Australians at War Film Archive

Norman Wright - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:33 **Can you give us a basic outline of your life starting with where you were born and where you grew up?**

First of all my name is Norman Douglas Wright. I'm the youngest of a twin whose name was Russell Francis Wright, who is still alive and lives in England. My father, Charles Wright was an engineer and my mother was a commercial artist.

01:00 Her name was Jessie MacLean. We were born in Number 20, Myrtle Road, Canterbury. In those days home births were quite normal. My father was in the permanent army and was sent to England for two years. We went there in 1923, came back in 1925, whereupon we went to a small

01:30 primary named Carisbrook in Victoria Avenue, Canterbury until we were about eight. Then my brother and I went to Scotch College in 1929 until 1939, both dates obviously included. At school I was not an academic at all. It was an effort for me,

02:00 but still we enjoyed life I think, bearing in mind that it was the Depression years. From '29 onwards we had the Depression. There was very little money for extracurricular things. After school I went into employment with a big engineering firm that was making defence equipment.

02:30 That presented a problem because they wouldn't let me join up but I eventually did and then went into the AIF [Australian Imperial Force] from 1941 until 1946. After '46 I rejoined the firm. I was not very happy there. They didn't have a future for me,

03:00 so I left and went to the big oil company, Shell Company. I stayed there for 34 years then retired. In the meantime of course I had joined, apart from the AIF, the CMF [Citizens Military Force] in 1953 and stayed there for 16 years. After I retired from employment I went into a small part-time job

03:30 as a secretary administrator to the Institute of Public Affairs. I left that when my wife became very ill and since then, since she's gone, I've just been at home. I have two children. Phillip is 52 and Alison, who is about 49,

04:00 and they've got children. I think that's a brief summary.

That's fantastic, thank you. Starting with your pre-war life, could you tell us more about your early years at Scotch College? How old were you when you actually left school?

I left school when I was

04:30 just 19, 1939.

Can you tell us more about your upbringing?

Our upbringing…we were only just three when we went to England for two years, so between three and five we were in England. Dad was

05:00 attached to a training school in the UK [United Kingdom]. When we came back we went to this little primary school, which was very small in today's climate and run privately. We had to walk to school, which in those days was a bugbear but it was just under a kilometre from home

05:30 to the school. Then we moved to Hawthorn and just after we went to Scotch, so we had to walk again, from Canterbury to school, and then from Hawthorn to school. That wasn't so bad. Dad did have a car but it wasn't

06:00 used the way they are today, put it that way. Life at Scotch, as I said I was not an academic. I always struggled but I did take an interest in the Cadet Corps there and so did my brother, not surprising with Dad being in the army. We joined the Cadet Corps when I was about 13 and a half,

06:30 and went to one of their early camps attached to the Senior 9th Battalion. That was an eye opener for two little boys but obviously it was a good experience. I think one of the problems, particularly with my brother, he felt and obviously I did too, a little bit homesick being away, even though we were only away ten days.

07:00 In the Cadet Corps I had the opportunity of going into the Q Store [Quartermaster's Store]. Strange as it may seem, I learnt quite a bit in there, handling equipment and that sort of thing. I was able to get promoted within the Cadet Corps and eventually was selected for officer training, which was obviously very good.

07:30 I ended up by getting a Cadet Commission and then a few of us were specifically invited to sit the army subject C exams for promotion to lieutenant. I was fortunate enough to pass that and thereby get a commission at a pretty young age.

08:00 **Can you tell us about your father and mother's background in a little bit more detail?**

My father was one of four children brought up and born in Warrigal. Regrettably

08:30 two of his sisters died very, very young and his brother was disabled at birth, and he didn't live very long, so Dad virtually grew up as an orphan. He didn't like the land at all and he went to Warrigal High School, called King's College, was apparently

09:00 quite a good athlete. Then decided he would come to Melbourne to the Working Men's College and do an engineering course. His mother supported him but his father wasn't quite so keen on the idea, but he did that. He did electrical, mechanical and marine engineering. His first job was

09:30 up in Cassilis, Cassilis Mine near Omeo, where he was an engineer on the first hydroelectric power station in Victoria, which was at Victoria Falls on the Cobungra River. He was there for nine or twelve months and then joined the Department of Navy construction branch, who at the time were

10:00 in the throes of building Flinders Naval Base. He was in their Head Office, Drawing Office a lot of the time and then later he was stationed down at Swan Island where the Navy had a submarine base, and he was involved with the submarine and the J3, which is still

10:30 in existence from the point of view of a very rusty hull in the water edge. Because he was in the civilian side of the navy, he wasn't able to join the AIF in the First World War. In 1923 he decided to join the Australian Army as

11:00 an ordinance mechanical engineer, which he did in 1923 and went to England straight off for a two year training course.

So he was a permanent army professional soldier?

He was a professional soldier yes. He wasn't one of the Duntroon people or that. He was in as a permanent officer of the Ordinance Corps.

11:30 He stayed in the Ordinance Corps as an engineer until he retired, although the engineering branch of Ordinance Corps was separated during the war to become the Electrical and Mechanical Engineering Corps, a separate corps. My mother was the youngest of 11 children, grew up the youngest of nine. Two of them

12:00 predeceased her. Her father was a very wealthy man but when the land boom came in 1895 they lost everything. He paid all his debts but they had no surplus. She went to Penley Girls School out at Essendon

12:30 and then went to the National Gallery as an art student, and trained as a commercial artist until she married my father during the First World War in 1916. After my brother and I arrived on the scene she was more or less house bound with twins. Very fortunately for her

13:00 and for us, she had an older who was not married and she lived with us for many years of our life. She was a good artist but she didn't practise at all.

How did your find your parents

13:30 **coped during the Depression years?**

It was a question of no surplus money. We couldn't do things that a lot of people could do. Mother made a lot of our clothes. She was a very good dressmaker, made her own clothes, made a lot of ours. There was one occasion when I joined the Cadet Corps when we used to wear leggings and britches, I couldn't get a pair of britches to fit me.

14:00 By a stroke of good luck Dad had bought some khaki material after the First World War and Mother was able to make some britches for me. She was very adaptable like that and a very competent person, good cook, good dressmaker.

Where were you living at the time?

20 Myrtle Road, Canterbury, which is from here about three kilometres away.

14:30 **Were you there basically until the war began?**

No, they moved into Myrtle Road in 1916 when they got married and stayed there until 1931. In 1931 we moved to Hawthorn. My brother and I were at Myrtle Road from when we were born in 1920 to 1931.

15:00 In 1931 we moved to Hawthorn, 185 Auburn Road. I was there until I married, which was 1949.

Can you tell us about Canterbury and Hawthorn? What were those suburbs like to live in at the time?

From memory the small shopping area at the corner of Myrtle Road and Canterbury Road, there were a couple of butchers, a couple of

15:30 grocers, a chemist, a couple of banks. They were all individually run shops, not the banks of course. We were living a couple of hundred yards away, so we used to walk up to the shops and buy the stuff. It was quite safe for us, even as a six year old, to walk up.

16:00 There was not the road traffic and that sort of thing, not that we did it every day. The area now has been quite developed. You wouldn't realise now the old wooden shops they had. Hawthorn was a different story. Again we weren't very far from the shops but there was many more of them.

16:30 The Depression, as I say, there was no spare money at all. In fact for a short period Dad's salary was cut by half. All the permanent army people had to reduce their salary by half and that made things a bit tight. The other side of it was that when they were just getting out of the Depression in 1934, Dad was moved to Sydney

17:00 for a four-year posting. He didn't obviously want to do it but he decided that the best thing to do instead of breaking up the household was to go up to Sydney and board. He left Mother and her sister to look after the two boys in Hawthorn.

17:30 Dad lived away from the house for four years. He made numerous trips of course but in those days again, travelling was an overnight train. You couldn't run a car right through in a day very easily. The cars were not like they are. He used to make a number of trips. Some of them would be private trips and others

18:00 would be that he would come down for service requirements, and then get the benefit of seeing the family.

What period was your father gone?

He went up in the middle of 1934 till 1938, '39.

18:30 Yes, it would be that period, just before the war started.

What were Canterbury and Hawthorn like during those periods? Were they badly affected by the Depression? What sort of socio-economic standing did they have at the time?

I would have said, of course, little boys in those days, you weren't involved in the community things that you get

19:00 today. The school was nine in the morning till five or four thirty. There was not the extra school activities, particularly from the primary school point of view. I don't recall any and at Scotch in those earlier years there was very little compared to what they do today, the extracurricular stuff. At Scotch we probably

19:30 felt it without complaining that we weren't able to go on country trips. There used to be trips through Central Australia and the Gold Coast, and things like that. We just didn't have that sort of money. We couldn't afford that because it not only meant one boy but it meant two boys. That's the sort of thing with the Depression and as I said earlier, our mother made a lot of our clothes.

20:00 **What about food? Did you have problems obtaining food?**

No, I don't recall any real problems over food. Dad for a long time when he was at barracks would go to the South Melbourne Market on a Friday afternoon. He'd take two sugar bags, old big canvas sugar bags and buy the week's vegetables,

20:30 the week's meat and groceries, in one hit. He would take the car around to the South Melbourne Market and did the week's shopping. That was a ritual on Friday night. He used to do that and that saved a lot of money because the market was good pricing, and Dad was a very good buyer actually. He knew his meats because he'd lived on the land. He knew meat and he could buy well.

21:00 It obviously saved us quite a lot of money. Milk was delivered in those days. Bread and butter we used to have sent out from the Mutual Store, again on a Friday. They were good suppliers of that sort of stuff

and reasonable,

21:30 at least I presume it was reasonable. No, I think that from a Depression point of view that the main thing was a slight curtailing of our activities, which by today's standards you wouldn't have done. When we went to Auburn Road we used to have people coming in, knocking on the door wanting five shillings

22:00 to buy a sandwich. Well, they didn't want five shillings to buy a sandwich at all. They wanted five shillings to walk down to the pub. Mother was awake up to this so she'd say to them, "All right, now you sit on the veranda there and I'll make you a couple of sandwiches." In a few minutes she'd hear them walk away but there was a lot of that sort of thing going on.

Did you come across sustenance workers?

22:30 No, not really. There was a stage when Dad was doing some concreting at home and an extension to the house, and we got a couple of people in that in fact turned out to be distant relatives. They were out of work, so they were glad to come and work for us.

23:00 There were a few people around like that. Quite a number of people joined the militia in those pre-war days in the thirties, purely for the army pay. I know of a couple that joined but not necessarily for that reason.

What was your father's reason for joining the army as a professional soldier?

23:30 That's a good question. I think he probably could see that there wasn't the future in the navy because the navy relied very heavily on suppliers from the British Navy. The army

24:00 after World War I realised that mechanisation was going to be the up and coming thing. It also had learnt the necessity for maintenance of equipment, whether it be the horses themselves or the saddlery, or guns, equipment and that sort of thing. There was a marked appreciation by the services that it was essential to

24:30 improve the maintenance of equipment and at one time his actual role was what they called an IOM, Inspector of Ordinance Machinery. That was the thing. The service I think, were advertising for this sort of thing. He had been, for a short

25:00 period, in the Australian Corps of Engineers. He joined back in 1913 and was a corporal, and then sat and got his commission. I think it was as happens today, there's a person who is technically qualified, they can enter the service with a rank of a lieutenant or a captain. You take a medico. Once a medico's

25:30 got his degree he can join the army automatically and become a captain. I think he had a taste of a service career in 1913 and 1914. Just why he decided on the navy or the navy branch is another question, which

26:00 I don't really know. I know he tried for several other jobs but picked the navy one and because as I say, being in the Department of Navy, he wasn't able to join the AIF.

He was working basically as a public servant?

26:30 That's right yes.

How old was he in the First World War when he got married in 1916?

He married in 1916. He was born in 1892, so he'd be 24 when he married and my mother was 28.

At that period he was still working?

Yes, he

27:00 joined the navy in about 1914, '15, certainly before he got married because in fact the clock up in there was presented to him on the occasion of his wedding by the Navy Construction Branch.

Did he leave Australia during the First World War?

No.

He was sorting out administrative…?

27:30 He was classed as an engineer draftsman and he was in a big drawing office in the city. What he really did I'm not aware of, the actual drawing details of that but he was there, and he spent quite a bit of time down at Flinders

28:00 Naval Base. In fact he was down there when Mother gave birth to her two twins! Whether it was expected or not expected, I'm not sure from a timing point of view but he was not home at the time. She had to get a midwife in until the doctor arrived. Well that was 1920 and he stayed on until

28:30 the middle of '23 when he joined the army. He had an interesting job down there. I've not been able to determine the precise nature of it but at Swan Island they had submarines. One of them was a J3 and in

his diary notes he's made reference to the fact that he took down "Commander So and So" to have a look at the engines of the J3.

29:00 On another occasion he found some ball bearings loose in the engine and a few things like that, so just what his job was I'm not quite sure. My guess is that the ship was a training ship and wasn't necessarily sea-going at this stage but it was probably used as a training ship, probably for engineers, but I'm not sure.

Where was your father educated?

Kings College in

29:30 Warrigal until he was 14 and then at Working Men's College, which was the Melbourne Tech School, now RMIT [Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology]. He was at the Working Men's College where he did, in those days they were diploma degrees in mechanical, electrical and marine. The marine engineering was

30:00 a very rare one for people to do at that period. Why he did it I don't know but obviously it came in useful to him because he was involved with the submarine.

What did he say about Australia and the First World War?

He wasn't directly involved obviously because he was in the navy

30:30 branch. History says that all or a lot of young people were keen to go and join up, and all the rest of it. He had a number of friends that did go. I think on reflection that he regretted that he wasn't able to do it but on the other hand he

31:00 was working with the navy and received a home-service award or clasp recognising that he had had a home-service duty, notwithstanding the fact that he was civilian. As I mentioned earlier, I know that the services were concerned about the maintenance

31:30 of equipment and that's why relatively only…1918 to 1923, only four or five years, they got really going to improve the status of the maintenance.

Did you have a rather open relationship with your father?

32:00 Yes I think we had a pretty open relationship. He was fairly stern. He wasn't unbearable or anything like that. We had a pretty good relationship and you realised that he was Father, and you obeyed what Father said. You didn't argue the point very much.

32:30 As I say, in later years when he was away so much and when were 16, we had to sort of toe the line as Mother saw it but from a family point of view we acknowledged, certainly later, that they had made the right decision

33:00 in keeping us at school in Melbourne rather than disrupting and trying to settle in at another school. I think they appreciated that the two boys were probably not sort of flexible enough in their minds to make a transition from one school to another. Such a transition could be detrimental to their studies.

33:30 I think they appreciated that and I think they would be right.

You said before that your father, all his siblings had had some misfortune and passed on, being basically the only child as a result, what sort of relationship did he have with his parents?

He had a very good relationship with his mother,

34:00 who was handicapped to the extent of being very, very deaf, almost stone deaf. In fact they attributed her deafness…it didn't cause obviously but one of the children, one of the girls that died was not heard when another parent might have heard them

34:30 and the child ended up by getting in a cupboard and got some matches, and ate some matches. A person with good hearing probably would have heard but it was just one of those sad things that happen. That child died very young and

35:00 another girl died of hydatids poisoning because they lived on a farm, they had dogs and the dogs would eat rabbits, and the rabbits were the breeding ground for hydatids. Today's medicine would probably fix it up but back then…then of course the fourth child was very disabled.

35:30 He was more or less on his own. Apparently he was extraordinarily good to the disabled child. He used to look after him. For a short period his mother sent my father to an aunt to live when he was about four or five, for about

36:00 three or four years. She didn't want to do it but she realised that it was the only thing to do, so that she could give more attention to the disabled child, was to send young Charlie to the aunt and I don't think he regretted it because he always spoke fondly of her but he went back to Warrigal

36:30 when he was about eight or something like that, and went to the local school there.

Your father's father, what sort of profession was he involved with?

He was a grazier, my grandfather, his father, a grazier in Warrigal. I had a look at the property a few years ago and you just wouldn't know the difference; the clearing of it

37:00 and the sowing of the grasses to what it was when he was down there. It was just rough bush and trees. Dad didn't like the country life at all. He loved animals too much to be a real farmer, notwithstanding the fact that in one of his diaries he said he spent time with his father, "I helped Father kill some

37:30 sheep." But I think that was probably just one of those incidents he took a note of.

You said your father expressed some sort of regret for not taking part in the war. Can you tell us more about that?

I wouldn't say regret…regret I suppose because a lot of his friends had been in it and he did have a minor health problem just

38:00 after they got married. I don't think it was a major issue with him other than the fact that in going for employment jobs and things like that, a person that came back from World War I had a little, you might say extra, to be considered whereas a person that didn't go away, unless you knew

38:30 why the person didn't go away…The main reason was that he was doing a civilian job in a wartime industry, whereas in the '39 to '45 war, there were two classifications. A firm could be a protected industry. An employee could be in what was called a reserved occupation.

39:00 I myself was in a firm, which was a protected industry but my occupation was not a Reserved Occupation. If it had been a reserved occupation I could never have joined up. The attitude applied after World War I that ex-service

39:30 people got preference over non-ex-service people and they would regard Dad as an ex-serviceman, notwithstanding the fact that he was in the navy or the navy branch.

Tape 2

00:32 **Did you talk much about politics to your father?**

No we didn't really. I think the main reason was that he was away at a stage when we perhaps might have talked. For instance he was away from, you might say, 16 until the beginning of the war.

01:00 He wasn't about, you see. Then when I joined up in '41, well obviously I wasn't home and so we didn't really talk much on politics. Talking to Dad, he was not home enough.

What about

01:30 **during the war? Did you get chances to meet him? He was a regular army soldier. Did you talk much about politics?**

No, well, in the five years during the war I would have probably only…when I was in Sydney for a year, I caught up with him a bit then. I'd go out to

02:00 his mess but it would only be for a couple of hours and on other occasions, if I was flying down to Melbourne, which I did occasionally, if he was home, yes. He was away most of the time. He was in Sydney or Brisbane most of the time. I was in Western Australia, so we couldn't have been further apart. There was no time for political

02:30 discussions. I think we probably engaged ourselves a little bit on what I was doing immediately and that sort of thing, and wondering how my brother was getting along because by this stage he was a POW [Prisoner of War].

Can you tell us about your parent's political leanings and their viewpoints?

They'd be…well they were liberal,

03:00 liberal views. They weren't influenced I don't think by anything really. I think that my father went his own way. He obviously talked to many people and some of those that I remember

03:30 would have been liberally minded anyway. He certainly wouldn't have done much talking to his own father because his own father, after his mother died, his father went to Flinders Island almost as a hermit, just gave the family away

04:00 almost. On Mother's side they were a bit more religiously oriented. My mother's mother or my

grandmother, was very church minded, Baptist church minded and so was her husband

04:30 but that didn't influence the family very much. In fact one or two of them changed from Baptist to Presbyterian.

This was your…?

My mother's side.

What about your father's side?

I did find out that he used to from time to time, go to church more than I probably would have expected him

05:00 to have but I don't think there was any religious influence there at all, or political as far as that goes. I certainly never, even looking at some of the old diaries and I've got some of his diaries going back to 1911. There's no indication of any religious influence.

He was

05:30 **Presbyterian I take it?**

He was, yes. Yes he was Presbyterian. He may have been a bit inclined to the Church of England but basically Presbyterian.

What about your religious upbringing?

I suppose my religious

06:00 upbringing and generally the family's…as a young person I know my mother considered that the religious instruction at Scotch was sufficient. Yes, we'd go to church occasionally but not every

06:30 week. They were quite happy about that because it was their upbringing and it could have been a slight reaction against their own mother. Her own mother was a very religious person, very strong person, totally against drink and all that sort of thing. Their own

07:00 life history was very interesting but I don't think that's our subject.

What did you do for entertainment in the Depression years as a young chap in the thirties?

I used to go to the football quite a bit at one time with Dad. We used to go to the MCC [Melbourne Cricket Club].

07:30 We'd entertain ourselves at home. There was not a great deal of going out but we were encouraged to have hobbies. I took up photography as a hobby but was curtailed from the point of view of expense. In those days photography was quite expensive. I used to develop my own films, do

08:00 my own printing and enlarging, and all that. I enjoyed doing it but the original camera I had was a plate camera, a glass plate camera. That was quite a bit of fun from the point of view but a cumbersome article. I've still got it and I enjoyed that, and I enjoyed

08:30 the developing of those films. I then converted the camera into an enlarger and did enlarging work, again we couldn't afford to buy an enlarger, so I made up my own lamp house and clipped it onto the back of the camera, and used a steep pole for sliding the enlarger up and down to get

09:00 your size.

So it was quite a hobby for you?

Oh it was. It was a hobby and the parents supported me. It originated actually from an uncle who was a missionary engineer from India and was over on furlough once, and he was very keen to do his own photography. I used to go down to his darkroom

09:30 and spend hours with him printing and enlarging. That's where I got the bug for it and then I was able to buy a reasonable camera called a "Voigtlander Superb", which was one of these miniature reflexes. It was very good and I've still got that but as a hobby it was

10:00 an expensive hobby. My brother went on to building radio sets and learning all about radio, and he was very good at it. That wasn't quite so expensive. If you bought something then you had it, whereas with photography you had to buy a whole lot of developer and that sort of thing. Once it's used it's gone.

What understanding did you have of previous wars?

10:30 Virtually none at that stage. The only understanding…none of my parent's family were in the First World War at all. One or two of their friends were and I used to hear about one

11:00 chap, who was killed in the war. He was an old Scotch boy. His name is on the plate. There was another cousin or second cousin, who was apparently a very bright boy and was killed in 1915. He was a South

African lad but he was part of the family.

11:30 **I would understand that Scotch College would have had a fairly prominent military tradition?**

Oh it has, yes. Scotch has had a Cadet Corps for nearly one hundred years and in my time we joined it…

12:00 I was 13 and a half when we joined it in 1934, February 1934. As I mentioned earlier, we were little cadets in the place. We went to this one camp with the 39th Battalion Cadets and we were all kitted out with webbing equipment, which was 1914 webbing equipment.

12:30 I'll show you the photo of that later. It's really quite interesting from that point of view. I was given the opportunity of going into the Q Store, which was a funny sort of thing to do but I learned quite a bit in there, accounting, recording of equipment and that sort of thing. I got interested in rifles and Lewis machine guns, the biggest machine guns and ended up

13:00 in the rifle team. I was captain of it at one stage and I was a reasonable good shot, collected a couple of spoons for being on target. Lewis guns and Vickers guns [machine guns] I could strip blindfolded quite easily as a young bloke. I couldn't do it now. Then as I mentioned, I got the opportunity of doing the officer's training course

13:30 and the tactics part of the course was conducted by two newly graduated officers from Duntroon. They weren't just schoolboy instructors. They were proper army instructors and they were very good. One of them I made friends with while I was at school actually. I made a friend of him and

14:00 he only died recently. I used to see a lot of him over the last 20 years. Publicly I used to say that I blamed Ben Butler for me being commissioned because he was the instructor on the course. Of course that led on to being invited to do the

14:30 CMF written exam, which I passed with a full commission. So the Cadets were a big part of our life and not an expensive part because basically all the equipment was supplied by the army. Travelling to Williamstown Rifle Range, which I did a lot, was paid for by the army and in camps, that was all provided

15:00 by the army or obviously funded by the army. So it was an occupation or a hobby, which was not terribly expensive, from the individual's point of view, and obviously you got some benefit out of it.

With the Scotch College military tradition,

15:30 **what was the level of participation from Scotch College in the First World War?**

In the First World War, if my memory is right, there were about 380 killed in the First World War, which was a fair number.

16:00 The Commander of the Australian Forces, General John Monash, he was an old Scotch boy. General Mackay was an old Scotch boy. They had a lot of leaders. I'd have to refresh my memory on those but no, Scotch has always been…and World War II the same, General Steele and a couple of

16:30 the air force people, navy. They've always had a very good representation, put it that way.

What about [General] Blamey?

Blamey wasn't an old boy. He was a different kettle of fish altogether. I think John Hetherington's book about Blamey is the one you want to read on Blamey. I wouldn't like to comment too much.

17:00 I know what some people have said about him.

Can you tell us about the actual celebration of Anzac Day and its tradition in Scotch College?

At Scotch, I haven't been there and I don't know what they do now but in our days there used to be a special…

17:30 every morning at Scotch they had what they called an "Assembly", which had a slight religious tone to it, a couple of hymns and a prayer. Anzac Day they'd make something special of it. Armistice Day as it was then known, Remembrance Day now, the same happened and they'd have boys and probably

18:00 a couple of senior prefects, reading the names of those that were killed in the war. In today's climate it is a bit different. The school sends its two bands, it's got a very good pipes and drums band, and a

18:30 military band or brass band, to the Anzac Day march. Although they're only boys, most of the senior boys, they perform very, very well. In fact they've been nominated the best junior band for probably the last five or six years, certainly the pipes and drums have.

With awards, were there any people from Scotch College

19:00 **who received the Victoria Cross?**

Not the Victoria Cross that I'm aware of.

At the time or the First World War?

The First World War I'm not aware. I'd have to research that one. Nor in the Second World War either I don't think but they've had other high awards of course.

19:30 There was one chap, a navy chap, Syme, got the George Cross and the George Medal, pretty high standard.

What did the Empire mean to you at the time before the war?

20:00 I suppose the Empire just meant what its name implies. The Empire was the support to the Australian nation. Traditionally in those days the Empire

20:30 was the be all and end all, and people looked up to it, which is of course a totally different thing now. They don't want to be part of the Empire. In those days they wanted to be and that's why they got so many people volunteering for the 1st AIF. It was just part of the thing.

21:00 I think as we thought, there was certainly not the public debate about the Empire. It was looked upon as the mother or father of the nation and that was it. I certainly don't recall

21:30 any specific debate about it.

What about at school at Scotch College? I would understand there they were very supportive of the Empire?

Oh yes, they were. There's no doubt about that.

Can you tell us more about their traditions and what they instilled in that sense?

Well I suppose it was only more or less by traditional behaviour of the school, supportive

22:00 from a…I don't want to use the word academic but masters and those sort of people that had been there, those that had been Rhodes Scholars, they would have been supportive. Although I must admit the headmaster when I was there, Dr William Littlejohn, he was a New Zealander but that didn't make any difference,

22:30 again just part of the Empire. I don't think I could really elaborate on that one very easily.

I understand for instance that some of the veterans we have interviewed before from Melbourne Grammar had talked about songs or poems they were reciting, that was instilled in them at Melbourne Grammar. It was part of the curriculum.

23:00 Oh yes, I can see what they're getting at. At Scotch we had a lad who in 1914 went away and he wrote a very good poem about this heritage, the bugles of England blowing over the seas. It is really a very nice thing.

23:30 If you wanted it I can get it.

Can you recite it for us for the sake of the camera?

I'd have to re-read it. I couldn't do it out of my head. I would have to read it but if you wanted it, I can get it. My memory is not good enough on that sort of thing. It

24:00 lets you down and I would not want to try. I'll get it for you later.

I would consider the traditions of Melbourne Grammar and Scotch as working in tandem on this sort of thing?

24:30 Oh yes but strong rivalry, no doubt about that. You might say and I hate to use the comparison but take Richmond and Essendon, good team-mates rivalry. Melbourne and Richmond rivalry but traditionally have always looked after each other. Scotch and Grammar

25:00 were the same. When I was doing a lot of rifle shooting, it was mainly against Melbourne Grammar boys. They had a very good chap in their Cadet Corps who coached them shooting. We didn't have a very good chap but we got on well, no doubt about that. We had a number of mixed camps together and I made

25:30 a number of good friends from that point of view but there was always the rivalry, football matches and that sort of thing.

With the camps and the cadets in general, did that have to be funded by your parents?

No, most of the camps were funded by the government.

At no extra cost to the families?

Very little anyway, no major cost.

26:00 **Were most people part of the cadet contingent there?**

No it was purely voluntary. We had four or five hundred boys in it at one stage, which was a fair number, almost…not half the school but getting close. It was about half the senior school, not quite, half the senior school. Scotch was divided into two, junior school and senior school.

26:30 When I was there the numbers were about 1200 boys of which there'd be about 300 odd in the junior school and eight or nine hundred in the senior school, and we had three to four hundred in the Cadets quite easily. The Cadet Corps was well supported, so was the scouts. They were well supported. Nowadays they've got all sorts of things.

27:00 Life in the Cadets Corps is totally different to what my life was in the Cadet Corps was, I can assure you of that. I mean I would bring rifles home on the tram, a Lewis machine gun I'd being home on the tram. All the rifles that the schools use now are all made non-effective.

Probably for good reason.

Well, that's the attitude, that's right. It's the attitude rather than the reality. I mean,

27:30 there's been a few nasty accidents and I agree but in my view they've gone overboard.

So that was fine? You'd be in uniform on the tram and you could carry all your weapons?

Yes, no trouble at all. I used to have my rifle at home all the time.

Did you have to have a special licence or something?

No.

The police wouldn't…

No, nothing at all.

So they knew straight away that you were a cadet?

Yes.

28:00 No, they would never pick you up in those days. There weren't the same types of rules of course.

You were in uniform I take it?

Yes.

Cadet uniform?

Yes, cadet uniform. There'd be the odd occasion when you mightn't be but you'd be in cadet uniform. I think on one occasion I got my mother to drive me down to Williamstown with a Vickers machine gun in the back of the car.

28:30 Well the Vickers is a heavy gun, a heavy hand weapon! It's a heavy thing.

And you were allowed to take that home?

Well, we weren't barred from it on the odd occasion. Very rarely did I take the Vickers home. The Lewis was a different matter. You could sling that over your shoulder but the Vickers, no that was a totally different thing.

29:00 I would have only done it once or something like that. I happened to be an instructor on the weapon at the school, so I knew what I was doing, hopefully!

You did mention that you weren't academically inclined but nonetheless were you an avid reader of newspapers?

No, I was not a good reader.

Having said that, were you

29:30 **aware about some of the political issues in the thirties, like the Spanish Civil War for instance?**

I was probably aware of it but didn't take much interest.

When you say that, do you mean that you really didn't know what the war was actually about?

Well if you're talking about the Spanish Civil War, I suppose we

30:00 didn't worry very much. It was written up. It didn't affect Australia as such and I suppose probably in a casual way, the schoolboy wouldn't be very interested in it. Probably schoolboys and as far as that goes, school children, were probably not very interested in that sort of news,

30:30 as it is today because the paper is one thing but now with all the radio and TV. Radio in those days was very low-keyed sort of stuff. There were five or six major stations and there wasn't the news programs that they have today or the debate either.

31:00 **Considering this was the thirties, did you ever come across or start to hear about Communism? There was a fair amount of Communist activity in Melbourne for instance, during the Depression and the Spanish Civil War and those sorts of movements taking place, the Russian Civil War.**

31:30 **How did that impact you and how did you understand it at that time?**

I'm not aware really of any you might say influences in that general life. There might have been pockets of Communism around but from our family point of view, I don't remember any.

32:00 I remember that for a short time we had a minister at the school who was a bit of a red-ragger [Communist] but it was nothing.

When you say minister…?

A religious minister, a reverend.

When you say red-ragger, do you mean that he was very left-wing?

Apparently he was but it

32:30 didn't come out in his behaviour at the school but he came from a background of looking after needy people and people sympathised with him. He wasn't bad as far as being a minister at the school was concerned but he was a bit of a contrast to the one they

33:00 had already had. I'm being detrimental against him because I think he did what he was asked to do but his background was probably Communist inclined.

On the topic of Communism, being a soldier yourself you must have heard about soldiers who were in the First World War, who had come from fairly affluent backgrounds

33:30 **or middle-class backgrounds, like Jack Throssell, who won the Victoria Cross, and as a result of his war experiences had turned quite left-wing. How was that seen in the circles you associated with some people, like Scotch College? Was that spoken about?**

No it wasn't. Well, you see, if you are talking of

34:00 1939, that's when I left the school, so I wouldn't have heard anything after that. Earlier than that I don't think it raised its head very much anyway.

Did you ever hear about a chap by the name of Major Gullett in the Second World War?

Gullett?

34:30 Sir Harold [Henry] Gullett, yes that's right. I only knew him by name.

You speak of Major Gullett?

No, Gullett. No it was the father whose name I knew but Major Gullett, I can't place him. Where did you strike him?

He served…I'm not sure which division he was in.

35:00 **He may have been in 7th but I do know that he served in Papua New Guinea and he joined up as an infantryman. He refused an officer commission and he ended up at the end of the war as a major, so he worked his way right up the ranks. He was a very interesting character and a lot of the soldiers I have interviewed have spoken quite highly of him.**

35:30 I'll check his book out.

Yes it would be interesting.

I have a list. It is was is called an Army List of Officers, a couple of books that thick and it has everybody's name in it, and a very, very brief history but I certainly remember the name Gullett. It would be his father that I remember because how old would this Gullett be? This Major Gullett, how old would he be now?

36:00 **I have no idea.**

Well if he was in New Guinea he must be close to 80, 80 to 85.

I don't think he's alive now. I think he died a couple of years ago.

Well he'd be the same age as myself roughly.

Did you ever come across any other soldiers, who decided to enlist as privates,

36:30 **who had the option of joining as officers?**

There was the odd one or two but it depends. From an Australian infantry point of view and artillery, there was no real avenue to come in off the street with a commission. The technical services are a different matter but a person in the infantry

37:00 wouldn't be offered a commission to join the infantry as such. If he was, then you would have to ask what technical qualifications did he have? If he did have technical qualifications, why wasn't he joining say, the Corps of Engineers or perhaps the Signals Corps. The

37:30 combat units, to use an American term, I would see no reason that you would offer a personnel to join the 5th Battalion and we'll give you a commission, no. That wouldn't be done. The service process wouldn't allow it but if they've got technical qualifications, that's a different matter.

When the war began

38:00 **how old were you in 1939?**

I was 19.

You were 19? Were you a member of any militia or battalion before the war took place outside the cadets?

No, my military service started with the cadets. As I mentioned I was invited to do this exam and I was fully commissioned. At or about that time, I

38:30 left school and because it was a full commission, I was posted to what was called the "Unattached List of Officers", which was a holding list, where for some reason if a person had a commission and was not in a unit, could be held on this unallotted list for a maximum period of two years. These were the old regulations.

39:00 So in my case, I was put on that unattached list until I found a unit to join, which is what I did.

Did you have a choice in the unit you could join?

Yes, the choice was to get a CO [Commanding Officer] who would accept you. That was the choice.

With the lead-up to war

39:30 **in the '37 to '38 period, what were you expecting? Did you feel that the war was going to happen and what understanding did you have of what was taking place in Germany?**

'37 to '38 from the point of view of a schoolboy atmosphere, we probably didn't think that there was very much in it, that there would be a

40:00 war or not. We knew the problems that the Prime Minister had in the UK and all that sort of thing, and Hitler but I don't think in '37, '38 that we would have really thought that there might be a war. Having said that, I know that from a defence point of view, they were well aware that something might happen.

40:30 I've got letters from some of Dad's files where it is quite clear that the writers were concerned that there could be a war and we better do something about it beforehand, getting equipment and things like that but it didn't perhaps filter down to the level of a young cadet.

41:00 The Australian Army had relied on supplies from the UK a great deal. Although they did have a big munitions factory at Maribyrnong pre-war and one or two other things, a small arms factory in Lithgow, New South Wales, their capability of mass production

41:30 was very limited at that time. Once it got geared up then of course they did very well.

Tape 3

00:33 **Perhaps now that we are getting into World War II, where were you when war was first declared?**

I was at home at Auburn Road. Remember, it was Sunday night the 3rd of September 1939. We were just at home and heard it on the wireless.

How did the announcement affect you?

01:00 I suppose like a lot of other people that, "What's come?" sort of thing. Dad was not home at the time and I don't suppose we really had taken it in because it wasn't until October that they started enlisting people.

What about your reaction to Menzies'

01:30 **speech that a war against England was a war against Australia? Did you feel totally in agreement with that?**

I think a lot of people did, yes. Personally I was probably the same. As young 18 year olds you probably don't think of the depth of these things and it gets back to the question that

02:00 Sergei [interviewer] was mentioning on the question of the Empire. I think the Empire attitude still prevailed even up to '39. I'm sure of that. Some people probably wouldn't admit it but I think so.

Where were you working at this point?

I was still at school in '39.

But you were a member of the cadets?

Yes.

02:30 **At what point did you actually join the AIF?**

I joined the AIF on the…there are two aspects. I joined the army in a militia unit on full time duty. The point being that militia units, except for those that went to New Guinea, were not allowed to serve

03:00 outside Australia and I could only join because I was on the Unattached List of Officers, I had to join a Militia unit first, which is what I did, and was on full time duty. That was the 17th of October 1941. I didn't join the unit until

03:30 April '42 because of the problem I had over the reserved occupation problem. From an army records point of view, from October '41 until April '42 I was on leave from the army. I was in the army but on leave

04:00 working, rather a technical aspect.

Where were you working at that point?

I was working at a big engineering firm. It was a branch of McPherson's Limited called Associated Machine Tools Australia and they were making entirely defence machine tools. I don't know whether you know what machine tools are but

04:30 lathes of various types, shapers, drilling machines, milling machines, all that sort of equipment and one very interesting one we did when I was there actually was to manufacture a series of special purpose lathes called the Hepburn lathe, which came from Canada. It was special purpose in so far as it did one operation

05:00 only. One of them was a shell turning and base-recessing lathe where when you put the shell in the lathe it spun, and cut the base properly, and cut the driving band grooves, and the nose cap for the fuses. They had a separate one for each

05:30 type of ammunition, whether it was 25 pounder ammunition or six inch ammunition, there were different lathes. All they had to work from was a sample of one of each lathe. They had to strip them down and redraw them, and blow them up to cater for the different sized ammunition. It was quite an interesting exercise and a very commendable one on the company's part. It involved,

06:00 I think the final production was something like 64 lathes, on that particular lathe.

What was your role in doing that?

I was a draftsman, engineering draftsman. I wasn't qualified as an engineer but I was doing mechanical drawings.

So you were involved in drafting the drawings for these machines?

Yes, and some of the lathes that we drew,

06:30 we had diagrams come out from England, and they were what they called a dyeline paper copy. The dyeline was so bad that we had to redraw them to make blueprints because you didn't have the copying machines that you have today.

What do you mean by a dyeline?

A dyeline is a special means where the paper is a transparent paper

07:00 and chemically they copy onto it, a diagram. So you have your original diagram and then this special paper put on and exposed, and then you get what they call the dyeline. I don't know the real detail of it. We didn't have that process here. Our problem was that when we tried to make blueprints from them, the big blue sheets with white things on them.

07:30 You know what a blueprint is? Well they were so fuzzy, we couldn't get working copies from them, so we brought in a whole lot of girls to redraw them all before they could be issued out to the workshop.

At this point you were an officer on leave,

08:00 **presumably you knew that at some point you would be called up to join a unit, a place would be found for you. How did your parents feel about this possibility and did you talk about the different places to which you might be sent?**

Well, certainly they knew the possibility and certainly they wanted me to join anyway. It was a mutual thing. There was no problem there. Dad was in the army. My brother was in the army.

08:30 In fact it was through Dad that I eventually got in. Through the back door I had to ask them to call me up, so that I could get an official letter coming in and say, "I've been called up", which is what happened. The company couldn't do anything about it.

09:00 It was interesting because the director of the company, who was involved in this machine work was an army man, a militia man, with a rank of full colonel and he had enlisted for full time duty, and was seconded to the Department of Machine Tools and Gauges, the very department that controlled this

09:30 company. So he an allegiance to the company and he had an allegiance to the army. You can guess which one! It was a very interesting episode that.

So did you talk with your parents and did they advise you on which part of the army would be good to work with?

10:00 Dad wasn't home at the time but I mean we discussed it and it was more or less, "What can you get?" I went to several people and ended up with the artillery. From an academic point of view, although I wasn't a scholar they felt

10:30 that I could do the technical side.

When you did join your unit in '42...

'42, April '42.

Can you describe that for me from the point where you actually got the call?

I got the call before, in October and that's when I got joined up. Then I got the

11:00 notice to attend camp, which was after the six months. I went down, the unit was in camp down at Balcombe and I went down there armed with a tin trunk of my uniforms, etc and was immediately given two days embarkation leave. The unit had already received its embarkation orders to move to Western Australia.

11:30 As soon as I got there I went home for two days and then went back again, and embarked on the City of London, which was probably about an 8000 tonner. We went to Western Australia with a convoy of two ships, the City of London and the City of Paris, and an armed New Zealand

12:00 merchantman, and an old four-funnelled American destroyer. That was the convoy, which left Melbourne and travelled straight down the West Coast of Tasmania to somewhere about three hundred to four hundred miles below the bottom of Tasmania, and then zigzagged all the way up the Indian

12:30 Ocean, across the Indian Ocean, around up to Geraldton, or an area off Geraldton, put it that way, and then came down the coast of Western Australia into Fremantle. The reason for doing that was that by this time, '41, '42, there had been something like 30 ships sunk in the Bass Strait area, could have even been more. A lot of ships

13:00 had already been sunk, mainly German raiders and submarines, and the odd Jap [Japanese] ones. So it was to get a safer passage, they zigzagged all the way up. The weather was the worst weather that the captain of the City of London had ever been in, dreadful weather. I was sick for the first four days, absolutely,

13:30 so were all the troops onboard. The very first morning I got up and being a young bloke I thought I had better go down and see how the troops are. That's an officer's responsibility to look after the troops. I got halfway down the gangway into the hold and doubled up. The stench, dreadful! Heat, vomit everywhere, the sickness!

14:00 I ended up being sick over the side of the ship. I'll never forget that and I was pretty poorly for a few days. We had a medical officer onboard and he had a meeting of officers, and said that there was bound to be a lot of seasickness but "Don't worry about it. It is all in the mind. Nothing is going to happen. Tell your troops to get on with it."

14:30 He was far off the beam, he really was. He was a very tough man but as I say, I was out for about three days. By then I got my sea legs and it wasn't so bad but we were well looked after because the ship was

still under…merchant seaman ship. It wasn't directly navy and still had civilian staff onboard. We had cabins

15:00 and quite good meals. I feel sorry for the troops down in the hold, dreadful.

What were your conditions like and did you have a cabin to yourself?

No I think from memory I had…there was certainly one other officer. Most of the cabins were all two bunk on most of the ships in those days. There was the odd one which was single but

15:30 I think most of them would have been two. I did two trips by ship. That was one and the second one was on the Duntroon.

Was that your first trip on a ship?

It was the first that I can remember, put it that way. When we went to England in 1923 we went by ship and obviously came back by ship. There was no flying in those days but yes, the City of London

16:00 was my first sea going voyage that I can really remember. The other ship was the Duntroon. I was on that. That's another story. I can't remember but one of those two, we had three in a two berth cabin and I won the toss, and didn't sleep on the floor!

How long were you onboard for?

Seven days I think it was.

16:30 **How did the men keep themselves entertained and how did you keep yourself entertained?**

There was not a great deal of entertaining really done onboard.

Did you do exercises or..?

The troops probably did exercises. I don't really remember all the detail. It was such a rough trip going across the [Great Australian] Bight that

17:00 you couldn't play deck quoits or anything like that. It was far too rough for that sort of thing. It was just sit in bed and read I think. To be honest with you I'm not quite sure how the troops entertained themselves.

Before you left for Balcombe what did you pack?

I'd been given a list of certain things

17:30 but mainly it was your uniform, underclothing, shirts and that sort of thing.

Did you take any personal possessions?

Not really, no, very little. I didn't take my camera that time I don't think. No, I didn't. I took very little possessions.

You went across to Fremantle

18:00 **and did you actually dock at Fremantle?**

Yes, docked at Fremantle.

What were your first impressions of Fremantle at the time?

I suppose my first impression was the fact that it was sort of the entrance to the river, the docks. I don't think it left any major impression. It was just

18:30 another town to be in and have a look around. We were camped just out of Fremantle at a place called Melville. We were there for about three weeks, maybe a month whilst we were waiting to receive our heavy equipment, our guns and tractors. We had to wait for those but we filled in the time doing a lot of PT [Physical Training]

19:00 training and ground training.

How did you find that?

I suppose as a young bloke, quite OK. I didn't have any problems with it. We had an odd situation in the regiment where the regiment consisted of three batteries and one of the batteries, number 39,

19:30 comprised of men who had enlisted in the AIF. They were sent to this militia unit and they didn't appreciate that at all. Some of them were pretty tough blokes and the reason for it was that at this stage in '42 things looked pretty grim over in the West, and up in the Darwin area because Darwin had

20:00 been bombed. In early '42 Singapore had fallen and the West was considered, of all places in Australia, as the most likely for a Japanese landing. So they built up the defences there and people didn't

appreciate that. At one stage, by early

20:30 ’43, there were over 60 000 troops in Western Australia. That’s a lot of troops. Getting back to the 39th Battery, these men that had enlisted in the AIF expected to go overseas in the AIF, not to go to Perth with a militia unit.

21:00 They got a bit awkward to get on with but they settled down in due course.

In what ways were they awkward to get on with?

The Militia people had been given the nickname of “Chocos” [‘chocolate soldiers’ - militia] and the AIF people thought they were above the Chocos, you know Tin Soldiers, hence the name. They didn’t appreciate that, particularly when there was

21:30 no AIF officer with them. Eventually we did get a couple but they weren’t any good anyway. They settled down but there was always that little bit of rivalry, human nature being what it is. I don’t know what happened. I left the unit early. I left the unit in the middle of ‘43

22:00 and went over to Sydney to a heavy anti-aircraft unit. That’s another story.

We’ll get there. At the time when you had just got to Melville, had you heard about your brother?

No we hadn’t.

Where was he

22:30 **posted?**

He was in Malaya. He went up to Malaya and arrived in Malaya somewhere about the 12th of January 1942, just a fortnight before the fall of Singapore. In fact

23:00 he’d only just got there and as soon as they realised that Singapore was going to fall, they put him on a ship to evacuate him because he was a very well qualified radar man. Radar was a very secret bit of equipment in its various roles and he went up

23:30 to Singapore to be posted to the British Army to help them on radar but other things intervened and he was put on a ship to be evacuated, and the ship was sunk. He was picked up by the Japanese Navy and ended up at Sumatra at the same time when Vivian Bullwinkle,

24:00 who you’ve probably heard about. Vivian Bullwinkle? A nurse? There was a group of nurses, 22 of them on a ship and they were rescued, and they went to Bangka Island, and the men were there, and the women and the men were separated. They marched

24:30 22 women into the water up to their waists and the Japanese machine-gunned them, and one survived. Her name was Vivian Bullwinkle and she stayed on the island just in the sand dunes for four or five days, looking after a British

25:00 soldier, who had been injured, and the two of them kept each other company for a while. Eventually they decided they’d have to give themselves up, which is what they did. It is a very famous story, Vivian Bullwinkle and I had met her a couple of times but I didn’t know I had met her. She has just recently died,

25:30 very famous Vivian.

How did you come to meet her?

I met her in the CMF when I was in the CMF. She was in the CMF, in the nurses and we met at 3 Division. We met one night on a couple of occasions.

So it was before she was in Malaya?

Oh no, after. Oh yes after.

26:00 **We’ll get to that story later in your history.**

Well from my point of view, I’d met her a couple of times. In fact she retired from the CMF the same night as I did. We both fronted up to the general. That’s another story.

Can you tell me a bit more about your time at Melville?

Whilst we were waiting for equipment

26:30 we did a lot of bush training. I had always been drilled with the idea that you never give an order to a person unless you are prepared to carry out that order yourself, except on occasions where it is a technical

27:00 problem and you’re not qualified to do it. For instance I couldn’t order a doctor to cut a man’s leg off

because I couldn't do it but I could tell a doctor to go and look after a man. I could look after him too. There's a subtle difference in that if you give an order then you shouldn't give it unless you are prepared

27:30 to carry it out yourself. I've always stuck by that, as I say, except qualifications of a technical basis. You can't tell a technical man how to do it. He's got to do that. On one occasion we were training, a bit of hard PT work, which included a question of jumping through fire to

28:00 toughen the boys up, so that was great fun and I did it myself. I gave the order to jump and I jumped too, and thought nothing of it. Years later I met a couple of chaps from the regiment in Sydney and they said, "Oh we were thinking about you." I said, "Oh yes?" and they let it be known

28:30 to me that I apparently was not considered a very sort of strong officer in the place, and they were going to "do me over" or something but they changed their minds after I acted in this way of jumping through the fire. They just thought I was going to sit back and apparently it changed the colour of their thinking, and they never worried me. I didn't know anything about this until after.

29:00 It just proves that the adage was right. We used to climb trees and all sorts of things, to strengthen ourselves up, get a bit of interest, PT work.

When you say jumping through fire, what exactly do you mean?

What we did was lay a whole lot of bushes on the ground and lit them, and then jumped through them.

29:30 I ended up losing my eyebrows but still that didn't matter. The thing was to toughen people up. If they'd done it in training then they could do it in action. If you haven't done it in training it is much harder to do it in action. You can do it but it is much harder. It's a question of confidence.

Do you think that says something about the Australian soldier as opposed to the English soldier,

30:00 **that they had respect for people who could "do" rather than just an inherent respect for a superior officer?**

Oh, no question about that, no question from the Australian point of view. The Australian was much more adventurous too. Yes, at all levels. The troops were as good at doing things as the officers, in many cases better.

Did you often feel as an officer that

30:30 **you were on parole until you proved yourself?**

Well I don't think you thought of it in that way but as it turns out, that's the sort of thing that happened. Yes, I did prove myself but I didn't know it. I mean as I say, it was several years later just casually. It was the Church of England National Emergency Fund Canteen in Sydney and these two chaps happened to be there. I was there and they told me about it.

31:00 I had no idea, none at all. I hadn't even sensed that they were unhappy with me around.

A lot of the men that you were working with, some of who were AIF, some militia, were they a rough lot?

Some of them were pretty rough. Oh yes, we had a few roughies.

31:30 You had to be careful on that because what had happened in some instances was that you could be reasonably sure that some people hadn't been screened as well as they should have been in being admitted to the service. We had several gaol people there and that was one thing that from a camp

32:00 point of view, you couldn't a person who had been in gaol, particular for theft and that sort of thing, to be in a tent with half a dozen blokes. You don't know what would happen, pinching things and that sort of thing. You had to be very careful.

Do you mean men who had been gaoled in the past and had got out of gaol to get into the army?

Yes, that's right. Oh yes.

Straight from gaol?

32:30 Straight from gaol wanting to work, pay and that sort of thing.

Was there a policy at the time to let people out of gaol if they were willing to…?

Oh no, no there'd be no policy like that. It would only be a person getting out of jail or being allowed out having done his time, looking around for a job, joining the AIF. There were a few of them. I don't say that there were a great many of them but

33:00 there certainly were a few of them. We even had it in the National Service after the war. I know of one

bloke who played for Carlton. He was a very rough individual, National Service bloke called up under National Service, sent to the unit I was in.

In general the men, whether they were

33:30 **former criminals or otherwise, were they generally blue collar [working class] or working class blokes?**

The answer would obviously be yes. I mean, I'm not saying there was a lot of this but there was certainly some. The little that I saw was only a very little, so obviously in other areas there would have been

34:00 the same.

How did you find mixing with them and getting on with them?

At the time I didn't think I had any trouble and on reflection I don't think I did either.

Once your equipment arrived what did you set about doing then?

Well then we went on to technical training, handling guns. From the other ranks' point of view,

34:30 gun crews and handling things. From an officer's point of view, taking up the fire control aspects and all that sort of thing.

How did you find that?

I found it interesting, yes. I wasn't brilliant at it but I found it interesting.

What was your role exactly?

In the first instances, I was one of the troop officers.

35:00 You had a troop commander, who was a captain and he had two or three officers, and I was one of those. You had X number of men to look after and supervise, partially administration. No, I didn't find much problem with that.

What sort of guns did you have?

We started off in

35:30 Western Australia with 18-pounders Mark 2 and 18-pounders Mark 4, and 4.5 howitzers. I don't know whether that means anything to you or not. An 18-pounder fired an 18 pound shell. The two Marks, Mark 2 and Mark 4, the Mark 2 had

36:00 what they called a tubular trail, so you got your axle in the gun and then a trail towing it. It was a tubular thing like that. The gun has a buffer on it that when the gun is fired it absorbs the energy of firing and returns the barrel to its correct place. It

36:30 had a buffer mounted on top of the barrel, whereas the Mark 4 had the buffer underneath, a slightly different system. It had what they called a box trailer, coming out like that and joining to a point where the tail was. A different type of structure but fired the same shell, the 18-pounder. The 4.5

37:00 Howitzer on the other hand, had a bigger shell, 4.5 as against the 18-pounder, which was about three inch. The design of the gun was that you could get a highering of the elevation of the barrel, so that a round would drop in, rather than an 18-pounder, which had a flat trajectory, which fired like that. You used the

37:30 4.5 howitzer for shooting over a hill or something like that. In the old trench warfare they tried to drop shells into trenches rather than just shooting across the top of them and usually a regiment had two batteries of 18-pounders, and one battery of 4.5 howitzers. That's what we had originally. The 37th Battery and the 39th Battery were 18-pounders and the howitzer was called the 101 Battery.

38:00 Then when we were reequipped they dispensed with the 4.5 howitzer and replaced it with 25-pounders, and the two 18-pounder batteries became 25-pounder batteries, so we had three 25-pounder batteries.

Were you already familiar with these guns through your training?

Not until I got there. It was a quick learning curve.

38:30 **Was there a lot to learn?**

A fair amount, yes my word! There's two sides of it. There's the technical side of the actual gun itself and then there's the fire control side of it, and the positioning of the guns, having to put them on the ground, survey them in the elementary way, and producing fire plans.

39:00 It was a technically minded thing. I admit that.

Can you tell us about the firing plan?

The firing plan; there's two types of engagement of targets you might say. One is "Observes Targets". You've got somebody out on OP, observation posts who can see the target and he knows where his guns are behind him. He's got a landline, a telephone line

39:30 and he estimates off a map the position of the target. He knows where his guns are. He knows where he is himself and he's then got to estimate the position of the target off the map, a map reading exercise. Having assessed where he thinks the target is, he'll give a fire order to the guns

40:00 to fire a round at this bearing angle of sight with a view of hitting the target. Once the shell has landed, he can then assess how far off the target it is, whether it is plus of the target, minus of the target, left or right, and he then gives an order to correct that fall of shot. It could be,

40:30 "Move left 100", which would mean move the gun to fire a round 100 yards to the left. That calculation is done down at the gun site or "Up 200 yards" or "Down 200 yards". He adjusts the fall of shot by observation. Once he's got one gun on the position, on the target, then he can bring the other three guns on

41:00 straight away.

Tape 4

00:33 The fire control, as I say once he's established his position of the target with his one round first and then the other guns come on top and that's it. The other method of fire control is done

01:00 on plans where you do it all on paper, which involves calculations and you've got to bring in things such as weather and all that, as against the visual where you automatically do that unconsciously. In other words you can see what's happening but on paper you've got to bring it in and you get things to make the correct adjustments, such as a met

01:30 telegram, meteorological telegram. That tells you what the temperatures are up in the air and the speeds, wind speeds and all that sort of thing. That helps you but you've also got to bring in other factors, wear on the guns sometimes. You then calculate where the target is and where the guns are so that you can fire at night,

02:00 and hopefully hit the target. It's done purely off paper.

So the paper planning is for night?

It can be done mainly for night where you haven't got the observation. Some night firing you can do because there's enough light to be able to see when the round goes off if your target is clear. The other thing is

02:30 on the paper one is for barrages. They have creeping barrages and they'll fire a round the width of the guns rather than a pinpoint target and then they can lift it every 200 yards, with troops following immediately behind, in a safe distance of course.

03:00 Night barrages, they're usually fired at night. They're usually called night barrages. I've not fired any in action. I've only fired them in training. In fact from a field point of view I wasn't in action at all, only training.

At this point at Melville,

03:30 **what kinds of things would you do when you got a bit of time off?**

There was quite a lot of picture shows put on, local picture shows and things like that.

Did you have much interaction with the locals?

I personally didn't. I had a few friends, a couple of relatives in Perth and if I got the chance to go up to Perth I would see them but we were only there a month

04:00 or something like that and then we moved on, and ended up in Geraldton. That was one big place. I did a trip across on the trans-train. I went to a School of Artillery for a course and I left the regiment for probably two months, went up to Geraldton.

04:30 Geraldton became a bit of a centre for concentration of troops. There was quite a lot up there in that area. 1 Armoured Brigade were up a little bit further, a couple of the infantry battalions. There was quite a lot of troops up there.

05:00 **Once you'd done your training in Melville were you then posted to a placement?**

The whole regiment was at Melville under training and then moved on to different camps, further training at all the camps of course. You just couldn't sit on your backside and do nothing.

05:30 In particular, as I said earlier, there was a lot of thought of the Japs coming in to Western Australia and particularly in an area called Jurien Bay and all the units in the area would spend probably up to a week from time to time, practicing exercising in that area.

06:00 We in fact had our actual gun positions, where we put each gun, pegged on the ground, so that we could come back a fortnight later and put the guns straight in. The idea was that if there was an alert and there was any Japanese activity then the ground units could be brought into action quickly, without having to do pre-recces [previous reconnaissance].

06:30 That was the lowest that they thought. They didn't think that the Japs would come any lower than that. They've got to get off. You know, if they were going to come and land, they've got to establish a base and then work out from that base. If they came down to Scarborough Beach or something like that, in the middle of Perth you can't imagine them getting very far, so that's why they thought that Jurien was

07:00 a most likely spot. Other places, if you go north, it was a question that they would have to bring in such a large number of troops and they would have a supply problem, which is in fact what the Japs eventually did have, a supply problem.

At this point the war with the Japanese

07:30 **was well and truly on. It was quite a big change from the beginning of the war, which was a European war on the other side of the world. Can you remember the feeling amongst yourself and the men to different events that were happening throughout that time, such as the fall of Singapore?**

The fall of Singapore had happened before I actually joined.

08:00 I had joined in October '41 but I hadn't got into the unit until April '42. In the meantime Singapore had fallen, so I don't know what their reaction was but there was a lot of disruption when on because at this stage a number of the Middle East units were being brought back to Australia and they were being brought back

08:30 purely to defend Australia. The order had been issued to them to come back to Australia before the fall of Singapore and some were diverted when Singapore became very imminent and likely of being taken, they diverted a number of the troops direct to the Singapore area, and some of them were caught.

09:00 The original intention was that they would all come back to Australia and there was a big political fight went on between Churchill [then Prime Minister of England] and the Prime Minister here…not Menzies, Chifley.

Curtin?

Oh Curtin, yes.

09:30 A very big argument went on between Curtin and that side of history is well worth looking at. I've read quite a bit of it but my memory is not as good as it ought to be.

From your point of view, how was morale at that time and how did it change as the Japanese were advancing?

As one that was not

10:00 closely involved obviously, in Western Australia as distinct from being up in New Guinea or even North Queensland, I suppose the general thought was we've got to keep them away whatever happens. The government started this thing that was called the Brisbane Line and of course they got a lot of Americans in.

10:30 If it hadn't have been for the fall of Pearl Harbour [United States Naval Base bombed by the Japanese] we wouldn't have had the Americans in, at least I would doubt it. They were so upset about losing Pearl Harbour that they wanted to retaliate and they had to have a springboard. The only springboard they had really was Australia.

How did you feel about the concept of the Brisbane Line?

I think it was probably reasonable. I wouldn't be in a

11:00 position to judge it from an operational point of view. I think some people were upset. Here you are, you're prepared to put in defences called the Brisbane Line, what about us in Perth? What about people in Broome? Where do you stop? Why are you singling out Brisbane? That became a political stunt.

What about people in Darwin?

That's right, dead right.

I'm asking this because

11:30 **you were at a point and we haven't spoken to many people in this position. You were at a point preparing to defend Australia against an invasion. You must have been looking to the north and watching where the Japanese were going, and wondering where they were going to go next?**

I suppose in the broad spectrum, yes. You are quite right but of course you were sent to a certain area

12:00 and you focussed on that area. As I said, 60,000 troops in Western Australia. It's a big country I know but that's a lot of troops also, more than they had on the Eastern Seaboard by a long shot.

So you didn't feel too worried?

No, I don't think people did no.

Did you think that a mainland invasion was a real possibility?

12:30 Certainly it was a possibility. I think it was basically pretty remote. I think a lot of people analysed it, yes they could come in and if they did, what would happen. Logistics was the major problem all along, logistics. If the Japs had really

13:00 wanted to come in they'd have had to go down, as I say, to a place like Jurien Bay but they'd have never got very far if they tried to get in on the Gold Coast for instance, although there weren't many troops there except at Atherton. There were a few in the Atherton Tablelands.

You were at Melville

13:30 **and then you went to Geraldton. At which point did you come back to Melbourne for training?**

It would be about September '42, I went to…

From Geraldton?

What was the camp? It might have been at Moora, between

14:00 Geraldton…between Melville and Geraldton we were at a camp. I think it was called Moora but there was an additional camp there. I moved from there, went over to the School of Artillery and then came back, and joined them in Geraldton.

So you came back

14:30 **to Melbourne for the School of Artillery?**

Yes, Seymour.

Why was that?

There was no school…the school covered all sorts of things, artillery things.

But more technical than hands on?

That's right.

What sort of things?

All the fire plans and the operation, the surveying, very minor surveying but still surveying.

15:00 It was technical training. On all these officers courses you had to know how the guns worked. You had to be able to detail the actual work that each gunner did. You had to know that, the gun drill you had, those sorts of things.

15:30 I don't think I've got any papers on that now. It is a long time ago.

In film we say "On the day". I'm not quite sure what the army term is but when the time comes, your role would be in the fire plan?

Yes, it would be,

16:00 just depending on your position in the troop because you had a troop with a small command post and then you had a battery command post, which supervised the two troops, or sometimes three troops, and you had an observation officer out in

16:30 the field. Each troop had its own observation officer out in the field and they could be engaging different targets. So if you took the lowest-ranking officer, such as a troop officer, he would be on the gun side supervising the four guns. You have a sergeant in charge of each gun

17:00 and a team of six, or thereabouts, and you have the officer who is responsible for supervising, usually the lieutenant.

Does that mean you would be out in the field?

Oh yes.

And supervising the guns?

My word.

When you are firing at a target and you had an observer,

17:30 **would you also observe yourself with field glasses?**

No, in most instances you are well away, too far away. You could be firing up to 10,000 yards away.

Firing at a target, would the observer then relay to you?

Precisely.

It has gone 20 yards too far…

18:00 That's right.

And then you would…?

They would do the adjustment at the troop command post. The idea is that the troop observation officer, who was usually a troop commander and was a captain, he would be well out forward and he would probably have one of the other officers with him, certainly not always. Sometimes

18:30 they went on their own and they took two signals or they would take a signaller with them and they would take an assistant OR [Other Rank] to help him, so there'd be the three in the OP [Observation Post] position. That was the normal standing. Occasionally they might take another officer but normally just the troop officer, an assistant and a telephone, and they would go out with a pack radio

19:00 on their back or something like that. They have their own vehicle, which they would probably park somewhere and they might have to walk up a hill to get an observation over the target. They might only be a thousand yards from the target or even less sometimes. It just depends on the lay of the ground.

19:30 **We have our targets, we have our observers, we have the guns and so on, and yourself. Where are you in relation to all this?**

It depends on your posting. You could be moved around. As a troop officer I was supervising one troop. If I was in the troop command post, which

20:00 I could have been, I'd be playing around with the information that came in there from the OPO [Observation Post Officer], from the observation officer, likewise the battery. It just depends on your position and you had to be able to do the various positions.

Did you find this enjoyable? Did you like your role?

20:30 Well I wouldn't say it is enjoyable but I mean it was always nice to have a shoot out I must admit, rather than just practicing without firing. I wouldn't say it was enjoyable but it was part of the game in those days. I don't suppose you thought of it from that point of view.

Did you find that

21:00 **there was a mental challenge involved though?**

There was certainly a challenge and you knew you had to try and do your best. I was a bit conscious of the fact that I hadn't had as much experience as some of the others but we still got by I think, to a certain extent.

21:30 **How long were you in Western Australia for?**

I left the West in June 1943, so I was only there for 12 months or so.

What was your next posting?

My next posting I went to Sydney to the heavy anti-aircraft group,

22:00 in particular I went to one heavy battery, one heavy anti-aircraft battery, which the Head Quarters was at Cremorne and we had two gun sites. One gun site was near Blue Fish Point. I don't know whether you know Sydney at all but…

I'm not familiar with that.

No. North Head

22:30 and South Head, and you've got the bay. North Head was the heaviest defended area. Coastal Artillery had big 9.2 guns in there and that's another story but near there was a point called Blue Fish Point, where they had a big radar set, early warning radar set for shipping work. Near Blue Fish Point

23:00 we had four guns in concrete emplacements, 3.7 anti-aircraft guns. It was known as Blue Fish gun site. The other gun site that the battery had was at a suburb called Artarmon, which is North Sydney. You go over the bridge and veer slightly to the north.

23:30 There was a big reserve and they had these guns on this reserve. It was a high point and they had the guns on the reserve, and they took over houses that surrounded the reserve. The street with houses on one side and nothing on the other and another one here, the army took those over as quarters. At Blue Fish we had a hutted campsite.

24:00 It was a very active gun site. It was understaffed but it was still pretty active. It was one of these places where I probably got one of the biggest shocks of my life. When I went out there, bearing in mind that I was only about 22 and a bit,

24:30 I had no sisters, I had no girlfriends, and when I was driven out to the gun site, the first thing I saw on the parade ground was 60 girls, AWAS [Australian Women's Army Service]. That was a big shock. I never expected it. I knew the AWAS were in the service of course but I didn't know they were in the artillery,

25:00 let alone the unit that I was going to. That was an experience.

Can you tell us more about that?

Well I really was quite concerned about it in a way and there was only one other officer on the gun site at the time but I overcame it very quickly by

25:30 saying to myself and disciplining myself that I would not fraternise with any of the girls on the gun site or even outside the gun site, absolutely nothing, which meant that you were at arms length, you could be fair to everybody; you didn't show any favours to anybody. I believed it

26:00 worked pretty well. We had the odd mischievous girl and the odd mischievous bloke but we seemed to be able to…well one of them we couldn't do much about but the others, we seemed to get along all right. They were a very nice group actually. There were 30 girls living on the gun site and 30 girls living out in barracks, coming up for training

26:30 every day. The girls on the gun site, they manned all the instruments, the predictor, range finders, the radar sets, the plotting room, ordinary guard duty, cook duty. The only thing they couldn't do, they weren't allowed to handle ammunition and they weren't allowed to man the guns. They were the two jobs that…

27:00 the reason for the ammunition was that each round, which is that long, weighed 56 pounds and you can't carry too many of those. Manning the guns, there was a crew of about ten. Handling the ammunition, they couldn't handle that. Trundling the guns round, quite a job. They were barred from that but operating the instruments,

27:30 the radar, the predictor, the girls were excellent, much more accurate than the men, painstaking and much more accurate.

Why do you think that was so?

Their nature. It was just their nature.

To be more accurate?

More patient and therefore more accurate.

28:00 **You seemed to have shown a great level of restraint. You were a 22 year-old bloke. Did you have ice in your blood?**

No I think it was probably just a self-defensive mood or move. I mean, I was obviously aware that

28:30 if you started fraternising with girls on a gun site, you'd lose control. You wouldn't have the respect.

Did you find it a bit intimidating, all these women?

No, I had a couple of girls there who were very, very good. Two of them were older than me but not by much. One was the daughter of the Bishop

29:00 of Grafton, a lovely girl. I kept correspondence with her after the war. I used to keep in touch with her a bit. Another one, a very intelligent girl, her brother was a doctor in the Middle East, a half colonel [lieutenant-colonel]. She was a pleasant soul.

29:30 Those two particularly stand out. I had twins on the gun site, pint-sized girls. They were just over 18 and they made friends with another girl. I used to call them the terrible trio. The average age was about 19 to 19 and a half, of all the girls. One night I found one of these girls

30:00 crying her heart out. They used to do night duty up at the command post and I found one of these girls crying her heart out. I went up to her and spoke to her. I said, "What's the problem?" She wouldn't or

couldn't say very much and so I said to her, knowing in advance, I said to her, "What's your brother doing today?" "Oh, I don't know." I said, "He's on the high seas

30:30 isn't he?" She said, "Yes." I'd heard this you see. I played that back to her. I said, "Well, why don't you think about him a bit. He's on the high seas, away from home, tossing around. You're in a camp here, nice and secure." So she thought about that a bit and she came around all right. It was just homesickness. That's all it was,

31:00 homesickness. Out at night in the dark, she felt sorry for herself, so as I say…that was one incident. In another instance, a new girl had come to the gun site. The female quarters were only 50 yards, maybe a bit more, from the guns but they were protected

31:30 by a double concertina apron wire fence, which is made of big coils of wire with a very narrow entrance to them. You couldn't walk side by side, a very narrow entrance, so you had to file in single. This girl in the middle of the night, I was up in the command post, "I've fallen into the flaming fence!" Here was this girl who stood about

32:00 5" 6 almost, a bit higher probably, and she was just spread out eagle like this on the barbed wired fence. She'd missed the narrow passageway, torn her stockings and that sort of thing. It was one of these small things that get you. I had another girl who I nicknamed the "Calamity". If something was to happen, it would happen to her. Do a gas chamber

32:30 test…we used to put them through the gas chambers and after the gas chamber test, they'd do a small route march. What should happen to Calamity? She'd fall over and faint or faint and fall over! She'd walk across the playground and twist her ankle, on one occasion. It was just one of those things, nice girl.

Was she putting it on to get out of duties?

Oh no. Now that was one thing that I

33:00 fastened on to. I made a rule and they knew it, the girls knew it. I would not allow a girl to be sick in lines for more than a day. If they were more than a day, up to the doctor at the fort. That kept that under control.

What do you mean by "in lines"?

33:30 Sick in bed.

Do you think otherwise there would have been a lot of malingering?

Oh yes. Well there could have been, put it that way. They knew my rules and they adhered to them. I'm not saying there wasn't one or two who didn't malinger and you never inspected their lines without

34:00 warning, and without company, never. The warning might only be five minutes. I mean you wouldn't give them an hour's notice, not necessarily because if you wanted to spring an inspection, which was one way of keeping a tab on what was going on, particularly at Artarmon

34:30 where the officers weren't close to the other ranks. I would say to one of the girls, "I'm coming down to inspect you in a quarter of an hour." Or ten minutes, something like that but I always had company, always.

We have spoken to a few AWAS and the impression I've got is that

35:00 **it was a late idea to bring women in and the army really wasn't prepared for women, from being different from men. Was there anything different that you noticed, different needs and different ways that they behaved?**

Certainly, but the first point

35:30 is that the army wasn't prepared for them probably as quickly. Certainly the army needed them. We didn't have enough men, there's no doubt about that and there were a number of jobs that the girls could do, and relieve the men. The heavy anti-aircraft was one.

36:00 We had them, as I say, in the statistics. In Sydney there was somewhere about 15 to 18, might have been a few more, heavy gun sites and when I was there in '43, they would have all had a proportion of girls on them, females. Now they've got to be administered.

36:30 I mean from the point of view of accommodation, obviously you had to provide separate accommodation. You obviously had to provide safe accommodation and you had to have strict rules about fraternisation, from the point of view of the men. When I say strict rules, you couldn't allow the men into their quarters or anything like that. I

37:00 used to day to them, to the men and to the girls, "You're on this gun site. You've got to work as a team. What you do outside Park Hill Gate is your affair and not mine." So if they wanted to take each other out, well and good. I used to do inspections of the gun site at

37:30 odd hours, two o'clock in the morning or something like that. There were a few favourite places that the girls and the blokes could have got to if they wanted to. One was the ammunition dumps. The ammunition dumps were in the ground and you could go in there and never be seen. I didn't do it terribly regularly but I did do it. I never found any blokes and girls together but they could have been.

38:00 I'm pretty confident that it was reasonably under control. We had one girl sent to us. Fortunately she was living in the barracks down at Manly and only came to us for training. The sergeant down there rang me up one day and said, "Gunner so and so won't be in today or won't be up for training. She's sick."

38:30 You just accept that. Anyway it went on for a couple of days and cutting a long story short, it turned out that she was pregnant. What do you do? I bit the sergeant in charge of the barracks and said, "Why didn't you tell me earlier?" "Oh we couldn't tell you that!" I said, "Well I happen to be her OC [Officer Commanding],

39:00 responsible for her on the gun site. I could have given her a job which might have prejudiced her." They hadn't thought of that one. Cutting a long story short, it turns out that the girl was pregnant before she joined the army.

There must have been other times where it was awkward?

39:30 Oh yes, you see in fact the girl I nicknamed Calamity was sent to us…before I go there, she was sent to us because she said no to the colonel. She was at another gun site or another headquarters and she said no to the colonel, so she was sent out to me.

40:00 She was a good girl. It was his fault. He was a rascal he was but there was a lot of that sort of thing. No, from the point of view of the girls, they ate the same as we did sort of thing. They cooked. They did the cooking. They did everything, except the guns. We had a minor supply occasionally, which I didn't…

40:30 being innocent, didn't realise the problem. I had a sergeant from Battery Head Quarters had come over and one of the corporals was talking to him, and I didn't quite understand what she was saying. I said to the sergeant afterwards, "What was she grizzling about?" "Oh" she said,

41:00 they've run short of what was nicknamed AWAR's supplies. You've got to think hard on that one, don't you! So, I said, "Oh yes. What's he doing?" "Oh, we've got them on order." So they arrived out on the back of a truck and he, a devil this bloke was,

41:30 he got hold of one of the bombardiers and said, "Righto, there's the truck and there's your supplies. Go and get em." The supplies were great big boxes like this with big blue lettering across them, "Kotex".

Monthly supplies?

Monthly supplies yes.

Tape 5

00:36 I think we've ended the Sydney episodes but in Sydney in conjunction with a Captain Carr, I assisted in forming the Headquarters of 4 Australian Heavy Anti-Aircraft Battery. It was formed at the Moore Park Gun Site and

01:00 the purpose of it was to go to Darwin, and relieve 2 Heavy Anti-Aircraft Battery, who had been up there for about two and a half years. On paper there were three officers and 25 other ranks I think but the team that went up, there was only two of us. The battery commander didn't go up; at least he went up there on different timing. We boarded the

01:30 troop ship, the Duntroon at Sydney and when we got onboard we found that the troops onboard the ship were going to be rostered for duty to man or supplement the manning of the artillery equipment on the ship.

02:00 There were two 4.7 guns, which was the bow and the stern gun. There were two Beaufighter guns and it was either four or six Alder guns. Jack Carr said to me, "Well, why don't we volunteer to man the guns all the time? We've got a battery of people or half a battery, they're all experienced in anti-aircraft."

02:30 So we went along to the DEMS Gunnery Officer, which is Defensive Equipment Merchant Service and said to him, "We have 20 odd, 30 blokes who are experienced in anti-aircraft. We'll man your guns for the whole of the trip instead of rostering people onboard." Which obviously was a much more reliable and efficient way of doing it, which is what we did. We manned all the guns. Of course there was a DEMS gunner

03:00 on each crew as well. As far as the troops were concerned, they quite enjoyed it because they had a free run of the ship almost and they didn't have to queue up for meals, so they did well. It didn't make any different to Jack Carr and myself except that we palled up with the DEMS gunnery officer, and he

invited us

03:30 down to his cabin from time to time to have a drink on the house, you might say, because it was a dry ship. The regular people on the ship was one thing but visiting people as we were, troops, were not allowed to drink or there was nothing supplied, put it that way. So we had an evening drink and it was a very pleasant trip up there. The ship was still under control of

04:00 the civilians, a civilian captain and that, and a number of crew were still civilians. I raise this point because going up through the Prince of Wales Islands one of the cabin boys became very sick and the ship's doctor, who was an old bloke, a civilian, wasn't sure what to do. They had this poor kid sick so he conferred with the

04:30 Service doctors and there were a couple of navy, certainly a couple of army and a couple of air force doctors onboard, so they decided to yank the poor kid's appendix out. They converted the ward room into a theatre and operated on this poor kid, and put him in the sick bay of the ship until we arrived at

05:00 Darwin. I can't understand why they put the sick bay where they did but nevertheless they did. It was at the back of the ship, end of the ship right underneath a big gun but anyway he was there and when we pulled in at the wharf at Darwin, the rise and fall in tide in Darwin is very, very

05:30 high, low. It is over 30 feet, the high tide to low tide. Anyway, there was a big conference went on as to how they were going to get this poor kid ashore. You just couldn't carry him down a gangway, so in due course one of the civilians on the boat said, "Look, what about doing this." Of course the civilian happened to be the bosun, so he knew what to do of course.

06:00 He got hold of a big Carly float. A Carly float was a thing about. probably equivalent to 12 feet square or more and probably a foot or two deep, probably two feet deep or more. He put that on the deck, got two derricks swung over, got hold of about a dozen troops to stand on the Carly float and lifted him up,

06:30 lifted the Carly float up, swung it over side then lowered it to the deck. That worked satisfactorily, so they got the Carly float back onto the ship, got the kid in the stretcher onto the Carly float, a bloke stood at each end of the stretcher so that he wouldn't slide off, lifted him up, over the edge with the two derricks, down onto the deck and all in a matter of about ten minutes. It was

07:00 a very good bit of work, an interesting one. The other thing going through the Prince of Wales [islands] about the same time was that we did a practice shoot firing the Beaufighters and the Alder guns but not the stern and the bow guns. That was just to give the troops a bit of excitement you might say.

How many troops did you say where in this?

I'm not sure how many troops were onboard but

07:30 there must have been three or four hundred. I wouldn't be sure on that at all.

You were talking about a group of islands?

The Prince of Wales? The Prince of Wales Islands are right off Cape York, right at the very top of Australia. You've heard of Thursday Island? Right, well now it is a little group just…not directly south of Thursday

08:00 Island but it's in that area. It is well known, well from a navigation point of view it was well known, the Prince of Wales Island group. That was a delightful trip up through the Barrier Reef on a beautiful fine day. It was really gorgeous. I can understand why people want to do it. So the battery arrived in Darwin

08:30 and we went out to a camp site called Berrimah at the eight mile peg and at the eight mile peg there was a very small turn off, firstly to a four gun emplacement and a little bit further on, the headquarters of the battery. I've got photos of those.

09:00 The battery had two gun sites. The one at Berrimah and then another one down Berrimah Road to the Quarantine Station, and it was near the Quarantine Station. In the Berrimah Road there was a military hospital. I think it was the 109. I'd have to check the number but there was a military hospital there and there was also a cemetery. Originally the hospital

09:30 had been the --what would you say -- staging quarters for Qantas civilian aircraft pre-war, when they were coming in. They stopped at Darwin and they had this overnight accommodation place as part of their journey but that was taken over as a small military hospital. They had a bigger military hospital in at

10:00 Larakia, right in Darwin. Having got to Berrimah we then relieved the 2 Battery, the Head Quarters of 2 Battery and the two troops, the troop at Berrimah and the troop at Quarantine. Those two troops, the two relieving troops, were made up of Western Australians and they came up

10:30 independently of the battery headquarters. The battery headquarters moved from Sydney. These two troops moved from Perth up and 98% of them would have been Western Australians. Our job was to take over the existing 2 Heavy Battery, which had been there about two and a half years. That was

11:00 early 1944. Yes that would be January, February 1944.

Your regiment got converted from

11:30 **militia to an AIF unit?**

Yes.

It did? When did that take place?

That took place roughly October, November 1942. It might have been a wee bit earlier actually. The reason why I'm doubting it is because the conversion relied upon the militia people, all militia people irrespective of

12:00 rank, ORs [other ranks] and officers and that, 90% of them had to volunteer to join the AIF. If the 90% joined the AIF then the unit became known as an AIF unit, so 10th Field Regiment was known as 10th Australian Field Regiment, then became 10th Australian Field Regiment (AIF), which showed that they were all,

12:30 mostly anyway…I'm not sure of the actual percentage but it would have been 90% or higher.

Volunteers basically?

Volunteers, yes. In other words all the people, like myself, volunteered to go to the AIF.

I see. They agreed to it.

They agreed to it and when they agreed to go to the AIF then the unit was called an AIF unit.

I see what you are saying. That makes sense.

But you see, one of the

13:00 problems with the militia come, AIF was about April 1942 through to…it may have been September '42, there was a gap there of nearly six months, not quite, where the army totally barred anybody joining the AIF. They had to join the militia units for a while and in fact

13:30 a number of senior and also junior regular army officers were, they used the term seconded, from the army into the CMF. I understand the real reason was that the army was very concerned that they

14:00 were not getting enough people to join the militia to become involved in the war. People were wanting to join the AIF with a view of going overseas but that didn't suit the government. The government wanted troops in Australia to defend Australia and one way of doing it was to make the people CMF people because under the government's regulations CMF couldn't be

14:30 sent overseas, except in one instance, and that was to New Guinea.

There wasn't any conscription was there?

No, no conscription.

It wasn't like the First World War.

Well you see, in the First World War they docked conscription out. The same applied. There was no conscription. You could volunteer for AIF. You couldn't be conscripted into the AIF.

But the militia was mandatory?

Yes, that was mandatory.

So that was

15:00 **a sort of form of conscription you could argue.**

Well almost, yes. I don't think it was quite as severe as that but there was a call up, a call up process and they could call up people and you then had to go in, not like the National Service, which is a slightly different thing. They could certainly call people up but they could only

15:30 post them to militia units.

There was some sort of rivalry between the militia and the AIF, can you tell us more about your experience and what you came across in that regard?

I didn't strike a great deal. I mean there was a little bit but it didn't worry me, I'll put it that way. As soon as

16:00 I could volunteer, I did. My VX number was a wee bit late because when the application forms went in, I happened to be away from the unit at the time, so the administrative process was delayed a couple of months but it didn't affect it. If somebody wanted to be inquisitive or nasty, they'd look at your number and they could say he's been a late enlisted man

16:30 but I don't think anybody worried about it. I certainly didn't.

When you were talking before about the AIF not recruiting, what period were you talking about?

They were always recruiting but the thing about the AIF was that the AIF people,

17:00 they themselves volunteered with a view to going overseas. That was what the AIF was. Now what the government had to try and do was to get enough soldiers in Australia, "to defend Australia".

That's the militia?

That's where militia came in, yes because they couldn't send the militia overseas so they kept them in Australia but there weren't enough of them, so they did, in our case, in our battery,

17:30 the 39 Battery, they put them to a militia unit and they stopped people joining or tentatively joining the AIF. I don't know how serious that was but I know from an officer's point of view, many officers were seconded to the CMF, which meant

18:00 that they couldn't be sent overseas, but the period of secondment was only six months or something like that.

AIF officers were seconded to CMF?

People that had earlier volunteered were seconded. It is one of those things that happened which has never really been explained in detail but

18:30 there were a lot, I know.

That's quite interesting.

It is an interesting one but it's a political one or partly political because they couldn't have conscription and because we had so many troops overseas in the Middle East, and Singapore had fallen, and virtually all hell reigned over Australia, "What's going to happen to Australia? We've got the AIF in the Middle East,

19:00 the Japs knocking at your door and you haven't got many troops here."

That's the period that you're talking about?

You see that's the period.

That would have been about…

April '42, yes the middle of '42.

Very interesting.

Some of the books that have been written, one on Stan Savage and one or two of the others, go into this political side very well.

19:30 One in particular is the book on Roden Cutler, the VC winner. That's got a good exposition on that. It's one of these things you know? You can read it but to remember all the details, not at my age thank you!

I recall that the Coral Sea Battle took place around the same time as the AIF troops were coming back from the Middle East,

20:00 **in fact almost exactly around the same time.**

That's right.

So at the period, were you aware? I probably wouldn't see that the troop shipments wouldn't be known that they were coming to Australia generally speaking. In military circles did you know that they were coming back from the Middle East?

I think some people did know that they were coming back because they were being brought back but what happened, they were diverted

20:30 to Malaya. A lot of them got as far as Colombo when they got the order to go up to Malaya but you see in '42 when I was in the Western Australia area, the Geraldton area, we had the 2nd 11th Battalion, which was a six division unit,

21:00 they were camped at Meningie, not far away from us and they'd only just arrived back. That was in early '42, the middle of '42. Those AIF units, 6th Division, 7th Division and 9th Division, they went over early 1940.

They were quite experienced soldiers weren't they, the 2nd 11th I understand was?

The 2nd 11th were experienced soldiers. The 2nd 16th was, a number of those. It would be very difficult

21:30 to say any one unit was more experienced than the other on the fighting side, whether it would be the (UNCLEAR) or the artillery or that. They certainly got some experience, some of them a little bit more than the others, yes but I know that the 2nd 11th was a Western Australian unit too.

22:00 **When you were talking about Geraldton, Geraldton I believe is on the northwest coastline? How far is it from Exmouth? Is it a bit south of Exmouth?**

It is south of Exmouth Gulf by…if you get a map, 500 miles.

500 miles?

Something like that.

So there was a genuine belief that the Japanese, if there was a potential landing,

22:30 **that Geraldton would be an ideal area to land?**

No, the thought mainly was that if they did land, in any quantity anyway, would be at Jurien Bay, which is below Geraldton but Geraldton also was a good supply point. It was quite a reasonable town.

23:00 It had quite a good airfield. It had facilities like showgrounds and all that sort of thing. It was on the main rail line. It's only a light rail, three foot six. It was certainly suitable from a camping point of view, no doubt about it. Jurien Bay was a bit further down,

23:30 about 150 miles lower I suppose. It did have a very sandy dust road linking the bay to the main road and from a landing point of view, would probably be a better area.

24:00 **You said Geraldton was a good supply base…?**

It would have been, yes.

Did they receive cargo vessels coming in?

I think the answer to that would be, "Describe what you mean by cargo vessel?"

Supplies and minerals for the war effort.

Well, there was very little mineral work and all that. One the primary things in that area was fishing. Fishing was a very popular thing there and

24:30 a little bit further up, you get from Geraldton, Exmouth Gulf and then Broome because Broome had a very big fishing and pearling industry going on. The Japs knew that area very, very well. Pre-war they knew it very well.

Yes, that is something very interesting you just brought up because the Japanese were actually working there as pearl divers and in the Merchant Marine as well, weren't they?

That's right.

25:00 Nobody really thought that the Japs were going to be against us at all at any time because they'd been our allies in the 1914-18 war and in the intervening period they'd been allowed to set up all their pearling harbour, and diving, not pearling harbour, pearling fishing game, and all their divers,

25:30 and they knew the country better than our people did.

Did you actually go around that area?

I didn't go actually to Broome, no.

You didn't? How far were the Japanese extended in that sense, as far as civilians were concerned in Western Australia?

Broome would have been one of the main because that was quite a big base, a shipping base and

26:00 no doubt at one or two other areas either side of Broome, but Broome was the main one, and in fact the Japs bombed Broome.

That's right, yes and many other little inlets around there.

Oh yes, around the area, yes.

So they must have had prior knowledge.

They knew it like the back of their hand, all from these pearl divers.

Can you tell us what you heard about these pearl divers?

Well, it is hearsay what I've

heard about it.

Sure, that's OK.

I mean the pearl divers were there. They knew from a navigation point of view, they knew every reef in the place. They knew what the water behaviour, the waves and all that sort of thing. The depth of the waters, they knew all that. They had divers going there

in dozens a day. When you think of it, it's just logical but nobody thought that they were ever going to fight us.

What happened to these pearl divers when the war started?

Those that were there when the war started would have all been taken into internment camps. I don't really know because I've not been there but if they were living in Darwin

or Broome, or those places, if they were Japanese, they would have been taken straight into internment camps because we had a lot of internees here. We had Germans, a lot of Italians and we also had Italians that they brought out from the Middle East when they were captured in the Middle East. They brought out Italians here.

These are civilians you're talking about?

Yes, civilians.

Or soldiers?

No, civilians. Well, they would be soldiers as well.

It is actually a very important point you have brought up here because that's an aspect that's very little known, about the Japanese. They'd been there for generations many of them.

Oh yes. I hadn't fully appreciated it. I knew that they had an idea of what was going on but I had not the faintest idea that they knew as much as they did. Obviously it is very logical.

They've got all these people and what better way of getting information than having pearling divers who could go under the water and move around, and get all the depths that they wanted from the point of view of bringing ships in, and also looking on the land. It was very logical.

Did you first hear about this in Geraldton?

No I wouldn't say that, no.

There was probably a very strong likelihood that some of them had mixed marriages with Anglo-Saxons, do you think that they would have also been interned if they had white blood?

It would depend on their official nationality.

If a white woman had married a Japanese pearl diver and had forgone her Australian nationality, she could have been interned but I don't know really. It's a very awkward question I can assure you. We had an experience…I mentioned that I was in this engineering firm

in Melbourne. We had what is classed as a Tool Maker and he was a German. He was about 5" 4. A little short chap, spoke pretty good English but he was absolutely the top in making fine tools. He was a very competent man and he specialised in making cams. Do you know what a cam is?

Well if you've got a circle disk and then you blow one end out, and you rotate it, so you've got this going around, that's a cam. Tappets in older cars were lifted by a cam coming up lifting it up. If you extended that design to what was known as a three dimensional cam, it not only did that but it was tapered and did that

but it also did that [demonstrates] It was a three dimensional cam. They were handmade and they were used in the anti-aircraft predictor Vickers model, and this chap who worked in this machine shop was partly employed by the munitions factory at Maribyrnong. He used to go out there and work on cams out there, and he'd work as a tool maker in McPherson's

until some of the stirrers out at Maribyrnong objected to this German. "Can we trust him?" which was a logical thing to say but he was absolutely vital to the production of these cams. Eventually he was arrested and he was interned for about a day,

and they released him on very, very strict control. He had to report to the police certainly once a week if not twice a week. He could only work for us, McPherson's in Kensington and he was not allowed out at Maribyrnong. Well that didn't worry McPherson's because McPherson's had the equipment to work

but one weekend or one Monday, he didn't turn up. Cutting a long story short, he had forgotten to report to the police that he was going out horse riding and he was grabbed on his return, and put in the clink for a couple of days until they sorted it out. It was his mistake that he hadn't reported it but they were right onto him.

33:00 He was a nice enough bloke. He was a typical German I might add!

What's a typical German?

They are pretty hard customers to deal with at times, I can assure you. Pretty arrogant but he was in a position to be that. I don't know what happened after. After the war he set up a very good engineering business up Ivanhoe way but he must be dead by now. I raise that as an example of an internee, or he was a citizen,

33:30 virtually being interned but released under very strict conditions, which is sensible enough.

That would have happened frequently you'd assume? It seems to be special cases.

That was a special case. My guess, there were more than one special case. I don't know how many but his was certainly a special case.

On the topic of minorities here, being in the AIF yourself and the Field Regiment, did you come across

34:00 **people of different nationalities, minorities like Chinese-Australians?**

There'd be very few because they'd all have to be naturalised before they could join the AIF, so there'd be very few. I could imagine some of the Italians who have been out here, second generation Italians or third generation Italians.

34:30 I only use that race because they have been out in Australia for quite a long time but there'd be the other odd ones. Primarily they'd have to be a naturalised Australian before they could join.

You don't recall coming across anything in particular that you could tell us about?

No, not on that score.

What about Aboriginals?

35:00 We had a few in. In certain areas there was quite a number. I only came across one who was a very nice bloke and he was one of the first, if not the first, Aborigines to get a commission.

Reg Saunders?

That's right! Reg Saunders, I met him a couple of times.

Where did you first meet him?

One of them was on one of the trans-train trips

35:30 actually.

Would you like to tell us about that?

Well it was just a casual meeting, nothing specific. He was a passenger. I was a passenger. We weren't friends or anything like that but I remember him.

He's quite an icon in the Aboriginal community, as you might imagine.

Oh yes, my word. Yes, he was one of the few that were commissioned but there were plenty of others,

36:00 but I didn't come across them.

Being in Geraldton and Darwin, you must have come across Aborigines, not in the actual service but as civilians?

In Darwin, the civilian ones were all evacuated from Darwin. They were put in various camps. Some of them were organised into, what you would colloquially say, a Labour

36:30 Battalion but they weren't in the service. They worked under civil things doing labouring work around the town.

Did you run into these units specifically?

In Darwin, on the outskirts of Darwin there were some but I myself, no I didn't have any dealings with them. I think it was only circumstances. You go down to Larrimah and places like that, and the

37:00 across the trans-trains, there's plenty of Aboriginals around there. I think from the Darwin point of view, after the main bombing they evacuated Darwin totally and the only people up there were the service people, and people belonging to the Civil Construction Corps, which was a civil organization building bridges and roads. They were allowed up there.

37:30 **You said that Geraldton was basically the furthest north you got in WA [Western Australia]?**

In WA it was, yes.

You said there was 60,000 troops in WA or in Geraldton?

No, no, WA. That extends from up past North Hampton, up getting to Exmouth Gulf.

I assume most of them were stationed in the north?

Right down the coast,

38:00 from the north right down. They wouldn't have had many down in Albany I don't think, well there was the fort down there and there was the naval base at Garden Island, a big base, naval base, Garden Island.

Where's Garden Island?

If you know where Fremantle is, if you look out from Fremantle slightly south-west,

38:30 you'd see it.

So it is off the coast of Fremantle?

It's off the coast of Fremantle just a bit lower down than Fremantle and it still is a Navy base there. Who are there now? I think the SAS [Special Air Service] are there now. I think that's their training ground.

39:00 There's two Garden Islands. There's that one in Western Australia and there's the Garden Island in Sydney Harbour. The Garden Island in Sydney Harbour is a naval base but the one in Western Australia during the war was a naval base and I think the SAS are down there. Of course you had Rottnest Island just a bit further out again, which was well fortified, had 9.2 inch guns

39:30 on it.

How many units was Geraldton defended by when you were stationed there?

I supposed deployed in the area there must have been probably four or five fairly big units.

Battalion-sized units?

Yes, battalion-sized I would have said.

40:00 I'm a little bit vague on that in detail because if you went just a little bit north of Geraldton, there was the 1st Armoured Regiment. The 1st Armoured Division were up there and they sat on their backsides up there for months, and years, did nothing.

Was this an AIF unit?

Yes and they were very upset about it.

40:30 They were in a position, because of being a tank unit, they had high mobility and the area was from that point of view, suitable for them. There were a great many hills and that sort of thing, plenty of dust but I wouldn't really like to comment on the strength outside Geraldton at the time. My guess is there would be five or six units, battalion strength.

Tape 6

00:48 **You say that there wasn't much of a controversy between the AIF and the militia**

01:00 **from your experience that is?**

I wouldn't have said there was a great deal no. From my experience, yes we had this one battery in Western Australia which was an AIF battery vis a vis to militia ones but I wouldn't have said… individuals. There were a few individuals against it of course and you'll get that in any group of people.

01:30 I wasn't conscious, really conscious. In fact I was one of the junior officers in this 39th Battery and I was a militiaman as against all the troops who were AIF, and I still lived.

Did you find that the name Chocolate Soldiers was used?

It was used disparagingly quite a lot,

02:00 totally unnecessary.

Can you tell us more about that?

I don't think I can really. It was just a degree or a form of insult you might say.

You must have seen some incidents take place.

To be honest with you I don't really recall any major incidents. I can't think of any.

Was that something that continued throughout the whole war?

No I would have said it died off,

02:30 gradually died off I think.

It is interesting, you said, "39th Battery", which is of course the 39th Battalion. I suppose you could get away with telling people you were at the 39th!

Well as I mentioned earlier, I went to a cadet camp with the 39th Battalion, Senior Cadets.

That's right, I recall that. This was the Senior Cadets camp.

03:00 **Sorry, yes that's when the 39th was functional.**

Yes, the 39th was an old battalion from the First World War, if not before and it was the City of Hawthorn one, and in those days, in that period, many of the battalions, and even some of the field regiments, had in the case of an infantry battalion, they would have a company

03:30 of senior cadets, people over 14 and under 18 who joined up. They just went along as part of the battalion but they were limited in certain degrees. One of them, they usually had their own camps if they could and of course they weren't allowed

04:00 any liquor or anything. They were restricted on certain duties. They weren't allowed to do guard duty and that sort of thing but they were just part of the battalion, yes. In case of the camp that I went to, the Scotch Cadets were treated exactly the same way. When we went into camps, even

04:30 on our own, we didn't do night guard duty at all. It was just one of those sort of things that grew up that people too young. I wouldn't make an issue of that.

At the time the war was being fought in PNG [Papua New Guinea] and there was some sense of a Japanese invasion, in modern circles

05:00 **and you explained some of these, that it was an unlikely probability that they would have invaded for logistical reasons, and all sorts of other reasons, there's a new theory that has come up that they call "The Battle for Australia". You must have heard of that. What's your opinion on that? Mind you in certain circles it is widely accepted.**

I think that's not unrealistic. I think

05:30 it's a new concept. It's a concept which has been brought up recently rather than a concept developed at the time. One of the things and this is political of course, was as I mentioned earlier, the Brisbane Line, the establishment of the Brisbane Line. Some people thought that was a good idea but others thought it was not, that it was, "Oh yes, you're prepared to defend Brisbane but

06:00 what about us?" So there was a bit of antagonism like that that went on. I'm not saying the Brisbane Line set up was correct by any means but certainly there was a slight disagreement about it and I think these people that are putting up this question of the Battle for Australia, is probably more correct.

06:30 **Wouldn't you argue that it is politically motivated?**

I think it is.

The concept of the Battle for Australia is politically motivated and therefore it is not accurately describing what took place. What I'm trying to ascertain from you is that you have a situation where the Japanese probably had no serious

07:00 **intention of invasion of Australia because simply their lack of resources and Australia being a secondary theatre to that of Burma, and the central Pacific area. I'm just curious.**

What you say is correct. I

07:30 think the present day view has become the Battle for Australia almost on hindsight. You don't want to forget though that the Japanese and the Germans, but the Japanese in particular, were very active around the East Coast of Australia, from Bass Strait right around to the top. There was a total of something over 100 ships sunk by Japanese,

08:00 certainly Japanese and Germans because a lot down in Bass Strait were sunk by the Germans with submarines, torpedoes and submarines. The sinking of the Centaur, of course that made history because it was a hospital ship. The submarine attack on Sydney Harbour. Now the

08:30 Japs in their right mind would realise that they could never capture Sydney just by sending in three or four little submarines but tremendous nuisance value. If they'd hit their mark it would have been worse but they didn't hit their mark. They only sunk the [HMAS] Kuttabul and about 30 people, which cost

them four midget submarines, and their crews.

09:00 They were certainly doing a lot of reconnaissance work around the coast, there's now doubt about that. You go further north to the Coral Sea Battle. If they hadn't broken the code…do you know the story of the codes?

The ultra code-breaking system?

It was the 1 Wireless unit, number 1 Wireless Unit,

09:30 an RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force] unit, which was stationed in the Northern Territory. They broke the Japanese Naval Code before the Coral Sea Battle and cutting a long story short, Macarthur was so impressed on the work of 1 Wireless Unit

10:00 that when he was planning to attack the Philippines, he requested the Australian Government, could he have the 1 Wireless Unit with him to help on their intelligence.

Did that actually take place?

That actually took place.

In the Philippines?

As far as I'm aware

10:30 that is the only Australian unit, full unit, wasn't a very big one either, but full unit to go into the Philippines, Australian unit.

How big was this unit, 1 Wireless?

I really don't know but I wouldn't expect it to be more than probably 50 people.

Would that be considered a section in military terms?

No because a section implies

11:00 that it is part of another group you see, whereas this was a whole unit on its own. It wasn't a section of a unit. It was the whole unit.

Are you saying that the terminology actually changes instead of platoon, company, section, battalion?

You take a section, an infantry section is part of a platoon and a platoon is part of a company, and a company is part of a battalion.

So this was outside that terminology?

Well, it is yes

11:30 because this was a unit totally in its own right, nobody else. In the artillery we talk about troops of guns, which is four guns to a troop, part of a battery, part of a regiment. In some regiments, mainly from administration, they'll talk about a unit

12:00 or a section of a troop, A Section or B Section of a troop, just to identify number one gun and number two gun as distinct from number three gun and number four gun. That can be of convenience in some fire planning. So in the case of this air force unit, it was a whole unit within itself. I don't know the

12:30 makeup of it but it was a whole unit within itself.

Getting back to the point that you were making about a series of skirmish actions taking place on the Eastern Seaboard of Australia, clearly it is more indicative of a naval engagement rather than a battle for Australia? Like the Battle of Britain for instance, which was predominantly an air engagement.

That was an air engagement. Well,

13:00 the Japs certainly didn't try an air engagement on Australia and obviously the reason was their lines of communication were far too great. If they had been able to get into Burma earlier perhaps they might have been able to fly into Australia. I don't know. A naval engagement,

13:30 you'd have to turn around and say, "Well what can they do?" To be successful a naval engagement would have to be of such intensity that either one city gives in or some area gives in and enables them to land a large force. You can't see that happening but nuisance

14:00 value, a different matter. This is where, in today's climate anyway, they've got to be careful on security. Even the little Jap subs that came in, if they had been able to land one or two and put a couple of sticks of gelignite under Sydney Harbour Bridge, it would have been a nuisance value but it wouldn't have caused them to win the war. It would be nuisance value.

Harassment?

That's right, yes.

14:30 On the other hand, you couldn't walk away from the problem. There is a chance of them landing and there was no doubt about that.

When you say landing, hypothetically if they did take Port Moresby by land…?

Yes if they took Port Moresby then you see Port Moresby would have been a good base for them to fly out of.

Do you think

15:00 **it's quite possible that the Japanese could spare such units, that the Kokoda engagement was no more than three battalions of troops, two on one side and one on the other, the 39th, that under the circumstances they could have spared any further troop deployments?**

I think the nature of the Japanese as such

15:30 was that they weren't concerned about numbers in so far as if they lost 1,000 people they weren't worried about it. There were more to come. There were plenty. Life didn't mean as much to them as it does to the Australian people and they brought hundreds down through Burma on pushbikes. I'm afraid we didn't do that sort of thing.

16:00 From my knowledge of overall strategy and tactics, I could certainly see them landing from a nuisance value point of view.

Small unit operations?

Yes, I could have seen that but how far they'd get is another matter. Here again, it was the lines of communication. If for instance they'd gone

16:30 into Jurien Bay in Western Australia and established themselves there, then it wouldn't have been difficult for them to go to one or two of the other towns out, Moora, not that Moora is a very big place but some of the other places, take those easily, and build themselves up a base. But you then ask the question, "The Australian Army is not going to allow that to happen?" They'd be onto them like a ton of bricks.

17:00 I think the logistical side sort of governed it but for nuisance value, yes. The Japanese could have.

Do you think strategically Australia was really a backwater for the Japanese?

Well no, because I think the Japs, in my understanding and this goes pre-war really, the Japs were very, very keen to control

17:30 what is known as the South West Pacific area. They started off after World War I. They started off in 1933 or '32, in Manchuria when they took Manchuria. That was their first step. They were fed up. They knew they couldn't do anything else going south so they went into Manchuria to form a large base there

18:00 and then worked out. This is precisely what happened. They worked out, took over Burma, Malaya, so they had control of all that large area.

Were you one to subscribe to the myths of the Japanese soldier initially when you see the collapse of the allied resistance in Malaya and Singapore?

18:30 **What was your view of the Japanese at that point?**

I think at the time I didn't think about it very greatly. On reflection it becomes a different matter.

You weren't stunned at the fall

19:00 **of Singapore?**

I think most and they'd be ignorant if they didn't admit it, that they were stunned when Singapore fell, and what's more, stunned more because of bad planning.

Were they also stunned that you had an Asian power for the first time since the Battle of Port Arthur in 1905 where

19:30 **an Asian power has effectively on its own terms challenged a Western military prowess and defeated it? Did that come into the picture?**

It probably did yes. I don't specifically recall but I would have said it probably did. Here's the Japs and they've been able to achieve this by literally brute force and numbers, and that's it. Life was made easier for

20:00 them because of the defective planning or what turned out to be, the defective planning of Singapore. I

mean you had 9.2 guns there and they couldn't traverse 360 degrees. I mean in a small place like that! They just never expected the Japs to come down through Burma. Now, OK,

20:30 our guns here in Sydney, we had 9.2s. They could traverse 360 degrees but there'd be quite large blanks where they wouldn't be able to shoot depending on the range but in Singapore they just couldn't traverse. That applied to a lot of fixed artillery because they were in concrete emplacements.

21:00 The concrete emplacement went there to there. No I wouldn't like to really comment on that any more. I think that the overall effect of the Japanese, yes, was very stunning. There's no doubt about that.

How did you see the Japanese soldier?

I never had anything to do with them.

As far as propaganda was concerned and the public sphere?

21:30 The Japanese soldier was…what's the word? He lived for the Emperor and he died for the Emperor. If he was taken as a prisoner of war, he was the scum of the earth you might say. They did not support a prisoner of war whatever.

It is a very interest point that you have raised here

22:00 **that he lives and dies for the Emperor.**

That's right.

You also have contrastingly amongst the British Empire, "King and Country". They died for King and Country.

Ah yes but you see, you take the number of Kamikaze pilots. Now they directly, you might say, died because of the Emperor. That's what they

22:30 thought of the Emperor. We're prepared to die for him like this, commit suicide. A different thing getting out into the battlefield and soldiering on using artillery and all that sort of thing. These people, they were going to get glory out of committing suicide and that's what they did, committed suicide. That was the nature of them and it lines up with their nature that it was a shame on the individual

23:00 to become a prisoner of war, an absolute shame. The culture was totally different.

Being an officer in Australia in the AIF, when did you start to

23:30 **feel that the Japanese threat had subsided?**

I think you could say it goes back to certainly 1944, if not earlier because we could see that once they'd overcome

24:00 some fairly heavy pockets of resistance in New Guinea, once they were taken then it was a mopping up operation really. From the Australian point of view the Japs that were left behind or had been left behind in small pockets here and there, they were just nuisance value things. They couldn't achieve anything. They did take

24:30 time from the point of view that the Australians had to spend time on them rather than do something else. I would have said 1944. I say probably you were looking at the middle of '44.

25:00 **Were you also keen to partake in combat being in the AIF in a wartime situation, as a lot of soldiers did?**

Yes a lot did. I think I was probably, "If I'm sent, I'm sent." If I wasn't sent, I wasn't sent.

25:30 Was I keen to go overseas? Well I probably was as a young bloke at the time. I probably didn't think about it very much.

You married your wife in 1949. Were you seeing your wife or a girlfriend during the war?

No.

So you had no link in that sense to any…?

26:00 No link to any girl whatsoever. Obviously there were a few girls…in Sydney there were a couple of girls I used to take out.

On dates?

Oh yes, or whatever. Call it what you like. There was no fixed understanding or anything like that.

26:30 You could always say I could have married either of them and there was a very nice girl I met up in Brisbane. I was flying through Brisbane once and she lived in Western Australia, and we got on famously for a number of years, properly that is. There was no commitment to each other.

27:00 **Did you feel any pressure to go overseas? I know that there was some pressure amongst people that there should be more chaps at the front and that sort of thing.**

No, some people, “Yes, must go overseas.”

27:30 Other people would say, “Why don’t you go overseas?” It wasn’t a question of why didn’t you go overseas. You went where the army sent you. It was as simple as that.

Your brother was a POW in the 8th Division I take it?

Yes.

So was he captured in Singapore?

He was captured in Singapore.

Did he survive?

Yes, he did.

That’s good news. Did you know that he was alive during the war?

28:00 It was about 12 months before we got firm advice that he was alive, about 12 months.

Tell us more about how you found that out.

It was found out through Red Cross and Dad kept his ear to the ground very closely, being a senior bloke,

28:30 and had met a few people, one or two who had escaped, who had seen him up to the time of being captured but it was about 12 months before we actually got official advice that he was safe. From a POW point of view, that was only the beginning of it. It was what happened after they were taken that you didn’t hear much. There

29:00 a couple of times they were able to send cards and we were able to send a card but they were just a postcard and just sort of “Yes or No” answers on it.

How was this facilitated?

It was all done through the International Red Cross but the Japs didn’t adhere to International Red Cross procedures altogether, far from it. Otherwise they wouldn’t have done what they did,

29:30 the way they treated them.

Your brother was of course older than you…

No, he was a twin.

He was a twin! Oh, sorry, my apologies.

He was the eldest twin I might add.

By about a minute?

No about ten minutes.

Which unit was he in?

He was in an ordinance field workshop.

He took after your father.

30:00 Yes that’s right. He was an engineer. At that time he was not a university qualified engineer but he had done sufficient work on radar in the army. There was a special radar school, the School of Radio Physics, which qualified him sufficiently for the job that he was doing.

Your father,

30:30 **what was he doing at this period in the war? Obviously still ordinance, I believe?**

He was ordinance up until the 1st of December 1942 when the Ordinance Mechanical Engineer branch of the Ordinance Corps was separated out to be made the Corps of Australian and Electrical Engineers. They took out the mechanical engineering branch

31:00 from the Ordinance Corps and reformed it as another corps, which was sensible because they were totally two different things really.

Your father formed that nucleus?

Yes he was one of the nucleuses.

He actually spearheaded that command structure?

He would have in conjunction with others. No one person does, but he would have been in on it, yes.

Did he actually go overseas at all?

31:30 No he didn't actually. I think mainly he was marginally too old. That happens at times.

He would have been in his fifties or sixties?

Who?

Your father?

Oh no, he's dead long ago.

No, I mean during the war.

Oh during the war. In 1942

32:00 he'd have been 50.

And what rank was he at this stage?

Full colonel.

Full colonel, OK. Now I suppose having your brother lost as a POW must have been quite traumatic for you and your family.

Oh yes.

Tell us more about more about how your mother, your father and you reacted to this.

Dad was extremely upset about it partly because

32:30 he was involved in my brother going there. From a corps point of view, an Ordinance Mechanical Engineering point of view, Dad was the senior one involved at the time and he of course approved all people that went up. He was virtually responsible for sending him. The Brits wanted him and he knew the British bloke over there

33:00 and so I think he felt that he was to blame when in fact he really wasn't but the people up there tried to get him out, but the ship was sunk, as I mentioned. So he felt it very strongly and so did my mother but she was lucky, insofar as

33:30 she had a sister living with her, who had lived with us all her life. An aunt lived with us and they kept each other company because I was in Western Australia.

How did that impact on you? Under those circumstances being a father he would obviously be quite reluctant to see you leave overseas. Did he place

34:00 **any pressure on you?**

No, none at all. He didn't interfere. He helped me on one or two occasions.

What do you mean helped you?

I wanted to get out of the regiment and go to Sydney. I didn't want to go to Sydney. I wanted to go to another regiment and he was able to find a hole for me.

34:30 So that's how I got there. It so happened that the regiment in Western Australia in '43 was sort of earmarked to be disbanded anyway and in fact about three months after I left the regiment, it was disbanded. People were sent where they were told to go, whereas I volunteered. I applied to go to another unit

35:00 and was happy with my choice.

Was your father a well known man in the AIF?

Oh yes, he was well known.

World War II is largely attributed

35:30 **in terms of military incompetence, Australians tend to look at the British as being at the forefront of that. They are probably not wrong at looking at that either but what about the Australian command structure? How did you view Blamey, Gordon Bennett, and all sorts of other chaps that were there?**

36:00 The thing is it is a bit of an unfair question, for this reason. As a 22 year old, 23 year old, I had no contact with those sorts of people. That's the first thing. I had met a number of those people, some of them pre-war,

36:30 through my father. General Stanke is one in particular, General Stanke but a number of the others…I

didn't know Laverack, nor Blamey. I hadn't met them but a lot of the others coming down the line. Red Robbie [Lieutenant-General Sir Horace Robertson] I'd met a number of times and a

37:00 very junior officer only sees a very small spectrum of the work that they do, and the political implications, and they're very extensive, particularly when you get to the Blamey level, Lavarack, Herring, Stan Savage, all those people. The political side is very involved, even

37:30 in those days and it is more so now. It's not a very fair question to be honest with you. In hindsight I've read Savage's book and a couple of the other's, they are very interesting. This political side is brought out in them. They are the sorts of books that you need to really read. Even Cutler's book, I found Cutler's book very interesting. He was a VC winner.

38:00 There's virtually only a page or a chapter put to his exploits in gaining a VC and his other life. A lot of it is political and it is well worth reading.

Do you think it is political because of the actual debacles that took place?

No, it was the type of individual that he was. He was literally only a captain but

38:30 after the war, he became Governor of New South Wales and the political side that he saw is really quite interesting. In this book they bring out quite a lot of the political stuff that happened during the war. It was a means of bringing it out to be honest, as I see it.

Blamey is certainly a very unique example of

39:00 **controversy in the Australian Armed Forces.**

Absolutely, but he was before the war, even before the war.

I didn't know what he was like before the war.

Well he'd been in the 1st AIF and he'd been apparently a fairly competent person, and he was appointed Commissioner of Police,

39:30 the Victorian Commissioner of Police. I don't know the ins and outs of it but he misbehaved essentially and he was turfed out of the police. Nevertheless a few years later when they formed the AIF, he was selected to be he commander.

You feel that is a political appointment?

Well it seemed

40:00 rather strange that it should happen whether it was political or not. It was political from the point of view that there was a very strong element supporting the appointment of a Citizen Military Force man into the top job. The regular army wanted a regular army officer and this became a very strong political theme.

40:30 There were only a couple of regular Army generals that had serious commands. Laverack was one. Sturdy was another. Bennett was a CMF man. Herring was a CMF man. Tubby Allen was a CMF man.

41:00 Stanke was a regular but he had Queensland command. He didn't go overseas and he would have been a bit older anyway. So there was a lot of rivalry in the appointments of senior people,

41:30 the regulars versus the CMF.

Tape 7

00:34 **There is another thing I'm interested in asking you about. The pressure with the enlistment and so forth, the white feathers that were used in World War I, did you come across any instances of colleagues who may have experienced that?**

No. Not at all.

Did you hear about it?

No, not that I recall.

01:00 No I mean obviously in some circles it may have happened but the answer is no. I know of no occasion.

Your posting with the Americans is one that is certainly of interest. Can you elaborate more about how you became involved in that?

Jumping the story, we

01:30 formed this battery and took it up to Darwin, 4 Battery and that was disposed of or sent back, and I

ended up in Sydney, and I was looking for a job. I went to barracks and talked one or two of the officers I knew, and one day a chap said, “Oh, I’ve got a job for you!” I said, “Thank you very much. Where is it?”

02:00 He said, “Oh it’s with the Americans. You’ll have to go to Melbourne to be interviewed.” He made an appointment and I went down to Melbourne, and I interviewed for this job, which was handled by an Australian officer in a liaison thing. He said, “Well, the job is Air Courier Liaison Officer with the American Army.” The next day he rang me up and he said, “You’ve got the job.”

02:30 So I then started on this Air Courier job and the Air Courier job was a very unique service at the time that I was flying in it. Basically it was a courier service run on behalf of the American Army by Australian National Airways. It was a private company,

03:00 who had certain aircraft, Dakota Aircraft under lease, piloted by an ANA captain, co-piloted by an RAAF officer pilot with a sergeant, usually a sergeant wireless operator, and an army courier officer or an American officer

03:30 as a courier officer. It was just the four of us on the plane. The extent of the service was basically from Hollandia up to Morotai, across to Manila back to Morotai, down to Hollandia, down to Finschhafen, Finschhafen down to Brisbane through Townsville and then back again and subsidiary

04:00 runs, which were done still under the same service but slightly different aircraft. They were RAAF planes, RAAF planes, RAAF pilot, RAAF co-pilot and the courier officer would go on those, and we’d do runs from Finschhafen to Madang, Iwatebu, Wewak, across to Lae and back again, down to Buin,

04:30 down to Milne Bay, across to Jacquinot Bay, Torokina, and then back again. There were a lot of small flights.

Did you get a chance to stay in those places?

We’d stayed overnight in a few of the places, some purposefully per the roster, one or two in the case of an accident or minor accident. Madang, I

05:00 spent a couple of nights there because they had wheel problems and because we were seconded to the American Army, we were under the American Army orders all the time, payed by the Australian Army but under American orders for duty, for discipline, accommodation, and all that sort of thing. We were just

05:30 out of the Australian Army for the time. The ANA pilots were absolutely top pilots. They were very, very good. You couldn’t pick one above the other they were equally so good. Personalities, they varied a little bit. I palled up with one in particular, who was a very nice bloke. You had to put him on a leash after he’d been flying for a while.

06:00 He enjoyed his drink but very, very strict. No drinking before flying. He was a very nice bloke. The places that we went to, we’d only drop in for an hour. Some of the flights, Brisbane to Townsville, was four hours, Townsville to Finschhafen, five hours. That’s a long time.

06:30 **What was Finschhafen like?**

Finschhafen was beautiful. Langemak Bay was the bay that they were on and the Americans had built a very nice club, officer’s club sort of thing. The Americans operate in a different way to what the Australian Army does in that sort of a situation. Usually each Australian unit would have its own kitchen and that sort of thing but in this area the Americans formed

07:00 a club. Instead of each unit having to provide an officer’s mess, they used this club and we were members of the club. We had to pay for our meals. In the Australian Army you didn’t pay for your meals. It was all provided but we, as visitors to the Americans, had to pay so much per diem. The Americans were allowed that in their pay. If they were travelling were allowed a per diem pay.

07:30 Finschhafen was a pretty place. The types of aircraft were all Dakotas, the military version of them, the C47, the C49. One had the Pratt and Whitby Wasp engine and the other had the Wright Cyclone engine. The C50 series, a bit unusual, had the

08:00 cargo door on the starboard side instead of on the port side, or some of them did anyway. They’d be taken over from the Dutch and the aircraft were very noisy. They weren’t lined. As that photo shows, they were unlined aircraft. The cockpit was obviously lined and had heating in it.

08:30 Out the back there was no heating at all. You just had to carry your own heat and they didn’t have oxygen. They had oxygen for the crew but not for the courier officer. In New Guinea some of the mountains are charted at 14,000 feet, if not more and the pilots always took

09:00 a safety limit, and they would fly at 16 to 18,000 feet, particularly in summer weather where they got heavy clouds, and down drafts. So the actual flying conditions were quite severe in a way. ANA provided a big food hamper, so we

09:30 used to feed off that. This one particular pilot that I was friendly with had one of these Berko jugs. You know those electric Berko jugs? He had it converted to 24 volts or he bought it at 24 volts. I don’t know

which. Because that was the power on the aircraft batteries, so we had hot meals.

10:00 The main thing on the service was the reliability of it, which is why ANA were asked to fly it actually, because ANA pilots were used to flying commercial flights, which were all timetabled and you had to fly by that, and they were used to that sort of a regime. They were absolutely ideal

10:30 for flying these aircraft, very reliable. In the three and a half years that they operated on two routes, I only flew on one particular route but on two routes out of Australia, they had an average of three planes in the air at any one time, and in three and a half years they only had

11:00 two crashes. One was up in Higginsfield. A plane went into the ground and everybody was killed. That was in May 1945. The remains of that aircraft are still there at Higginsfield. The other crash was at Tacloban, Leyte Gulf just after the war had ended, very stormy tropical

11:30 cyclone and the pilot made a run at the strip three times, and on the third time he ended up in Leyte Gulf, in the drink. The only survivor happened to be the courier officer, who was an American. They wouldn't allow Australians into Manila. We had to offload at Morotai and

12:00 hand over to an American officer. The American officer was lucky to survive that one and it was his first flight.

Why were Australians not allowed into Manila?

There was an edict that Macarthur in the first place, wouldn't allow anybody into the Philippines other than Americans. It was his show.

12:30 That was it, with the one exception, that 1 Wireless Unit of the RAAF. He asked the Australian Government for permission to take that in with him when he went. That's the only full unit that I know that went there but we weren't allowed to go there. There were no Australian camp facilities, not that we needed them really but that was the edict, so we had to terminate at Morotai.

13:00 Going up the northern coast of New Guinea, we'd fly low at Wewak in particular and drop newspapers to the troops in the area. We could see them and we would throw out bundles of newspapers. Near the hospital at Wewak, we'd come down to 50 feet and

13:30 open the cargo door, and push out these great big panniers of ice cream. Peter's Ice Cream had these great big canvas panniers. Things like this and the wireless operator and myself would go down the back of the plane, and undo the door, then hang on, and give a signal to the pilot, he'd bank the plane a little bit, out goes the pannier onto the ground, free fall, no parachute!

14:00 Then back on track and we didn't have any mishaps or anything. The hospital people just loved them for it, quite an exercise.

You said you went to Hollandia as well?

Hollandia, that strip was a nice strip. It was called Sentanni strip. It is now called Kota Bharu. Hollandia is now I think called Kota Bharu.

14:30 The campsite was on the river there. In fact, the hut that I had for a while was actually over the water, stilts in the water, underneath me went water, which was nice. For some reason I thought I had some photos of it but I can't find them. It was a pleasant place because there was a big hill between Sentanni strip and the ocean, I can't think of the name

15:00 of it now, which is where Macarthur's headquarters were because he moved from Hollandia to the Philippines.

Could you see evidence of the battles that had taken place around Hollandia?

Oh, in the scrub of course. The scrub there grows pretty quickly. I didn't see very much in the way of buildings damaged, one or two, but I didn't see a great deal.

15:30 In the scrub a shell hits a tree and it explodes, well the tree gets burnt down but they grow pretty quickly up there. I didn't see a great deal of that sort of thing.

What kind of activity was taking place in Hollandia?

It was just one of their major bases, a Yank base for their strike up to the Philippines

16:00 because their other big base was…where they had a big airfield out east of the Philippines. Guam I think it was. They had several big bases but Hollandia was the best one from their logistics point of view.

You went to Torokina?

Yes, I

16:30 only dropped into Torokina. It's on Bougainville. I went there about half a dozen times but I only spent

half an hour or an hour. I wasn't able to get around. That was the disadvantage of the trip. You touch down, handed over your despatches, refuelled the aircraft and were on your way.

17:00 It was a pretty expensive letter run, you might say but it was interesting to see these places. I think that pretty well sums the type of operation. There was only 12 Australian officers on it and we weren't

17:30 on duty all the time by any means. We used to have to kill time two or three days. You'd do a bit of ground duty and that sort of thing, and have a couple of days off but the flying was…in the first three months I did over 300 hours, which was as much as the pilots were allowed to do but we didn't have the comfort of the pilot. You sit on mailbags and go to sleep on that, take your own blankets,

18:00 wrap yourself up. It was frightfully cold sometimes. I think that about sums it up pretty well.

Is Jacquinot Bay in Rabaul?

Yes Jacquinot Bay is just down from Rabaul. There again, I think I only went in there twice and we had to keep detailed

18:30 flight logs, when we landed, and when we took off, if there was any mishap on the route, as happened on a couple of occasions. On one occasion a bloke lost a cover of his oil tanks. It seemed strange but those small things, a couple of flat wheels on landing, those types of things.

19:00 It was a unique service and I think that's the main thing about it.

How long did you actually spend doing that service?

I did it for nine months, not quite nine months, six months but the first three months was the most extensive period because they cut out some of it and I

19:30 then started doing flying from Brisbane down to Melbourne, and back. Of course you'd do that in a day.

You were at Biak as well?

Biak, yes.

Tell us about Biak.

The only thing I can remember of Biak was we came in to land a couple of times and the war had just finished, and they had lined up on the tarmac

20:00 a whole lot of aircraft. Things we'd not seen of, fighter aircraft such as the Black Widow. We hadn't seen those in Australia and a lot of aircraft had been marshalled together, and of course later on they were all going to be dumped at sea. No doubt some of them went home but Biak was just a passing phase.

20:30 Morotai I stayed overnight a couple of times.

I understand that you used to take top secret things. How would that be guarded?

I was armed. I was the only member of the crew that was armed. I was armed with top secret stuff. If we had anything

21:00 very top secret or something that had to be protected at all costs, it would have a magnesium bomb attached to it and the instructions were that if the plane got into any trouble flying or crash landed or anything like that, then we were to

21:30 ignite the magnesium and that would burn the contents of the bag. We had to inform the pilot when we got onboard that we had that bag with the magnesium bomb on it. I remember one occasion when I had it. I only had it twice. I told the pilot what I had and he said, "What's that?" He hadn't the faintest idea that

22:00 these things happened. I just said to him, "It's there. If you get into trouble you let me know and I'll get rid of the bag." That was the main purpose of the courier service in the very first instance, was to get top secret stuff out and not rely on normal…they wanted a

22:30 designated plane to do it, put it that way. ANA were so reliable in their normal service that they were able to do it and I gave them full marks.

Can you describe was a magnesium bomb you were referring to?

It was just a container obviously fitted with magnesium and

23:00 some sort of a electronic ignition, obviously something that you just pulled. I never had to use one. I carried one occasionally, only twice but it would have had a self-igniting thing. In other words, pull it like an old cracker. It would be some ignition system.

23:30 The reason for using magnesium was that it burns very quickly and leaves very little ash. It doesn't explode like if you used something like any cordite substance. It doesn't explode as such.

What about illicit activities? Was there any sort of dealings in that regard?

24:00 Which?

Illicit activities like taking alcohol?

The answer to your question is "Yes". There was quite a bit of it going on from time to time, which is regrettable. I hadn't realised that it was as bad as it was when one day, one of the planes came into Brisbane and

24:30 was parked, and I got out of the aircraft, and the aircraft was wheeled around to another hangar. It turned out that Customs were checking, doing a thorough check of the aircraft for illicit stuff. The only

25:00 thing I brought into Australia, I used to bring in paw paws. Near the Salvation Army hut at Finschhafen there was a couple of nice paw paw trees and I had the sergeant at the mess there of the Salvation Army, he would collect a bag for me, a bag about this high, I'd pick them up from him, and take them down to Brisbane, and that wasn't illicit anyway!

25:30 But yes, there was a bit of that went on. You see you could buy whisky and gin in Brisbane through an officer's mess for about five shillings a bottle and the Yanks would give you five dollars or more.

So what about your experience with the Americans in this particular instance?

26:00 I didn't do any of this illicit stuff.

No, outside the illicit stuff, just generically speaking your encounters with the Americans both in Australia and in your job as a courier. Was that largely positive?

Really it was just a positive thing. The Yanks wanted a good reliable flying service.

26:30 That was the first thing. Why did they want it? Because they wanted to carry urgent secret mail from point "A" to point "B" reliably. Why they wanted Australian Army people on it, I'm not quite sure but they had an Australian pilot and an Australian RAAF co-pilot, and wireless operator.

27:00 I'm not quite sure why they wanted Australians but my guess is that it became an all-Australian crew and may have been more helpful in the earlier days of setting up the service, rather than when I was doing it. We only had two American officers doing it when I was flying. It was nearly always an Australian.

27:30 **With your sorties in Darwin and Sydney, and Townsville for that matter, and Brisbane, you would have come across American service men who were on respite in Australia. Tell us more about them.**

From the various landing fields I went to and even in

28:00 Brisbane where I lived for a while. I lived in the American camp. Our flying timetable was such that there was virtually no time to do anything else. In Brisbane occasionally yes. You might have a day off but as a rule, in all these other places, even if you stayed overnight, RON [remain overnight]

28:30 as they used to call it, you didn't come up against the American troops at all. I had one experience at Finschhafen where I had to take a despatch to a Negro battalion and they wouldn't let me drive my vehicle in, which was a US Army

29:00 vehicle. I had a permit to drive those vehicles. I had to walk and I had to walk about 100 yards through this camp to the orderly room. I looked to the left and looked to the right, and here are these six foot six Negroes, huge blokes! Here's me like this! Small, thin anyway, white faced

29:30 Australian officer. I felt very uncomfortable. I knew that nothing would really happen but I just felt uncomfortable walking in that unit.

Were they looking at you?

Oh yes, well I stood out so clearly. I mean here's an Australian Army officer. I was in the summer uniform, jungle greens type of thing, with a gun on the side,

30:00 carrying this bag and I felt very self-conscious anyway, walking down, and I couldn't get out quick enough! In the officer's club, that was manned by a Chinese labour battalion, an American-Chinese labour battalion

30:30 and they just acted as waiters and cooks, served in the bar.

Like a service corps sort of thing?

Yes that's right, but it was the way the Yanks, as I mentioned earlier, they built this club rather than have a whole lot of other units and you had to be a member of it. I got a membership ticket for that but

31:00 they were all right. A lot has been said about the American food. In my view they had good raw

materials but spoilt it in their cooking. I mean they had a lot of chicken and stuff like that but by the time you got to it, it was all hard. They were not very adaptable. For instance I used to leave Finschhafen at probably six in the morning to catch an early plane out.

31:30 I'd go to the local cookhouse for a meal for breakfast and all they could offer you was pancakes. Well, usually if you went to an Australian cookhouse, particularly at a reasonable base, you'd probably pick up a couple of eggs or some sausages or something like that but no, it was pancakes, which is not very filling on a plane trip! But they were quite all right to work with.

32:00 It was an experience. So any other points on that?

When you were at Madang, did you socialise? You said you stayed a few nights because of mechanical trouble.

Yes, this was one occasion where I didn't know what to do. I'm not quite

32:30 sure what the pilots did actually but I went up to the chap in charge of the airfield, said who I was and he knew because the plane had come in. I said, "Is there any army unit close at hand? If there is I'll go there and see what I can get" because I knew there was no Yankee unit there. So he said, "Oh yes, through the bushes." I walked about 50 yards

33:00 and found a chap sitting in a tent. I introduced myself and said who I was, and why I was etc. I said, "I'm looking for somewhere where I can put a head for the night." He said, "Oh come right in!" So he sheltered me and we ended the night drinking about half a bottle of whisky! It was a very pleasant way to spend the night actually. But you could do that and that was the atmosphere

33:30 at most Australian camps. If you had somebody come along like that, you know you'd go out of your way to fix him but the Americans were a bit different in their styling.

Tell us where you were when the actual war ended, VJ [Victory over Japan] Day.

The 3rd of September, where was I? I'd have to check. I think I was in Finschhafen

34:00 but I was certainly down a couple of days later when they had a Peace March in Brisbane because when I was in Brisbane, on the short trips when I just came down for a night, I used to stay at the officer's club, which was the Daniel Hotel. It was taken over as an officer's club

34:30 and I remember on this day that in the afternoon I went out to the balcony, and here's this parade of troops. You know it was a Peace Parade of some sort, of troops and I didn't know anybody in Brisbane at all. Anyway, I ended up by talking to a girl beside

35:00 me, who was stand there, also a bit nonplussed, so I introduced myself. She was an officer in the Medical Corps. It turned out she was an officer in the Medical Corps and was in charge of the Blood and Serum Bank in Brisbane, a professional person, so we palled up, and

35:30 spent the afternoon there, and I saw her a couple of times. When I was in Brisbane I'd give her a ring. We'd go and have a bite together. She came from Western Australia but heaven knows what's happened to her now.

Throughout your air-courier service in the island, did you get a chance to meet the local population?

No, because you see

36:00 at all of them, Finschhafen was the only one where I had any length of time. I could have had a week between flights sometimes and the local population were virtually non-existent. As I say, there was a Chinese labour battalion. There was another battalion of labourers of some sort that used to clean out your sleeping quarters and that sort of thing. All the other

36:30 places other than Morotai, where I stayed overnight once or twice, you're in service encampments all the time. I remember at Morotai I went out to the Casualty Clearing Station or something and met a couple of friends out there, and sat and watched a film of Blamey signing the surrender document but

37:00 no. I didn't get to meet the locals at all.

Were you relieved when the war ended? Were you keen to get back to Australia?

I suppose yes. When the courier service wound up and I came down to Melbourne, I then did a short spell, nine months, 12 months,

37:30 at Headquarters Southern Command as a staff officer before I got my discharge, and that was done partly because I didn't have enough…when you were demobilised, you had a scorecard, and you got so many points, and if you had been in the service for so long etcetera, you had so many points. When I came down I didn't have enough points to get discharged immediately.

38:00 I had to wait a while and that also gave me time to think as to whether I would stay in the army or go

back to civvy life. I ended up by going back to civvy life and I admit that when I got my discharge and got home, I felt rather blown out. Had I done the right thing or what? I was in two minds.

38:30 That's all past history.

You were discharged in…?

In November 1946.

Tape 8

00:45 **Your time around Geraldton and Moora, you were there for about 12 months?**

No, it wouldn't have been as long as that, no.

01:00 I myself no because you see we didn't arrive until the end of April '42 and I left in June '43, so that's only just the 12 months in Western Australia and we were at various other places. One place I didn't mention is that we went to a place called Point Walter in Perth, which is on the Swan River,

01:30 to learn amphibious training whereby we used what they call FBEs, folding boat equipment, which comprised of two essential parts you might say. One was a true folding boat, which would carry 15, 20 odd people with their gear. The other was a pontoon type of folding boat, which had a decking on it

02:00 and by lashing them together we could transport vehicles. I've got photos of that. You put about three or four of them together as the decking and put a gun and its tractor on the one thing, and then tow it with a motorboat, some launch of some

02:30 sort to tow it. It had a ramp which could be put on the side so as to get the vehicles onto the beach. That was quite an interesting place and that was a suburb. We were in a small campsite there probably only a week or so. We did move around a little bit, certainly not the 12 months in Geraldton because we went to a place like

03:00 Chidlows at one time. We were there for about at least three months. We moved around. I didn't mention those. They were staging camps, well not staging camps. They were training camps. The concept was that they wanted to have troops in Western Australia. They wanted them trained. That's what it amounted to and it was no good just putting them all in one place. We had to move around, get experience from different land

03:30 points of view. If the occasion had arisen and they had a landing, they had troops available that knew the land.

We have spoken a bit about relating to the other men. How did you relate to the other officers?

Pretty well.

04:00 I mentioned hindsight. In hindsight would you do the same thing as I did? I doubt it. I have to acknowledge that at the time that I joined I was far too immature from a training point of view. I'd come up in a fairly strict…well I don't mean strict upbringing but the cadet training that I had, I was relying on

04:30 that all the time, which in retrospect was not sufficient really. I'd have to agree with that comment but I think that I reasonably held my own with the other officers. I didn't make any direct enemies. They had an odd attitude. I'll give you a small instance. I had applied for this transfer and had got it,

05:00 and of course the official letter went down into the battery. At the time I was doing an MT [Motor Transport] training course learning to drive Bren gun [light machine gun] carriers, the tracked Bren gun carrier and the BC [Battery Commander] came up to me and he said, "I see you're being reposted. No need for you to go to the MT course."

05:30 I said, "Steady, why not?" "Oh you won't want them where you're going." That was his attitude you see. He hadn't the faintest idea what…well he may have had a bit of an idea that 3.7s didn't need tracked vehicles but to deprive even a young officer as I was, the chance of qualifying for one that could be useful later on, obviously didn't enter his head. That was

06:00 the sort of attitude that some of those blokes took. I couldn't do anything more. I couldn't go on the course once he…I did the course for about two days. Having done that I was then pulled off it but that was the attitude of some of those people.

Did you ever find it difficult taking orders from superior officers?

No, I'd been brought up in a school and at this time I had a very severe

06:30 CO, commanding officer, who made it very clear to all officers, not just me but to all officers, if a meeting is called for five o'clock you will all be sitting in you chairs at five to five, not five o'clock, five to five. The meeting starts at five. He was very tough on that and in fact on one occasion

07:00 I was running to a meeting, and I was running marginally late, and I fell into a slit trench, unmarked, dark night, and I fell into the trench, and twisted my ankle. I eventually hobbled in and of course got the rounds of the kitchen from the CO. He was very impolite and when I went to go to bed I couldn't take my boot off. My ankle had swollen so badly.

07:30 That's the sort of thing. He didn't know about that later but that was his attitude. He ended up later knighted and the Chief Justice of Tasmania! I might add with our regiment, when that was wound up, he went to another regiment but he didn't leave Australia. I don't know

08:00 whether other people didn't like him or not. I got on with him but I didn't like him really. It was just one of those occasions that happens, partly the reason why I asked for a transfer. I found him a bit too hard.

Did you make any close friends with any of the blokes?

08:30 I made one or two, to be honest with you, not many. That's my nature. I've been a very quite, shy individual and that's been one of my basic problems. My brother was much more outgoing. I have been very reserved and a lot of it gets down to lack of confidence.

09:00 That's human nature but there was one or two. One in particular I liked very much and we kept in touch, and he ended up in Darwin when I did. He was sent up there. He didn't ask to go there and I found out he was there, so he was at the fort. I rang Laurie up and I said, "I'm up here. I'm coming up to see you." So I went up to Emery Point where the big 9.2s were

09:30 and met him, and we kept in touch, and later on when I was coming south, I rang him up and I said, "I'm going south." He said, "That's good because I'd like you to take this present down to my fiancé." So I took this present down to his fiancé, who lived in Sydney. She was a very nice girl and she

10:00 invited me out to her parent's house, and she had a younger sister, who was also very nice. The younger sister and I became quite good friends, a very small world. The father was an archdeacon, so it was a pretty straight-laced little thing and I was very friendly with the young one, Jean. She was a hostess

10:30 with Australian National Airways, was involved in an aircraft crash but got out of it and got all her passengers out as well. It was very good but I don't know what has happened to her since. My friend Laurie, they invited me to his wedding but I was up in the islands and I couldn't go. Later on

11:00 I met Laurie several times and his boy was a chorister at St Paul's Cathedral, and he died suddenly, not the boy. Laurie died. Anyway about a year or so ago, I rang his widow. She was absolutely delighted that I'd rung her. We hadn't spoken for probably 15 years or more but I've lost track of her now. I've looked in the phone book and she's obviously moved. She could have gone back to Sydney. I don't know.

11:30 The answer is I made one or two friends like that.

Tell us about some of the trips back to Melbourne on the Nullarbor.

Yes well the Nullarbor one, troop trains. I can't precisely remember the number of carriages but there'd be somewhere like the 15 mark and they were pretty old rolling stock but comfortable enough. The last

12:00 carriage on this particular train, the last carriage was reserved for nurses from the 2/1st AGH [Australian General Hospital]. You couldn't see them sharing carriages with blokes! At the very front of the train before the engine, they had a flat top with high sides and a canopy on the top with a special type of

12:30 field cooker called a Wiles Cooker. I don't know whether you know anything about them but it's a form of pressure cooker and you can use these devices for food cooking for a thousand men. They're very good. They had one of these on the train and the necessary cooks, so we'd pull into the siding,

13:00 and they'd put up two serving points. One on the left hand side, one on the right hand side, even carriages on one, odd carriages on the other side, so that they got fed together without too much mucking around. It worked out very well and the girls, these nurses were a bit hard to get on with. They seemed to rule their own roost all right

13:30 but we persuaded one to sit on some logs beside an Aborigine chap. The Aborigine chap was prepared to do it because he thought he was going to be paid for it but he wasn't! We persuaded this girl and we got a photo of her doing that. Another chap stuck a cigarette through this part of his nose, through the septum, like that, [demonstrates] parading around

14:00 wanting to have his photo taken and wanting five shillings or something like that. I got the photo but I didn't pay him, all those sorts of things. At Tarcoola, which I mentioned outside there, we had a longer stay than usual, somebody came along with a whole lot of small but throwable boomerangs and literally taught us how to throw a boomerang. That was quite interesting.

14:30 The train trips were slow of course and they didn't travel very fast, probably 50 miles an hour would probably be the maximum, I would think and having to pull off on sidings for civilian trains, and you'd have to wait. They would know by the signalling arrangements. They'd be shunted off and you'd have to wait till the train came. It might be ten minutes. It might be an hour, depending on just where it was.

15:00 A lot of Italian prisoner of war or internees were used along the track for fettling and they were camped at various places, Cook and those sorts of places, under the supervision of about one armed guard to about 30 blokes. There was no way that they were going to take off. There was nothing to go to in that area. It was dry as a bone.

15:30 **After Geraldton you were transferred to New South Wales. Why did you want to be transferred?**

I was unhappy in the regiment to be honest. That was the long and the short of it.

And your dad helped out with the transfer. Why did he transfer you to New South Wales?

It was a question of location and

16:00 at that time they were wanting people for heavy anti-aircraft anyway. I'm glad he did it because I could have ended up in Darwin on a Coast Artillery and coast artillery was a fading thing in those days. There were a lot of forts around and they were manned but the chances of any action, and really doing a job worthwhile were very limited, whereas the heavy anti-aircraft,

16:30 certainly up in Darwin, although the last raid was November 1943, we had reconnaissance raids up to the time I left, photoreconnaissance raids which meant that guns had to be bought into action. We didn't actually fire at them only because the targets…well two reasons. The air force were scrambling their Spitfires and the aerodromes were in Darwin itself,

17:00 and they couldn't have Spitfires trying to get up to height with anti-aircraft shells hanging around, which is fair enough. The other reason was the targets were in fact at absolute maximum, from the gun's point of view, they were at 28,000 feet. A 3.7 will shoot to 30,000 feet but the period of engagement that you get

17:30 was probably less than a minute. In other words you've got a barrel up there with a target coming, you've no sooner got to almost the vertical position and you've got to turn the gun around, and pick up the target. By that time a minute has gone and at that height, a different matter at lower height but at that height, it's not worth trying to engage a target. So there were two reasons, although we had to be at "action stations" and everything going,

18:00 guns loaded, and radar working.

You mentioned earlier when working on the guns there, you had a couple of different methods of gauging a plane's flight. You had the predictor box and then later the radar. Can you tell us about the predictor box and the differences with radar?

The predictor

18:30 was a metal box about that cube and it weighed…four people could carry it using what they called porter bars, two bars underneath and you could carry it, four people. It was a fairly heavy weight and it mechanically, mathematically, solved

19:00 the problem. Now the problem that you're looking at is that you're at point "B" on the ground and you can find yourself on the map. That's easy but you've got a target at say 20,000 feet, if that target flies at a constant height in course and speed, those three factors, you can predict with speed in the past what it will be in the future.

19:30 What you've got to allow for is the time it takes for a shell to get from the ground up to the target and explode at the same time. You've got to judge. That's called slant range. That slant range has got to be projected to the future position of the target because you've got to set the fuse

20:00 to that distance, not to that distance [demonstrates] but to the future distance. This box through sines and cosines, if you know anything about trig, solves this problem with the use of this special cam that I was talking about being made, a three dimensional cam, and at one time I knew the formula. I don't

20:30 now. You are looking at rates of change. The rate of change that way and the rate of change of the shell going up, and then also an angular rate of change depending on the target. On the predictor they have a means where two telescopes focus on the target. One operates for

21:00 the bearing and the other operates for the height, and range, and by turning their hand wheels, and keeping an indicator in a constant position, that calculates the rate of change. If the indicator is not steady then you haven't got an accurate reading but if it is steady, then you've got it. That's all fed into the machine and comes out

21:30 with the aid of having to put into the predictor the estimated height of the target, which can be judged or worked out from a height and range finder. That's put in and when that's put in to the predictor, it

calculates the future position of the target, and the length of the fuse required to

22:00 get to the target. That length of fuse is put into the fuse setter on the gun, so the ammunition number puts the shell into a little holder, moves two levers and that sets the fuse, as given to it from the predictor. It is then loaded into the gun and fired. That's all got to be done really quickly otherwise it is out of date.

22:30 **How long have you got to do that?**

Really you've got no time because you're working on a predicted point. At any given time you've got a predicted point and you've got to get to that point, so you really haven't got much time to do it. The fuse setter is constantly moving according to the predictor. You're probably

23:00 looking at only a matter of seconds. That's all done without the radar. When radar came into being, radar operates on radio waves and frequencies, and it could accurately calculate the slant range,

23:30 whereas the predictor can't. It can have height put into it and the angle but it can't give you actual distance. Radar can. What we'd do is have the radar hooked in to the predictor and it would supplement the predictor information with the radar information, particularly slant range.

24:00 The bearing of the target moving, that on radar is no more accurate because that is a mechanical assessment. That is no more accurate than the guns can do. The thing about radar of course, there's two aspects of it. There's the early warning detection of them and then there's what they call the

24:30 accurate position finding, the fire control side, which is where they are helpful. It is a complicated science, I have to admit. At one time you couldn't join the heavy anti-aircraft or any anti-aircraft unless you had majored in mathematics.

25:00 I hadn't but I had a fair knowledge! I've lost a lot of it now.

When you arrived in Darwin it can't have been long after the bombing there?

Yes the last bombing was November 1943 and I arrived up there in the beginning of March

25:30 1944.

So give us your first impressions of Darwin and a little bit about your time there.

The township of course was still devastated, a tremendous number of buildings bombed. In the city itself on the bank corner, there was two banks and a post office. There was only one building left standing and that was the Commonwealth Bank.

26:00 Darwin Hotel was left standing. It had only just been finished. In fact I think they still had to do a bit more work to it but it was operating. There were 13, 14 ships sunk in the harbour. Vestey's Meatworks was half blown. That was a big meatworks there but there was

26:30 an area of it that was still usable, which we used, the army used. Dozens of houses were all flattened and that sort of thing. Other houses were damaged through the army's neglect and it was a case of being wise after an event. The army moved in. They wanted accommodation and they just took over all these houses. A town…he wasn't a town clerk

27:00 but equivalent to that anyway, was appointed who had to keep a roll of all the properties, checks and what was doing, so that the army knew what it was up for I suppose. What the army did was that a lot of the timber houses there were up on stilts eight feet and then you had your house built, and somebody in the army got the bright idea, "If we board

27:30 around those pillars, we've got some extra accommodation." What they didn't realise was that that gave the white ants a chance to get into the houses and a lot of houses were ruined by the fact that they had built up underneath the house with boarding. White ants just went through them, a lot of damage done that way but that's an event after the scene. Nowadays you'd probably have some sort of

28:00 agro-chemical that would kill them but whether you could use it is another matter. Darwin's water supply was OK. The Manton Weir where the water came up from near Adelaide River, that was OK. In fact it was used a bit too freely at one time. They had to put an embargo on. People were coming along and tapping into the 10 inch pipe and getting water off

28:30 into their units. They had to put an embargo on that, rightly so. We had one tap off. It was all right, got our nice warm showers that way. Yes, Darwin was devastated. The Star Hotel was still functioning…the Star Theatre I should say, was still available. The Grandstand was all right. We used that.

What about

29:00 **the people? Had they all gone?**

All gone, yes all evacuated. When I got there they'd all been evacuated. The local population had all gone and they went all over the place, and gradually filtered back.

Was it a little bit like a ghost town?

It was a ghost town, yes. There was always troops around but other than that there was no one.

29:30 Probably about March ’44 the first civilians came back under the control of the government. It was the Commonwealth Bank. The Commonwealth Bank opened their bank. They opened it for a very good reason. The only civilians up there were

30:00 Civil Construction Corps people and the rest were army but that didn’t stop them from playing Two-Up, and all those money spinning games. A tremendous amount of money floated around the area, a tremendous amount. It wasn’t just waging on two pounds or anything like that. It was in the hundreds of pounds and they decided to open the bank so that

30:30 chaps could bank their money rather than sleeping on it, which is what they were doing. They probably expected a knife in their back or something like that, so they opened the bank and also to control the amount of money that could be sent south. I had a Commonwealth Bank account and I could use that automatically, and I used to have my pay put straight into the bank account

31:00 because I earned a bit of interest on that, which I didn’t get in the army pay book. Interest was worth having in those days. Today it is not worth having but that was the only civilian occupation where they came in early. It was the bankers.

Why did they want to limit the money being sent south?

Because I think they thought of the problems with these people gambling and it was a problem.

31:30 The question of payment of money, if money was out of the country, out of the Territory and a person owed 100 dollars or 200 dollars, where was he going to get the money from, so by having it in the bank rather than sleeping on it, they had money. They kept money in the area. That was one of the reasons for it. I was never involved in that at all.

32:00 **In regard to your courier work, what were your first impressions of New Guinea and the islands up north?**

I suppose I was quite impressed in a way. It was almost like when I first went to Darwin, I thought that Darwin was sand all around,

32:30 not on your Nelly! It was acres and acres of green bush and trees, and grasses. A totally different impression to what I had expected, particularly when I moved around and got to some of the odd places like Black Forest, and a few places like that, where the trees are 60, 70 feet high. New Guinea, Hollandia was the first place I went to.

33:00 Lake Sentanni my hut was built out over water, a very nice little surrounding area, bushes and all that, very pleasant. It tended to get a bit hot and steamy. That didn’t worry me when I was flying because it was cold enough in the aircraft anyway but on the ground it could be hot and muggy. Finschhafen was another delightful little place, built near Langemak Bay,

33:30 where they had a swimming staging and the water was something like 60 feet deep, tremendously deep water part but nice swimming.

Did you ever have any trouble with insects or diseases?

Oh yes. In Darwin in particular, I’d only been there a few months and I

34:00 sort of came out in a bit of a rash, very itchy, primarily from there to there because I wore shorts a lot. Anyway it turned out that it was a rash all right but it was caused by sandflies – sand fly bites. Before I left Sydney with the other officer, Jack Carr, we had gone around and got hold of some

34:30 nets for beds, and not knowing what was the score, and we got these nets all right, mosquito nets. It turned out that they were not fine enough. They were the standard type of mosquito net, whereas the one you used in this sand fly area,

35:00 the ordinary hole in a mosquito net was made with thread that was very furry, so it had the effect of dividing the hole with a very furry effect, not a great deal of strength but sufficient to stop sandflies from going in. We were using the wrong type of net. I was painted with all sorts of colours out of the rainbow

35:30 to try and cure me of this thing. It took about a month, six weeks before it was cured and I then developed an immunity to it, self-vaccination you might say. But yes, the sand fly bites were very bad. The mosquitoes you could control because we had mosquito lotion, which was pretty effective. I’ve seen you put it on your hand and a mosquito comes in,

36:00 lands and takes off again without even wanting to bite. It was so effective. It was very good and we always had plenty of supplies of that. The other thing we had, mainly in the islands, was Atebrin, which was as yellow as those boxes and it made you as yellow too.

36:30 I used to feed myself up. They were for anti-malaria and in New Guinea I used to have a lot of it, primarily because I was moving around so much. The usual habit was there was a bottle on the table and you took your tablet when you had your meal, and off you went but flying around, there'd be places where I wouldn't have a table with a bottle

37:00 on it, so I always carried my own. I consumed probably more that I needed but it certainly made me yellow. In fact when I went to meet my brother when he got back, I was taken as a POW because of my yellow state and he was as white as an Australian! It was quite embarrassing at one time actually.

37:30 **After the war how did you adjust to civilian life?**

To be honest at first it was a bit hard. When I got home after being discharged, demobbed [demobilised], I thought have I done the right thing etc. I had in the back of my mind all the time that I had

38:00 left this firm, I had an obligation to go back to it, which is what I did and why I got out. If I hadn't had that sort of moral obligation, I probably would have stayed in. I don't know but I certainly got out and went back to it. I was there for about 12 months. Admittedly the firm had a bad time because there was a very severe engineering strike and a lot of their men were off.

38:30 That was unfortunate but at the end of the 12 months I fronted up to the managing director and I said, "Well I've been here. I've been on the same pay as when I left the company." No increase in pay for being away or anything like that, which was much less than what I was getting in the army. I said, "What future is there because I want to settle down and do some study?"

39:00 He bluntly said, "We've got nothing for you." Just like that, so I virtually put in my resignation straight away. My mother had seen an advertisement where the Shell company were wanting some people, so she said, "Why don't you apply?" I said, "I don't know that I want to be there." She said, "If you don't like it, you can leave it." Anyway, I joined Shell and stayed there 34 years!

39:30 Whether I did the right thing or not is another matter but at least I got some better pay. No I was very disappointed in the attitude of McPherson's, particular so because the managing director, his son was in the AIF in the Middle East and was taken a prisoner of war by the Germans, and he was safe.

40:00 No problem there. When he came back to Australia I happened to be at the Showgrounds where they were discharging these people and I was doing a bit of official work there for them, and I saw his name on the roll, so I dug him up. The first thing he said to me was, "Have you got a car for me?" I said, "No, we don't have cars for people." He was very uptight about it. Anyway,

40:30 as I say I joined Shell.

You mentioned how your father helped with your transfer. I'm curious as to whether with your brother being a POW that your father was in some way trying to keep you near home and keep you out of trouble?

41:00 I don't think so. From memory he didn't react when I told him that I got the job flying with the air courier service, which would have been a time when he would have reacted. Although I know he did something about getting me the job,

41:30 I don't know that it was high pressure. I think it was probably one where he said to somebody, "My lad's looking for a job. Have you got one?" I think it would have been as simple as that. Dad was pretty fair on people like that. He wouldn't try and get too many favours or anything like that.

INTERVIEW ENDS