there was Paddy's Market, which had all the pornography. That was on Bougainville until the padre wasn't very impressed with what was coming out of there, so the hierarchy decided it should be pulled down. Just the

06:00 concrete floor was left, which had obviously been put in by the pioneers or something. Oh, yes, they tried to keep the boys' minds clean.

And it was an American initiative or an Australian one?

That was Australian, that one, but the Americans used to go there and trade things off and there was a trade in books too that I don't know where the Yanks used to get them, but paperbacks, that was the first time we

06:30 really saw any numbers of paperbacks. But there were some pretty startling sort of books they used to have too, but that was not unusual.

What do you mean by startling?

Well, pornographic books as such and that's when it started down at Paddy's Market was the name of the place

07:00 where they traded it all. And as I say, the padre wasn't very impressed so they had it all pulled down. Then of course there was a big two-up school too, which was against the rules, and big money used to change hands in the two-up schools. Some of the fellas took home some decent wads of money that they'd made playing the old two-up, because that was illegal

07:30 too in those days.

But surely even when that sort of thing, be it pornography or gambling was outlawed, it probably…

It went underground. Yeah, you're probably right, but those were the rules, I didn't hear of anything but you're probably…that's what probably did happen.

Did you manage to bring back any

08:00 **souvenirs?**

No, I don't think I did, there were quite a few who got Samurai swords which are worth a lot of money, which they took off officers and, of course, then there were some that they made themselves. But no, I wasn't lucky enough to, it was generally the guys that were right out in the front that would rip them off Japs and take them home. But never saw a lot of them.

08:30 But there was definitely a market for such units; even the Japs have been out here in recent years trying to buy such swords and the likes because a lot of them belonged to families and the engravings on them were very meaningful to them, but not so much to us. But I guess if you had the ones with the right writing on, and they

09:00 went back to the family, they'd be worth a lot of money.

What evidence did you see

09:30 **of Japanese maltreatment of local populations?**

Prefer not to talk about that. I saw quite a bit of it. Both sides. Yeah, knocking gold teeth out and things like that. So no, I never believed in it and I never talked about it much, but it did happen, there was no question about it.

10:00 But if you'd have brought the subject up today, you'd have the bloody legal department, they'd stir it.

I'm just trying to get an honest picture of what went on.

Well, it did happen. But I wouldn't like to name any of the situations I saw it in because I did not appreciate them and I can see it

10:30 happening and I was not at all impressed. And the guys that were involved are all dead and gone now, anyhow.

I wouldn't ask you to name names or anything like that, but are there certain examples that you could describe, even in a cursory sort of way?

I'd prefer not to. No, I've kept my silence on it this long and I'd prefer it to stay that way.

11:00 **We haven't really spoken about – we spoke about the food and you were saying how one tin of bully beef was shared amongst six men. Can you tell us a bit more about how you coped with that and you talked about the Christmas cake that came on Christmas Day '42, were there any other times when you were treated to a slightly better standard of life,**

11:30 **where there was food?**

We were probably lucky, in that we had enterprising cooks and that was the secret of success in what you ate, because often there was not a lot of choice, particularly when you were out in the front line. But the old bully beef was always a good standby and they'd make that into stew with

12:00 pawpaw and things of that nature and cos they were enterprising sort of cooks, they'd come up with a reasonable sort of a meal, really. But those, and then we had towards the end of the war, we had canned rations, which was a tin about that long and you opened it with the old screw thing, like you've got on the sardine tin. And you'd get three meals and they

12:30 weren't bad, you'd get three meals a day out of those. Chocolate and biscuits and that sort of thing, which were better, but you weren't supposed to open them unless you were desperate, you know, you carried them with you and they weighed a fair bit, but yeah, they were not all that enterprising but they were better than the basic…well as I say, the old bully beef and

13:00 pawpaw could get a worse meal than that, if you had a good cook put it together. I remember in my very early days of army at Seymour, cooks weren't all that bright in those days, and I can remember going to a meal in the mess up at Seymour, which was long tables like these spread right along, right through,

13:30 and down at the end, there'd be a roast of beef or lamb or something. And I remember one of my first meals at such an occasion, there were maggots growing on the end of the meat. You know, the fly had obviously laid its eggs there and they let it go. But the guys were desperate for a meal so all they did was cut round it and ate it; I couldn't believe that when I saw it. But

14:00 the more we moved along, the less we had of those problems, as I say, the cooks in most cases were pretty good operators but that always stuck in my gizzard.

You said you didn't drink, there was obviously some men liked to drink. You didn't drink until you came…?

No I didn't. Don't ask me why, but I had a lot of mates,

14:30 cos I don't think, in those days, if you're 18, 19, 20, you didn't drink much anyhow. You know, today it's…God they're killing themselves left, right and centre. But I never felt the desire to it and the first real binge I had was when we came back from Bougainville and it was my 21st birthday and a couple

15:00 of mates said I had to have a few drinks on this day and I did, and I quite enjoyed it but I've never been a boozer. I like a scotch, a nice scotch today but no, it's cos when I came back from the war too, I had ulcers, so, stomach ulcers. So that didn't help the cause to be drinking beer and those sorts of things.

15:30 So I think that made me become more cautious because I was seriously ill with ulcers at one stage, having lost eight pints out of the nine pints in your body at one stage, when I went back to work, so I became rather cautious after that. I knew I was having a problem but I just kept on working, you know I was a workaholic in those days.

16:00 **So they were stomach ulcers?**

Stomach ulcers, yes, which weren't hard to get, I've still got them today but I'm pretty careful about how I handle them. But yeah, and the medication I get today is a healing one, so that helps the cause too. Yes, did some silly things back in those days, but anyhow.

16:30 **It seems most soldiers smoked.**

That's how I got emphysema. When I came back from the war, they tried to tell me I had a hookworm; it wasn't hookworm it was ulcers. And I went to the doc and, cos I was having a heart attack as well at the same time,

17:00 and he said, "You know what your problem is?" I said, "Yeah?" He said, "Do you know how many cigarettes you used to smoke a day?" I said, "Tell me." He said, "60." I said, "How do you work that out?" He said, "The X-ray showed that that's how many you had." So that was another reason why I gave up smoking too. So I was never encouraged to that sort of activity.

17:30 **But when you were overseas, how important was smoking just to get you through?**

Well, in those days, the army used to give us a ration of cigarettes and even when the war was over, we were still given special, you know, gift vouchers to go to the…not…they weren't gift vouchers [ration coupons], we had to pay for them, to go to the tobacconist or milk bar and get your monthly ration.

18:00 And that's why, if you could prove that your problem was caused by smoking, the repat [Repatriation] came to the party and paid you a pension, because it was their own fault, they encouraged us to go. So that gave me part of a pension to help my cause. But yeah, that

18:30 was stupid what they did, but I guess they didn't understand. Not sure whether they all understand today.

So other than the smoke and the booze, what was there that allowed you to pass the time, when you weren't on patrol, when you were back at camp, how was time spent?

Yeah,

19:00 well being in an infantry unit there wasn't all that much time out from training and attending parades and that sort of thing because you had to be kept fit because you were on call to go into action at fairly short notice. But yeah, we'd do a bit of PT, physical jerks and that sort of thing but we didn't have the sort of

19:30 physical training that they have today. And they'd have you over a mad mile course, going underneath the barbed wire and doing it in such and such a time. Then I guess when you had spare time you lay on your back and read a book or whatever. That's a good question, I'd never thought much about that, but there never seemed to be much spare time to

20:00 make use of.

Was there ever such a thing in two years in New Guinea, were there evenings, days where you were left to your own devices or was there no such thing?

Left to your own devices? What do you mean by that?

Well I mean just basic things, like reading and sitting around playing cards and…

20:30 I mean if you could get leave, for example, before we went away to Bougainville, we were camped on a major line at Caboolture, because it was uphill coming into the station, she didn't move all that fast so the fellas used to jump the rattler and go into town and the army knew we were doing it, but they still let us carry

21:00 on with it. So there was time spent in those sorts of activities. Because the fellas would pick up a few girls in town and the likes, to while away their time, that wasn't unusual. But the old Caboolture train, in fact, any of the Queensland trains were terrible, when it was all boiled out.

21:30 **The two years in New Guinea, you ended up in Madang, the two years prior to that, had there been any leave at all, or were you on the job non-stop?**

No, there was final leave before we went overseas, which was…oh it'd be two or three weeks or something I guess.

22:00 But you could aggregate your leave but I can't remember we did have all that much leave. Was a pretty busy life in those days, the Japs weren't far away and they were trying to get us to be

22:30 as active and we did a lot of cross-country walking and that sort of thing and we'd go out for a weekend and you'd be expected to live off the land as they called it, if you're lucky enough to catch a rabbit or some such thing. But whenever we went through a town, we'd generally get ourselves to know the locals and be looked after and the

23:00 girls would soon get to know the blokes and life went on in a normal way.

What about when you were in New Guinea, from arriving in Port Moresby, through to your departure in Madang, that whole period there, were there ever down times, where you could move back from the front and there was a chance to recuperate?

23:30 What do you mean, by leave?

Yeah, be it leave, be it times when there was a lull in the fighting and you were just…?

Yeah, cause if you're in the fighting you're under control of your unit as to

24:00 where you went and what, but other than the…they didn't give us much leave, it was a case of save it up and make the most of it when you go out. That's why I say, when we came back from Bougainville, we had that much beer we didn't know what to do with it and then we had leave, for a couple of months, then they gave us three weeks before we went away again, sort of thing. They didn't give you much in

24:30 time of hours and that, it was either a departure leave or something of that nature, but no, I can't remember us getting, other than you'd get leave in town whether they counted us then, there'd always be a three ton wagon would take you in and then you'd have to be on it at midnight; if you weren't on it, for not midnight you were in trouble so,

25:00 but that's a normal life in the army. No, I don't remember all that much spare time, because when we were in New Guinea we were there for a couple of years, much to our disgust, and there was no leave at that time, not till we came back.

How do you keep going? All that time, you say…

Sometimes I wonder, when I see younger people today, I don't know how. We were

25:30 living in pretty wild country and we were always subject to the enemy being about. Yeah, that's a good question, I often wonder myself, how the hell because we didn't have that many guys that went round the twist, we had a few but I…whether life was not as complicated as it is today, we weren't as educated as kids are today, I'm not sure. But as I say, if we had another

26:00 fair dinkum war, I wonder whether we'd get many would volunteer to go away. I think they probably would, but you sometimes wonder when you see some of these, particularly the educated lads, you wonder what they might do and the way kids are killing themselves off in car accidents and the like today. It's a bit of a worry.

26:30 **The nitty-gritty things of finding a place to sleep, I can't imagine how trying the conditions must have been in terms of getting a good night's sleep, if such a thing was ever possible.**

Yeah, right, when we first went to Queensland, they used to tell us, they don't have bushfires in Queensland, I don't think they did have that many in those days. But I remember sleeping one night and it rained like hell and we had

27:00 a groundsheet, which was basically a plastic or rubber-covered thing, with eyelets in so you could pin it down, I can still remember lying on the ground with my boots as a pillow, although probably a shirt over the top of it and all of a sudden this rain, I could feel it running down my back. But couldn't do much about it was stuck with it. I think we just accepted things a lot easier in those days. We probably

27:30 wouldn't do it if we went back again today, particularly our kids wouldn't do it, because I think they're better educated than we are. But no, whims and things, if we were near a good town, example Maryborough in Queensland, that had 49 pubs in it,

28:00 which wasn't unusual for Queensland towns in those days and we'd always be well looked after. In fact one of our fellas still owns a pub in Maryborough today. So I mean, an Aussie would always be happy to have a drink and there was never any shortage of it and it wasn't all that expensive by current standards, but yeah, I guess, yeah

28:30 you're asking me questions I've not worried too much about in recent times. Had to go into the army, we were stuck with it and didn't have much option and we put up with it. So I said, that was for King and country; if they said that to kids today I think they'd just laugh, particularly old Harry [British Prince Harry, working in Australia during 2004] out here at the present time. I don't think he'd give a damn, by the sound of him.

By the end of the war, had

29:00 **that attitude changed at all, the King and country?**

No, not really, no. As I said, Australia was desperate and we were needed. I got a cousin of mine, he used to give me a hard time, he said, "You joined up and I hadn't joined up," and he said, "You used to tell me it was my duty to do it." I said, " I can't believe that." But that's what he reckoned I said to him.

29:30 He finished up in the air force. Yeah, it's a long while ago.

I'm curious to know just about the basics in New Guinea, in Bougainville, getting sleep, how do you cope with minimal

30:00 **sleep? Hygiene, were you digging latrines wherever you went?**

Yeah, they'd dig holes and stick a wooden top over them and that sort of thing, because it was the law of the land that you had to clean up any of those sort of things and I remember they had one of them and

somebody poured some mortar bombs down them and set them off and made a hell of a mess.

30:30 But the hole is deep enough to take up most of the concussion that poured out. But yeah, they were very strict on rules like that. Do those sorts of things.

And what about contact with home, was there any during the two years in New Guinea?

Mail was about the only one and

31:00 used to take a while for the mail to come through, and most of us got into a habit of drawing illustrations on the front of the envelope and things like that. Yeah, families I think were closer in those days and although you've got the Internet today, but I don't know how they'd go with the Internet out in the field. But yeah, communication was mainly through the

31:30 mail and it used to take perhaps ten days to get a letter through.

So was it ten days? Both ways, it was the same thing was it?

Yeah. And of course your letters were censored, they had a

32:00 blue pencil, all the officers, or they alternatively cut bits out with a razor blade and if you tried to pass on information, where you were or that sort of thing. Some of the guys had their own particular way of advising their families where they were, but it wasn't always the smartest thing to do, to have the enemy aware of what you're

32:30 up to.

Being an I man, was that something that you were expected to look out for? Were you censoring at all?

Yes, my letters were censored. In fact officers were supposed to be censored by other officers. I don't know whether they always were but they

33:00 were supposed to be censored and I know I can remember having some of mine censored too. But if you were fairly smart and didn't throw up the obvious, you could generally get away with it. That probably made the mail a bit longer before it was sent out, the officer had made up his mind that he'd do a bit of reading, cos some of the guys who were writing passionate love letters to their girlfriends

33:30 weren't very impressed with censorship as you can imagine.

You said that girls were not a major part of your life before you went away with the army, obviously they were for some people?

Well I had a couple of girlfriends back home, I don't know whether I was being true to those or

34:00 what, but oh yeah, there was a couple that I was madly in love with but I wasn't one to chase them out in the traps, you know, but there were those that did, no doubt about that.

Did you write to those girls as well?

Yes and I always exchanged a photograph or I asked for a photograph and that sort of thing.

34:30 Oh yes, you tried to keep up the normal social attributes of your growing up attitude but as I say, we were pretty young in those days and you didn't tie girls down at 18, 19. But if you could get away with a bit of freedom in your lovemaking well then good luck to you and there were quite a few guys that did, no doubt about that.

35:00 **This is during training and overseas as well?**

Well, more overseas than locally cos it could get lonelier out in the field than it could just exchanging between Queensland and Victoria for example. Yeah.

So what sorts of relationships are

35:30 **you talking about? This is with local girls is it?**

Oh yeah, girls that you would be friendly with before you went away and you could have a pretty serious relationship with them if you weren't careful but the point was you didn't want to get tied up with some lass and then you get yourself killed or something. Being in an infantry unit, so

36:00 I guess there were always those cautions. I don't know what else I can expound for you.

So for those men who sought the company of women in Moresby, New Guinea, Bougainville was that available to them?

36:30 Good question. You'd get a lot of guys if they could form a relationship they would and some of them would do it just for the hell of it, you know, and kid the girls that they were madly in love with them and the rest of it and they had no desire to and of course there were family breakdowns with wives and that

on occasions that you couldn't always avoid. And I think it

37:00 went on as you'd normally find it in civilian life today. But there were so many of us were only kids, 18, 19, probably didn't mean as much then as it did later; as I say I had a couple of girlfriends back home but

37:30 it's a long while ago now, 1941, December 1941, it's a long while back.

What are the most vivid

38:00 **memories that you have of that time?**

Well I think the greatest shock was that I had been trying to get into air force and navy without success including my Dad not being keen on me going, but having no option but to go. I think probably one of the biggest things that made me sit up and take notice was the fact that I was going into an infantry battalion.

38:30 And having known a lot of the things that happened in World War I and the thousands and thousands of soldiers that were killed on that front, I wasn't very keen to be involved in that sort of activity, but the difference between World War I and World War II, World War I

39:00 they hardly moved in 12 months the Western Front and Anzac Cove and places like that were subject to different types of conditions. You know, my old…I think, I'm not exactly sure, but my

39:30 First World War 24th Battalion I think they lost 9000 or something at Gallipoli. But you know, that's a hell of a lot and if you go to the shrine and see there's 119,000 in World War I that were lost, now we lost a lot but we didn't lose anywhere near those numbers and you see war as we've seen it today and you go to Afghanistan, they don't lose a

40:00 soul and they get onto where was the next there?

Iraq.

Yeah, in similar conditions, how the hell they came home without casualties when I know what…when my own unit wasn't all that bad but we lost nearly 100 killed and 300 wounded, fighting on one patrol fronts, not on wide open fronts as they did in

40:30 World War I. God knows what the next one will be, cos the world is getting smaller and smaller unfortunately. It's too easy to get from one place to another today.

Tape 6

00:32 **Just taking you back to Atherton, can you tell me about – there was a situation with a willy-willy – did you remember that situation? Were you part of that or not?**

No, to be honest I don't remember that.

01:00 That was on the Atherton Tableland?

That was on the Atherton Tableland, it was around the time that you'd just been told that you'd be going for a second tour of duty, a new destination. You'd been at Atherton for three months.

Yeah, I should have been around there, but I can't recall.

Can you recall that day, that time when you were told, everybody was told that

01:30 **they'd be embarking again, but not told where?**

Yeah, well that's after we'd been and done our three months training after leave and preparing for the next destination and we were re-equipped ready to go off and they took us down to Townsville

02:00 I think it was. God I should know more about Bougainville than I know about anything.

Was there an enthusiasm for this, or were people worried? There was also something about writing, when you did find out where you were going, people were writing home and quoting passages from the Old Testament?

Oh, right, yeah, that; well you're more up to date than I am

02:30 so it just shows you how my mind has dulled. But yeah, well it was never a great thought to know that you were going back into action again, particularly after you'd spent two years in the front, but Bougainville was an entirely different experience. It was a different war altogether, as I've said, it was on a wider front whereas it wasn't

03:00 just patrolling as we did so much in New Guinea. So going from New Guinea to Bougainville was a brand new ballgame. But any rate, we went and I said, we landed on that stretch of beautiful sand from the old Van Huyts then onto the LCTs, landing craft tank,

03:30 and it was a stinking hot day, I can still feel it clambering down the side of the ship, the Van Huyts, with the temperature probably in the forties and here you are with the full pack having to get down into the boats, into the LCTs. Then we went ashore and we didn't have a prepared camp, as far as

04:00 we knew, so we just went to a staging post and then finally we were designated to occupy an American camp, Camp Pendleton, which made the sort of camps we'd been in look like second-hand whorehouses and they'd had a beautiful parade ground, I can still see that.

04:30 Pardon me, laughing, I can remember one night after they'd been drinking some of this beer that we had that was 98 bottles per man or some such thing, we finally had our own battalion parade and there was a Japanese mountain gun that we'd captured down south and here they were running round all hours of the night with this mountain gun and of course the CO [Commanding Officer] wasn't impressed.

05:00 He had his rather nicely built hut, or it was a lot more than a hut, over in the corner of the parade and he was not at all impressed, he was entertaining and he wasn't impressed with these troops making all this noise. So Camp…I'm getting lost.

05:30 **Tell me more about the camp. Apparently there was a swimming pool there.**

Yeah, that was; I'm just trying to work out whether we went there or we didn't go there until we came back. I think we went there before we went south. Anyhow, it was built with typical American architecture styling. Not that it was that out of

06:00 fashion or in fashion and, any rate, that's about the best I can describe you of the camp. And we must have

06:30 gone back to the staging post, yeah, we wouldn't have gone into action, I don't think at that point. Terrible the way I'm putting this, but that was when we knew that we were going to be on the Buin Road heading south and as I said, there'd been a major action where there were about 500 Japanese had

07:00 been killed, and they needed bulldozers to bury the dead otherwise they couldn't leave them there and nobody knew who they were anyhow. And we started, progressed down the Buin Road. We knew at that point that we were going to have tank support, we knew that we were going to have New Zealand Corsair aircraft dive bombers, which were very good and did an outstanding job in supporting us. And we started the

07:30 trek down the Buin Road supported by aircraft and tanks; that was a brand new experience for us because we'd not been involved in tanks and aircraft generally flew fairly high over the top of us. We started down and were heading for a place

08:00 called Anderson's Junction. Anderson was the colonel and a villain; he's dead and gone now, and unfortunately we camped on the road junction of Kekro Creek and Anderson's Junction. That was the worst thing we could have done and the Japs slammed us with artillery and knocked off a few of our fellows and then we

08:30 had enough sense to move down the road a bit off the main track.

When did this happen? Did it just…?

This happened, and that's the point I hadn't quite worked out, whether it was when we…I think Camp Pendleton, I don't think we went there until we came back from below, but I can't remember how we got from off the landing craft. I remember us going to a staging

09:00 post and I think that's what happened. Then we moved down and we didn't come to Camp Pendleton until the war was over. That's where I've got a bit of confusion, I'll have to try and sort that out.

But at this crossroads, the Anderson's Junction?

Anderson's Junction and the Kekro Creek. And the Japs had a habit, if they had been over an area, they always pinpointed them with artillery, so

09:30 if you moved through that area, they knew exactly where you were, and that's where they'd shoot you up.

So tell me how do you mean "pinpointed them with artillery?"

Well, they would know from their own mapping that they'd done as they'd come down Buin Road that the trig points or whatever were such and such. So if they had any idea and they always guessed that you'd land on a target like that; we were stupid, we

10:00 shouldn’t have gone there as quick as we did, and they bombed us and we lost a few of our own troops there unfortunately, but we learnt from that point on that we didn’t stop on road junctions or river junctions. Because they called it “the battle of the rivers” because the Buin Road was intercepted every few miles by creeks and fast-flowing

10:30 streams and the likes, and that’s why the tanks had their problems. But we’d not had tanks before and it was certainly a morale-boosting exercise, and we gradually pushed down the road, there’d been fairly heavy rain and the vehicles sunk into the mud and they had to get the Pioneers to cut trees down and put

11:00 corduroy down onto the road so that it would be possible to pass over. And we had situations as I explained before where it was not possible to get over the creek at all and they used what they called the flail tank, which had the tank in the middle and threw out great arms either end and then from that point on,

11:30 after they’d come down flat, you could drive a trawler tractor or other troops could get over otherwise it was pretty messy to get through.

On your patrols, did you come across many dead Japanese?

Yeah. I didn’t talk about those, yeah. That was a bit gruesome, that. And that’s where we were told to get some prisoners

12:00 and stop killing them all off. So anyhow, that was…

Did you come across any evidence of cannibalism?

Yes, we did. We know that, because they had no food the Japs, there was a fair bit of cannibalism, buttocks chopped off and that sort of thing. And a lot of them were killed before they even got to that stage and we had them on the run that fast that they

12:30 weren’t too sure where they were going themselves.

So who’d been cannibalised, other Japanese soldiers or Australians?

The Japanese had cannibalised their own, because they had no food and chopped buttocks off and that sort of thing and cooked it; cooked the meat as barbecue, or whatever you like to term it, because they were desperate for food at that stage, and that’s why I probably chopped the thing short the other day, because

13:00 the Buin Road was then a series of crossing rivers and making sure you kept out of the road of the Japanese and every morning at five o'clock they used to pump one shell, a six-inch 150-millimetre shell into our camp and you’d stand there, because that was when we’d have stand to, what they do at the Shrine and that sort of thing. And

13:30 you’d hear the 150-millimetre shell, which is that size, that diameter, six inches across and weighing a couple of hundred pounds and they used to throw those at us, one every hour. You never knew whether it had your name on it because you could hear them roaring through the air and then you’d say, “Thank God, that one didn’t have my name on it.”

14:00 I got fairly close at one stage because every time we stopped, we had to dig slit trenches, because of this continuous bombing and you’d build your trench and then you’d get in, you’d probably have a mate and they’d probably occupy two bods, and I got a bit close on one occasion, the shell came over, it burst, the shrapnel went everywhere, I was laying on my stomach, fortunately I had

14:30 my legs spread apart and the chunk of shrapnel came right down between me legs, cut my pants but never cut me I’m pleased to say. So there was a lot of that sort of thing and some fellas got caught. Then there was another case where two fellas were in one of these slit trenches and the bomb came over or the shell came over and ripped straight into the trench between the two of them.

15:00 And they practically lost their minds to see that here was this shell stuck in the ground between them.

Unexploded?

Unexploded, yes. They were just lucky that it landed right in the middle, between the two of them and they got out of it, but that’s why war on Bougainville was different to war on New Guinea; New Guinea was patrolling, whereas

15:30 Bougainville was more on a wider front. And as I say, as we progressed down the road, the artillery would fire in front of us and they used to be able to put their guns so that they threw the shrapnel away from us, not at us. You’d still be walking down the road and

16:00 the officers’d be saying, “Keep going. Keep going.” In other words, don’t go flat on your belly and you hoped one wouldn’t get you. But the artillery were, I think they were 25-pounders, and they came through and gave us at least the feeling that you should be lucky enough that you didn’t get

16:30 shells-shocked or that was the word I was looking for before, to see fellas shell-shocked from this

artillery is pretty horrific too and quite a few had to give up and go back to base, because they couldn't handle these thumping great shells which were "sss-sss-sss-sss" coming at you, as I say, as that one got…I mean they used to do one on the hour every hour and that was not fun.

17:00 And then the Kiwis and their fighter bombers would fly over the front and would strafe in front of the artillery so they were pretty good to have that, that we hadn't had before, so it was a different ballgame altogether.

17:30 But they were dive bombers, Corsair dive bombers, that the… As a matter of fact, my buddy that comes to see me on Thursday, he's still got a mate in New Zealand that he's going back to see him in October after all this time and he was one of the pilots that dropped the bombs, dive bombed, cos the old dive bomber goes in like the scoop bomb we were talking about sort of thing and comes in with a whack, doesn't go straight out and

18:00 disperse itself. So they had to throw it, hoping that it would go away from you, that it wouldn't come back into you, and they were pretty good at doing it but that was always the risk that was taken. The tanks were a great deal of assistance when we had never had that sort of thing. But they got into more sorts of trouble than you could poke a stick at. As I said, they had this ingenious camouflaged section; they had two trees

18:30 that they'd cut off with a cross-cut saw and put them onto ropes and they had guns that could pull them back at the appropriate moment, so that they let our tanks get right over the river and then all of a sudden they'd pull the, like the curtains at a theatre, they'd pull the ropes from behind and up they'd go. And there were the tanks all prepared

19:00 to be taken and then if they were lucky, as they were in one tank, they fired the shell right down the turret – there was a turret in front of them, which was the only way the driver could see – and that shell was fired inside the tank and killed the whole crew. But they weren't the greatest sort of unit to have in that warfare but they sure were

19:30 a lot better than the others, and as I say, there was the flail tanks that went over the top and allowed bridging to happen and that sort of thing, so that was a different sort of a game. For nine months we tramped down the, I guess it would have only been 50 miles altogether, mightn't have even been that far. But we always had to consolidate after we'd been in action somewhere.

So for nine months?

Nine months we were

20:00 on Bougainville, that was right from, not nine months down the road necessarily, nine months from when we arrived off the landing craft until the time we came back to Camp Pendleton and enjoyed life like we'd never enjoyed it before. The Yanks used to go to tremendous trouble to build those camps and that sort of thing.

Was that Torokina?

Yes, that's Torokina. Yeah. Camp Pendleton it was called,

20:30 which the Yanks had a way of naming their camps after, I guess, generals or some such thing. Then as I say, at the camp we had a tremendous swimming pool that we had to go and pull the drawbridge up every night so that if the rains, which always came round about four o'clock, came in heavily, the water would not be held up by

21:00 the…I guess a dam wall, you'd call it. But because timber was no problem to get, magnificent timber and they'd put those in, we'd have to lift them every night to make sure that nobody got wiped out sort of thing in case. Because when they…as I said, when I mentioned earlier this afternoon about Naffa Creek, near Boana

21:30 where the battalion had its headquarters and got caught when the floods came down from, I'm starting to confuse you now, from Boana and I have never seen…there were logs bigger than that table and as the water rolled onto them they kept going and there'd be a couple of trees that would finally catch them and they'd

22:00 build their own dam wall, and the next thing, if you didn't get out of the road, you were right into it and that's what happened with the battalion headquarters. And the whole headquarters was caught in a place called Naffa Creek and we lost a couple of fellas and one had black fever, but one died

22:30 I think it was, and had one casualty and the rest got out, which were lucky. But I've never seen timber like these magnificent trees that were just stopped across the timber that was on either side and would build up and then all of a sudden couldn't hang on any longer and whoosh away she'd go and then the whole battalion headquarters was just blown away. Now I was up on the

23:00 Boana Butchers' track at that stage. And I can remember coming back after we'd finished that exercise and seeing all these trees and they were like matchsticks, you wouldn't believe it to see how they'd been torn to shreds literally and we came back to it, which had been base camp, and unfortunately there was nobody there, the battalion headquarters had

23:30 gone back and they'd taken the dead with them, the three or four that had died there. And that was the end of that episode.

Where were the Japanese POWs [Prisoners of War] kept, on Bougainville?

Well they were not caught or not

24:00 gathered, there's pictures in that, you may have noticed, they had them as it was the end of the war, there were thousands of them and they didn't know what to do with them. And those that didn't have enough points, we had to get so many points to get permission to go home, and if you were a single man there wasn't much chance you would be successful. I was lucky, or was I lucky? My Dad was seriously ill and someone pulled a couple of strings for me and I got

24:30 home a bit earlier. But, there I go; I've lost my thought again. What was I talking about?

Well, I asked you about the POWs.

That's right, POWs. We had thousands of them and they were put into compounds with barbed wire around them and were marched out every day on exercise and the likes and were arrogant

25:00 types of characters, and then finally they were transferred to Faroe Island and some may have gone to Rabaul. And a lot of those fellas that didn't have enough points to get them home quickly, were left the job of looking after them but they led the pretty good life some of them with captured Japanese speed boats and God knows what. And not

25:30 speed boats, but boats that had been used to power people round in. So yeah, I'd gone home and they put, finally after some weeks of waiting, I may as well have waited for the battalion as it turned out, but they put me on a PBY flying boat, I see there were Catalinas on the telly last night but these are smaller type and I flew all the way from

26:00 I guess that must have been Port Moresby back to Townsville.

So John, going back a bit, at the end of the war in August, where were you?

I was still in the front line when the…with Clive Egan, and we were in the stage of changing over from the reserve battalion taking our positions and we're going back and that's when

26:30 we did go back to Camp Pendleton where I think we must have been before, I'll have to check that out. But yeah, so I was in the front line but then came back and somebody was on my side but it took me weeks to try and get transport back because you always had the smarties that knew somebody and could get home quicker than you could.

And at that point

27:00 **the Japanese surrendered so the war was over, how were you feeling? How was your health and how were you psychologically?**

Yeah, well you weren't too sure, or you couldn't believe that after four plus years you'd been out there and it was all over and I think it was the day before we came out of action, one of our fellas got wounded. But we came back

27:30 and as I say, I finally got across to Australia, which was quite a fascinating trip on one of those little PBY flying boats. Came home and I was still stationed at Camp Powell – Camp Powell was the American name, Royal Park we called it – and I was

28:00 given leave to go and then in December 1945, they said, "We don't need you any more" so I kissed them goodbye or words to that effect. So you know, when I think back at the age of 18, you know, to have been through all the things we had to

28:30 go through, not just me, all my mates and 300 of them in my battalion, 360 or 80, I find it hard to believe today that when I look around to a lot of the kids that I was saying before, I think if the need was there we'd probably get them to volunteer and go, but I think it'd be a different sort of a ballgame when you see a lot of the kids around today.

What was your father's condition when you…?

He was pretty close

29:00 to death at that stage and even my doctor and our senior officer tried to get me back and they did, as I say, but it took me some weeks before I finally could make it. He lasted a couple of months after that but I was pleased that I got back and could at least exchange a few words with him, but

29:30 he couldn't believe it that I'd been and done all the things he didn't want me to do and got home still in one piece.

Must have been an emotional reunion, was it?

Yeah, very emotional. Yeah particularly from my mother's side, she was a very emotional person. And

my Dad, because he was delighted to see me after some time, my mother had to have a party to welcome me back home, so.

30:00 Yeah I was a bit sorry, not that I wouldn't want to go back and see my Dad but some of the mates I left behind and some of the things they got involved with, I would have liked to have been there but if I'd have had the choice there's no question of the way that I went but it took so long to get there, I remember being stuck in the staging camp with a bunch of books and nothing else to do all day long, just hoping I might get a

30:30 number on an aircraft cos, you know, it was mates, if you knew somebody there was more chance you could get out on the way, but.

So this is at Port Moresby, you're stuck?

Yeah, I was stuck at Port Moresby and I must have been at a flying boat base, which was probably at, would have been at Port Moresby, although I must have got transferred out because I

31:00 wouldn't normally have been stuck there for so long, but it doesn't sound as exciting today so.

So you were waiting?

Waiting four or five or six weeks to try and get transport out and finally someone looked down on me and I got a ticket to take me back to Townsville where the PB [Patrol Bomber] base was.

31:30 **Why couldn't you get a plane? Were there no planes coming back to Australia or were they loaded up with POWs or injured?**

Well it was the end of the war and everybody had a reason why they should be going home and if you didn't have the right credentials that was the transport was always the problem, you know, you'd go on hands and knees to the RTO [Railway Transport Officer], transport officer, and

32:00 boy, unless you had a good excuse, and there was somebody was pushing for you, it was always a hell of a thing to get transport in the army transport services. So that was it. You know, I'd probably do it all over again if I had to. I've made that many wonderful friends even though I'm past the

32:30 age of what I should be for even thinking that way, I have some of the greatest thoughts and experiences in my mind that occurred in those years and don't let somebody doubt I had fear too to be in some of those things that I was involved in, you know, I was no hero. But as I said, for King and for country was the slogan

33:00 and that sounds a bit bravado but that's the way it went.

So you've remained with your association, can you tell me about the 24th Battalion Association?

That's right.

Tell me about that.

Well cos, when I came back, in those days they gave me a job back again if you so desired it and I went back into the advertising business.

33:30 And I was there for a couple of years and they'd started a magazine, The Red and White Diamond but the guy had been running it, he'd had enough of it and they were trying to get someone else, so they nailed me, would I do it and

34:00 cos they knew I had the experience and background for the magazines I'd done with my old company. So I got the job, I was editor of the magazine and I thoroughly enjoyed it. I spent about…I think it worked out 28 years over periods, editing it or writing it and editing it for them. And then I had a couple of breaks. I didn't take it on

34:30 entirely because my job started to be demanding and I was required to travel quite a bit. And I was climbing the executive ladder, to use a phrase, so they needed my time, but any rate whenever there was a need I always came back, but then they wanted me as president, so I took on the job as president for three years and

35:00 I was the youngest president of the association as it turned out. I was only about 24 or some such thing. And as I say, I did that for three years and then they had me back on The Red and White Diamond to help out with that and I was on the committee for years, but again I thoroughly enjoyed it so.

So that was pretty soon after the war?

35:30 **It was only a matter of a few years that you became president of the association?**

Yeah I came back at 23 and I was president at 24 for three years I think it was.

So what did you do, what was your role as president?

Well when we went away we had about 1200 guys and we lost a couple of hundred overseas and some of them got older

36:00 and had no desire to stay there, and the role was to take on the responsibilities of the association because before we went away when we formed the 24th Battalion Association, the charter was that we would look after our mates who didn't come back and their families if there was a need there and look into the future for that, so it

36:30 had its needs and could keep you busy if you weren't careful. Then of all things, I run into our treasurer who was well-heeled, but the story was he liked the girls and money and he robbed us of 1300 pounds, which was a hell of a lot of money in those days and as I was president I took on the job

37:00 that I would get the money back. I lost more friends over that because I didn't tell the guys whose names had been used, that they'd been used, and consequently I was finally rung by a CIB [Criminal Investigation Bureau] detective and he said, "What's this we hear about you?"

37:30 In the meantime, I'd found out about the money, I'd been and seen our solicitor and got another mate and decided what we'd do, but fellas whose name had been used were not very impressed. So finally the detective, no stage one before that, the 1300 pounds he wrote a cheque onto Qantas [Australian airline] and

38:00 I went into the National Bank in Collins Street, with my hand in my pocket took away 1300 single notes of money and took it straight up to the bank and put the money in the bank, and did I run into trouble. Because, but I've said it many times, I would do the same thing again. If it happened to me I wouldn't… it was important to get the funds to the association first. But one guy,

38:30 he took me to his grave, he wouldn't have a bar of being…I should have told him that he was blamed, but he would be one person I wouldn't like to tell. So we got our 1300 pounds back and I was delighted of course and I think I gave away the executive role of it for a while and I think I was on the committee.

39:00 But that's just another experience on the way, but I don't know whether that's for the army archives. But that's how it happened. And we've still got him today. He's a tremendous bloke and he went out of his way to help me and advise me on how it should be handled. Did it all for nothing too. So.

39:30 **He was a member of the association?**

Yeah. Yes, he's still a member of the association, well–heeled, he's retired now, but a very well-known solicitor of Mullumby and Mullumby was their name, he's sold the business out now. But if anybody ever did anything to help, as a matter of fact he's still doing some work, we're looking at

40:00 the shrine and if the shrine needs any further help, you never know we could donate a few dollars to there. But it's been an experience, because I guess it's spread over from 1941, till about the year 2000, 2001 so

40:30 sometimes your family gets neglected when you get involved in that business, that didn't help my cause at home. But that was it, we did it and that was the way it's been, my wife – deceased these days unfortunately – she wasn't very pleased with me taking on extra activities and I was one of those sort of guys I guess.

41:00 So it's question time.

Anything you'd like to say? Any reflections on war and the point of it or the lack of a point?

Yes. War as it is today I hate, with all the know-how, weapons that are being used. It was much more simplistic in our day and it was more for comradeship than it is, just because that's the way the world has gone. I'm too old now to be going back again, but I've still enjoyed particularly the association of my buddies that I can pick up that phone and ring six of them now and get a good reception. And that has been one of the most important things right through the battalion years.

INTERVIEW ENDS