Australians at War Film Archive

Arnold Forrester - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:42 **Five-minute book sleeve on your life, so if you'd like to introduce yourself, start with your name and where you were born and touch on the major points.**

I'm Arnold William Forrester; I was born in Victoria Park Daylesford,

01:00 25th August 1919. Lived there for three years and moved to a place called Woods Point which is mining, changed from place to place, and we spent five or six years. Started at a school at Woods Point when I was about six years, five or six years of age and from there the water beat us at the gold mines so we moved to Lake Eildon where the construction

01:30 of the Eildon Weir was going on. And we stayed there for most of my life time and after my mother died when I was ten years of age, a great aunt took me over in Melbourne and I went to school in Melbourne for a short time and then when I was fourteen, the day I was fourteen I went to work for a lingerie firm in

02:00 Brunswick and I stayed there for the best part of seven years. Two of those years were in reserve occupation 1939 to 1941 and consequently when things got serious in the Pacific, I was called up and joined the 57/60th battalion when I was twenty-one years of age.

02:30 **So when you think back what are your first memories of childhood?**

Well I do know that we took a very grave risk of being lost in a house fire. My sister, my family went out for the evening and my sister was a bit anxious and she stood at the front room curtains with a candle and the curtains caught on fire and of course my brother and I are in the house, he's a little older than I and

03:00 we were gravely, in grave danger there. But anyway, and also we had in our backyard a wonderful swing, I've never seen one like it. We had two telegraph posts, thirty odd feet long I suppose, sunk into the ground and we had a steel cable on and that was our swing. It was the most wonderful swing. And we had a dog, a little Australian fox terrier

03:30 and he unfortunately got run over on the road. But that's about as far back as I can remember, when I was very young. Three years of age or so.

How far did the house go with the fire?

Not serious, one of the neighbours apparently was keeping an eye on things from a distance and pulled one of the curtains off the rails and we were saved.

Can you remember what the house was like?

It was a weatherboard house, built at the side of the road at Victoria Park, which

04:00 is three or four ks [kilometres] out of Daylesford. And that's about all I can remember there.

And how many brothers and sisters did you have?

I had an elder sister and an elder brother, yes.

And did you have to share a bedroom with them?

That's before my time. I think I had a cot.

Can you tell us about your dad?

He was an engine driver. He trained and got a winding certificate.

04:30 And when he moved from the mines around Ballarat and those places, he spent time away from home

and then we moved to Woods Point because my grandfather was in charge of the Morning Star [mine] at Woods Point, which was a going concern in those times and so he got a job, as the son of the family, and he got a job winding the men in the cages, the dirt up and the men down and

05:00 until that water beat us at the gold mine. It opened a number of times after that over the years, following on. But Grandfather retired at that stage and went to live in Castlemaine. But we moved to Eildon and our father took up winding down there and they were all electrical motors in Eildon, as things progressed from the steam to electric motors, it was

05:30 a big improvement. I did go to school again at Eildon and when the works closed down at Eildon, everyone was moving off to Yarrawonga and various other work sites and my Dad was asked, "Are you going to move?" And he said, "Oh no, I think I like it here." So we bought the Bush Nursing Centre Hospital. Everything was being sold off,

06:00 so my father and mother bought the hospital and we turned it into a guesthouse. I remember a sign on the footpath approaching the house, we had a big sign up 'Salmo Ferrio'. That was sort of a name for a brown trout, but as a tourist say would go past, they'd say, "That's a dago's [southern European] place, we won't go there". So

06:30 that was just another thing. We had marvellous times. I learnt to fish and we had very few cars coming through in those times, that's nineteen, early thirties, late 1928, late twenties and when we purchased that place, Uncle Arthur died and everything was going fine. And then we had a whole

07:00 series of managers after that and then the whole thing folded and I went to Melbourne.

What can you tell us about your Mum?

She was a very broad woman, a very well-built lady and very strong and I don't, I had a photo of her somewhere, anyway she was, she liked gathering wood and stuff like that. And she was a really wonderful hard-working

07:30 mother. She provided a wonderful cook and whatnot and unfortunately medical facilities weren't the very best in those times and she was taken off with, in childbirth, with double pneumonia. And we lost her in the Alexander hospital.

What about your brother and sister?

They unfortunately at the time, our break up,

08:00 our mother going, my sister got herself a boyfriend, she was only sixteen and then she got herself pregnant, and she got married to that fellow and she went off to live in the Depression times, it was very hard, and with the fishermen that used to come there, they had Buicks and Packards and DeSotos and doctors and dentists and chemists

08:30 and estate agents and things from Melbourne – we had a wonderful clientele at the guesthouse – fishing, fly-fishing – and through one of our contacts they were able to get a house in Preston near the school and husband used to go along to Braithwaites tannery and get cuttings off the leather, clippings and waste and they'd burn that in the fire and make soup. They'd go to the market and get cheap vegetables and sell it a penny a cupful to the school children.

09:00 And that was how they existed, it was really hard.

What do you remember of the Depression years yourself?

We were a little bit fortunate, we had these known anglers and some, one Trescothicks had boots, they were shoemakers, and they'd bring us along a pair of boots you know and we never, ever went really barefoot.

09:30 We had dripping on the table. And we put that away when any guests came of course and hide the dripping. But no we were reasonably, not well off but we managed. Father would, he would usually struck it lucky with a night watching job or something like that and we never really, not really suffered.

10:00 **Were you self sufficient at all?**

We had a wonderful garden yes. You had to be in those times. We lived very close to the earth and always have. We've always grown our own vegetables and fruit and that was the thing to do in those times, live as cheaply as you could.

And what sort of chores did you have around the house?

Worked of course, had a billy-cart and I'd go into the bush

10:30 and gather wood and I got promised five shillings, a mate and I. And he got his but I didn't get five shillings for working right through the Christmas holiday and I remember when I was nine or ten, I was a very good fisherman in those times, very good kid on the fishing, and they even named – a photo there where I'm fishing there – and they named the point where I used to go 'Arnolds Point.' It was known for a number of years until it was

11:00 submerged in later years for the new weir and it lost it's name then. I was called into the dining room one evening and there were all these gentry sitting around there swapping yarns of the 'one that got away' and Geoffrey Austin, he was a huge landowner in NSW, thousands of sheep, and he said, "Arnold, I hear you've

11:30 been doing great things as far as letting the fish go." These trout, I was fishing for an eighty fish but its closed season and you had to let the trout go and I mean big fish you do, let them go. And he said, "Great sportsmanship in the making there" he said, "and I've got a nice Hardy reel here I'd like you to have". And the fellow took the photo for the front page of The Women's Weekly, he said,

12:00 "I've got Father's rod here, it's the best part of a hundred years of age" and he said, "I'd like you to have that too." Fly rod. And Doctor Westmore-Stephens from Collins Street said, "Well, I'll send you an English double-tapered fly line to go with it." So I had a full kit and I've still got that kit today, probably a hundred, hundred and forty years old that rod. And I've had it serviced from time to time, but I've still got it.

12:30 **Can you tell us how that photo came about?**

That one for the, well this Kirk, it was the fellow that gave me the rod, I've still got it inscribed with his father's name in brass on the butt, and he was a fishing, shooting pistol man and he had a long barrelled pistol on his belt all the time and he just fire.22 [calibre]

13:00 bullets at targets and whatnot if he went around and whatnot and he had a camera also. He was an amateur photographer and he could see value in this photo of Arnold, sitting on the point there with his two rods out there and he thought that would make a good picture and he took it for The Australian Women's Weekly and had it admitted onto the front page, so that's how I come to get a copy of that.

13:30 **That must have been a bit of a thrill to have your photo on the front page?**

Yes. Always had a fairly protected sort of a life. It's been, come through it fairly well.

So would you say it was an idyllic childhood?

I'd say so yes.

And what besides fishing, whatever sort of rat-bag things did you get up to as a kid?

Some of these wealthy fellows son's that would come

14:00 with their fathers fishing and we'd go wandering around the streets at night and we didn't, we'd like to get over somebody's fence and take some fruit. It was always much, much sweeter over the fence than we had in our own garden and occasionally we'd put stones on somebody's roof and we thought that was a hell of a joke but when I think about what stress we must have caused those people,

14:30 but other than that, no we didn't get into serious… My sister's intended husband used to supply a few cigarettes when I was quite young, because he wanted to you know get me away. They had things to be doing and whatnot, and he'd bribe me off with

15:00 Sevens I think they called them in those times, cigarettes, and I started early actually smoking and didn't have any money of course, and around the post office was a reasonably good place to pick up a few butts and you'd throw your hanky up in the air and it would land down on the butt and you'd pick the butt up with your hanky and when you had enough you'd break them up and I had a little bent

15:30 pipe and I used to keep that in the sugar bag that we had to cut up newspaper in the dunny [toilet] down the back. And unfortunately one day the paper ran out and somebody's groping for the paper and they came across my pipe and of course that was all over. No more pipe. But I must have been only nine or ten years of age at the most, yeah, in those times.

And did you play much with your brother?

16:00 We hit a ball around a little bit, yes but we didn't have any tools very much. We got an airgun at an early time, a little dart gun, we had quite a bit of fun and we always had a shanghai of course and we used to hunt with that and we got pretty good with the shanghai killing little birds and the like, parrots, you could roast parrots, they were good food, light a little fire and bake a spud.

16:30 **…tyre.**

Oh yes we had an old motor tyre and I've got a photo there of sitting in the motor tyre and brother bowling along. That, and another thing we had was a number eight wire, a stiff wire with a small wheel on the bent part and you'd run for miles with that piece of wire and you had a handle on the end of it to hang onto, and you'd run for miles,

17:00 just chasing this wheel. And another thing, somebody said if you, on the top of the tins, on the four-gallon tins, kerosene tins and like, they always had a handle a metal link and if you joined one to the other you could have a long chain. So that was a thing, gathering tins and the tops and the hammer and knock these tops out and handles

17:30 and join them together and you had a great big long train. And I had a good bag of marbles I had a sock almost to the, almost full of marbles, good marbles, ellies, we used to play.

So what do you remember going to primary school?

Very little, I was never very good at school. I was always looking out the window and particularly when I went to Eildon School

18:00 the, in those early times they created a fish rearing, a trout rearing station under our house. Our guest house, old hospital was built on six foot pillars and under the house there was lots and lots of room so we put fish trays, big trays and reticulated water from one through to the other and whatnot and inside the trays we'd have a mesh and

18:30 the inspectors would come from Melbourne from the Fisheries and Game Department in those times and bring their nets and whatnot and we'd in the sporting season, in the Goulburn [River] we'd net these fish and spawn them there. And coming home from school I'd bring a billy of eggs after having been fertilised and I'd lay them in the troughs and after so many days we'd have to pick the white ones out but unfortunately we were using chlorinated water and

19:00 we couldn't rear anything, everything died eventually. But that was a lead up to the very big hatcheries, the largest in the southern hemisphere. It was started just a few kilometres from where we lived and they used the same gear, they took it away and took it down there and later I went away and went to work there for twenty-eight years.

So when you were at school what were you thinking of when you were staring out the window?

I had to be outside, fish, fish, fish, fish, yes.

19:30 **So how far through did you go with school?**

Only to fourteen, day I turned fourteen, out. I had a job to go to through the people who owned the Preston Hosiery and I started on nine shillings a week I think and then after twelve weeks

20:00 we got a rise in the cost of living, a shilling, but we got a ninepence cut the same week so got thruppence.

Can you remember how you got that job?

Through Preston Hosiery, the fisherman who owned it, G.G Feletter, owned this huge factory in Brunswick and through his patronage at our guesthouse we were able to

20:30 look after our brother and I, he was a little older and he went there as a machine operator and he stayed for a number of years but in the rag trade there's always some sort of a problem happening every now and again with the finances and the imports and whatnot and they ran out of money and they had to put off certain numbers of people and he got put off and I did too and

21:00 we hunted around looking for jobs, I had a little money in the bank but not very much, four hundred pounds I think. And I knew that ten shillings a week that wouldn't last very long so I hunted around. I went to Fowlers pottery where they make the toilet pans and whatnot and they said, "No, we're not putting anyone on." And I went back after a fortnight or so, I went back to

21:30 Preston Hosiery and I said you know, "Is there…?" and they said, "Yeah, we'll give you a job in another department". It was hundreds of cottons coming on a warping machine and I would miss one every now and again, it was actually a good sight, I don't know how I'd miss it, like a road opening up on one thread of about couple of hundred you'd miss and they were getting these long bolts of material through

22:00 with one cotton missing. So they had to take me off that and they put me up into the dying department where I stayed with an old Scotsman up there and we had three spin dryers at the time, very big machines and I helped him and then eventually he left and he left me the job and he said, "Look boy," he said, "Always save a little bit, the last bit, a quarter hour at the

22:30 end of the day, time and a half." He said, "It's good for your pocket" And he trained me in being a Scotsman, always save a little bit for the end of the day, and I stayed there until I was called up in 1941.

How old were you when your mum died?

Nine.

What sort of affect did that have on you?

It was very devastating; yes, I missed her very

23:00 much, you know. And an aunt came and looked after us for a little while and looked after the guesthouse and that wasn't very satisfactory and so Father made other arrangements with this great aunt in Melbourne, she had a big family too. And she really did a wonderful job for us, but I was paying, my father was helping a little bit with the board and also to get me a bike

23:30 when I started the bike racing . I joined a club when I was fourteen years of age and riding the bike for the club and I remember I was paying, I think I went from ten shillings to twelve shillings a week, I was paying and I think I asked Aunt could I have a bigger plate. It was a fairly small plate compared to the other boys who were older than I were and they were working fellas,

24:00 grown fellas, and I wanted a little bit more food, I was always hungry and one of the chappies at the dye factory he always came every day with his morning tea, he'd have a large slab of Adams fruit cake and I used to get that every day. Going behind the machine and eating this fruitcake, you know, in the bosses time sort of thing. You know, oh great.

24:30 **Did he give it to you?**

Yes, he knew that I was a growing boy, you know, and things weren't the very best in those times.

And how many kids did your aunt have?

She was married and I think she had two or three husbands, and I think she had at least four or five children, but they'd drifted, they got married and drifted away but we always had, even a boarder there, helping her out, she had the local minister there, staying and living with us.

25:00 She had another daughter living with us and one son home. So there was always quite a lot around the table on Sunday night when we had a cut up salad with lots of mustard dressing or egg dressing on it. A very nice tea on, but we always had the same things for sandwiches, compressed tongue, it lasted the best part of a week

25:30 with Raleigh's mustard on it. You absolutely, even though I was hungry it was pretty hard to put up with, always the same routine the same food every day. It was shanks or fresh tongue and things like that, cheap cuts.

Was she struggling with the Depression?

I think she had a very, very hard life right from when she lived in the bush when her first husband died

26:00 and I think she had these four or five kids, at least. I think she might have had three then, then two to the next fellow, came along. And he died too, so she was a widow.

What sort of jobs did you have to do around the home there?

Not very much around the house, no, they didn't have a garden and a fellow used to come and empty the toilets –

26:30 pan man. No we didn't have many jobs. I rode the bike a lot and was out every minute of the day when it was available.

And you would have had to find a new group of mates.

They came with the bike club, yes, there was quite a good club in Preston. As I grew I could get another frame and put my parts back on it

27:00 again, as the frame from an eighteen inch to a twenty-three inch bike, full size bike. I'd just put the frame in for a couple of years and just transfer my stuff over. For five pounds I could get a new bike sort of thing you know, a bigger one. I've still got that bike today, it's fifty-seven years of age.

27:30 I ride it every day, I've ridden one hundred and ten kilometres this week on it. I ride every week. Although the fellas around here they've got bikes and each wheel is worth a thousand dollars and you know three or four thousand dollars for the bike and they're very lightweight and they ride at forty kilometres an hour and I'm only riding at eighteen to twenty-three kilometres an hour. But I'd like to get behind

28:00 some of these university ladies riding the bikes and they go for their morning ride and I can cope with them, I get behind and sit in there and I got some quite good friends I've made over the years since I've been in town.

Besides the biking, what other sports did you do?

Fishing, yeah, we lived on a river when we came to town here. We've always lived on a river somewhere so it's always been really convenient to, I fed the family on fish and rabbits. Fish and rabbits yes.

28:30 **What about when you were at your aunt's place, did you do any other sports?**

No, we used to, there was a spare block next door and we played cricket and broke somebody's window. See, the elder, one of her boys were at home, her elder boys and we used to get out and about and play cricket and whatnot.

So who were your sporting heroes, did you have any sporting heroes?

No they were bike riders, yes. Later on, there was.

Who were some of the great Aussie bike riders at the time?

29:00 Well, Billy Guyatt, no there was Nino Borsari, he was an Italian that came out here and friends took permanent residence in a big bike shop here in Melbourne. He's a marvellous rider, oh I knew so many of the

29:30 local people that used to run the Warrnambool to Melbourne. I partook in Colac to Melbourne one day, but I was outpaced by the mark I had and after I was about thirty kilometres out and I had a puncture and a car was coming past and I thought this is not for me. I was getting left behind in that group; this was pre-war of course.

30:00 **So what sort of things would you get up to socially, if you had some spare time?**

Dancing, oh yeah, ballroom dancing, lots of it, couple of nights a week.

Where would that be held?

The town hall, Brunswick Town Hall, Preston Town Hall, Colamar Town Hall was marvellous, I didn't ever get down to the Palais in St Kilda but,

30:30 no, the town halls were very good floors.

And they were a couple of nights a week, you were saying?

Yes, Saturday night and Wednesday night, you'd make it to the dance.

And did good crowds turn up to those?

Oh yes, ones with big bands. Three floors operating, you know, go from one to another. I was a very timid person, but I always had a little flask of Limona gin,

31:00 it was in a tiny little flask you could get for fifty cents, five shillings I think. And put it in the toilet bowl you know. A little bit of Dutch courage and then we used to have a pink lolly, used to suck that lolly take the smell of the gin away. That was pretty frequently.

31:30 **Did you ever go to the movies, to the pictures?**

Not very often, occasionally, the money never a lot of it around, you know. I used to have to, when you want something from the bike shop, it would be on two shillings a week to pay for whatever you were going to buy, like a new tyre or something like that. Money was always, not a lot of it about.

32:00 **And how often would you get into Melbourne?**

Very rarely. I did go in on the tram one time and I wanted a pair of plus fours and I went to Leviathan and I think they were six or seven pounds and I didn't have that sort of money but somehow or other I got them

32:30 from the fellows, the salesman from some means or other and then they got very thin in the seat so I got the boot-maker to sew a nice big leather seat in them for me on the strong part still left around. I had those plus fours for a long, long time. They were the things to ride in in those days for training rides, yeah.

Your first bike, your first racing bike was it a particular brand?

33:00 Yes it was hand built in High Street, Northcote, it was known as a Whippet, a carved 'W' on the front of it and that fellow used to buy the parts in, the new parts and he'd have on the wall a lead coming through from the gas line and he'd have a little torch, a blow torch because it's, to run

33:30 brass it's a very low flame and he'd use the back end, for the blower the back end of a vacuum cleaner and he'd bronze the fittings, the head pieces and the braces and whatnot and he put all these brackets together and he'd line them up with piece of string and whatnot and so he'd make a frame and then send it off to, whatever colour you wanted it ducoed,

34:00 baked enamel and so you'd have a bike in next to no time. A lot of people bought ready-made bikes, but I had a very short reach so I had an eighty inch top bar which is very, very short top bar for a big bike.

And the bronze joins were strong enough?

Oh yes, they've withstood fifty-seven years.

34:30 **So had any of your relatives, uncles or anything like that, served in World War I?**

I think we, not sure, no. Too underage or something I think at the time. No I didn't have any. This aunt I lived with, she lost a son.

35:00 George. No my family wasn't in the war business.

What was your knowledge of World War I?

Very little. It was a long time ago sort of thing. Like it is today. You know it's almost been forgotten, our war. Even the Korean War

35:30 is in the background now and the Vietnam is more to the fore and they'll be the people, that and the volunteer people that didn't go away, they're going to be quite strong to carry the flag for a number of years I think, the RSL [Returned and Services League].

Can you remember as a child ever seeing any of the Anzac Day parades?

We used to have,

36:00 one of the 1914 fellows come and give and Armistice day or whatever, come and give a talk on the war. But you know, just quite small and it didn't mean a lot to us, just serve the country, serve the king, sort of thing. Honour the flag.

Was there a feeling at the time, a close bond with the mother country?

I expect there was yes,

36:30 we always had a strong leaning towards being sort of a satellite, an off-shoot, yes.

You know in the mornings, did you have to sing the national anthem and things like that?

Yes, we always lined up for the flag, king and country sort of thing.

And did they fly both flags at school? Did they fly the Union jack and the Australian flag at school?

Oh no. Just the one, don't know which one it was,

37:00 the Union jack I think.

So you left school at fourteen. Do you know what grade that was, what year?

Seventh grade. But I really wasn't up to seventh grade standard. Once you get behind at school you were behind all the time. You didn't have any special tuition like people can get these times you know. If you didn't stay with the front-runners, you were backward.

37:30 **Did you need dad's permission to leave school?**

No. Just normal, that was the leaving age, fourteen, unless you went on the high school.

And did you have any mates that went on to high school?

Yes, some went on yes, some of the more clever ones, yes.

Was there much work around? I guess it was the Depression then, it would have been pretty hard to get work.

It was, yes, it wasn't good.

38:00 But as I say I was very fortunate in having walked straight into a job.

So when you first started work, what exactly sort of work you did?

We had brown linoleum on the floors and there was a long room, as long as you could see down both sides and all the workbenches and whatnot, might have been a hundred and fifty ladies working on that floor. All

38:30 folding, folding the dyed stockings and boxing and whatnot. And there was a boxing room there and when I wasn't polishing the floors we used to have an old broom handle, a mop, a handle with this thing on it and we'd pull on these undyed stockings, just pull them on, oh had a great plaster these stockings, just pull on another one when that one got dirty and so it built up and it gave a better weight

39:00 and you'd put the polish on this clean surface and you'd rub it all over the floor and then you'd grab another one and you'd buff it up with the other one. So when you weren't that, you could see your face in the floor it was so beautifully polished, these old Government brown linoleum and you'd think it would last forever you know. And then you were serving, behind the counter, there were girls came for certain numbers of, thousands of

39:30 boxes were brought in to this room and so that progressed to and I went on to shifting the folded stockings on boards on a trolley. I used to take them downstairs or bring them up from downstairs, where they'd been pressed and whatnot and bring them up to the folding department.

40:00 That was just another job I had to do. And of course I always bought a bread roll, it was the cheapest and most filling thing you could get, was a buttered bread roll for morning tea. Cost a penny or something like that.

And how did the ladies who worked there treat you?

Oh very well, yes, some of the older fellows got treated very well, but I wasn't quite up to that. It was always avenues in the box department where they, plenty of space in there between the boxes, and some of these girls used to come in the back door and now they call it molesting but in those times it wasn't molesting. They would eagerly come in the back door. Have a bit of loving in the

40:30 passage ways.

Love marked the cartons?

Tape 2

00:33 **Do you know how much the stockings were selling for?**

No, various prices. No, I wouldn't have any idea about that. We used to get them at a reduced rate being an employee and you'd put in an order of what, and there'd be one day a week you'd go and buy them

01:00 from the warehouse sort of thing.

And were they nylon stockings?

Yes, they were the first to create a splash-proof stocking and it was very hush-hush and they had to put in a big machine and a mixing compartment and they used to put this wax stuff in and boil it up and whatnot and the stockings

01:30 would resist water, it was quite an invention in those times. It was very hush-hush because they didn't want it generally known by the other firms.

So at the time that you went to go and live with your aunt and you were working in the factory, were you having much to do with your dad?

No, just by correspondence and holidays and I'd always catch a service car and go home yes.

02:00 That would only be once a year but we'd have three weeks wonderful time at home fishing and we had our own, our father had his own fleet of boats on Eildon and that was his living after the guesthouse folded up. That was his situation, a lady across the way,

02:30 she had another guesthouse and she had all cubicles and when we folded up, she took over our place, the old hospital and our father used to get his meals across the road and of course getting his meals daily and whatnot, things got around, they finished up they got married. So this was going on, he lived with her for a number of years while I was away and then he

03:00 thought he'd better do the right thing before I came home from New Guinea, so they got married.

What happened to your brother and sister, where did they go and live?

My brother did get work but not in Australia, he had to go to the same firm, Preston Hosiery in New Zealand and he got the same sort of a job in New Zealand and he stayed over there for a number of years and he married a girl from St Kilda Melbourne over there and she was a worker there also

03:30 and at that time you couldn't bring any money out from New Zealand you had to more or less buy something over there and anyway they eventually came back to live in Melbourne.

And your sister?

My sister she had a number of children, four or five I think over the years. She lost her husband later on through cancer or something when he was about fifty-five

04:00 or so and big family, all did very well, they were just bush kids, no special training whatsoever but they got into earthmoving and all sorts of good jobs. They created their own employment and employed other people and they've all done very well in the country district and she has lived on until recent times and she

04:30 is in a nursing home. She's ninety-two. I also have a half sister and she's about ninety-four. She's also in a nursing home.

So the half-sister was?

My father back in the early days, when he was a young fella, courting ladies and he wanted to go to a dance and he asked a lady by the name of Cathy and she said, "No".

05:00 And he said, "What are you doing, Florence?" And she said, "I'd love to go." But Florence was pregnant at the time; anyway things blossomed from then on. And father married Florence, so that child that was born, I think he didn't marry at that time but when the child was born, that went to a

05:30 grandmother and always seemed a funny thing to us that this little baby would be with the grandmother and she was reared by her, all the way through and we were separated, our family and came along later.

So Florence was your mum?

Yes.

And do you know if she had much to do with the daughter?

No, I think, we lived nearby, next to Grandpa,

06:00 but eventually we moved away and Grandpa and then they all died eventually. Then this lady got a boyfriend and was a very early time, and she stayed with that fellow for fifty years probably. And he died eventually and she's still going.

So was that difficult for you when you as a child being split up from your brother and your sister and your dad?

06:30 Oh no, we just made our own way. Didn't, we made our own friends. My brother was with me for quite a while, we were both working and then he went to New Zealand and then of course we were on our own then.

Were those special times going home to visit dad?

Absolutely, oh marvellous times, yes. We'd go

07:00 away for two or three days and just fish and shoot and very, very special times.

What were you shooting when you were with your dad?

Cormorants, they were fish eaters. And we'd go always around Easter time the birds were nesting and they had the young ones in the nest who were all in stages of growing up and we'd hire a little boat or whatever,

07:30 we had a big boat as well, a passenger boat we had, which you'd sleep on and whatnot and we always took a little boat alongside. Anyway we'd stand under the tree and shoot these cormorants in the nest you know and it was a terrible slaughter, after we'd finished there and then we'd climb the tree and break the eggs anyway. So it was real, they were the nasty old birds of course; they used to eat a lot of fish.

08:00 But they used to provide cartridges in those times if you provided proof that you were shooting cormorants.

So that was a government?

Yes. They had clubs that used to go out and shoot too and try and keep them at bay. But otherwise we were always fishing and shooting. I remember one day the priest came down and he came down on the far side

08:30 of where we were, on the bush track down, he was going down to do some fishing and ah we were shooting up into the trees and the bullets were probably landing over near the horse and he left all the gates open all the way down, all fifteen kilometres I suppose and when he got out to open one of the gates see, the horse sort of turned around and took off and went to Mansfield. Never ever forgot that.

09:00 That same fella, that same priest used to come to my stepmother's boarding house, he always came once a month or whatever, when he came to visit his flock, because she was Catholic and we were Protestants at the time. And she'd say, "What would you like for dinner, Father? I've got lovely saddle of Murray Cod

09:30 or we'll have trout or I have a nice T bone." "Oh," he said, "I've been working fairly", Friday of course, "I've been working fairly hard today, I think the steak would be lovely." There was a certain privilege he had I suppose, he had a hard day's work and meat for dinner.

Was it your dad who taught you to shoot?

10:00 Yes I think that tried to, being country boys with shanghais and whatnot, camouflage sneaking up on rabbits and things, I think we were mostly country fellas in the army, in the battalion and I think really it stood us in good stead for later on what had to come that way, you know, because we were badly trained, no training.

When you were shooting with your dad what kind of rifles were you using?

10:30 I had little Browning .22, a Browning automatic, which fired ten shots, bang, bang, bang, automatic, very fast, but the bullets were very cheap in those times and a lot of fun to be had yeah. I mean everything's gone so haywire now as far as the weaponry goes.

You didn't have to have any special license or anything?

No, no everybody just used to leave your gun

11:00 standing at the backdoor just in case a crow come around you know, it was never a worry that anyone would want to steal it or anything like that, they all had guns, everybody had a gun. No restrictions whatsoever.

When you said you'd leave your gun by the door, would that be a loaded gun?

Not necessarily so, no. You'd just be handy there but the bullets wouldn't be far away or the cartridges. Just in case a crow come to take the eggs from the WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK

11:30 house, but.

What do you remember of the war breaking out?

Well I used to study the papers of the morning break, morning tea and there was list after list after list, frightful really. No that was very sort of devastating to see all these people being lost.

What were the lists?

12:00 Long columns of whole pages of them in the daily paper, nearly every day, a long list of the casualties from overseas, in the Middle East. But that was at that time, somebody else's war. Wasn't mine until it happened.

Had there been much of a buzz before the war that you were aware of?

12:30 How do you mean?

Well were there rumours that war was going to start?

No, not, a lot it all happened fairly suddenly, yes when Hitler started to get strong and created an army, yes, nobody ever thought much about it and they always reckoned it was cream puffs it would be all right if we went along or snowballs or something, bit more serious than that.

13:00 **Do you recall how you actually heard the news that the war had started?**

I've been to a dance and coming home, you know they put out a late edition and I think I've still got that paper after all these years.

Do you recall at the time when it started, was it World War II from the outset, or was it something that didn't seem that it would be that big?

Well everybody thought it would be over pretty quickly

13:30 but they didn't expect it to escalate like it did. All over Greece, Middle East and it was, never expected it to go that long.

Were they calling it World War II at the time?

Yes.

And so when war actually broke out were many fellows that you knew joining up?

14:00 Not a lot, a few, yes, I lost a good bike riding mate at Singapore, that was in 1942. He went down, the allies sank the ship and almost a whole seven hundred were lost on that particular trip they were being transferred to, transported to Japan. They were torpedoed and

14:30 they were all lost then.

Did you have any interest in the initial stages in joining up?

No, no, I was quite happy to be in a reserve occupation. But we were making soldiers socks and they put on a sort of a night shift to make some stockings and lingerie dying and whatnot, but the main thing was

15:00 the soldiers socks were being produced and as I say when things got serious, that was the norm then.

So was it declared a reserved industry straight away?

Yeah well they took contracts of course, they still wanted to operate their mill and they took contracts for the government, there were a lot of contracts.

15:30 **So I'm just trying to imagine what that is like. One day you are producing stockings and the next it is khaki socks.**

Yes well they put on the night shift and they'd still produce the stockings at night time and dye them but during the day this was, the factory was converted over to making thousands and thousands of pair of officers socks, preferably, long socks.

16:00 **And was that a fairly good thing for the morale in the factory, to feel like you were contributing to the war?**

Yes, we thought we were doing what we thought was a good job. Yes. I can't think of anything else to say about it but.

We have heard some World War I stories of people that were working in reserved occupations about the whole white feather thing.

Oh yes, I never ever got one of those

16:30 you know, it was just one of those things. I think there were a few about in the World War II. I think from time to time that was a situation, not only in World War I.

Did you know anybody at the factory that did?

No, no I didn't.

So what was it then that changed your mind?

17:00 Regarding the war? We were called up. We were committed to joining the army. I'd just had my twenty-first birthday and then a couple of months after that I was in the army.

In the first couple of years before you got called up, how had you seen Australia changing?

17:30 I think it didn't worry us too much. We just growing up and as long as you had some bike riding and something to eat and a good job, some money in your pocket, plenty of nice girls on the dance floor. I mean you didn't worry much what was going on around you actually.

18:00 **I'm curious to know, one of the things they say happens in wartime is that people get more romantic because they get a bit sort of panicked about what is going on in the world, did you ever notice anything like that going on?**

Well there was a great shortage of fellows. I suppose that could be brought about by that I would think.

18:30 Because thousands went out of the country and of course girls were joining up as well in the land army and whatnot they formed and the airforce and various. Lots of ladies went away too. The army and nurses. But there was still quite a lot staying at home, yes.

So was that a good thing to be…

It was quite good yes.

19:00 **What can you tell us about wartime in Melbourne?**

No, no I haven't very much to do with Melbourne. We were in the suburbs and never really ventured into Melbourne really.

Did if have much an effect on day-to-day supplies?

Oh absolutely yes,

19:30 everything was rationed of course, tea and petrol and sugar and butter. Everything was rationed, you had your tickets and whatnot and you just made do, if you didn't have it you'd make do and use the tea over and over again. You'd dry it and use it back again. You could smoke it if you were a bit short.

20:00 **What did that taste like?**

It's better than the smokes I used to have when I was a kid fishing, I'd used to get the perforated thistles, the big Scotch thistles and when they were dry, there were millions of little holes in them and quite large like a big cigar, and you could break off a piece off the end of that, and it was quite hot on the throat but you got a good smoke up.

20:30 And it was good drawing power, all these little holes in it. That was one of our pastimes down at the river while we were fishing yes.

And so tea tastes better than that?

Oh well it was just another trial and error I think.

And with the rationing did people used to swap?

I didn't have a lot to do with it because I was living with somebody else at the time but

21:00 I guess mainly if they didn't have it they didn't have it, that's all. You got another ration, another issue, but petrol was always a great worry to lots of people. I didn't have a car and my family didn't have a car, we had boats and my father bought up quite a lot of petrol, drums of petrol and hid it in the WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK house

21:30 and it all turned to not petrol. He lost it all. Had just changed, like some wines that go back to vinegar again and the petrol did likewise. It changed so it wasn't petrol any more it was just a waste, yeah. Kept it too long.

When you were at work in the protected industry, did you

22:00 **ever see many blokes trying to get out of it?**

No I don't think so. Not to my knowledge, no, they were quite happy to be in the industry.

Once the war started did that affect your pay in any way?

No, still carried on the same money.

22:30 **And do you know where all those socks that were being produced, where they all went?**

All over the world I reckon. Transferred wherever Australian soldiers were, England, the Middle East, where-ever they were fighting.

Did anyone ever put messages in the socks?

I think that was the case yes.

23:00 In comfort parcels, you often got an address from Woolloomooloo in Sydney or various places. I had addresses sent to me too and corresponded with these various ladies from time to time, yeah; nothing ever came of it.

Do you know if any of the girls in the factory were putting them in when they were making them?

I don't think so, no, they not to my knowledge, no. I wasn't in the finishing section of

23:30 the socks in those days I was in the dying section in those days and the drying of them, yes.

How did you dye the socks the khaki colour?

Large vats and a six foot pile and you stirred them, lifting them up and stirring them, getting an even dye and they'd, you'd dry one and put it

24:00 on the shape of a leg the foot on a steam dryer and dry it and take it into the office and they'd all have matching pieces there and they'd match it with an original to get the right colour so you wouldn't like to have a bad dye lot you know, it'd have to be standard all the way through. They'd have matching samples and if they're not bright enough they'd add just a little bit more dye.

24:30 Go to the dying area and add, they'd allot you so much, go and get such and such and you'd add that to the water and stir it in and another sample in twenty minutes sort of thing yeah.

Do you know what the dye actually was, what it was made of?

No, I don't. I couldn't say.

Was it a powder?

They were all powdered yes. They'd just measure it out like measuring out coffee or something like that.

25:00 So many grams and highly technical sort of work. Everything would be weighed and gauged and allotted into a bucket and you'd put a steam some water and then steam it and get a good mix up and then pour it in and then start mixing it with your pole and lifting the stockings up and whatnot. Sometimes

25:30 they dyed them in a bag, a mesh bag.

And do they make army socks in different sizes or is it…?

Oh yeah they would have made them different sizes, yep.

And what were they made of, were they woollen?

Woollen socks. Fine wool, office socks were a lot finer than the ordinary soldiers' socks.

I didn't know that, that officers had different socks.

Oh yes they had long socks.

26:00 Very, very fine, fine wool.

Did you know people that were working in other protected industries?

No I didn't. No. There would have been many but I didn't know of anybody.

26:30 **So how did that come about then that you got called up?**

Well owing to the Japanese occupying the various islands and expansion of them, the aggressiveness of the situation at the time and, with three divisions overseas, there was very little around here.

27:00 So they decided that they needed more personnel on the ground so they called up the eighteen year olds and I was in that group of course being twenty-one and reserve occupation and so I got into that group. They allotted a battalion in Seymour, issued whatever they could muster up and to start off with it was only a broom pole,

27:30 sort of a musket, but eventually we got a rifle.

So how did you get the news that you had to go?

A notification, a call-up notice was in the mail. And everybody was wondering who would be next sort of thing. So anyway, they were taking reserve occupation people at the time, and putting girls on

28:00 and the like to do the work, and so they created extra hundreds and hundreds of soldiers.

Do you remember hearing the news that the Japanese had entered the war?

Oh yes, it wasn't good news. But once we got into it, we took more interest in it of course. But initially we were posted in what

28:30 they called a cadre. It wasn't a section or a group it was just a group of nondescripts and belting into a bit of shape, early morning climb in the hills and whatnot and a bit of rifle practice and bayonet practice and whatnot and at a certain time they'd create various companies into a battalion.

29:00 We happened to be in this group of cadres in 57/60th which was known as 57/60th Battalion and we were all at Seymour doing a bivouac, a bit of country bush training, and I still had my fishing rod, I had a line, I cut a stick and I had a line tied on it and I used to fish with a grasshopper and catch trout.

29:30 And we weren't out in the bush very long, it was only a few days and we got a call to say that a special unit was being formed and they had to have so many blokes from the 57/60th Battalion because all this cadre that was brought in, a large number of fellows over and above the requirements of what the battalion would be. So they said, "Well we have to have so many fellows", so they set about calling for volunteers and if they didn't get them they put the

30:00 names in the hat, of each group. And they wanted ten from our section and the tenth fellow was an eighteen year old and he had a widowed mother and he had a bit of a bawl and made sure he didn't and they said, "Oh, Hunt can't go." His name was Hunt. "Draw another one." So they drew me.

30:30 So from then on I was in the 39th Infantry Battalion, stationed at Bacchus Marsh. I was on the train the next day, heading off from Seymour to go to Bacchus Marsh and I got on the Goulburn Valley train and, of all the carriages I could have got in, I got in the one with all the big photos of Eildon Weir all around and I thought how strange this is.

31:00 I mean all the other units and all the other carriages I could have been in but I got in this one. Photos of Eildon and I thought, "Gee I don't know what message this is telling me", you know.

What had you actually thought when you heard the news of Pearl Harbour?

I just can't think whether we were in the army at the time.

31:30 I think around about that time. Yes I think it was around about that time we were called into the army. Not being there and not knowing much about it, we didn't know much about it. But as things closed in, you know, Singapore was a devastation as far as we were concerned because they'd lost all these thousands of men and

32:00 the two largest battleships, English battleships were sunk in the Pacific and things were really bad. Just, it really upset us, somewhat.

Can you recall the mood changing in Australia before you got called up?

No, I still felt that they thought it was a fair way away. It was out somewhere else,

32:30 another land somewhere. I don't think anything changed very much, no. Everywhere you went on the train, they kept saying, "You'll be sorry." That's a famous saying, we got that all the time.

Can you just tell me how the call-up worked? Everyone that was over eighteen did you have to go and register somewhere?

Yes, you had to go to the drill hall and you were sworn in and examined.

33:00 **But before you actually got called up did you?**

No, you got your notification that you had to report to the drill hall; that was your call up notice.

How were they picking those people, by birthday?

By birthday, eighteen and whatever group above that was yeah.

And did you hear, like was it on the wireless that they were calling up everyone born on the eighteenth of January or you didn't know until?

33:30 No I don't remember it but it probably was notified in the press I would think. But apart from reading the casualties every day, the news didn't worry us very much, except when things started to heat up a little bit then we got a bit more interested.

So when you go that call up that was for the CMF [Citizens' Military Force]?

Yes.

34:00 That's right. CMF. And you report there through Preston and from then on you're in the army, yes.

And did you know at that stage that you got called up that you might have to serve overseas?

No, no we didn't, well it was special unit at the time, I didn't know about this. But after we were allotted to the 39th Battalion, it was forming a unit for special duties

34:30 and that was for overseas service but it was more or less a sort of a reserved area where it had been, weren't, not to be a front line job, no. We were sort of an occupation force and same as went to Rabaul, the 2/22nd Battalion went to Rabaul and I think there were only a thousand men there, but that was a holding job, but there was no war going on. And the next thing they were involved

35:00 and captured. Not many got out from Rabaul, few did. Eventually we got our CO [Commanding Officer] that came to us and arranged us, he came out, got away from Rabaul with nine other fellas in a boat and landed on the coast of New Guinea and walked overland to Port Moresby. And as soon as he got there he was a major and he was shot straight through up to into the [Owen] Stanley Range up to the war at Kokoda.

35:30 **And who was that?**

Colonel Cameron, a brigadier, Colonel Cameron. I think he was a major at the time.

So at the time you first got that letter in the mail, you being called up, did you think it was primarily going to be for home defence?

Yes we did that's true, yeah. We thought we'd be defending Australia on the Australian coast somewhere, but of course when they brought this

36:00 special battalion in, quite a lot of them were volunteers, not all of them were drawn out of the hat. The Victorian Rifles provided most of the sergeants and corporals and they'd been in the CMF for a number of years and they had a bit of experience behind them, bit of training and whatnot in warfare, and they were the sort of nucleus for our battalion.

36:30 **So what were your feelings when you got that call up letter in the mail?**

I don't know, a little bit sickened really I suppose. But it was going to be a whole new ball game as far as we were concerned but just had to make the most of it.

Was there any way of getting out of it?

37:00 No, that was it, no, you were in the army. Unless you had flat feet or heart tremors or whatever, unless you were physically you were graded even second class, and you might have gotten out, graded second, 'B', 'B' class. And they'd give you a job somewhere else, secondary job somewhere.

37:30 **For the purpose of the archive we're really interested in getting all the details. So from the day you got your notice, then what happened?**

Well within two or three days we were on a, being transferred to Seymour.

So in that two or three days you got the notice and then you had to report somewhere?

Well, you notified your firm that you were called up and let them make some other arrangement, and then you set about

38:00 preparing yourself to go into camp.

Can you remember what your bosses' response was when you informed them that you had been called up?

I think that they probably would realise that eventually going to happen with the way the situation was working out for our country and I think it was just a matter of course to put the girls on at night work and take our jobs and leave us free to go.

38:30 **Was there a farewell for you on your last day at work?**

No, don't remember anything like that no, just we were out, pick up your pay and go.

And was there anybody else from the factory that was called up at the same time as you?

I don’t remember anybody no.

So you got your notice, told the boss.

Quite a lot of eighteen year olds rolled up of course at the drill hall the day that I was there and then they put you through like sheep through a dip or something.

39:00 **So what happened when you actually got to the drill hall? Was there a long line that you had to go in?**

Yes you stood in the line and they took you along and filled in the details whether you were ‘Meth’ [Methodist], Protestant or otherwise, and so on and you had medical and classed A1 and then you were transferred to ‘A’ unit which was Raglan

39:30 Street was the 57/60th headquarters and so you were allotted to that Seymour area and so you are in a canvas town then. Our first meal was pea soup. The peas had a little core in them when you cooked them, a tiny little core

40:00 that was freed when the peas were cooked and they really looked like something else and we objected to eating this soup because we thought it had been fly-blown. So all hell broke loose and anyway they ascertained eventually that the soup was all right to eat.

Were you told to take anything with you on that first day in the drill hall?

No, just go as you were. And you

40:30 would be equipped. I think we took a little bag with socks and whatnot but that was all sent home, on your next leave you’d bring it home.

Tape 3

00:30 **You were in a protected industry, were you surprised that you got called up?**

Oh no it would have been normal yes, I mean eventually it had to come the way the situation got, things were so bad, very, very bad, as far as the war situation was, they just didn’t have anybody here. They eventually they got round to forming what they called the Brisbane Line. And that’s where they,

01:00 that was their first line of defence. And that’s how it was meant to be. They were prepared to sacrifice us, we were just like another Rabaul, there were only a thousand blokes at Rabaul and they went and everything from there on went, what was it sixteen thousand Australians went in Singapore and there was nothing in New Guinea. There were three thousand fellows in New Guinea, our

01:30 brigade, but no training, hardly ever had a shot out of it, we got to bring us the night, the day before they went over the range, or before they flew over, wrapped in greaseproof and we’re out with a hurricane lamp learning to overcome a gas blockage. I never fired a Bren gun the whole time I was there. I carried it but I never fired it.

02:00 **We’ll go back to your training. Who was the bloke that got his named called out, the tenth bloke?**

Can’t think of his Christian name, Hunt anyway. Yes.

And then they redrew the thing and you got it.

Yes, I was number ten yeah.

Was there a nice story about that?

Well, it was just the way it was, you’re in and…

And his mum appreciated it, did she?

Oh, look, out of this world, poor lady.

02:30 God knows what she went without to send me soldier’s cakes so often and a letter every week, three page letter and we had nothing whatsoever in common apart from the boy, me taking his place, she sacrificed God knows what to send these cakes, beautifully hand-made cakes you know to New Guinea, all done up in, wrapped up, sewed up in hessian,

03:00 in cloth and beautifully moist, beautiful cakes. So many of them and other blokes enjoyed them too. Yeah.

And do you know what happened to him?

He eventually went to the islands. He went with the 57/60th Battalion to Bougainville I think, and the Bomana cemetery at Port Moresby has many, many headstones of the 57/60th Battalion and I’ve never

ever

03:30 been able to get the history of them. I don't know, never been able to find out and it's getting too late now. My bike-riding friend down Moe way down Traralgon, I spoke to him recently, "I'm so deaf Arnold, I'll let you talk to the wife", he's gone you know. He was in the 57/60th.

04:00 **So he survived the war, but never been able to catch up with him since the war?**

No, he came to my sixtieth birthday, came up, big surprise, huge surprise. The daughter put it on for me and it was on a Saturday evening and I, they took me to Melbourne and we drove down to Melbourne and going to dinner, going to my daughter's for dinner and I noticed

04:30 all these cars along the street and I thought, "Nobody about", and I thought, "Gee a lot of cars in this little street". Anyway went inside and all of a sudden, pulled the curtains back and there's thirty people there. What a surprise. Sixtieth birthday. I left work when I was sixty.

So once you had your name pulled out of the hat and you were off to the 39th, how did training change?

05:00 Well very little, I don't know that we, we had to have inoculations because it was all going to be fairly quick after we got to Darley and Bacchus Marsh and inoculations and some route marches and we had a sergeant, Sergeant Morrison, great bloke, he's a bit like Bill Guest as far as a sergeant goes and a leader of men and he did wonderful things at Kokoda, and

05:30 Bill, Tosser Morrison, Sergeant Morrison, he was a leader of men and on our twenty-mile route marches and the like, getting us toughened up around Bacchus Marsh, he had a song and it was a ditty and it was about fifteen verses long and it was a

06:00 He called it My Ring-Dang-Doo [a bawdy song]. And it went on, "Ring-dang-doo, it was soft and furry and it was like a pussycat and it hair all round it and whiskers too, that's what he called a ring-dang-doo". It was about fifteen verses and we'd be marching and "Have a repeat of that one!" And twenty miles has gone, you know.

06:30 Great bloke.

You don't remember the words to that by any chance do you?

That was some of the words yeah. And it went on "The boys all came and the boys all went and the price went down fifteen cents, and they all had a ride on the ring-dang-doo." Tosser Morrison, he finished up, he had hard times in New Guinea and finished up alcoholic and died early. A lot of them did this.

07:00 **Did you all have 303s to train on?**

After, I think we had a few broomsticks for a while, just a pole. But eventually we all got an old 303 yeah.

So besides route marches, what other training did you do?

Up hills, running up hills first thing of a morning. Bayonet training, in and out on guard, drive you silly, but it stood us in good stead anyway.

07:30 We only did one bayonet charge in New Guinea and the sergeant got the Distinguished Conduct Medal for it. A lot of exaggeration goes on in war, you know, it's not all what it seems. They seem to add all, I was going through my book there and when I was there and saw differs considerably to what is written in the book. They seem to add quite a bit

08:00 somehow or other and they probably miss out lots of things.

So did you know where the 39th would be deployed, when did you find out you were going to?

On the Aquitania, we thought we were going to Darwin for special duties. Darwin was very vulnerable area then and that's where we found after we had been on the Aquitania for a couple of days and they said New Guinea and it was

08:30 well on the (UNCLEAR) war on. Things really looked grim then.

How much warning did they give you before you were to board the ship and leave?

It was only a very short time from when we actually, seven or eight, probably ten weeks I suppose from the time I joined the 57/60th, you know conscripted there, probably about ten weeks I think and we were on the water.

09:00 And in that time we had no, well, jungle training and there was no jungle but we had a bit of rifle out on the range and fired a 303 a few times but, threw a grenade or two.

So how many rounds do you reckon you'd fired in your training?

Probably less than a hundred probably, yes.

And one or two grenades.

Threw a few grenades, nothing very much.

What about infantry tactics?

09:30 No, what were they? No, we didn't have any infantry tactics, no. No, there was no basic training at all, there just wasn't time by the time we got our inoculations and final leave and away. I think around about December 25th we had trained or something at Bacchus Marsh and then went on to Sydney and boarded, I think we left on the 27th.

10:00 And our sister battalion they rounded those poor buggers off the street, the 53rd Battalion. They didn't have home leave. They had a very bad record in New Guinea, they were looking after our flank in, off the back of Isurava there and we thought they're right they're looking after that left hand flank there, but the beggars weren't there; they all shot through.

10:30 Terrible situation. They redeemed themselves though. They broke them up and put them in our battalion to make up for our losses. They got killed like nobody's business at Gona, Buna. Good blokes, they were badly led.

With your pre-embarkation leave what did you do, where did you go for that?

I had to go to Daylesford; my sister was up there,

11:00 and a day or two there and of course I had to go to Eildon, which is in the opposite direction, up the north east and had a few days at home with Father and then back to city with my great aunt and all in all the fourteen days were taken up, I think it was. Only a short time, fourteen days I think.

You must be charged with different emotions before you board a ship to go to war, how were you feeling?

11:30 Well I think it was just inevitable, it was there and you had to do what you had to do, nobody wanted to be there. It was a case of go with the flow.

People might ask, "What were you fighting for?" What were you fighting for?

12:00 Well we were fighting for our country, Australia. We were leaving it behind and wanted to get back to it as soon as we could. We, as the boys said later, "The king and country," but we were fighting for the 39th Battalion that particular time. But no we wanted to defend these beggars and get home.

So where about was the Aquitania docked when you boarded that?

12:30 Woolloomooloo. It was third largest ship in the world. It was very good.

Was there a send off for you?

No, didn't have any send off, no, might have put on a nice tea before I left, Great Aunt,

13:00 other than that, no it was just inevitable, you were on your way and the trip across was uneventful, six or so days, apart from we had a scare one evening the warships rushed in from the horizon and dropped some depth charges and we still don't know to this day whether it was a submarine or a whale, but they flung over some depth charges and stayed close to the ship that

13:30 night, but we were well escorted by a very fine flotilla of warships and corvettes. We had more or less as slow as our slowest tramp.

Did you get to say goodbye to dad before you left?

Oh yes, had final leave at home. No coming down to seeing us go or anything like that, it was just you know.

And did he give you

14:00 **any special words before you left?**

No, he wasn't a fighting man and it was just you know, look after yourself, don't be long, come home. And that was as far as it went.

Did you take over any personal things such as a chain or a cross or anything?

No, I had some photographs of my mother's grave and whatnot and

14:30 I had a very nice pocketknife I didn't get back; the Japs [Japanese] got that one too. Unfortunately I did get back with a photo, somehow or other, but I think they might be replacements, we lost most of our gear at, actually we lost two lots of gear at New Guinea. When we got up to before we got Sanananda, we were going out

15:00 to Gona West and that was our first engagement, after the Stanley Ranges. They took us, after the Ranges were finished, they were relieved eventually at Iora Creek and we got back and I don't

remember anything. I mean we left Isurava and that was quite

15:30 a story too because we got cut off before we got to the, but anyway a native policeman got us out of that situation and walked all day and got us back onto the track at a point away from the Japanese. Got us back and walked all night to Iora Creek and we took our position under the hut at Iora Creek and were there until the following day when the Japs caught up with us again and belted us out of that lot.

16:00 But from Iora Creek on, we were still some days away from being relieved as we were to be at Isurava but I have no recollection whatsoever because we were worn, we were spent. We were just, just a walking corpse actually and I haven't any idea, except coming down three or four thousand steps where you lost your knees and whatnot.

16:30 And all the troops, as they were going up we were coming back. That whole thing that was a blank, we got back to base and they provided with a roast dinner and a large lump of Herbert Adams cake and we were as sick as dogs because our stomachs were about as big as a walnut, through starvation. And then into con [convalescent] camps and we were in hospitals and all over the place for quite a time there. And then

17:00 they formed the battalion again and dragged up the 53rd Battalion and built up and in the end we had fifteen hundred men instead of the usual thousand, we finished up with fifteen hundred going through and they fattened up and they sent us up a new brigadier, from Melbourne, Brigadier Porter and he took over and on parade he said, actually we had a wonderful thing, we were the only

17:30 Australian troops that wore khaki shirts and shorts and 1914 leather leggings with tan boots and if you see a photo an image in the leggings, a great spectacle. And on parade he said "I've got you back into a bit of form now and we're taking you back to lick those Japs." He said, "They gave you a caning but we're going to cane them." So back we went and

18:00 we flew over to Popondetta and then Gona West, which was our first engagement over there. And that was where they said, "You don't need your packs any more, you've just, whatever you don't want to carry in your haversack put, stockpile, put the packs in the stockpile." And they pulled all the packs onto the wet ground it was marshy ground and emptied it all out there in a heap and they used the packs for the natives carrying

18:30 grenades and whatnot. They all nipped off with those and when we came back eventually and called back to get our gear and there was nothing left, it all had been rifled and gone. And that was the first lot of gear lost and then the next time of course when unexpectedly we had to leave Isurava, dark one evening and it was the greatest shock to my life

19:00 not to be going back in, I thought only, when we moved in the afternoon just a hundred yards or so to block a situation at Isurava, I thought this was only a temporary arrangement, we'll be back and we didn't take any food and about three o'clock in the afternoon they called for volunteers to go down to our little kitchen down there to be able to get some food and it was a straight drop down to get our food.

19:30 And I ducked, number one, I volunteered because I had a little bit of tobacco in my tin, in my lean-to I had a lean-to and I got my little bit of tobacco and a bag of bully beef and biscuits and up the hill again and the Japs peppered hell out of us, this is true, and they say the ones that the bullet you don't hear is the one you got to worry about. They were peppered just like rabbits. Peppering rabbit going up the hill you know.

20:00 Bloody shots firing, they were all up trees firing at us. And anyway, the six of us got up the hill again with our load of stuff, but never in our wildest dreams did we think we were going to leave Isurava that night.

I might just back up; go to Aquitania. What were conditions like on the ship?

Oh beautiful, they had the wonderful cooks and whatnot, merchant navy I think the cooks were and it was big dining rooms and

20:30 whatnot, oh, it was a wonderful situation, plenty of room.

And where were you sleeping on board?

I think we were down in the holds, yeah, that was quite good, whatever was down there, I can't quite remember that, it wasn't hammocks I don't think. But there was only an amount of accommodation down there; there was only two thousand on the ship.

21:00 Yes there were two thousand, 53rd and the 39th. The 49th were already been in Port Moresby by that time, when we got there.

Did you mix much with the 53rd blokes on the ship?

Well no not really. I didn't have much to do with them. They had their own section and their own mealtime and whatnot, No we didn't have much contact with them, no.

And the rumour was you were going to Darwin?

That was the idea yes.

21:30 First couple of days and then we had PT [physical training] and cleaning the rifles and whatnot and they kept us busy in the morning and of a day with activities, basketball, anything just to wile away the time and keep us occupied. And when we got closer to Port Moresby, they issued five rounds of 303 and said, "We might just have to fight our way to

22:00 ground. Landing might be a bit rough." Big as they tell you, "Fire up." We had no idea what we were going to find when we landed in New Guinea but we couldn't the ship was so big. You just had to stand off about two kilometres and they transferred us with lighters and we got off just before dark one afternoon and all formed up and marched the 7-Mile drome, which was seven miles.

22:30 And you see all these black figures just standing around yabbering away, like monkeys in the dark they were. It was hairy; it was quite an experience you know. And when I got there the only facility was a four-inch water pipe to serve a thousand men. It was our only facility and of course as we did find out that, we must have been carrying a blanket

23:00 with our gear, we must have had a blanket rolled over our haversack, anyway our camping, mess gear was on the bottom of the Aquitania and it took them two weeks to find it. So we were all heavily infected with malaria, there were thousands and thousands of mosquitos, they just ate you alive. You just cover yourself up with the blanket, we were sleeping on the ground around Jackson [Field], it was called Jackson after the 7-Mile drome, yeah.

23:30 But we were there for three or four months I think. There was never a dull moment, no thought about doing a bit of training, we were unloading the ships and digging fortifications. We dug so many holes in battalion positions, all over the island. And even down Bootless Bay, we were down there putting barbed wire entanglements up amongst the mangrove, so if the Japs did land and they did in Bootless Bay, it was

24:00 the nearest approach they would land, we would hold them up a little bit. We lost one bloke there he got bitten by a snake. He died instantly. A water snake, deadly, most deadly. He was our first casualty I think. Then of course we lost some on the Macdhui when our supply ship got bombed and

24:30 sunk in Moresby harbour. We lost a few, 39th blokes on that too. I never got on a working party, I went in a couple of days and Zeros came over and made it nasty for everybody, machine gunning everywhere, but we only just went in for a bit of a trip I think, an outing.

What did you think of Port Moresby?

Well, all the civilian people had gone, it was just the natives and they'd gone bush anyway.

25:00 No it was just a lot of buildings standing around and we were out of town, we were seven miles out and we… I eventually got my pushbike of course, there was a lot of (UNCLEAR) from right back in Darley. That was another event we had, we'd line up these hundred odd blokes and they'd give a message here and they'd pass a message and they'd receive it at the other end and

25:30 unreal what that message would turn out to be in the long term. I don't know whether, I don't know how I come to be picked as company runner but company runner I was for the whole of the war actually, even in the 2/2nd Battalion. They tried to fit us in when we were transferred over, they tried to fit us in to as near as they could into what we had been doing, and knew what we were doing. So I was company runner there too.

26:00 They eventually got me a pushbike at Port Moresby and it was a couple of kilometres down to the battalion there and of course I used to have to take the recce, the requisite papers in every day and the tally in and whatnot. So that was another, and of course running to the battalions you had to run to the platoons and I

26:30 dug a hole under, it was a very narrow hole but a very deep one, just outside our tent, in high country, hilly country around Port Moresby, just surrounded by hills and on the seaside. And I dug a fantastic hole and that was the only hole I would ever want to get into. If I was going to get hit, I was going to be in the hole and I'd have to run up hill and down to

27:00 get to the nearest platoons and, by God would I run back again, because I'd be delivering a message saying that there's a pending air raid. They used to fire 303 shots and we didn't have any connection otherwise and I had to run and tell them if they hadn't heard it, that there was one pending and by God I used to make it back to that hole every time I could.

27:30 And they did put us pretty close to it. We had a Fokker mail plane in those times, it used to fly vegetables in from town, Darwin, the nearest point, Darwin I suppose. They used to fly our mail and our vegetables into Port Moresby, made out of the old galvanised iron that Kingsford Smith used, the old twin engine

28:00 Fokker and it had been used for transferring heavy materials, heavy engineering stuff over to the mines in Borroloola and the like and anyway it was taken over by the army and parked it on the far end, the

plane on our end of the field and thirty bombers came over and patterned bombed and you could see them and see the bomb bays open and they were coming down in a long arc, you know, screaming down and right through our area.

28:30 They got the plane in cinders and they burnt our tent, we got put out, didn't get alight, and our beer bottles were lined up against two trees and they all fell over, just this, we were in the hole you know. "Oh God! What's happening now?" But anyway nothing came into our hole but down in Ela Beach, just down that way, they were digging there, started to dig for two blokes normally would be in that hole, because they dug it.

29:00 Poor old Curry, I think his name was Curry, can't remember the other one, anyway out of the bush they came that day. They didn't go into the hole, they thought, "We won't go there today, we'll go up the hill" and went up the hill and they weren't in the hole. I think we had a bit of guidance from some being somewhere, I don't know what, because I feel sure we were looked after, here and there along the line.

Have you had any religious upbringing?

Oh yes, right from very early

29:30 days in Woods Point, we'd always go to church, religious church on a Sunday. And then we'd, Dad had an old accordion and we'd sing around, we didn't have a piano and we'd sing songs and whatnot and then when I came to live in with my great aunt in Melbourne, we had the minister staying with us and Sunday school

30:00 and church Sunday night. And that went on for a number of years until I thought, "I'll draw the line at this" because I was starting to feel myself a bit as far as dancing and whatnot and bike riding. I thought I was starting to get a little bit aged for this bible class or whatever. And brother was in the bible class and I saw him come home with grass on his back one night

30:30 and he'd been somewhere else apart from the bible class so anyway, I used to get dressed and go to Sunday school but I never went, I gave it away. The minister kept his quiet, he didn't say anything, but I eventually broke away from the church. I always had a religious feeling, because I know there is something there somewhere and I like to go along with it.

31:00 **So the first air raid was that the Zeros?**

No, the first air raid was something like twenty-five bombers at night at about ten, eleven o'clock at night and we were in bed and some of the boys were well-equipped, they had arm chairs and whatnot because they'd raided the warehouses at Burns Philp and whatnot and they had lounges and oh God. We had pegs driven in the ground with

31:30 wire netting on them and stretchers made out of wire netting and whatnot and we were pretty comfortable, had our mosquito nets up and whatnot, we were pretty comfortable along the foothills of the 7-Mile drome. But we worked jolly hard. If we couldn't dig it with the picks and shovels, we'd blast it, fellows with fuses and whatnot and gelignite and blow a hole to try and make it easier. They did, Conran instigated a

32:00 (UNCLEAR) and boring, building all these future positions we could fall back to or whatever, or whoever was going to be falling back to them, and Conran instigated a scheme whereby the best section to build a fortification was going to be sent home for a trip. I don't think he got any of those blokes back. I think they all shot off. True. I never ever heard

32:30 but I don't know if they got back. Oh, it was a bugger of a place, Port Moresby.

Did you feel like soldiers?

I felt like if I could have got my boat, the one that Dad had the thirty passenger boat on Eildon, if I had that tied up somewhere on the coast there on Port Moresby I think I would have used it, because we had no escape route, there was no way out of Port Moresby for us, no way.

33:00 That was it.

What had you been told about the Japanese soldier?

Well they said that their sight wasn't good, that they had glasses as thick as beer bottles and they all wore glasses, and we had really not a worry to worry about as far as their ability to shoot people. And I mean we believed it until we saw them

33:30 and I wasn't the first to go over, our company was, Don Company was the first to fly over to Kokoda, but the first fellows walked over, they were B Company with Sam Templeton and they walked over and sent their heavy gear around by boat to Buna and they more or less just beat the Japanese landing by just a few hours, or a few days at the very least and they battled, the B Company battled them all the way back from

34:00 Buna right back to Kokoda and of course they flew part of Don Company, only about two plane loads landed at Kokoda, very initial take-off and we went to the drome many occasions and rested Don Company but each time we were sent away again

34:30 and actually they sent one plane over with a load in it and the American pilot and as the blokes that were already ran out to clear the drums off the drome and he said “Chaps.” And he turned around and went home again, took that load, oh God, they were gravely needed too, that load of blokes. And so we went back and of course the drome was closed henceforth and we walked then for the nine days

35:00 along with A and C Companies. B had already gone over, so we had just a portion, just about thirty blokes of Don over at Kokoda, under Lieutenant McLean.

So your first taste of war, was that being bombed that night?

Oh yes, God yes, that was the first, that was, they used to fly along the coast until they came to a large rock apparently off the coast

35:30 and from there, just straight in to Port Moresby, that was their mark. They always did this at night time. Well it reached the stage there wasn’t many more roads, they bombed the barracks and whatnot that night and ammunition dumps and whatnot. They just ran and bombing and the town, they wrecked Burns Philp and all those places and the

36:00 AA [anti-aircraft] guns we had could barely reach them in daytime, they had quite a problem getting to thirty-thousand feet with their guns and oh they got a bomber or two but not many. But then they started the daylight raids with the Zeros and whatnot and that was nearly every day. I got a list there of the days those bombers – there

36:30 were well over a hundred air raids – I got a list of what days they took place on.

And that first time that you got bombed, how did you feel about suddenly being in it?

Pretty awful, didn’t get much sleep that night, no. It was quite an experience, could hear the bombs falling, seven kilometres away. It wasn’t long before they were doing air raids, bombing during the daytime and then the Zeros and whatnot were coming over frequently.

37:00 Every day.

Did you feel differently being bombed as opposed to being strafed; was there a difference in how you guys felt about that?

I think while you could see something it was worth looking at, you could see the Zeros strafing the drome, not many occasions they went looking on the foothills for us, it did happen once or twice I think, in the main they were

37:30 after targets and I have seen the little twin-wing things, Japanese come off a ship or somewhere and I’ve seen them thirty feet above us flying over Bootless Bay looking at our fortifications there and after the calamity of our ‘Tomorrow Hawks’ or Kittyhawks as you might call them, we weren’t allowed to fire a

38:00 shot after that and there are these fellas here you could almost poke a stick at them. And you weren’t allowed to shoot at them. They were just photographing and getting the whole lay of the land. Open Slather, couldn’t touch them.

Can you tell us about the ‘Tomorrow Hawk’ story?

Well it’s been fairly well been told. We were promised these planes because every day these Zeros were coming in and strafing, they just at random no matter what and

38:30 varying numbers from day to day and the initially we were away too, they died very quickly because they had no chance of keeping up with the Zeros and they, game fellows, to take them off the ground. And then of course we had the whispering death the two, a couple of those, can’t think of the name of them, Beaufighters, yeah marvellous, marvellous plane,

39:00 they would fly at tree height, strafe and whatnot, they were fantastic planes. And consequently we had a couple of those eventually, eventually we were going to get these American planes these Kittyhawks and every day they’re going to come so we called them the Tomorrow Hawks because they just didn’t turn up. And of course when they did come over,

39:30 same route as the Japs would take, from the stone across to the drome, to the city, Port Moresby, it was all the same just in that area there. And so of course they come over waving their wings and whatnot and the boys said, “Righto, into them.” And so the boys on that side were firing their old Lewis guns at them and bullets were landing here at these blokes and these were firing at them going over and the only trouble was the planes didn’t go away, they kept going around and getting more shots fired at them

40:00 and as you said, the big ‘J’ underneath, yeah Japs and it turned out to be fella’s name, pilot’s name on the plane. Anyway, the major came down Bill and he said, “For Christ’s sake, stop firing, they’re our blokes. Stop, stop, stop.” So from that day on, we weren’t allowed to fire a shot.

40:30 And one of the bullets I’m told came through Jackson’s legs and went through the plane. It just chipped his chin as it went through. And as I say, when he stepped out of his plane with his revolver and he’s looking for the first bloke with a rifle and shoot him.

Tape 4

00:31 **In that three or four months that you were at Port Moresby, how did your opinion of New Guinea develop?**

Well you were the only, the small area between the 7-Mile and the ships were unloading, that's the only area, we didn't know anything about the island, Stanley Range or anything like that, which was the back of beyond somewhere. And so that was all in the future.

01:00 **What did you first think though, when you first got there?**

Well we had no idea what we were going to be in for. Japanese hadn't landed on New Guinea. We were going to be a garrison force and that's all we should have been. Unfortunately we were front line.

What was your impression of the physical surroundings when you first got there?

It was all bush country and high country and

01:30 the gravel strip down the centre of the flat bit of ground there and the roads were as rough as could be, frightful roads and there. And we did have transport with us, but other than that there were very few vehicles in New Guinea. And the natives, they used to come in, bring in fruit and stuff from down the coast, all the fair haired ones and we were supposed not to fraternise with them in any shape or form but

02:00 we liked their fruit just the same, because we didn't know whether they were Fifth Column [enemy agents] or what they were you know. They could have been sent in by the Japanese, we didn't know where they came from, they just bring good bananas and pawpaws and stuff, yeah, which we exchanged for money. Other than that life was just sweat and the old commander there, the old Morris,

02:30 Brigadier Morris, he always wore his hat and the old Indian type hat and he reckoned white men, the only way you could live in New Guinea was to drink a bottle of whisky a day. But of course that didn't work out, we didn't have that sort of commodity. We got a bottle of beer once a fortnight or so. We were having trouble getting supplies through from the mainland.

03:00 The wharf labourers wouldn't load our ammunition; they wanted extra money for that, for that dangerous occupation. They'd load the beer all right but they wouldn't, they went on strike, wouldn't load the ammunition. So that was one of the things we didn't get on too well with initially. But otherwise Port Moresby was just

03:30 an island country and we only knew what we could see just around us.

When you first got there and you did see what was around you, did it seem more beautiful or daunting?

It was a wonderful country. It was hot. It rained everyday at three o'clock; that was part and parcel of your day. We eventually had tents and we lived pretty well. Food was basic

04:00 and we had our own cookhouse and they turned bully beef and stuff into unusual dishes and whatnot.

What was some of the different ways they would cook up the bully beef?

I wasn't a cook but they used to have you know large dishes of all mashed up food and mix it with vegetables and whatnot, sort of a hash,

04:30 mess tables and whatnot and tinned cheese and tinned butter, all pretty rancid, over the bread. We'd get some bread occasionally, we'd get a loaf, get a slice of bread occasionally, they used to bake, had a bake-house somewhere in the town. There's a story goes, don't know how true it was, there was a story doing the rounds at the time there, when the Americans did arrive, their commodity, their flour ran out one day so they

05:00 came along to the Q [Quartermaster] store and wanted to see if they could borrow a few bags of our flour and so they were accommodated and they were back in about three weeks and they said, "We'll pay this twofolds", they were very generous and they were back in two or three weeks time, they wanted more of our Australian flour. Said, "The boys love the caraway seeds." Because every slice of bread had ten weevils in it and

05:30 you'd see all these little flecks just in the baked bread and this is the story, the Americans loved the caraway seed in the bread. So they unloaded a certain number of bags for good flour and swapped.

In that time in Port Moresby, when you were saying before that the natives that were going by you weren't really meant to interact with, what was that like though? When you did start interacting with them?

Well it was still more or less forbidden

06:00 to do so and no matter where or what. It wasn't until we got along the track that we had really anything to do with the real bushies. There were four thousand of them working on the track, something like that figure and they were the carriers going out and bringing the wounded back.

Did you ever have any interaction with them in Port Moresby though when you were?

No, no there weren't very many around really, you very seldom

06:30 saw a…occasionally you'd see two or three women with a group of fellows moving from one place to another, but they didn't like what was happening around Port Moresby with the shooting and whatnot. It was an armed city at that time so they stayed away in the bush.

What was the story about when you lost blokes in the

07:00 **Macdhui?**

Yes, Macdhui. They were unloading apparently, we had an unloading party every time the ship came in and all other ships too, always unloading parties called for and you'd be just allotted a task, just jump on the wagon and go in, put in your eight hours there. And very frequently they'd strafe the boats and whatnot but once they started the

07:30 bombing it was pretty serious. As I say, I only went to Port Moresby one day and we were strafed that day. But we did lose five or six fellows killed, along with I think about fourteen or fifteen got killed actually, on that occasion.

Sorry the ones that you lost they were?

Our unit, yeah.

And they were shot?

Killed with the bombing, the shrapnel, yeah.

08:00 Direct hits, three or four direct hits went right through from the top of the ship to the bottom. Through the bottom and yeah she just sank where she was. Now still in the harbour, towed out to the centre of Port Moresby harbour and rusting wreck out there.

What was it like on that first walk, the seven mile walk to the aerodrome, what was that walk like?

As I say it was a pretty hairy

08:30 sort of a walk, not knowing our destination, where we were going, anything about it and all these mutterings and going on as we marched along and the walk was pretty daunting in so much as our feet, we hadn't, we'd been exercising but to get out and walk seven kilometres was pretty hard on our feet and I can remember a lieutenant he had

09:00 blisters but he just strode on out in front, strode out, and of course when we got to the strip we knew we had reached our destination then so they said, "Oh just park anywhere for tonight and we'll sort things out tomorrow." As I say, a three-quarter inch water pipe wasn't much good to a battalion so that was one of the first things they had to do was get some water to us.

So you unloaded off the ship and it was all sort of fifteen hundred of you or how many blokes were on that walk?

09:30 Yeah, it was the 53rd went to another area but we went to the 7-Mile drome and that'd be a thousand fellas yeah.

A thousand fellows walking along in the dark? How on earth did you, how did it happen?

Followed the road yes, I suppose somebody knew where to go. Followed the commander and took off. Pitch black.

Are you all just marching single file?

10:00 Oh no, three, probably three abreast. There was no traffic on the road, no nothing.

And what sort of mutterings were going around?

Well we didn't know what the natives were talking about but they were wondering what's going on too. All these fellows arriving on their doorstep. They already had about a thousand fellows there in the 49th Battalion. They were there for some months and they were quite

10:30 used to them being around. But this new lot, something they didn't know too much about.

So was it mostly uphill?

No it was a flat walk. But it was very difficult with not having exercised to that extent and carrying a

fair load of stuff too, we had a fair load of gear on; all our gear, big pack and whatnot.

11:00 **What were you carrying on that walk?**

Well the main thing was we had a blanket and our spare clothing and it was all, probably a haversack and a pack a bit of both, our water bottle and our rifle. I suppose we had forty or fifty pounds weight of stuff and that tired us out for the best part of a couple of weeks. And sleeping on the ground with a blanket over us,

11:30 had to keep us away from the mosquitos as, never forget the mosquitos, they were so bad.

How do a thousand blokes see where they are going in the dark?

You get night eyes I think. No, we didn't worry, once we got to the 7-Mile drome which was a gravel strip, apparently they knew that was the place to be and we just

12:00 lay down anywhere we could and they sorted us out tomorrow and allotted us a position around the drome, security.

Seeing that you thought as part of the CMF that when you got there, you were just going to be doing garrison duties, were you surprised when the air raids started coming in?

No we weren't actually because having,

12:30 Labuan was the next island and having just been taken, we knew we were going to be next. There was nothing more sure than that. But to have the bombers come over it was an experience we hadn't experienced before. It was pretty upsetting really, but anyway it was just the way it was and we got used to it after that.

13:00 Still.

Obviously I've never experienced…

Aerial bombing is such a frightening experience, you don't know which one has got your name on it, because they just random bomb and they're bombing from thirty-thousand feet and they're probably aiming for a target but

13:30 in one instance they were after, they got many of our planes, from time to time and at the most critical time the Zeros got three Dakotas, which were our supply aircraft to supply the people over the range and you can't fight a war if you haven't got supplies and these, that

14:00 was the most awful thing to have happened at a critical time for these planes, all to be lined up wing tip to wing tip on the tarmac and they got the lot. Knocked them all out. That was a devastating thing to happen.

When you were saying before that as your job as company runner you had to go and make sure everyone had heard the warning, what warning are you getting of air raid? Is it when you first see the plane?

No, we had early…

14:30 From when we first got there, they called for coastwatchers and the people volunteered, was an experience for all of them and some people are like that they like volunteering and they gained quite a few of our fellas from 39th and they went out and supplied with a little radio and they had basic training as to how to go about this and they'd be situated, they'd have to move every couple of days because

15:00 they didn't want their location located and they operated all around the coast of New Guinea and they called them the early warning system and they have since written a book on the Coastwatchers. But a good many of them were killed just the same, they were all decorated, every one of those coastwatchers for their amazing work that they put in guarding

15:30 the population or whatever.

So from the time that you first got the early warning that there was going to be a raid, how long generally was that?

It might be several minutes, ten minutes, because the Zeros were a very fast plane and they'd wire us on their Morse code or whatever they'd send through to Port Moresby and then they'd fire the three shots from the battalion headquarters somewhere and that was an indication that there was an air raid

16:00 coming and then at the end of the air raid they'd fire another two or three to indicate that it's all over, back to work.

it must be a pretty tense ten minutes.

Yes you don't know what's coming but you know that one's pending. You don't know whether it's going to be bombers or fighters but, or both. As I say there were over a hundred raids. You got used to them you know,

16:30 daily coming in.

Did you get a bit blasé?

Oh you still go for the hole though. You still duck down like a rabbit. You have to take cover because you don't know what is going to happen next.

I can only imagine what I've seen in movies, which I'm sure could be quite different from what actually happens, can you tell me what actually happens during an air raid?

Well after you've got your warning, you make your way

17:00 to the trench and you stand around until you saw some activity or saw some noise coming and then you make up your mind which direction they were going whether you were going to go down the hole or you weren't. And the holes were usually about three to four feet deep and usually quite narrow because the smaller target as you could get. So you would judge for yourself whether you were going to go down or not.

17:30 **So while guys are standing around deciding what they are going to do, are there conversations going on?**

Oh yes, I guess, I can't say what we'd be talking about but there'd be, when the next beer supply is perhaps. It was very hard, the beer was always very warm

18:00 of course, there was no refrigeration and whatnot and we always wet a good woollen sock and hung it on a tree somewhere like a Coolgardie safe; it's a wonderful method of having a cold beer.

In the moments before an air raid and while an air raid's happening, if you were looking around, are guys showing fear?

18:30 Yes, you're never very happy about the situation. Yes it's, well you never now what's to take place in the near future, it all flashed up pretty quickly, so you're just hoping that one of them doesn't have your name on it, that's all.

So when you're looking around you and you're seeing guys that are experiencing fear, are they crossing themselves and praying or swearing or crying or all of the above?

I haven't any idea, I didn't do

19:00 those things I just hoped that everything would turn out all right. I guess there were fellas that had to do that, I suppose, cross themselves or whatever, but you know you're always of the opinion it's not going to happen to me anyway. It happens to somebody else.

Were there guys, especially because there are some of them only eighteen years old, are there guys that aren't coping while all this is going on?

19:30 I'm sorry but the situation was that you were there and there wasn't anything you could do about it. It was the situation at the time and whatever will be will be. You couldn't avoid if your numbers were up. We didn't lose very many I don't think with bombing apart from on the ship and that was a prime target of course.

20:00 Otherwise we were well spread out around the drome.

Were there ever guys that were caught naked or?

Oh yes, my friend Bill Guest, I think he got caught down on the drome because that was a very vulnerable place to be, right down on the drome,

20:30 in defence there and they had a gun down there and of course they had very small Bofors guns for low flying aircraft and they were stationed right on the drome, right on the strip, at the edge of the strip, very dangerous work there and Bill got caught, finished up in a slit trench, in a latrine. he took the first hole he came across and it happened to be a latrine.

21:00 Bill tells the story pretty, he didn't get anything other than a dirty pair of clothes.

When something like that happens is that something that afterwards…?

It's good fun ,yes.

21:30 **Did he get a bit of a ribbing after that?**

I guess so yeah. I wasn't actually alongside him at that time but that would be the case, yeah.

When you see that sort of thing in a movie, obviously they're creating the noises that are going on, what sort of noise is actually…?

Well you've got a lot of noise from the aircraft engines, yeah. Lots and lots of noise and of course the

22:00 screaming bombs coming down. Alternatively, the two or three machine guns firing automatically from

the flying aircraft strafing and whatnot, a lot of din goes on, and of course the off-shoot that again is our ack-ack [anti-aircraft] guns are laying into them too trying to bring them down. It's a hell of a lot of big booms going on there.

22:30 **What was the noise that you described the screaming bombs?**

They've got a very loud noise as they race through the air at a great rate of knots. And they let them go three miles back from where their target is and they come down on a long arc right down to get to their target. And everything is worked out on the aircraft as to how far back they're going to release them. And it's that intervening

23:00 time that you see the bomb bays open, probably three kilometres out and the screaming starts that you don't know where they're going to be landing. It's a pretty exciting time for anybody on the ground.

So when you're seeing a bomb get dropped and you're seeing this screaming noise as it comes down, what's going through your mind?

You're just hoping that there's not one for you that's all, that you won't be in trouble.

23:30 I don't know that you'd be thinking anything except that this is not for me.

Have you ever heard a noise since that reminds you of that sound?

If a car exhaust or anything goes off, you get a bit jumpy about that yes. It's only natural those sounds will never leave you, every person.

24:00 **And what's it like in that initial calm after the storm?**

Well you're thankful, you're grateful, that they're gone, that's it for another day. Can't add much to that I don't think.

A lot of guys talk about the Aussie sense of humour, is that apparent in situations like that?

Well I never found too much humour about it. We were all pretty

24:30 serious lot of guys in my lot. We were as I say, a little bit protected, well not from most elements, but later on in more or less hand-to-hand fighting and that sort of thing. I did initial scouting work, out in front you know and found Japanese and whatnot, alive ones, but there is something to be said for, if you're

25:00 a forward scout and you've got three thousand fellows behind you, moving up to a position, there is something to be a little bit proud about. You feel pretty, even though you're a sitting duck out in front, it's something to be there to do that, to be a forward scout with a movement like that of three thousand blokes moving. That was an

25:30 occasion that did happen.

Must be a sense of pride being that?

Yes certainly, my word. That happened at a later time of course, next round.

So when was it in Port Moresby that you first got an inkling that you might have to move out?

I guess the time the General Morris

26:00 got the warning that Rabaul had fallen and then next move would be the coast of Papua, Port Moresby area. And that came to pass very quickly and that's when the battle for Midway and the battle for Coral Sea and every hour after hour, you'd see these planes coming and going, you'd see nine or ten go out and seven come back out of a group of ten

26:30 and they were bombing and strafing and they did eventually defeat the Japanese and they run their tail and went back to Rabaul. But that was an invasion force that would have wiped us out, that lot, the air force, both the American and Australian air force combated that, wonderful battle there in the Coral Sea. And that was, that really stung the Japanese very heavily. And of course they decided

27:00 we can't do it that way, we'll go across country. So they infiltrated into Gona and Buna and they landed there under, you know, no opposition at all. They didn't even see them coming. They landed there at night and (UNCLEAR) and they landed two thousand at Gona and Buna,

27:30 and that was when our fellows were already over it.

What's it like when you're seeing ten planes go out and seven come back?

That's pretty upsetting too because you know that those guys have been lost at sea and this was every day for some days that happened and it was relentless, day and night these bombers were operating.

28:00 Both from Australia and from Port Moresby.

So when you're seeing ten go out and seven come back and it's pretty upsetting is that?

Well you'd see some of them come back and there'd be holes everywhere and they'd be shot up or others would have to do a forced landing with the undercarriage shot away, come down hit the drome and swerve off into the scrub somewhere and all sorts of things that took place.

28:30 **So that feeling of being upset, is that something that the guys talked about or did everyone just keep that to themselves?**

Their air force, we never, I never came in contact with the air force, no, they were just another branch of the service.

But I mean amongst your branch of the 39th seeing it?

We'd wonder what, wouldn't know what was going on but know that something pretty big is going on with the amount of planes

29:00 going and coming and coming back short all the time yeah. We knew it was pretty big business wherever they were going and of course not knowing where they were going. Communications were almost non-existent as far as ordinary soldier, a foot soldier goes, on the ground. They'd tell battalion headquarters what was happening but we wouldn't know.

So as the ordinary soldiers there in the 39th, what had you heard about Rabaul?

Nothing, nothing.

29:30 Just that there's another island and it had fallen. No, we didn't know anything about it whatsoever.

Did you know which Aussies were there?

I knew that the 2/22nd was there yes, but they were overwhelmed in no time. No, very few got away.

So when you got word then

30:00 **that it was time for you guys to leave the aerodrome, can you talk me through that, what happened?**

Well, as I say, some of them got away by aircraft over Kokoda, I think three lots got over. Fourth one was returned. We went to the drome every day but it didn't take place, but it was on one of those trips that a Marauder came in with no undercarriage and the bomb still intact and it exploded, I think killed, of another unit I think seventy people were dead.

30:30 It exploded right when it hit the ground. Not a lot was known about it or said about it, it was just killed in action. But it's one of the things that can happen in war. As I say, we couldn't get over by plane, we walked for nine days from, we walked the thirty kilometres up to

31:00 the starting point, up to Ower's corner, that's around about close to thirty kilometres.

Was that a pretty frustrating experience turning up to the drome everyday thinking you're…?

We were hoping we would get away because that was the idea, for us to get over there if that was where we had to be and not to be getting there. On one of the occasions, an unescorted plane too, you know,

31:30 the Zeros could be anywhere at any time it was pretty hairy sort of business for people flying over but the Americans were a bit upset when one of our boys, from I think the second flight, poked his Bren gun through his window of his aircraft, he didn't like the window of his aircraft being damaged, our bloke was not going to go down without a fight if he could help it, put a few shots into a low flying plane if he could.

32:00 Anyway that's just another.

What happened during the night, you'd head out during the day thinking you were going to head off then you'd come back and have to wait another night?

Well it was only a couple of nights and then we were on our way. You had to pack up in a hurry and as we say you'd be out with a hurricane lamp learning how to dismantle a Bren gun, unwrap and get it out of it's greaseproof papers and whatnot.

32:30 This they did, on the planes, the ones that flew over, they didn't have a chance to get a demonstration; they were on the plane and got the guns on the way over. It was only about twenty minutes ride I think, across to the drome, Kokoda.

So when you got news that you were going to Kokoda, had you heard of Kokoda?

No, didn't know anything about it. Didn't know anything about the Stanley Range until you set out

33:00 and they took us to Itiki, we walked up to Itiki and then we were camped around the falls, they had a big hospital at Rouna Falls and that was about halfway from Port Moresby to Itiki, to Ower's Corner, and

we were camped on Hombrom Bluff which was right opposite the river and right opposite the Rouna Falls General Hospital and we camped there for two

33:30 or three days because they didn't know whether, what was going to be happening, whether any of the Japanese probably land or had landed and that's why we had to walk. We lost a fellow there, he's never been found since, he's just missing in action. He disappeared. It was probably a three or four hundred foot drop from the bluff to the water, to the river

34:00 below, but we never ever knew what happened to that fellow whether he walked in his sleep or what, he just disappeared, he just wasn't in camp tomorrow sort o thing. Lost in action.

Was that fairly unsettling when something like that…?

Yeah it's a mystery, it's always been a mystery as to where, we didn't know whether he had shot through and got a plane to Australia or what, and just concealed and changed his name, we don't know, he was just

34:30 recorded in our book here as missing in action.

So when you got news that you were going to Kokoda, was it a dead certainty in your mind at that time that you were going to the front line and you'd have to fight?

Oh yes that was for sure. We just had to get over there as quickly as we could and the nearest we could do it was nine days.

When you originally went to New Guinea you weren't…?

It was a garrison force, yes.

35:00 **What was the reaction amongst most of the guys when you were told that you were going to Kokoda?**

Well we had no options. There weren't any options; there wasn't anybody else between here and Australia. And later on, as I say, when we got up to Kokoda, in all there were, I'd say, they call it a battalion and there were so many battalions there,

35:30 but these battalions, by the time you'd whittle them down, they'd always leave LOBs behind us, left out of battle, as a nucleus of those to keep the battalion going forever and there were a few away sick and a few away at schools and whatnot and the upshot is, of a thousand men you finished up with about, well if you get five hundred you've got a pretty good sort of battalion. We had no more than four hundred,

36:00 that was our battalion. And we knew we were up against some pretty stiff odds because one of our lieutenants, the first fellow sitting there, they were not little fellows with glasses but they had anchors on their arm here, they were marines and they were six feet tall and they were giants of Japanese

36:30 and they'd been fighting in Manchuria for the last ten years odd and they'd had so much battle experience that it was a daunting experience for us to find these things out, that they were a long way better than what they anticipated. We were to see them or find them. But initially we were being attacked by two thousand against, as I say, no more than four hundred, so that was a thin line between there and the Brisbane line.

37:00 There wasn't much else, 49th Battalion were back in Port Moresby, they were in defence, we left them in charge. And the 53rd came with us and they went down another branch, another track somewhere else, into our left somewhere into the high country, never had any more contact with them, as I say our battalion, no more than four hundred.

37:30 **When you got word that you were being sent to Kokoda to the front line, do you think blokes kind of resented that or were they charged up after hearing about the fall of Rabaul?**

Well that's all there was, we had to do the best with what we had. Now what was the saying, 'so few did so much for…',

38:00 well whatever anyway, I can't remember off-hand, but no it was a daunting experience for so few to be attacked by so many and there was nothing much we could do about it. After we got through from the ranges, we came through, I've never been to Kokoda except on a return visit recently, but when we got

38:30 to Deniki, that's the most forward position for the 39th Battalion, apart from Kokoda, which was down the hill down there, straight over the bluff, down there. When they got driven out of Kokoda, lost Kokoda the first time, we all came back up the hill and they sat on the hill there and waited and formed formations there in preparations for further attack and

39:00 it was then that having lost our colonel at Kokoda, the first opening shots, were shot through the head, they lost Kokoda and then we had Colonel Cameron, this is an escapee from Rabaul came up and took over our command and he was only there a couple of days and he devised, he wanted the drome back again because that was our life-line, and he devised a means by he was going to send a force

39:30 to Kokoda and our company, Don Company was comprised of about sixty fellas at the most, we went out

towards Buna and going out we went out towards Gorari and beyond there and we were to stop anybody, any of the Japs coming in from the Buna end, who were trying to protect the fellas from, there were two companies, such as they were, called companies, they went in and attacked Kokoda and

40:00 they walked in and there were no Japs at Kokoda. So they ran up the flag and their orders were that they would fire a Very pistol to Colonel Cameron who was just up at Deniki, straight above there. And nobody saw the shot, at evening time nobody saw the Very light, which should have been visible for God knows how far, and it wasn't heated and, because we had a line, a single line from Deniki to Port Moresby and

40:30 unfortunately it wasn't noticed and this remnants of D Company, no sorry, remnants of A and C Company, they were already in Kokoda and we're out on a leg way out here to and beyond Gorari and we ran into all sorts of troubles. That was when I first saw some blood being spilt when I see our fellows being knocked over and

41:00 we got a few, got caught up with a few fellows in the gardens and whatnot and shot those.

Tape 5

00:31 **So can you tell us a bit more about going across from Port Moresby to Kokoda?**

Yes, well we set off in single file and by the end of the day, it was about an eight hour walk, thereabouts and we'd finish off with the rain and whatnot and the mud and slush, not many had gone before us but the track was still cut up a fair bit, and the engineers hadn't been through

01:00 so there weren't any steps, some of the climbs probably one in six or so, almost straight up, you know, and it was hands and knees on vines and whatnot, having to crawl your way up and then slide your way down the other side and it was quite a struggle. By the end of the day, they came in all varying stages of exhaustion and quite large gaps

01:30 and the stopping time was like a convoy, you go so far and the bloke in front stops and then there's a long break and catch up period and I think they decided I think the second day that they would leave at a staggered time so that they would cut that time of stop, stop start all the time. And so we progressed on that scheme for the rest of the journey which was, I think it was nine days and

02:00 the intense cold at night and the poor old natives of course, they carrying boxes of ammunition and two to a long pole and probably seventy to eighty pounds or hundred pound weight on their shoulder, how they managed I'll never know, up hill an down dale, frightful situation for them. A lot of them died very, very young. And when they got to their destination wet and cold and miserable, they had to set to

02:30 and cook a bit of rice. There was nothing provided for them and they'd sleep under the hut, we'd sleep on the floor above and just throw your blanket down on the thing and didn't take much rocking of course, you just went off to sleep very quickly. There was nothing else, it was pitch dark very early in the night and so you'd get ready for tomorrow morning again. Have rest and be on your way again and they'd say the progress as the days went by

03:00 and the distance got behind us, so the (UNCLEAR) was that you carried a couple of days supply with you and that was always a problem of supply until they got this Bert Kienzle from the plantations, from the rubber plantations he owned up out from Kokoda. And they gave him a commission and said he was a lieutenant and they said he's a knowledgeable

03:30 fellow and put him charge of the track for as far as the provisions go. And he set out and found the Myola Lakes, the dry lakes of Myola, which were a fantastic find. Although I think the first one was a bit of a failure, it was too marshy, but the second one seemed to be all right and but of the air drops they used to have their old biscuit bombers come over and they

04:00 had a navvy and I think they had to tie him in there and his job, as they pushed the door, he kicked it out, so he was a kicker. To save him being sucked out, they had him tied up, tied back. But probably eighty percent of the stuff was lost, so it wasn't very successful, they did get a few parachutes after that and they learnt better techniques in rolling the stuff in blankets and stuff and getting

04:30 some of it to ground. But long after we left the area in fighting withdrawals coming back, the Japanese would have found lots of our food hanging in the trees and whatnot. We only had one fatality and that was a fella killed by a box of butter that come off the plane in a bit of a hurry sort of thing. I think it was a military policeman got knocked. Anyway,

05:00 killed in action. Well eventually, it was a miserable thing to see these beggars after a hard day, these dark boys to have to set to and cook a bit of rice and put it on a banana leaf as a plate and lay into this raw rice, cooked rice, white rice, and that's all they had to eat all the time, nothing else, nothing provided for them.

05:30 So, we found ourselves at Deniki and they were looking Kokoda and that's where we met our other boys

there, some of them had got back from Kokoda and lost quite a few down there and this Guest fellow, Sergeant Guest, he says

06:00 in one of his stories there, is that he saw the heels of his lieutenant he must have struck a bit of dry ground because you could see the dust up the road heading back and he says, “He left me with it.” And he says he took his little section group and headed off out of the way of the place. He made Isurava about five days later. He missed Deniki altogether and came back onto the track Isurava. There was lots of those stories where

06:30 they had to find there own way back more of less. Anyway we met up with them all at Deniki and that’s where, as I say, Colonel Cameron came from the Rabaul, took over command and he sent us A and C [Companies] to occupy Kokoda and Don Company did the Oivi leg and that’s where I say we ran into all sorts of trouble

07:00 out there, the first blood was spilt there and when we walk through, anywhere now, where that native plant is growing, reddish thing that grows all over NSW, the curse, vine, anyway every time I see that the smell of it reminds me of the first blood we found.

07:30 Anyway I’ll think of it as we go along. We did run into all sorts of problems there and we had our Lieutenant Crawford got a bullet right in the helmet there and that pinned it to his skull and he had great difficulty getting it off without gouging the hole much larger and anyway Jack Wilder, mate of mine,

08:00 and one was detailed to take him back to Deniki and he got back along the track and pulled the revolver on these two boys and he said, “I’m right now, you go back to the boys.” And reluctantly they left him and we never saw him again and he disappeared forever, whether he fell off the little catwalk across the river [Iora Creek] or not I don’t know. Very dangerous crossing you had to get across, or maybe he met with Japanese,

08:30 we don’t know, anything was possible there and we stayed on there until late afternoon and we lost two runners. What they did, our Captain Bidstrup, in charge of Don Company, sent a section forward to a junction of the road and beyond, well beyond Oivi towards Buna and they occupied the track all right but they got surrounded

09:00 and the Japs got between they and us and we sent two runners out and they both got killed, and so at about three or four in the afternoon there was so much chattering going on and sounding of whistles and blowing of horns and all the time while they’re occupying your attention near there they’re working around you fast, getting around, feeling for the edges all the time and getting around and so we decided to back off there so

09:30 we went back to the nearest village, probably about two or three kilometres back and put the night, we were carrying our stretchers with us we had one stretcher. And a fellow by the name of Hannam, he was shot through the, breathing through a hole in his chest. And he was a worry all night and he made an awful noise all night and it was a hundred percent security, nobody slept and watched out all night in case they followed us up. Anyway before

10:00 dawn the next morning, they dispatched a group going back towards Kokoda to a crossing where they wanted to secure that in case the Japs had gone on around on another track and cut across and cut our retreat off, so that was secured and we all moved off and I was in the stretcher party, carrying the, and we had a Bren gunner behind us and an escort in front and we had a pretty slow pace to carry this Hannam fellow back to Deniki. And on the way back, of

10:30 course, we could hear firing going on, Deniki and the Japanese had certainly they had left Kokoda and they had climbed the sidelings and started to attack, we’d left in camp Cameron who was in charge, Colonel Cameron and a few of B Company because they had been fighting from Buna all the way back so they were pretty well spent and a few sick blokes with malaria and whatnot and a cook or two were in camp and that was all there was there to defend the place. So

11:00 defend it they did and of course this put a big spurt on for our blokes, we had to get back quick smart and there were about ten of us carrying this stretcher and turn and unfortunately we got to the bottom of the hill and our fellow died. So then we were able to quicken the pace a bit then and get up the hill and so we were there another two days I’d say before we were completely driven out of there by the Japs. They

11:30 were going around us in all directions. So we got back to Isurava, it’s the best part of a day’s walk, few hours anyway back to Isurava, mostly uphill and there if we had a shovel we would have been great you know, we would have saved hundreds of lives, dozens of lives, but it was our tin hat and bayonet to dig a hole. And it was a, there was no foresight in what we carried,

12:00 looking after the soldier. Of course our uniform was khaki, theirs was green and they had camouflage leaves and all over them you know. You couldn't see the fellows; they were eight or ten feet away, no idea. They were there. So as I say we got driven out and back to Isurava and took up selected positions there and dug what holes we could and settled down.

12:30 I didn’t get any running jobs in Isurava, I don’t know why that didn’t happen, we were only there about

three or four days. I had my birthday, twenty second birthday, there and I happened to be standing on the track and just across that side of the track was our doctor with our operating table with a few vine leaves over the top of him and he was operating with a scalpel or two removing limbs and whatnot.

13:00 And all of a sudden, we've been expecting a relief because of Colonel Honner. We'd lost Cameron in this time, he'd been transferred to the 53rd Battalion to go and look after that lot. They were in bad shape, they were running all over the place, Colonel Cameron went and took over there and Colonel Honner took over with the great Middle East decorations and whatnot. Wonderful, wonderful, wonderful soldier. And

13:30 he said later that any soldier worth his salt, after he'd been told he was going to be relieved, would never leave the post and that's where we were going to die. So inside, we were only there another, the twenty-sixth 2/14th arrived. They say the battalion arrived but there was only, there was two, less than two companies, there was about one hundred and sixty strong,

14:00 I estimated them to be, because when they appeared at the junction and track there wanting directions straight up the ridge and across there, that's where they had to go and that's where they, the direction I directed them to and they had jungle greens on and American gaiters and they were seven feet tall all of them, full faces and lovely equipment and whatnot, oh God and you see our blokes and

14:30 eyes at the back of our head, like skeletons. The soles off our feet, our boots and such a lot of wrecks I'd never seen before. Anyway they come to relieve us of course but this didn't happen. Colonel Honner wouldn't hear of it and consequently we were there another three or four days and in the meantime the Japanese had been reinforced from their two thousand to ten thousand. And

15:00 this is adding up, what with our losses after Kokoda and Deniki about five hundred, four hundred odd I'd put it at, we were down to probably three hundred at the most. And most of those were a bit sick. We joined forces with the 2/14th and we stayed for about another three days and as I say late afternoon when we got a call from the company headquarters, our little group

15:30 about eight of us had to go straight up onto the ridge where the 2/14th were to block a corner there that seemed to be vacant. So we went up there and as I say we called for volunteers, I got me bit of tobacco after that. And then yes we didn't expect to lose the place because we didn't take any food with us, we had to go down and get a bit of food and so

16:00 I was relating the other day, I went to the barracks this month to the opening of the Colonel Honner… A great honour it was for me, the only representative in Townsville and I was invited from Puckapunyal to go to this opening, they named the facility, it's the Press Button Warfare. There are five rooms costing millions, millions I don't know how many millions and my wife and I had such a wonderful day over there and met the

16:30 Honner family and that was, I related our local member here, he asked a question he said, "Have you got any little story you can tell us about the Colonel, you were with him for a long time." And I said, "Well, I only have one little story, it relates to, he came down to the little waterfall we had in Isurava to have a bit of a clean up and when he got there he met 'Kanga' Moore,

17:00 Lieutenant Moore, who was having a bit of a shave and he said, "With respect, lieutenant, when you've finished your ablutions, would you make your way back to your company because the Japanese have just broken through." As cool and calm as could be, you know, our federal representative was able to bring this up at this presentation, anyway, that's beside the point but

17:30 Colonel Honner, he was a great man. And anyway he's certainly got a wonderful facility over there now, at the barracks. But, well as I say, we left, we did the rearguard for the 2/14th and that's the only time a militia battalion has done the rearguard for the AIF [Australian Imperial Force] and a good many of us were AIF by that time, I joined in Port Moresby and I was still with the 39th Battalion as an AIF

18:00 personnel with a VX number.

Can you tell us how that all happened? You guys all going across to the AIF.

Well we had 1914-18 banana growers from around Shepparton and around the Murray Valley there, they all got a soldier settlement there from when they came back from 1914-1918 war and of course things got so serious, they were still on the role of commanders and whatnot and in a reserve role and they were given active service to look

18:30 after the 39th Battalion in New Guinea and they were fifty-five, sixty years of age more probably, and old stiff-legged fellows they all were. But they'd been through the mill and they knew a bit, I mean there wasn't all lost and they consequently, when they decided that the Japanese were getting pretty close, they landed in some returned AIF blokes from the Middle East and that's when our

19:00 old banana growers left us. It was about that time that we were being bombed day and night, whatever and I thought, "By cripes, if there's any good that's going after this war's over, they're going to look after the AIF surely." And so I joined the AIF along with a good many others and so we'd be, we were commanded by young officers, they mightn't have seen action, but they had been in the Middle East and

19:30 we collected some fine soldiers. Thus started our journey on the way.

Did your number change?

Yes. It did. It went from a 'V' number to a 'VX' number.

And prior to changing over had any of the blokes in the battalion received any of that Nasho [National Service soldiers] koala bear sort of thing?

Yes, of course,

20:00 it was, 'chocolate soldiers', absolutely, melt under pressure. That was most common word of the day. We just weren't up to the game, you know, but anyway, getting back to this evacuation of night time of Isurava, the 2/14th came down off the ridge and we followed them down across a valley and up the other side and they went on their way to another village further back and we took

20:30 up a position, it was still Isurava but on the outskirts of it and we took up a position off the track there and sat and waited and we didn't have long to wait until the next morning about eleven o'clock. Prior to that night, as a company runner they, Captain Bidstrup said, "Runner," called a runner, said, "There's two sigs [signallers] up here along the ridge here, go and locate them."

21:00 So away I went and I called, called, called, called in the dark, got right up until I got to the end of the 14th, was coming back down again and got to the end of the line and the bloke says, "Gee, I wouldn't' go up there much further mate," he said, "There's only Japs up there, not a soul not another living soul up there." I said, "Thanks mate, I'll come back." And I called and called and called and of course the little narrow track is only a foot wide down off the ridge there and there hadn't been a track until the soldiers had made one, going up and coming back

21:30 with their food and the wounded and whatnot, and wounded they had plenty of, they wanted a VC [Victoria Cross] there too, anyway we took up, as I say, next morning at ten or eleven o'clock, there was movement in the scrub, bit of movement and out comes our two blokes walked out of the scrub, that I went to find the night before. And ones limping he got shot in the hip. And it's the first they

22:00 knew of what was going on and the bullets were flying through along the scrub aside of them, so close that one got, one he didn't hear came and got him in the leg. And so they, he hobbled out and those blokes, you know in the state they were in they just, hard rocky ground, they were just a yard or two off the track and went to sleep, they didn't hear anybody go past not even a hundred and twenty, thirty blokes.

Does exhaustion get to that point where…?

22:30 Absolutely, almost non-com [non compos mentis, mad], you know, I mean days and nights without sleep and you can only go so far and not much food and your boots hadn't been off for days and if you took them off, you lost the sole of your foot. Just so much pulp it would just fall off. If you had a sole on your boot that is, I mean the heat and the rain and the mud soon pulled the sole, we had good boots but they

23:00 still fell apart. But anyway, it wasn't long about two o'clock in the afternoon, lots of jabbering and they were calling out, "Come on, digger, come up soldier, come and give us a hand." In broken English, they were trying to get us to go and investigate, the beggars, all sorts of gimmicks they were up to. But working around all the time and that time police boy came through and he was

23:30 bringing a boong train [native carrier line] through but when they got, came down over a creek bed they were fired on from the rear there. And the boongs just went, gone. Lost the whole, dropped the lot, so he came through on his own and he said, "You've got the option," he said, "Fighting your way back over that lot, or I'll try and find a way out for you this other way." So we said, "We'll take the alternative".

24:00 He lead us down through and over the river and the gorge, we were miles down the valley and up the other side and around and by dark he brought us back onto the track about three kilometres from where we were to the creek and he took us three kilometres beyond that point. And we came onto the track at dark and all we had was mud almost to our knees and a sig wire [telephone cable] plus the phosphorus would stick on one another

24:30 or hang onto this bayonet, scabbard.

For people that don't know, what was the phosphorus from?

It was a growth that grew on the moist banks and whatnot, you know like you see fireflies around there, they're similar sort of thing but you couldn't succumb those to sit on your shoulder but grab this handful of phosphorus and it was quite a bright light on your shoulder and you hang onto the other bloke's scabbard and others would just sink in the mud and fall down and go to sleep in mud.

25:00 You'd get them up and say, "Come on, there's no good staying there, you're not going to survive if you stay there." Just get them going and you walked to daylight in the morning and we came to a creek but apparently we must have missed a village there, somewhere along the track he took, he by-passed that village and I don't know, no recollection, don't know that one, but we came out at Iora Creek, I think they call it Templeton's Crossing or something like that. We crossed a very big log over the creek and onto

25:30 a plateau where there were native huts and RAP [Regimental Aid Post] stations were and they were treating the, anyway they had a very serious case there and oh he made a terrible noise all night and they didn't know what, by daylight they had to get the stretchers away early and got him on the track during the night. But this fellow, they were hanging onto him because they didn't think he'd make morning, and the beggar kicked on. And they had to make a stretcher and put him on it and

26:00 they only got him up, that was the worst defensive position I've ever been in, we were on a plateau on a river bank there and it was a straight hill behind us for about a hundred and fifty, two hundred feet upwards, almost straight up onto the track. And the Japanese appeared about eleven o'clock and they were firing from the trees straight, directly, you know open sights onto us. And as Blamey said about the running rabbits, by cripes it was a terrible job getting up that hill with it being peppered.

26:30 Climb it we did, we got out of there in a hell of a hurry and our stretcher fella died pretty much straight after, well they gave him a good shot of morphine, but he was too far gone to go anywhere.

When you go through those memories, everything that happened there, what was the one thing that stands above all else, was it the physical conditions, the mud and the conditions or was it the tiredness?

Well, the recollections are not good, you know, well they are and they're not,

27:00 it's hard to explain this one because it was just a case of wanting to survive and to keep going, do what you could to get out of the place at that stage. And as I say I have pretty well no recollection of other stands, we stood again other places, further back than that before getting back to where we had to, our break, we were relieved at Myola I think it was.

27:30 Colonel Honner took over, that was our relief and our, it's well known photo, it's everywhere, the 39th battalion that parade. But I don't even remember being on parade. Must have been there somewhere, but no recollection, nothing anywhere, blank, it's all gone, gone, gone.

28:00 **Do you think it might be a case of just being so physically…?**

I'd say so yeah, absolutely, worn out, yeah, and a good many the same. You see such a ragtime show in that photo of that parade. We're all standing there with felt hats dragging down over their face and all bedraggled and all got a walking stick and it's a funny old, but anyway. So we made our way

28:30 back to Itiki and to con camps, hospitals and whatnot, and our roast dinner and cake and sickness.

And they probably thought they were doing you blokes a great favour?

Yes, slice of bread and a bit of cheese would have been nice, but no this damn roast beef and all the veggies and whatnot and of course, we couldn't refuse, we just had to get into it and it was just our undoing.

29:00 A similar happening too in Atherton Tablelands out on the bivouac there, where you were very hungry and we bought a calf from a farmer. We were out there doing 'doovers' and whatnot, fighting patrols and whatnot, and we were very hungry and we bought a calf for three or four pounds from a farmer and slaughtered it and put it in the pot straightaway and oh God we were ill!

29:30 You should hang that stuff for three or four days though. We used to shoot scrub turkeys, any damned thing to get something to eat. We were very hungry, even in our own country. Another time way out west somewhere, arid country out there, we did a manoeuvre, these times were now with the 2/2nd Battalion and they, this patrol, battalion against battalion, and like they

30:00 captured our food truck and held it. And we were there two days and didn't have any food. God, talk about hungry. You were looking at your mate's bare arm you know. Have a bit of a suck on that.

So now that you're in the thick of it. What do you think of your training that you've had before going to New Guinea?

Well, we didn't have any. See they relied on building

30:30 the battalion from scratch and they relied on the Victorian Rifles to provide the nucleus for the sergeants and whatnot and they had a portion of a battalion there but they were calling for other units to provide some men and in the meantime they called what I believe, I wasn't there, the battle of Corangamite and that was some force against another

31:00 force and I believe it was a complete fiasco. It was just so badly run, but no we did, we didn't have any training. There wasn't time for training.

Did blokes become bitter at that once they'd been thrown into the fight without having the right training?

You couldn't do anything about it; that was it, we were there and there we had to stay. It was sad but there was

31:30 nothing between us and Brisbane of any note whatsoever. Nothing for an invasion army.

And how did you feel about the gear they had supplied you with?

Well we had to make do with what we had because there was nothing else. 1914-18 rifles and they were absolutely useless and at such close quarter, you fired a shot and if you didn't kill the bloke you couldn't fire a second one because he killed you because the rattle of the bolt was too much noise.

32:00 At ten feet or so, there was no chance you'd get a second shot away because they used to give on the range rapid fire but that's all right in theory, but there was no answer to it but an automatic weapon, where you got more than, you got thirty to work on there, thirty rounds.

When you first hooked up with the 2/14th blokes, did they say anything to you guys?

No they went straight about their business. Straight up the hill. I think they were pretty sorry for

32:30 what they saw. It ended out they were pretty grateful for what we did while we were there to see them through. No they still attend our function and whatnot and we theirs. They're a great crowd of people too.

Do you think what you blokes did there before they turned up, do you think that changed the way they looked at the militia blokes?

It didn't save the battalion

33:00 from being disbanded and I don't know why. They could have disbanded any other unit, the 2/14th, the 49th Battalion, they didn't do a lot, lost a few killed one way or another but they didn't see a lot of action. I mean they could have disbanded any one of them. But why the 39th when they did such a wonderful job? I think it might have

33:30 been something to do with the fact that the CMF was helping the AIF out. I fancy there might have been something there or other. There, I believe they, I since heard it, they put it down that there wasn't sufficient funds to restock and re-equip the unit, but I mean that was the story that was put out. I don't know.

So what happened after Isurava?

34:00 Well we got into a base camp back into outside of Port Moresby, more diggings and settled back into more or less camp life, tents and organised cooking and recces [reconnaissance] sending messages to the battalion, running messages to the battalion, running messages up to our boss, requisites for the day

34:30 and whatnot. And so it went on and doing a bit of training and generally building the troops up and re-equipping, new equipment and new uniform all round.

So you finally got new greens on?

Oh yeah, yes, a great dying match took place and we got long sleeved shirts and a bit of green went a long way there in that time and of course we probably got the

35:00 American gaiters then; they probably did away with the leather leggings. That was a fiasco too, when they issued those, you got two left or two rights and you had to go around all around, just how they pushed one into the other you know, and these leggings and they were never paired together and you had to hunt around until you got two lefts or two, a left and a right.

And were they different sizes too?

Oh no I think they were all the same size. Anyway they sorted that you got the right size one.

35:30 **I heard some stories that some of the blokes had dyed their khakis. Did you ever do that?**

No you didn't get time. No that was what you were issued with and that was khaki.

They reckoned it washed off pretty quick anyway.

I guess true yeah, I don't know what they did it with, if they did it. I don't know about that. I did know I had a gold watch and I often put a slab of mud over the top of it so it wouldn't be glinting in the sun. I was hoping, I would have always like d one of those leather covers they had over it,

36:00 you know the old wartime thing, but I didn't have one of those, and anyway, the watch survived.

So after coming out after all that, being at rock bottom and then having a big feed and being sick and all that.

All fit fellas again.

Did you get any sort of three or four days off and you just do nothing and relax?

Oh yes, we had leisure time, we had picture theatres and bouts of public

36:30 boxing and our Colonel Honner won the hundred-yard sprint the day before we went to over to Gona.

He won the hundred-yard sprint; yeah we had a bit of sports and whatnot. And the Yanks [Americans] were moving in in numbers then and getting quite a few aircraft, I think we had control of the skies.

Was it the first time you had seen Americans in any great numbers?

37:00 First off we saw the darkie boys [African-Americans] driving the trucks and whatnot. Great blokes they were, yeah, we got on very well with the darkies. But when we went over and after Gona West, we came over to Gona and we took over from the Americans and they'd set in the holes there and they didn't go anywhere and nobody could get them to do anything. Even when they changed commander after commander, they just

37:30 wouldn't fight. They weren't marines, they were just, ordinary enlisted fellas but they didn't want to be in it. That was their problem. They say, all our dispatches, everything went through MacArthur as you would have heard many times, and it was all distorted to suit the Americans and we got very little recognition

38:00 and always have.

At the time did you know that that was occurring?

No, no, we used to get a paper Guinea Gold, I've got one there it's still years old, but you get a bit of information from Guinea Gold, MacArthur did this or General MacArthur said that and the beggar he only came to Moresby once. He conducted everything from a high rise in Brisbane. It was only, very reluctant we got Blamey up there and it would have been better if he had

38:30 stayed away too.

What was your impression of Blamey at the time?

I didn't know too much about this and I think I might have been in hospital when he told us about this big parade for the 2/14th or the 27th Battalion, 16th Battalion and these boys did such a wonderful job and got cut to ribbons and yet he paraded them and said it was only the rabbits that ran away that got shot.

39:00 Now that was a frightful thing to say to fellas. I think if anyone had had a round in their rifle that day they would have shot him, but it didn't happen. But you know people in hospital, every time he'd appear, he'd wander around the hospitals, doing his good turn for the day, they were all eating lettuce leaves. All rabbits.

39:30 That was their way, silent way, of taking it out on him.

And what did you think of MacArthur?

We never ever saw him and didn't know anything about him. He was just a supreme commander and the poor old bloke, he had to do what he was told and he had to tell, and he did some terrible things because they weren't losing enough men and they never came out to the front and see how the situation was.

40:00 They had no idea, they said, "More men, you're only fighting with companies and platoons and why don't you push in battalions". Supplies, there was no supplies; always behind all the time. As I said just a little time ago, there was three or four Dakotas or whatever they were called, sent up especially to move all the stuff over to the Myola lakes all wing tip, wing tip, lost the lot. And that left us

40:30 back to one old DC. Douglas again, you know.

Tape 6

00:32 **The World War I blokes that came in to sort of look after you blokes when you first got there, what sort of interaction did you have with them? In terms of, did you regard them well or did they sort of talk down to you like you were just a bunch of young blokes?**

Well I suppose from fifty-five years and over down to eighteen, nineteen, twenty year olds,

01:00 I suppose there was a little bit of talk down but they regarded us as up and coming soldiers I think and they knew and seen a lot and they weren't a great handicap, they would have been, they would never have made the ranges, that's true, that's why they were changed, they got in pretty early and got them changed, sent them all home. They did their job initially, yes.

Do you think it was a great help initially to have them there?

01:30 Well we had no other. You make do with what you have. There were no others, there were no more forthcoming, there were no more in Australia. The fall back of that was 'Dad's Army', the old VDC [Volunteer Defence Corps], they recruited all the sixty year olds to put in the home army. That took place in our hometowns and whatnot; they formed their own little brigades and whatnot.

02:00 **These guys that were there with you, the World War I guys, were they telling you many stories?**

No, we never got that chummy with them. They were officers and we were only just 'Joe Blows' [ordinary men].

Did they give you any sort of indication of what you might expect?

No. They leave that for you to find out for yourselves. No, there was no interaction there at all, no.

How would you describe the Owen Stanleys to someone?

02:30 Well it is one of the most rugged walking tracks in the world and it's an experience for anybody that is fit enough to take it on, yes. Most isolated place in the world, you know, only foot traffic, and if you got into trouble in there with a broken limb or whatnot that has happened a couple of times, very expensive

03:00 to get a helicopter to come and get you out

And of course you didn't have that luxury?

No, we had a fellow crawl for days on his hands and knees, he didn't want to take up five or six carriers, as it took about six of them to carry, four at a time and two spares. That was an ordeal in itself you know, getting around the narrow

03:30 track, getting around a precipice hundreds of feet down there, and manoeuvring these fifteen foot poles to get around the corner, you know, one helping taking this one and then he'd take the arm of the stretcher and stretch it around the thing to get around the corner.

You mentioned in one of your stories you went out on a stretcher party. Can you tell me about being on the stretcher party?

04:00 We were on our way back trying to get back to camp and we had a badly wounded fellow and we carried him for many hours and the orderly nursed him overnight and I think he was putting hot stones on him, to take some of the pain away, putting warm stones on his wound, around his wound and he was breathing and gurgling through his chest all the time. Breathing though

04:30 right through his back, you know.

So you were on a stretcher party, how many blokes?

We had ten in our group but the natives, I think it was six they had, four carrying and two spares. Changing over all the time you know.

Can you describe the stretcher for me?

It was a blanket slung between two long poles, that's it. Tied on with vine.

And who made those? You guys or?

The natives knock them up quick smart; they'd cut

05:00 some vine and use it like rope, lace the blanket on make it nice and secure and make him comfortable and so they'd set off to the next dressing station where they might give him a shot of morphine or something and he'd go on his way. And yeah, these stations were a day's walk between,

05:30 pretty well you know, so pretty long ordeal for these blokes carried out.

I'm just trying to get a really good mental picture for myself because it is so different to anything that happens now, when you are on a stretcher party, are all ten guys on it at the same time?

No, four. It's a long pole and two there and two there, and that's the way, you've got to try and, without rocking him too much, without giving him a hard time.

06:00 You've got to try and keep in some sort of step to make it an even ride for him right through.

And how did you do that?

Just keep a step I suppose and try and do the best you could, but we were stumbling and slipping and sliding. Those poor natives did, we had a bit of a hard track the day I was carrying but it wasn't any ordeal at all, and unfortunately he died before we had to climb the big hill, for us anyway, yeah.

06:30 **When you were carrying people in stretchers, were you having conversations with them? Or was it all...?**

No, only carried the one and oh yes, wondered what was going on back at camp because they were shooting back there. We were trying to get back there to give them a hand. And of that fighting that took place at Isurava, it's well known there that there were about thirty of our fellows

07:00 left progressively over the previous few day s and they'd gone back to the next dressing station and they heard what difficulties we were in and they decided that they, of the thirty, twenty-eight came back, into the hell-hole. And the other two, one was less his foot and the other one was some very, very terrible serious shooting and he couldn't make it. But that's

07:30 somebody said, "Well, why did you do it?" and they said it wasn't for King and Country, it was for the 39th Battalion. That's a well-known story too.

When you are carrying a guy that's obviously badly injured and you can hear shooting going on behind you, how do you keep your spirits up, how do you reassure each other?

Well you're going that way so it's not so bad. You're going away so you're pretty happy about that one.

08:00 **The young man that you were carrying in the stretcher, that died the next day, was there time for a burial for him?**

They set to and usually if you got to find the (UNCLEAR) around and as I say this fellow putting the hot stones around him, the heat would try and deter the pain a little bit, you've got no other things to think about and all the

08:30 time he's holding the rosary around the poor fella, just keeping him in touch with it. He did that all night according to the book. I didn't see it but according to the book.

Were you part of the burial party the next day?

I was. As I say I had a very protected war being in the reserves, just at the

09:00 back of our frontage, our protection is always in front of us and there was only one time we ever had an attack from the rear, which we had to deal with and I'm lucky to be alive to see that one out too, because I seemed to be about the furthermost one forward and I could see the Japanese, well I couldn't, all I could see was the sunshine shining on a piece of his face just like your cheek there, and instead of firing a foot below

09:30 I fired at that thing and I missed him at less than ten feet. And he must have got burnt with the powder that went out the end of the barrel and as I say, I didn't have a chance to fire a second shot, too late and he took off and it was a dry bed of a creek and he ran through the swamp, he took off but one of our boys, next one from me, just tucked around the bush there, jumped up with his gun on me and the sergeant says, "No, no, no, no, no! Looms

10:00 don't you shoot." Looms had glasses as I say almost as thick as a beer bottle, he should never have been up the front, he could hardly see and he just saw movement and heard the noise and he was going to shoot and fortunately it didn't happen. A lot of people get shot by their own fellas in war

10:30 in close fighting. Many, many are lost that way.

It must be chaotic.

It is yeah, particularly at night time and it's heavy rain and guard duty at night standing on the corner of a track somewhere, you're guarding the rest of your sleeping fellows or trying to sleep and you might be an hour on, an hour off. And it's pouring rain and a ground sheet over you and a bloody

11:00 pig runs out . The army command is you say, "Stop, who goes there?" But that's a stupid thing, I mean you don't get second chances, that's silly, yes, "Stop, who goes there?" Realistic terms it doesn't work.

11:30 "Shoot first and ask questions later" seems to be the go. Lots of people got shot.

The times that you were telling us that you were on the track and you could hear the Japs yelling out in broken English, were you well aware that it was the Japanese?

Oh yes, they, there's lot of words they can't say. We always had a password of a night and it is one

12:00 that they can't get their tongue around and they try you're not fooled by it at all, so. It's broken English, I don't think I ever heard really good English spoken Japanese, but there was possibly a number of them around because they'd been in various other islands and countries for years before fighting.

So when you were hearing the broken English,

12:30 **how far away would they have been?**

Seventy or eighty feet, ninety feet, yeah pretty close. Trying to encourage you to come up and peer.

That must be pretty eerie?

Oh yes, well you learn not to do these things, yeah, I suppose there were people got caught I expect. Didn't hear of any but it's very possible. They make it very real,

13:00 you know, scream out as though they are wounded, "Help me, help me digger, help me Aussie." They get information from their, us falling back like this they were getting our dead and whatnot and they

were getting information and the Salvation Army fellow was very often up the front providing coffee and biscuits for us and

13:30 a bit of good cheer or a bit of help and he said in some of his writings, that when the Japanese, if and when they got hold of a bit of information about the Salvation Army, they thought, “Geez, we’re fighting another army”. They mightn’t know about the Salvation and the work that they were doing. That was beside the point, yeah.

Did you have any superstitions or good

14:00 **luck sort of things?**

No, well always hung onto something, some bit of supernatural there somewhere. Yeah I think everybody did, I’m sure they did, they might not admit it but I think everybody thought about it quite a bit. Hoped that somebody would look after them.

14:30 Didn’t always work apparently, we lost a hundred and seventy-seven blokes. I think a hundred, nearly two hundred were wounded, over the period of the 39th Battalion. Significant list.

15:00 **What does that do to a young bloke seeing that many other people sort of around his age?**

It’s devastating but you, that’s the situation you know. You age pretty quickly. They sent one fellow home, he was fourteen years of age. Fourteen year old from the battalion. So I believe,

15:30 he got called up and they said, “Any sickness? Pneumonia or anything?” “Malaria.” “Oh, where did you get that?” “New Guinea.” Oh, out of here, you know. Free. Didn’t want to know him. That’s just another one of the stories.

With the terrain being such heavy going, did you procure anything to help you?

16:00 Yes prickly thorns and all sorts of problems, grab anything. One of our fellows got shot, he was a lieutenant and the fellow in front of him fell and discharged his rifle and the fellow immediately behind got killed. So his number was up see, the writing was on the wall for him, there is nothing you can do about those things, an accident.

16:30 Killed in action.

I’ve seen photos of the track of guys walking along with sticks, did you?

Everybody had a stick, yeah, you had a good long stick, that’s your third leg. And I still use one today. I carry one every day I walk. Always have, for the last twenty years.

Was that a habit you picked up over there?

Yes it was and our walking club in the Dandenongs [Ranges] and it was invaluable,

17:00 I mean getting ladies across the narrow log across a creek and stone crossings and things like that, and hold a stick out, and just enough to give them courage to hold on and get them over, just fantastic, yeah.

Do you remember the stick that you had?

No I don’t but we all had one and it was a must; you couldn’t hold your feet or stand up without having a

17:30 third leg.

And you just found them?

Oh yes, the one I found now it’s off a yellow box tree and it’s heavy, a wonderful stick, and it’s all shaped and got a curved handle on it. I found it outside Albury under a yellow box tree and dressed it up and varnished it and whatnot. I only lost it once and I ran back a couple of miles to get it. I still use it; I still carry it.

Can you describe the

18:00 **operating theatre for me?**

Well it was just a sort of a lean-to, the natives cut with their big knives and four sticks in the ground and they just a bit of protection over for the fellow, and on a rough stretcher they make over vines, or whatever and blanket tied, and that was his operating table and Captain Shera, I have heard tell he was doing some operating with his pocket knife.

18:30 But we, they usually tried to carry their few tools with them and as much morphine as they could carry. When we left Deniki, we had to destroy all our gear and they poured quite a lot of ether and stuff on the rice and we peed all over it so it made it, contaminated it. And stabbed all the tins, as much as possible we had to destroy. We left our tents and whatnot there but that wasn’t much

19:00 good to them. I took a second blanket and I thought, “Jeez, I’m not going to be cold” because in the ranges it was very cold, it was, not at Isurava but back along Port Moresby it was up to seven thousand

feet high and half a blanket didn't go very far in those times. You had half a towel and half a blanket. Had two blankets at Deniki

19:30 and I thought, "I'm not going to leave those behind" and I took two and rolled them up and I stacked them and I started to get so far behind the group that I had to cut the string and let it roll down the hill. Finished up with one blanket.

When you were leaving Deniki, was there panic?

No, it was pretty orderly, it was a daytime evacuation from there, the order was given, "We got to go, get out"

20:00 and they formed up into their single file, it was a narrow track and headed off, B Company, A Company, C Company, Don Company and left a rearguard to cover our tracks and got out along the track so far towards Isurava and they set a trap there with a listening post and a few guys and they'd change it every twelve hours or so and

20:30 it was pretty intense on the nerves out there, just sitting in no-man's land waiting. So they just sit there and wait until they got fired upon or something came along the track and slaughter a few and get out of it. Early warning system it was.

When you were, when D Company was sent up the track to Oivi,

21:00 **you said that was the first time you encountered Japanese?**

That's right, yes, apart from the aircraft ones, yes. They were the first ones on the ground, yes.

Looking back in your mind's eye what do you see about the first time you saw them?

We only saw dead ones, they were the only ones I saw. Up the north they were alive but they were in the scrub somewhere. No they all wore a

21:30 funny sort of a toeless shoe, just one toe, for climbing trees and whatnot and they all had this one toe shoe and distinct mark in the ground it would be, all very lightweight everything they had and distinctive roundish helmet, bit like an American helmet, but you couldn't go wrong if you saw that sort of a helmet you knew you were on the right track to do something about it.

22:00 But most often you didn't see your enemy.

So those dead Japanese that you saw, how did they differ from what you'd been told to expect?

Well they were all quite big fellows. Quite big fellows, but unfortunately they didn't carry supplies with them, they carried lots of ammunition and carried heavy, very heavy weapons we never had. Mortars, they had everything, mountain guns, all sorts of gear.

22:30 We didn't have anything such like and that's where we found it very difficult. They used to have a nine-pound shell that used to fire sights direct onto us and that played havoc with us, also a heavy machine gun they used to call it a 'woodpecker', it used to peck the trees away, you'd see the bark falling off the trees. It was a slow firing gun and it would go 'bing-bing-bing-bing-bing'. It was a very heavy calibre bullet.

23:00 Famous old woodpecker, I think it was designed from the Hotchkiss from the German design of the German heavy guns.

So on that day when you were headed out for Oivi and you came across the dead Japanese, was part of the task to search them and see what they had?

Well you got a watch if you could. Anything else. Some of them got a few gold teeth too. That's all in the 'go',

23:30 they did the same thing. They did worse to us, later on after Isurava, and the boys, after they were defeated at Iorobaiwa, they found many, many cases in the dixies and there was no raw meat to be had. They found that this sweet bread was the best eating

24:00 from the body and they called it long pig. They talked amongst themselves, it was known as long pig.

Did you ever see any of that?

No I didn't, our unit did though. Our battalion did, yeah.

When you were saying before that one of the reasons that you had to fight

24:30 **was that there was nothing left between you and the Brisbane line, did you have that feeling that you were fighting for Australia?**

Last resort yes. Yeah absolutely, yeah, nothing, we knew of this, there was nothing there. It was, we definitely had some control of the skies at that time or about that time but as for bods [men] on the ground there wasn't much, they had one division in Australia and

25:00 it was deployed as the Brisbane line, the 7th Division was here, but the 6th and the 9th were overseas, all on the high water and that's when the big stoush took place as far as getting the soldiers back from the Middle East. Churchill wanted to finish the Middle East war first and worry about the Pacific later. He said, "Deal with them later, those little

25:30 Japanese blokes." But Curtin wouldn't have a bar of that; he demanded that they come home. And even to the extent that they shot them into Ceylon. And they were there, tied up there for some days. The Japanese were having a bit of a stoush there too. But I don't know much about that one, that's a bit of an incident there. Churchill was stalling by shooting them off, side-shooting them off, sidestepping

26:00 into Ceylon to hold ground sort of thing, to bide time. And while this pulling and froing was going on and finally Curtin run out and got them home. But by the time they got home and had fourteen days leave and got them all back again and trained them and boat to Port Moresby, all the July had gone pretty well and they just landed,

26:30 wasn't an hour to spare I wouldn't think at Isurava. And as I say, they could only maintain a small force there owing to the food.

When you met up with the 2/14th and they were meant to relieve you and Colonel Honner wouldn't leave them there, what was the mood amongst the men about that?

27:00 I think we were pretty happy to be able to assist. They were assisting us no end and we were very grateful. I mean it was impossible for us to be around many more hours, you know. And it so happened they lasted another three days from when they arrived, might have been four at the most. And they had, the Japanese seemed to attack,

27:30 they got a big surprise, they didn't know we'd been reinforced and they attacked more or less that section the 2/14th Battalion and they put up a great show, they had them feet tall in front of them, as a barrier lined up. Had them climbing, had the Japs climbing over one another and this barrier had them, thick in front. Wave after wave,

28:00 men didn't matter, just wave after wave and that's pretty tiring after three or four days. You can't stand too much of that with a limited number of men.

When the guys from the AIF arrived, you say they were tall, good looking and you guys were pretty ragged by then, were they also better equipped than you?

Absolutely; they had wonderful gear, all brand new webbings

28:30 and automatic weapons and mortars and they had everything but of course unfortunately they didn't do very well with the mortar in so much that they used the few rounds they carried, which were quite heavy, I think eight or nine pound weight I think. They carried some but they then relied on the air drop ones and a mortar is designed that when you throw

29:00 it down the barrel of the striking pin, it discharges the mortar on its way and when the mortar gets there it explodes. Well these bombs were being dropped from the air and they were already discharged the first shot. And when they put this bomb down the barrel that was the final shot and it killed them all and it happened at least a couple of times. Four of them would be wiped out straightaway, with the mortar they'd go. It burst in the barrel, so that came to

29:30 pass that that couldn't happen any more. I think they lost two crews in mortars. So that was just another incident of war where you learn by experience. These things had never happened before in wartime where they had to drop, kick it out by air and whatnot.

Did the 2/14th resupply you guys at all?

30:00 No, well all the supplies whatever came through, we were certainly get our share of them, yes. It wasn't a matter of many days though, we were only there together about four days at most and we sort of, at that place, at Isurava. But as I say, I don't have a lot of recollection after Iora Creek of ever seeing any more except other troops, 2/16th and the 27th,

30:30 and the other two battalions of that brigade, they were still pushing their way through. But they couldn't support them through there so they had to be held back along the track. So urgently as they were needed up the front they couldn't supply the food or ammunition.

After Isurava and you got back and they were trying to feed you and building you back up again,

31:00 **was there any sort of pat on the back for you?**

No, I don't think so, it was, that was just par for the course we did what we had to do and no we just went about our normal business, the blokes drifted back from con camps and hospitals and whatnot and gradually they reinforced us with the 53rd Battalion blokes and got those in, pulled those into gear and got a sort of fighting force with us.

31:30 And then took us back to Popondetta by plane to Gona.

I know you said you don't remember actually hearing Blamey's speech, you were maybe in hospital at the time, once you rejoined the men was there much talk about it amongst the men?

I didn't hear very much about it, no. I don't know whether our battalion was involved in,

32:00 according to our battalion book it is, but I wasn't there. I had lots of malaria, I wasn't away a long time but periodically I was away a week or two at a time.

When you were telling us earlier that you didn't dare take your shoes off, boots off half the time, was there any relief or remedy for things like that?

32:30 No, I guess tinea would be rife and you know, as I say this thick sole would be there, the 'pappiness' [softness, sponginess] of your foot, well you just lived with it, that was all there was to it. No treatment. There were fellas very sick at the time too with malaria and whatnot, but as I say those twenty-eight out of the thirty came back to give a hand.

33:00 They were malaria cases and lightly shot and things like that and just a slight wound.

Reading books about Kokoda now, there were so many stories about bravery, like you saying before like the guy who was crawling on his hands and knees, are there any other stories like that that you recall?

No, I can't think of any. No.

33:30 There was a lot of heroism, there's no doubt about it. There should have been a lot more medals given out, but they weren't.

When you got back to camp and you were recuperating to go out again, did you have any concept of how much you had achieved?

No we didn't, even after the war,

34:00 it never ever occurred to us what we had done in the past. It wasn't talked about, nobody, I gained that war time photo, I hanged just on a sheet of paper on the back verandah, under the son-in-law's set of chairs. He said, "That's too valuable to have it there," he said, and we had it framed after that. No, but it was all in the past it was

34:30 something that happened and I never ever talked to the family about those things or anything. Nobody ever wanted to know anything anyway. None of the fellas at work ever know, others had been to the Middle East and Tobruk and those places, but it didn't concern you, you just got on with your work and, no there was no reminiscing. I didn't belong to the RSL. I think those people that did join the RSL

35:00 and got in and stayed along that line of drinking with their mates and whatnot, they're not around today, they're gone. They stuck to the old routine of drinking and smoking, and that business. I smoke too but I couldn't smoke any more and I had to give it away. But drinking, I've never been a drinker. I'm a social drinker, but I'm here and they're gone long since, way back along

35:30 the track these fellas have been falling by the wayside because they followed along the old pattern of booze. Smoking and booze, cancers, you know, tuberculosis, cirrhosis of the liver.

Can we talk about that photo briefly? Do you remember the day the photo was taken?

No, I don't. Must have been in one of those places where as I say that's all blank, I don't know anything about it, I don't remember. We were just happy to be relieved and getting out, back.

36:00 **Do you remember the first time you saw the photo?**

Ah yes, this lady, Mrs Hunt, saved me the photo. She saw it in the Melbourne Women's Weekly and said, "Oh, that's Arnold" and she cut it out and posted it to me, to the family anyway, looked after it for me. Yes, but it was quite a surprise yes.

36:30 Good work. But as for that, it lay dormant for all those years more or less you know, and I went to the war memorial and I saw it there, six foot by six foot, in the foyer of the Pacific War area and I thought, "Gee that's great you know, it's up there." And of course things have advanced now with the Kokoda section in the war memorial, it's fantastic.

So when did you actually first hear about that photo, just when you were in New Guinea or when you got back?

37:00 No, when I got back apparently, yes. She sent it to, she apparently sent it to me wherever I was, but I just don't when I received it, but she saved it for me until I got back and I went to her place for dinner one night but I'm afraid I've, I met up with some of my cousins and the beggars got me drunk and unfortunately I was sorry about that because she was such a wonderful woman and I wasn't really all I should have been that particular night

37:30 and I don't like scallops anyway, God, scallops in Melbourne you know, doing those, that was wartime period and God I don't know what she went without to get those. Anyway, I got through the night all right.

That photo is in lots of school history textbooks and books about Kokoda.

38:00 Yes, very few pictures came out because everything was so damp and wet and not a lot of pictures came out of Kokoda; the other one, the most prominent one, leading the digger out with a patch over his eye and that was in the high country somewhere, in Nadzab or somewhere, that wasn't the 39th Battalion.

What do you think now when you see that photo?

Our photo? Yeah I love it. I carry one around in my wallet and any

38:30 excursions we go on and talking it comes up about, "You were in the army, where were you?" "I was in the Middle East" or "Bougainville" or "Yeah, I was in New Guinea for three years", "Oh yeah?" "Actually I have a photo to show this." And so it does the bus around, you know, things like that. No I'm pretty pleased with that photo. Hasn't led me to the water hole very often but

39:00 its been nice to have.

Your twenty-second birthday that you had over there, was there any time for any sort of celebration?

Oh God no, we were up to our knees in battle. No, nobody would know from next, they wouldn't know it's your birthday, those sort of things just happened. No, Mrs Hunt didn't get a

39:30 cake to me that time. We used to get letters, and of course we had no way, used to write if there was a spare, any writing on the back of a, unwritten on a page, you'd scribble a few lines on the back of a page and no stamps of anything, just South-West Pacific and send it off. If you could stick it down somehow or other best you could and it was all we did for sending a bit

40:00 of message home.

And when would you get time to write?

Well between things happening; bit of daylight hours. There were no lights or anything at nighttime we didn't have any lights or torches or anything like that. There was no room to carry those things around, no.

Tape 7

00:35 **Before you had to ditch your packs, before when you mentioned…**

Over towards Gona, yes.

Before that happened, how much stuff would you actually carry in your pack?

Lots of ammunition and grenades and magazines, Owen gun or Bren whatever it might be and probably a hundred rounds of 303.

01:00 The Japanese bullet was a thinner one than ours a sharper, less lead and they bit inclined, they'd go right through you rather than tear a hole. They weren't a bad little bullet. I've got one there, an empty one. I brought it back in a bag. Oh no, it's

01:30 just a certain amount of personal stuff, wallets and whatnot and lost all that stuff of course. Great shame, we called in and not anything left. It'd all been scrounged and different ones coming back at different times and it was a long walk back from Gona back to the airport, I think it was about twenty kilometres and with malaria

02:00 rife, you didn't get away, at Gona, the closing stages were, they were just mopping up, Buna's finished, Gona West is finished and Sanananda, that was over and done with, it was just a little bit of mopping up going on, and if you're a hundred and four they let you go back to hospital and I got out three days before they finished.

02:30 I walked back the twenty-odd kilometres to the airstrip.

When you first came back from Port Moresby to Kokoda, by that stage had the engineers finished doing the stairs?

On our way back, yes, three thousand steps or something, a colossal amount of steps.

How were the stairs constructed?

It was a foot of ground, eighteen inches of ground,

03:00 dug out with two pegs in and a strip of green wood along the top to stop the bank from falling away, the step from falling away. And that's what it was comprised, most of the bark off it, it was like a slip, God if you didn't get a fair square footing on that, you just down you'd go and of course you didn't have a lot of control after you'd done it. Couple of hundred steps, off your legs, 'laughing knees' they'd call it

03:30 would take over and I don't really know how we got down the blessed steps you know after such an ordeal, uncontrollable legs.

Can you explain to someone that has never done anything like that what laughing knees is?

Well it's uncontrollable shakes, you don't have any control over your leg power at all; you just lose it, just vibrations

04:00 and tremor setting in, and that's it.

And what could you do if you got laughing knees? Would you have to stop for a while?

I think that's the only thing you could do, would be to pull off onto the side of the hill and wedge yourself up against a tree somewhere so that you wouldn't go sliding down, because it's terribly steep terrain where that took place.

And of course as you were going down

04:30 **a lot of blokes were going the other way.**

They were coming up yes. They were doing this, moving forward, not knowing what they were going into.

What sort of condition were they in?

Oh experience condition. Top, yeah. 2/14th and 22nd Battalion well equipped and similar, same sort of situation 2/14 Brigade.

The first time you went to Kokoda,

05:00 **other blokes we have spoke to have said how hard it is not knowing where you are going to meet the Japanese, can you talk about that sort of tension of going into something that you didn't know?**

Well it didn't mean a lot to us because we didn't know what we were going into. We'd never shot anything but rabbits before, or a fox or two but no, we, it was an experience we had to find out for ourselves,

05:30 I couldn't add any more to that I don't think.

What sort of things did the native carriers carry?

What did they carry? Well they carried everything from wartime from mail to parcels to hundreds of pairs of boots and socks and blankets and with the supplies they always dropped blankets, wrapped

06:00 everything in blankets, so there was always a good supply of blankets coming in. But even though they had some holes in them, they'd hit the ground and disappear right into the mud and whatnot and they always had a salvage crew to go out and climb the trees and cut the, with the parachutes they used to cut the ropes and let them down. Let the parcels down and I think they dropped their mortar bombs by parachute too eventually

06:30 so it wouldn't get such a crash effect. Every conceivable thing, ammunition by the tons, grenades, I don't think there was ever a shortage of rifles because we finished up with so many of them, everybody who got hit didn't worry about carrying his rifle back he just

07:00 left it for somebody else to handle and the first thing he'd carry it so far and he'd pull the bolt out of it and throw it in the river. If we were crossing a creek somewhere, get rid of it.

Did you ever in any of your time there see the carriers carrying their own weapons?

They didn't have any, no they didn't. The padre carried a grenade or two. But

07:30 no, they relied on their scrapers.

What about the 'Sally' men, did you ever see a Salvo [Salvation Army] with a weapon?

No I can't say I did but he probably did have. I would say so yes. Padre they all certainly had, they always carried a grenade. I think he was going to look after himself if he could, in a situation, yes.

Were they known as fuzzy-wuzzies then?

08:00 Yes they were, yes.

Did you communicate with them at all?

No, they didn't speak our language. Anything but pidgin English, I don't know how many dialects, so many of them and the four thousand of them they brought from all over New Guinea, brought into this work force. They were conscripted of course. But unfortunately the Australian government didn't look after them after the war like they should have. I guess they

08:30 saved the day there's no doubt about it. We couldn't have operated without them. Impossible. But some of them got a medal, not many of them, but they got nothing out of it.

Did you ever see any Papuan Infantry blokes over there?

Oh yes they were very distinctive with their coloured little skirts that they had on, sort of a lap-lap thing and their coloured shirts.

09:00 Oh no, great blokes, I think the only thing better than a Papuan out in front with you would be an Alsatian dog, which we didn't have any of. That would have been a great saviour if we'd had some dogs because they're so sensitive to noise and sound. Far, far superior to any man, and yet nothing like those things. In that sort of situation they would have been invaluable.

09:30 **We'll pick it up from when you were flown to Buna from Port Moresby, how long, how did you get there?**

We went to Popondetta and then I think to Gona West or Gona round that area. Prior to dropping our packs off, we then took a very wet muddy track to Gona West

10:00 to a river crossing there and the Japs were operating in that area with barges of a night and one of our patrols crossed a river, it was a shallow sort of a, it backed up when the sea came in and it was quite a bit of width in it but otherwise it was just a little stream when the tide came out and the Japs could easily cross this sandbar, but they used

10:30 to land just up along the coast a bit and we had a patrol up there and the barge came in one night and they dropped the tailgate and whatnot and nobody did anything and they didn't do anything and nobody got off or on and they just pulled up and went away again, they must have been going to meet somebody, I suppose, but it didn't happen. Our blokes didn't fire and they just went away again. But they were operating nightly and they'd hide their barges during the day and they'd come in and bring supplies, probably from a submarine or something

11:00 and it'd pick up the barge and land troops and take sick fellas off and whatnot. And that operated nightly which was, we didn't have any barges or any of that sort of stuff, not even a rowboat, no. They used to cook our food, our cooks would be two or three kilometres back

11:30 and they could have these diesel burners, high-pressure burners and they'd pump them up and you'd get a good flame going and they'd be able to cook the rice and it was always a special dish this New Guinea, it was a cheap way of going, providing a hot meal was a good four-gallon tin, half full of water and rice. You'd cook it up and throw in some peas, currants and

12:00 raisins and oh gosh it was good food, and they'd lug it up to us and then they'd allot it out and some would go to this platoon and so much to that platoon and you'd have to take the bucket and take it where the boys had their half a dixie and you only had half a dixie and a spoon, knife, fork and spoon, yeah. And they'd all be lying

12:30 in water and trenches and lying in marshy ground right under the sand was out there, a nice bit of sand, but the village huts were there and the Japanese were under these huts dug in, it was only fifty yards away and you didn't know whether you were, you didn't know exactly what the situation was when you walked up these planks, you walked with your bucket and your rifle over your shoulder to take the hot food up to them.

13:00 But many is the time I could have been a target bringing the food up to them but it so happened that that didn't happen.

They probably would have smelt you coming as well.

They would have had I had a Camel or two but no we didn't have any Camel, the Americans lost many a soldier using that Camel cigarette. Yes, very strong smelling.

13:30 **How did the blokes up forward, how did they treat blokes like yourself that were more often in the rear?**

Well we didn't have much. I did me job, I got in there and got out again as quickly as I could. And they'd say, "Get down, get down." And you're trying to get down carrying a bucket and your bloody rifle sticking over your shoulder, or digging into the ground, so it wasn't easy but, you're walking on a duck-board to get around to keep out of the water, because the tide would come in and flood that area

14:00 and the poor beggars would be there for days and there'd be fights going on. Every now and then they'd have a hate session and every now and then and they're trying. They eventually got them all out of there, they attacked from the lower side there they sent in, they called it Haddy's Village and Lieutenant Haddy got shot there on the beach and it was known as Haddy's Village but they attacked from another group from

14:30 the Gona side and eventually got them out of there altogether so got the last of them.

What did you call that session that they had?

Hate session, yeah, they put this on many times during the day. Get stuck into it.

And how long were you there for?

I'd say it must have been the best part of a week before we got rid of that lot. It was at that

15:00 point, it was George Palmer in, the second bloke in that photo, he, we were just at company headquarters we had slit trenches and whatnot there and we were sort of the troops were there and there were more there and more over there near the river bank and we were sort of the rear section protecting that lot sort of thing and we had to always be prepared and George must have come out of, we had a tent there and must have been company

15:30 headquarters and they had records to keep and whatnot I suppose, George must have come out of the tent and there's a bloke holding up a piece of paper so he just whipped a rifle out and shot him. And he wanted to surrender apparently, but George didn't realise in the spur of the moment he was holding this piece of paper up and George knocked him off anyway, just one of those things, bit of bad luck for that guy.

Did you know

16:00 **of the pamphlets that we were dropping to the Japanese?**

No I didn't see any but that came much later of course. That came back when I went the second time to New Guinea, they, I don't think they dropped any pamphlets at that time there was no talk of surrender while the 39th were in around Gona and Buna, it was a fight to the death there. They weren't going to give up, they couldn't get away, they were cornered

16:30 and plastered, they were dropping five hundred pound bombs on them and they were sort of bouncing off the barricades, they had fantastic barricades, these, you know the coconut palm is such a tough fibre wood and they had them stacked one on top of them and just a little slit, you could put a grenade in the hole to get rid of them. And even then they were standing on their dead to get to the firing slit to have a shot you know and the stench, oh God. It was a frightful situation.

17:00 They were great soldiers the Japanese, there was no doubt about that. But not too many, you're supposed to fight for your country and be soldiers and be prepared to die but if there was a way out we'd like to take it, you know, if there was a surrender, like there was in Singapore but there was no surrender there.

That fanaticism

17:30 **that they had for their emperor, did that scare the blokes, that they would fight so tenaciously?**

We were quite aware of it and I mean we knew what we were up against and there was no way, you just had to get at them that was all, they're not going to surrender and they wanted to take you out if they could. That was their…

18:00 **So how long were you at Buna, Gona before you returned to Australia?**

We must have been there about a month, we relieved the Americans after that, after we got back from Gona West and we went in and did Sanananda, we did a short spurt at

18:30 Buna, one night company headquarters were called on to fill a block, one of these blocking corner sort of thing and they rushed us there around into there with a leader, dark at night and we got squat, dug a bit of a hole and squatted in the water, water was so deep and you sort of stood on, sat on or kneeled on or sat down on the side on a bit of wood, anything you could get hold of, sit on the side of the trench until something was happening and during

19:00 the night these Japs were all cornered, completely surrounded by sea one side and all they were doing was trying to get out. And there was one fella making all sorts of noises in front of me and he sounded as though he was only eight or ten feet away and I thought we were blocking a hole there, my intention we were the front line, right in it and he's getting closer with his noises and movement and

19:30 I slowly pulled, got the pin out of the grenade and I'm holding it just ready to count a couple and throw it and it was all ready to go sort of thing and someone in front of me threw one and let out a scream and said, "Take that with you. Take that with your eyes." And we didn't hear any more noises. There was another line of blokes in front of us and they didn't tell us about these things. I mean I was so close to throwing that grenade so I just

20:00 quietly when that grenade went off and the scream went out I went, "Oh gee how lucky, I didn't kill some blokes." Just another occasion where it can happen. And so we were there within a few hours there and then we went over to Gona then and that's when Colonel Honner sent a message, "Gona's

gone". Brune I think has written a book

20:30 about that, Gona's gone!, and within three days of that 'Gona's gone', that I left with a hundred and four temperature and walked back to Popondetta and headed back to hospital and caught the Manunda the hospital ship home. Had to spend weeks and weeks in hospital, malaria, and carbuncles and boils and hookworm and

21:00 ringworm, every damn thing you could think of. And I spent weeks and weeks at Bathurst and then I went to country leave at Orange and had this mansion of a golf course there, eighteen hole golf course and recuperation there for a fortnight or so and then home on fourteen days leave so, which was good and of course when I did get home to Eildon,

21:30 fourteen days wasn't very long. I did have a bit of, I had Atebrin, we were all as yellow as guineas from the Atebrin and not much potential as far as the bromide was going too. Anyway that's beside the point but anyway, I had Daylesford to go and see my sister and then folks at Eildon, Dad and so, and while I was there at Eildon Weir

22:00 on this holiday the old veterans, VDC had a thing going where they cooperated with the army as a training exercise and they had such a successful one defending the Eildon Weir wall from saboteurs, this army crowd coming in on little boats, that the captain decided to repeat the fixture in about six weeks time with a different crew. And this

22:30 took place, they had such a wonderful exercise that these young fellas and the old fellas to defend the wall, anyway they were equipped with 303s and whatnot anyway this next expedition took place and as the fellas, six weeks is a long time in Victoria where the water situation can change and in six weeks they'd had a lot of rain and the river had swollen and this guy, this captain didn't realise it but when they

23:00 swung around the corner there was a wall of water going up eighteen feet or so in front of them there. And they threw this (UNCLEAR) it's a wide, wide flooded river and it's in full flood and great pace travelling at and they're onto it before, and when they came out there were five men missing, they were dead. They were drowned. They counted up five missing, all the gear. So they got in touch with the local authority and they came out and with a

23:30 box of grenades and they were going to, they got a nice lot of fish, that's about as much as they, they didn't blow anybody out of the river. For the next two or three days the army searched for them and they said "No, dead men aren't on our list. They're out. " So they gave it away. My Dad had boats and whatnot at Eildon and that's twelve miles away so he used to organise that we'd go every day and we went every day and we got five of them.

24:00 I knew what I was looking for having seen them in the river before. Having a lovely drink of water and somebody very dark in colour very black and blown up, just over here a few yards away. However that's the, anyway we got the five of them and Dad got a commendation from the coroner for a good effort.

Not a very nice way to spend your leave.

Well no, it wasn't. Anyway, I got back into town and I had to go and stay with my great aunt,

24:30 so wonderful to me over those years, and the bed was too soft, of course single bed and the mattress, wire mattress, oh jeez, I slept on the floor just put the bedding on the floor, best place, lovely and comfortable on the floor. And I was up the Croxton's Hotel having a beer one day and an old mate walked in and he said, "Oh Titch" – they knew me as Titch in those days –

25:00 "Oh Titch, where you been. I haven't seen you in a long time." And I said "No" And he said, "You been away." And I had some Chevrons on my arm and said, "Yes, I've been up in New Guinea, I've been the best part of two years." And he said, "Oh I haven' t seen you about. What are you up to?" And I said, "I'm on leave actually, but I'm over a bit, I'm having a few extra days." "Oh Christ," he said, "You want to be careful who you're talking to." And he pulled out his MP [Military Police] badge out of his pocket. And he said, "Don't worry

25:30 about it, we're mates," he said, "But don't go over ten days," he said, "You'd be a deserter, no, you must go back, come back to Caulfield on your tenth day" he said, "and you'll be right. Ask for Terry and I might just be able to swing it a little bit with the brig [brigadier]. Just might be able to". So I went out to Caulfield on the tenth day and I said, "Is Terry about?" And he said,

26:00 "No he's on escort in the city". And he said, "No, he'll be away the best part of the day" and he said, "Can I do anything for you?" And I said, "Yes, I suppose you can." So I was in behind the barbed wire. Ten-foot fence there, missed out on any lunch. What with the interrogations and whatnot I wasn't, well anyway, about half past four, five, must have been five, might even been six, they brought a truck up all

26:30 wired in with locks and whatnot and they loaded a group of us in and we all went to the Melbourne jail. Well, what a hell of a place that is. "Everything out of your pockets." All you've got is what you stand up in. And he said, the bloke said, "You had any dinner?" and we said, "No, we missed out on lunch too." And he said, "It's all over here. It's all finished." And he said, "Here's half a loaf of bread and a tin of jam." He shot it up the table and I think we said, "Oh, I think we'll give it a miss."

27:00 And we had a blanket on the concrete floor and at four o'clock they get the bad boys out and they're up and down the concrete, bang, bang, bang! Yelling and screaming and then shave of course, two hundred shaved before you with the blade, over a period of twelve months or so you have a scratch and that, and about nine o'clock I had to front the brigadier, the brig, so he said, "What do you have to say yourself?" And I said, "I've been on leave but I wasn't very well. I had a bit of malaria."

27:30 And he said, "Where's your certificate?" I said, "I didn't have one. I was twenty miles from the nearest doctor." And I had some Atebrin so I said I stayed in bed and treated myself and he said, "Yeah", he's shaking his head and he said, "Shame to spoil a good record, soldier." And he's thinking about it and he said, "Fined ten days pay and return to your unit." Out of there quick smart, couldn't get out quick enough.

28:00 Grabbed my gear and out onto the tram and down back to Caulfield. Got back to Caulfield, I went home to my aunt and I stayed the night with my aunt and went into Caulfield the next morning, got in there nice and early and there's all our blokes there and they said, "Where've you been, Titch?" And I said, "In bloody jail." And I said, "What's happening?" And he said, "We've been here over two weeks" he said, "Connelly is in charge" and Lieutenant Connelly was, he was a great bloke but

28:30 he was a rogue, he'd be into anything, anything that was crook, Connelly would be in it and yeah, Connelly is in charge of the draft. They used to get enough blokes from around and about to send them off every day and keep all our blokes there, I mean how lucky can you not be? So here I am. So he said, "You've got to get a leave pass." So I went out, went dancing that night I think, saw an old, saw another aunt

29:00 and said, "Ta ta [goodbye]", I said "It could happen any time." And it was the last night and we were on a draft, he couldn't hold us any longer. So we were on a draft to Herberton, Atherton Tablelands and got up there and got into camp and there were a few of the boys there and dribbled back from leave and whatnot and from various hospitals they'd been in whatnot and they declared the unit closed, finished, all wound up. So they marched

29:30 us over to the 2/2nd Battalion and the band was up the road and they marched us down the road, all great pomp and ceremony and hand over and of course Colonel Cameron is in charge, and a militia officer in charge of one of the lead battalions. God, he wasn't liked very much. 'Blood and guts' Cameron, he had two, three decorations, but he was a

30:00 career soldier. It didn't matter, he'd have to be in it.

How did the news of the 39th being disbanded, how did that effect the blokes?

Devastated, absolutely. Couldn't believe it. How could a thing like this happen? We had such a great name. Just to be dumped off like that, jettisoned for no good reason. And so they took us home and we were incorporated into the 2nd Battalion, they took all the VX numbers and

30:30 the V numbers, all the 'chocos' [chocolate soldiers]. The poor beggars got distributed around all the various other units. Some of them found themselves back in New Guinea with 36th Battalion inside of a week. They shot back up again into Bougainville or some of these other distant places around from Nadzab or some of those places they went to. And it says in the book, the Kokoda book there, they

31:00 lacked natural fibre, these poor beggars. It was crook; anyway we soldiered on. AIF were there, 2/2nd Battalion, and we were looked down upon, "Bloody militia blokes. We've been to the Middle East. We're five years." You know. And we weren't well received; we had a surplus of sergeants

31:30 and some we lost, some good blokes went to other units and whatnot and but it was never a really happy situation, we were always 'choco' soldiers as far as these old-timers were concerned. Although we put up a good show with them, we co-operated with them and had to of course, but we always felt underdogs to this elite battalion. And so we battled on with those,

32:00 we did lots of manoeuvres into the forest, other manoeuvres, I was on a working party, we were up on the side of the hill and any new recruits were going underneath on the track, like the Kokoda Track underneath us and we're firing Brens over the top of them, in fact I felled a tree this big with my own gun, gradually chopped it away until it fell over and the gully and we were there for days and days these blokes, gelignite and stuff,

32:30 all hell going, it was very, very realistic.

Sounds like the training was more for them than for you.

Yes, that's right, we were getting jungle training, there's no doubt about that, well supposedly. And as I say, this was one of the times we were pretty hungry up there too. We caught an eel, a great big eel one night. He came right up to the camp where the cook had been throwing some stuff in the water. And we shot him and got him out and dressed him and we had eel along with our scrub turkey.

33:00 Supplement our food. And so we put out a bit of time out on this, other fellows went to schools and sergeant's training courses and whatnot and I guess I could have gone a bit further than a company runner but I wasn't a leader of men. I didn't have education to read maps and stuff, I wasn't terribly bright on those things, so I was just prepared to be led by anybody that,

33:30 anybody at all.

Did you learn anything at the jungle training there that you hadn't already experienced?

No not really. We knew all about camouflage by that time. I think we knew probably everything there was to know about it. But anyway, we went along with it and we walked, we did an overland march and we had ten days leave, I think, in Cairns and we walked from Herberton into Gordonvale,

34:00 cross-country, crossing rivers and God knows what. I don't know how far that was. It was a long walk though, bivouacked overnight and whatnot, hard rations. And then we occupied some empty houses in Cairns there for a fortnight or something. Got very drunk on this homemade wine from out Gordonvale way there. Italians used to make this cheap wine, five shillings for a bottle, oh mostly methylated spirits, God

34:30 you'd be out for days, terrible stuff. Anyway.

Did you blokes have those Lady Blameys?

Absolutely, in camp, yeah. Everybody had to make their own Lady Blamey yes.

How did you make those?

Well, you had your beer bottle and you'd soak a lump of good quality string in kerosene and wrap

35:00 it around the bottle at the certain height you wanted it then light it and it used to run around, just neat as you like and you'd get a stone and rub the rough bit off and you got a lovely big glass, a Lady Blamey, yeah. So that was ah, we had a bit of leave, they fattened us up nice, bit of jungle training, fattened us up, then we had fourteen days leave

35:30 and I was home at Eildon with my father and he had, we had a boat, thirty passenger boat and hire boats and whatnot.

So you got to go back south for your leave?

Going back down, fourteen days leave, yes. Four or five days journey to Melbourne and same on the way back and, yeah, got down to having fourteen days final leave and Dad said, "I've go a bit of a job for you in the morning." And I said, "What's that, Dad?" And he said, "Lady and General Blamey

36:00 want to go for a picnic." And I said, "Oh Yeah." And he said, "Take a couple of rods and do a bit of trawling and see if you can catch a trout for them." He said, "Let the old bloke hold the rod." And he said, "They want to go for a bit of a quiet picnic and take them up to Rennie's Flat or somewhere." So I met the general and I had my army hat on and 2/2nd Battalion badge and whatnot and

36:30 his cousin, Captain Blamey, was killed in the 2/2nd Battalion. And no recognition whatsoever, not a thought, he wouldn't know anything from a bar of soap. He wouldn't know much at all about troops or any other damn thing. I think he's such a sodden, wooden old beggar and so I got him loaded in the little boat and away we trotted and an hour or so later I put him on a nice flat spot

37:00 for their hamper and whatnot and I got my cut lunch and started to walk away and, "No, you must come here." And I said, "No, be yourselves, be together, you know, you're always apart all the time". And Lady Blamey lives up at Herberton and one night Colonel Cameron had her in the rafters up there and they were all underneath, 'ra-ra-ra' you know. Colonel Cameron took her home that night down to,

37:30 anyway.

Did he enquire at all about your military status?

Not a blink, no. Not a blink, never mentioned a thing. Nor did I and I didn't (UNCLEAR) the beggar either. So we had a good day, I ate the chicken and drank some of their champagne and I didn't have any conversation with them at all, might have been just around about Eildon perhaps, a bit of fishing perhaps, nothing really.

38:00 **Were you tempted to have a go at him about the 39th at all?**

No, he wouldn't know. He wouldn't know anything. He wouldn't know. In fact, I don't know if I was aware of what took place until later times when it was written up and whatnot. And I've got a pamphlet there and a photo of the Red Cross fellow and he was there and gee

38:30 he got a terrific pamphlet there on a full page on what he saw of it and what Carlyon, the aide-de-camp had to say about it's all in a bit of print there but it was said all right and he knew what he was saying when he said it. They tried to cover it up and say it was something else but Carlyon eventually said, "Oh no, I think you're right." I think he had to admit it. It was what he said.

But you would have still been a bit angry about the 39th being disbanded.

Oh yes but it was nothing to do with

39:00 Blamey, he wouldn't know anything about the 39th. Actually when Colonel Honner came in from the

ranges, he came in to see Blamey into Port Moresby, apparently walked in and he said, “Oh, come in Honner, yes, just up from the south?” And Colonel said, “Oh no, Sir, I’ve been up in the ranges.”

39:30 So you know, he was completely out of touch with everything. He’d been battling up in the high country with us, with the 39th, and here he is thinking he’s just come up from the south, just a new boy on the block. Well, we’ve got the day trip over and I suppose I got paid for that trip, I don’t know.

40:00 Oh, an enjoyable leave and I didn’t go overtime that time. I was back in camp and we used to sling a blanket between the luggage racks and whatnot and make a hammock and there were hammocks all over the place and it was a five-day trip and we all had a billy and as soon as the engine stopped to take on fuel and water, we’d all run along and fill up our billy, make the tea have a hot brew every so often along the

40:30 track, that was the recommended thing to do yeah. Everybody had their little billycan. And so we were back in camp with the 2/2nd Battalion and we were only there a short time and they packed up stores and got the movement order and we were on the James Adams to Aitape.

Tape 8

00:34 **We’ll pick it up from where the last tape stopped.**

Well, we arrived at Aitape and there was an armada of ships in the harbour there, it was a very rough landing, we had to scramble down the nets with all the gear on, down over into barges at the bottom, oh very rough surf and as we were coming off,

01:00 going on, Americans were coming off, we took over from the Americans at Aitape. They landed there, they lost a hundred and fifty men or so in their landing there but that’s where it started and finished, they had their big screen up to watch the pictures and they had a security guard out a of a night time and I have heard the Japs were looking at it from that other side, watching the pictures from that side of the screen, but whether that is only furphy. But they didn’t do anything,

01:30 they just stayed put and the Japs had their gardens down along the coast and they were, you know, living off the land and they were quite happy to not do anything until we arrived, and we took over some of their gear and there was a bit of good gear and they had turkey and all, good stuff, you know, good food, anyway we took over and the first thing Colonel Cameron did was to send out some fighting patrols

02:00 to get the feel of the situation. And of course, if you stand on an ant’s nest you’re going to get trouble and trouble we got and we got plenty of it. And it was a shame to see these poor beggars and they’d been five years fighting in the Middle East and going down, terrible thing. Should never ever have happened. These Japanese were cut off, they were finished, they were by-passed, they were there just to live out their days and

02:30 but they took the 9th and the 7th Division and they went off with the Americans to do Iwo Jima and all these other islands, Rabaul, all those places all had to be taken and the 7th and 9th were right into it there and so they said, “The 6th, oh jeez what are we going to do with Blamey? Jeez, we’ve got to give him something to do. Oh, send him up to Aitape, there’s plenty of Japs up there, he’ll fiddle around for the rest of the war, you know.” And this he did.

03:00 That’s all we did, fiddle around with these blessed Japanese and we chased them for a hundred miles. We lost ever so many people. Much better war there because on the coast, back from where the sea, the sea frontage, back into the foothills, there was a margin of water, swamps and whatnot, oh deep, deep swamps, which

03:30 we had to sometimes negotiate to get off the beaten track to go around a situation where we couldn’t go front on, do a frontage attack, we’d have to go sideways and it was only one way and that was to go to the right because the sea was on the other side and so we went on chasing these fellas down the beach. And one particular incident I had, we found a boat, a seaworthy Japanese rowing boat,

04:00 beached up on the bank, so we cut a couple of spars out of the scrub there and fashioned a couple of oars and I had a fishing line and we went over the swamp and I avoided the little crocodiles, there’s lots of little ones there, little ‘freshies’ [freshwater crocodiles], but I got some paper and a grenade and a mate and I went out, got permission from our captain, “Yeah, get me a feed too while you’re out.” So we went out one evening and we were out there fishing,

04:30 we didn’t have any anchor, just these poles to row and we just had these poles and we weren’t catching much water with them, and anyway we were out there fishing and we drifted. Unbeknownst we were travelling quite a current, and we travelled from Don Company lines down into A Company, and the next thing all hell broke loose, bloody automatic and rifle fire and oh I was lying on the bottom of the boat and we were drifting closer and it was no good lying in the boat, bullets were dipping

05:00 all round so we got to and we paddled out, went like hell and there was an island way out there and we

didn’t know if it was inhabited or not but we headed out that way and we got out of the range of the weapons and we went around and came in. They did tell us that they were getting in touch at one stage with the artillery, whether that was true I don’t know. But we had, we were very lucky to escape that night from our own weapons. That was just an incident that happened down near But I think it was

05:30 called, But on the way to Wewak. Well we had some very hard struggles down there in the swamps and on one occasion we were moving forward and walking along a very narrow track on the sea frontage and,

06:00 unbeknownst to us, we were being watched from the high country by the Japanese and their warning, they might have been going about their business, whatever they were doing, eating or whatever, but they had an early warning system out whereby it was a landmine in the middle of the track and my tent mate, Corporal Post stood on it and we found later a piece of his pocket had OST on it. That was all that was left of

06:30 Corporal Post. And at the same time when that went off, that alerted the Japanese that we were about and unbeknownst at that time a few moments in between that we scattered, that they a gun directly to the area here and they were firing nine pound shells on open sights direct onto us, which was pretty hazardous with no holes dug or nowhere to go on a sandy beach,

07:00 bar scrub on one side. Anyway, one of the boys found just in the scrub over here, a vine, a trip-wire that had a five hundred pound bomb attached to it. So they meant to get everybody. But it didn’t, it wasn’t tripped fortunately. So that was just another lucky escape that we had. And then we pushed on and we had no opposition until we got down the track a bit further and that’s where we formed a front and

07:30 we’d make another stand, driving them back all the time, boot was on the other foot compared to Stanley Ranges. We were going with the flow and we were doing frontal attacks and all that sort of thing and they did catch us on the open ground another time with a heavy gun, it was concealed in the high country. And this time we had our own artillery and mortars and we were better equipped the next

08:00 time, we had plenty of automatic weapons and so we battled on for the best part of twelve months, we chased those Japanese and finally we found ourselves, Don Company was in the high country behind Wewak in the Torricelli Mountains and we were on a ridge at, they brought us some flame throwers and as soon as

08:30 you lit the flame you got killed. So they, because the fuels were very low quality and it didn’t fire, it didn’t flame very far in front and there was no chance of getting the Japanese, so we dug into fox holes just on this narrow ridge and you couldn't go around, there was no way you could get around, so it was a frontal attack and as soon as you moved forward you got killed. So we were stalemate there, we were there for some days and anyway, all of a sudden

09:00 we heard that the war was finished, they’d dropped the bomb on Hiroshima, and what a relief. For the next two weeks, we were sitting up on the hill there, you couldn't fire a shot after that because the war was over. We took the grenades away from our booby traps around on the tracks at night time and replaced them with tins, bully beef tins with stones in, so that they would create a rattle and

09:30 of course, we had great security, we didn’t dare go to sleep or not all at the one time anyway, because we wanted to survive at this late stage and eventually they brought us down. They were dropping pamphlets and the like, planes, telling us the war’s finished fellas, come in, come in, and we assembled down on the beach eventually, rigged up a nice camp down there and got settled in and unfortunately all low ground, you couldn't dig a hole because

10:00 you struck water straightaway so the engineers came up with building a mound up and putting a forty-four gallon drum on it with a seat and they used to burn those every day with diesel. Those were our toilets. You couldn't, you struck water as soon as you went underground at all. So these were our form of disposing of our waste was in these built up mounds,

10:30 toilets. We organised sailing races in four-gallon tins and all sorts of modes of, we had regattas and whatnot and they formed a, the Japanese were eventually coaxed to come in and I’ve got a bundle of photos there of General Adachi, he flew into Wom airport,

11:00 airstrip, and his entourage and all that and he rigged up a table and I was one of the battalion, it was on parade that day, there was a hell of a lot of blokes on parade, couldn't put them all on parade, there was a good many there, battalions. A division actually, 6th Division, so, so many were picked from every battalion to go and

11:30 watch this display of handover and I think he handed over twenty-five or thirty thousand troops. And the photo’s there, he’s parleying about giving the sword over, this Samurai sword that was their, had been their heirloom for hundreds of years. And this he didn’t wish to do, he wanted to parley about it but there was no parley, General Robertson, Robbie was taking care of the hand-over

12:00 and he accepted gratefully the sword and they sat down and signed the papers and that was all over. And there we enjoyed a little while on the beach waiting for what they call the point system.

What were your feelings sitting there watching the official surrender?

Great relief, yeah, great relief, we didn't know there were that many Japs around New Guinea just the same. Oh God there was still stacks of them there, they were just going falling

12:30 back as we, same as in the ranges, we'd leave a fighting patrol and move a body of troops back and then, soon as the patrol was fired on they'd move back and then they'd attack us then. We were doing the same with the Japanese; they were fighting going back all the time. As I say they were, they had been living off the land, they were in good condition, they were well equipped, they would have gladly lived on there forever I think.

13:00 Eventually, we were waiting on this point system to come back to Australia as you enlisted, the time you got points and the Middle East fellows got out quite early because they had been five years so they were first away. And while we were there waiting, a call came out, an urgent, for volunteers for an urgent mission.

13:30 And I thought, "Oh God." And they got a hundred men from the unit and they didn't tell them what it was for and they were armed to the teeth and they took off, they went down to Wom airport and took off, and they finished up this group, my sergeant went and he, they went to

14:00 Dutch New Guinea over at, can't think of the name of the place, anyway they got over there and the air force people were there and they said, "What's doing?" And they said there's an uprising of the Indonesians at Dutch New Guinea, and they've changed the name of it since then but, "Oh", they said, "This is news to us." Anyway, they were there

14:30 about two day s or so and they said, "We're heading off. We're destroying everything around here. Would you like to come home with us? We've got plenty of room in the plane." And the beggars beat us home, yeah, they all shot through, got back to Brisbane and when we got there, my points came up and we were loaded onto the Taroona and brought home on this corvette, and yeah, these blokes had been at the showgrounds for the best part of a fortnight I think, before we got home.

15:00 They beat us home for their good fortune of volunteering for something they didn't know what they were going to be doing. I can't think of the name of this damn place they went to, but anyway, it's over on the tip of New Guinea, Dutch New Guinea. So during that, the struggles we had up in the Torricelli Mountains,

15:30 we did a fighting patrol we were going forward and before we got to this narrow place on the ridge, and the village, we took, I can't think of the name of it now but we had to cross the river and our boys behind us gave us covering fire and our platoon had to fix bayonets and do a bayonet charge up the foot of the hills and I can't remember being fired on but they reckon

16:00 three, four or five Japs killed and the village was ultimately taken by the next wave that went beyond us and, all in all, our fellow got a DCM [Distinguished Conduct Medal] for it. It was a nice bit of work, but I don't think he earned a DCM; there were lots and lots of jobs that went unnoticed, but just that he was in the right place at the right time and he collected a DCM for it. And he went to England, he was one of the fortunate ones to

16:30 be selected to go to England to the whatever it was they had over there, the big end of the war business, yeah. However, yes, home to Brisbane, a bit of a staging there and down to Sydney and a bit of staging there for a few days and then on to Melbourne and Royal Park and I thought find that bit of paper we've been looking for, for so long.

17:00 And they said, "Oh points", yeah points, these blasted points. "Oh, you haven't got quite enough," he said, "Where would you like to be stationed?" He gave me a list of Bonegilla and Murchison East and I said, "These are all prisoner of war camps." Italians and Germans and hundreds of them, big camps,

17:30 around Tatura there was another one, all northeastern Victoria. And I said, "Murchison East sounds all right to me. Murial was fifty miles away teaching at a school, so I thought fifty miles is not far. So Murchison East it was and I got in touch with friends in Melbourne where I left my bike, my pushbike, and got it sent up to Murchison East

18:00 and I rode over one day, over for the weekend, to see her, fifty miles or thereabouts. Gravel road all the way. Last six miles is straight up winding road, Strathbogie Ranges. Yeah, oh well and so it be.

Beautiful story.

Mmm. That's about…

18:30 **I want to talk to you a bit more about what happened to you when you got back to Australia, if it's okay I'm just going to go back and ask you a few more questions about what actually happened in New Guinea. When you went to Buna and Gona, how did the fighting and the conditions there differ to up in the Owen Stanleys?**

It was all beach country, very water logged, very wet, but not the same nowhere near the same conditions as the mud and slush

19:00 that we had, just sandy beach country and low scrub and as far as the Japanese fortifications go, they

were out of this world as far as perfection went. They had every angle covered and frontal attacks were just so silly, they put them on, some commanders were the higher up, were dead-bent on

19:30 the old first war frontage, attacks, you know they had hundreds of men to, they had them to expend but not so, we didn't have that sort of facilities there and so Colonel Honner wouldn't be in these, he at one stage, it may not have been at Sanananda or Gona but in the Stanley Ranges there was a bridge, a log bridge to cross

20:00 and they were adamant that he had to cross this bridge and they lost ten blokes the day before trying to, there were direct guns were direct onto it. There was no way to get over this bridge and Colonel Honner didn't want to put his men to this knowing what was to follow. So he went to the higher authority and he, well the other advice he got he went

20:30 dark one evening, prior to his crossing, he went one evening with the commander of the 2/1st Battalion and they went over, they sneaked over the bridge over the other side and it was all quiet and everything so they came back again and this is how they crossed the bridge, they went over in the dark. And

21:00 he didn't lose any men. He got over it that way, he did what they wanted him to do but he did it his way. That happened in New Guinea somewhere but I just don't know the location of it.

It sounds like he was very well respected by the men?

Oh, absolutely. Yes, he was a gentlemen there's no doubt about it. He had great respect for the 39th Battalion and he came down for our fiftieth anniversary

21:30 in Melbourne and took our parade and later on after the dinner at the shrine, and our president has got us all lined up in two or three lines of fifties or whatever was lined up there after the dinner, in front of the flame, and after that Colonel Honner handed back to him our president and we were going to go up the shrine steps, up to go to the shrine.

22:00 Special occasion this because they were going to do the trooping of the colour, they had all the bands and whatnot there and big, big day this was for the 39th Battalion, fiftieth anniversary. And our president's out in front and he said, "Battalion, attention! The battalion will turn to the right, right turn." And everybody turned to the left to go up to the shrine. Almost to a man, all went, that's the discipline we had!

22:30 Another instance yeah.

How about Cameron, how was he regarded?

Not very well with the 2/2nd Battalion, no, he was a militia battalion, or known as, he's probably AIF as well, he commanded the militia battalions and our own and 53rd Battalion

23:00 and he wasn't liked, he never was liked, but he was a great organiser as far as discipline went and sports, he was a pretty good commander really.

Was he just disliked by the AIF guys or was that the militia part as well?

Yes he was disliked by the AIF, the militia blokes didn't mind because they had experience with him, they had been with him and they knew his capabilities and

23:30 although he was an escapee, he didn't go with his men, likewise the commander who got out from Singapore, he was never, he was always looked down upon as having left his men and got out, General whatever his name was.

Nye?

No. No, I don't know what his name was. But he was always looked down upon as having let his men down.

24:00 **When the 39th was disbanded and you joined the 2/2nd, were you with anyone else from the 39th? Many of you together?**

Oh yes, quite a number of us. That was the inner, we did assemble after sickness and leave and all that, after their home leave, they assembled back there, they all came back in dribs and drabs and some came back to find no battalion there at all but they were directed to the various other units if they were VX or whatever and they

24:30 were absorbed in; where possible they accommodated us. I went as company runner with Don Company as I've always been with Don Company, 39th Battalion. Company headquarters, company runner, so they did, with the sergeants, they had a surplus of all these people and a lot of them couldn't get where they wanted to be with their own men. They were with other units, the 2/1st Battalion and like that. They had to accommodate them somewhere and they did the

25:00 best they could with them, yeah.

I'm not familiar with, on your uniform do you have something that identifies you as?

Yes we had a colour patch and ours was mud over blood. It was an oval patch that was surrounded by, AIF, surrounded with a grey surround around a mud over blood.

25:30 That was all.

And did you get to keep that when you went to the 2/2nd or?

Well no, we transferred it over and it was mauve and green, a square patch, mauve and green.

Did you get to keep anything that identified you as having part of the 39th?

No, the 39th had gone. Nothing left.

That must have been pretty heartbreaking, to have to hand all that back in?

It was it was

26:00 a severance and that took place and that was it, nothing, everything was absorbed into other seam of units and whatnot and our stores and everything handed in and we started a new life.

Did many blokes keep any sort of 39th memorabilia?

I think so, yes for later, yes, I would say so, yeah. Some photos they had,

26:30 I've got some photos there; I didn't bring them down. We dug a latrine, sorry I've crossed my arms here, we had to dig a latrine in, a deep hole in New Guinea and one of the first jobs we had in our situation there and we did have picks and shovels there that's big picks and shovels, as for a little doover shovel we should have had with us, everybody should have had one in the mountains,

27:00 the Japanese had them, they had little folding up ones like the Americans had, we didn't have anything like that. It wasn't thought of with our equipment. We had to dig a latrine and then we fashioned a wooden box with the seat cut out and we fitted that over our head before we had any use for it and somebody had a camera and took some photos of, I've got some photos of myself with a mate, with a couple of mates with these boxes over, before and after sort of thing, yeah.

27:30 And then they sat them over the hole and they're sitting on these boxes, making believe, yeah, few photos we had.

I wanted to ask you when you went to Aitape, you were saying today talking to us, you felt it was very futile and frustrating.

Absolutely.

Did you feel that at the time?

Absolutely. We knew it was a lost cause. We knew it as well as anybody else that these people had been cut off and finished, they were

28:00 disbanded, they were a lost cause and it should never have happened, but they didn't have a place for Blamey to fiddle away his time so and so they left the whole 6th Division there.

I know it must be a difficult comparison to make but do you think it was almost harder losing blokes there at the end knowing that the end of the war was so close?

Absolutely,

28:30 those five year old men, see, in the situation it wasn't, it should never have been and there was no need for those, they wanted some training, send up some young blokes it would have been all right, a bit experience for them but as for putting the five year men in there to be killed, it was just so silly, you were part of a unit and that's the way it goes. So sad to see these people killed and injured.

29:00 And there was lots of it too. There was 2/2nd Battalion got a VC [Victoria Cross] there with young fella by the name of Chowne, he was a young daredevil lieutenant and he used to go out on his own and he said, "Don't come looking for me. This is my little war." And he'd go out on his own and get a few off his own bat

29:30 and he ran into a bit of trouble and a well known friend of mine he was there at the scene and he got shot in the leg too at the same time but Chowne got killed. He got a VC for that there. All my sergeant got was shot in the leg. Groin trouble for the rest of his days. But had us on just a little mission they were doing, yeah.

30:00 But he just loved killing Japs, he liked to do that but he ran into serious trouble and got caught.

Can you talk to us a little bit more about when you had to do the bayonet charge?

Across the river, yes, it all happened very, very quickly, lots and lots of fire going over our head, going forward of us to keep their heads down and stop them firing

30:30 and I didn't see any Japs I was, it was a long line of probably a platoon, around about thirty fellows stretched in a single line and we got across the very shallow creek and spread out as soon as we got over and there was lots of cover and fire and going over our head and we were firing and yelling and screaming and yelling and racing up the hill until we ran out of breath and ran out of puff altogether

31:00 and sort of stopped and another crowd, the rest of them crossed the creek and took over from us and gone on further and they eventually gone on and took the village and they said to us quite a number of Japanese killed and I didn't see anybody, I didn't see any Japanese at all, didn't see any sign of foxholes or anything. But this story was written up; it was such a wonderful

31:30 bayonet charge, and sergeant, lost his name, he got the DCM for bravery.

When you are in a situation like that where you are crossing a river and there are blokes yelling and bullets going over your head, how does that experience differ from something like we were talking about earlier like being in an air raid?

32:00 No, no thought. You just, that's what you're doing and you're going with the flow, regardless of what is going to be thrown at you or anything, you're just, that's it you're in the line and to default would be to let your mates down and you've got to be there. Comradeship, you just go. Scream like the rest of them.

32:30 **What sort of things were people screaming out?**

Just yelling, blood curdling, oh God! Frightened the hell out of the enemy. You'd have to take fright and go, whether they ran or not I don't know whether there was anybody there I don't know, but anyway Sergeant Donnet, I think his name was Sergeant Donnet, got the DCM for this great feat of bayonet attack and taking a

33:00 responsible, lead up to the taking of this village, native village. So.

So what happens, so you are on one side and are your bayonets fixed already?

No, you fix your bayonet. Fix bayonets and you move across the river in the firing starts and you've got covering fire coming from behind you over your heads and that was the

33:30 idea to keep their heads down and stop them from getting, bobbing up out of their fox holes and you just charge in and if there's anybody out, round about, you're shooting and firing and loading and firing and shooting randomly all over the place. Just wild.

Had you fixed your bayonet in action many times before that?

That was the only bayonet charge I did. But in round

34:00 Isurava and those places, there were many times that they did use a bayonet and cleaned a nest of them out, yes.

So when you get the charge of fixed bayonets, I mean obviously everything would be happening pretty quickly, was there a bit of a gulp, that oh this is going to be serious?

It's the risk you take, you've got to be there, you're part of the team.

34:30 That's just front line soldier's job is to be there. Part and parcel of his, that's an effort he's got to go along with.

When you were talking about the air raid before you were helping me out with really great descriptions like…

Yeah the screaming bombs yeah.

Like you were going through in slow motion. Can you tell me about the same sort of thing in this instance like what, so there are blokes yelling,

35:00 **what's the sound of bullets flying everywhere?**

No, you get very used to these things, it's the ones you don't hear that you've got to worry about, they're the ones that are very serious. The ones that are going over and they artillery, had thousands of rounds firing over your head and in a frontal attack they fire for, they might fire two hundred rounds of heavy artillery

35:30 at twenty five pounders and they'll fire to a point and in case of one of our frontal attacks at Gona, Colonel Honner we were doing this frontal attack and which was unavoidable and he adjusted with the Opip [Observation Post], the fella that's the look out, they send a smoke signal and gauge where they're going to shoot, whether it goes up a bit or

36:00 back a bit and Colonel Honner adjusted a time that we were going to be more forward by half a minute or so, while the firing was still going on, we were going forward. He took a chance on that. And what he did was instead of the shells hitting the bunkers and bursting, he got them to put an extended fuse on and they went into the ground about two or three feet and then exploded.

36:30 They were a different charge altogether and this instigated by his own personal effort and when they were still firing, we were still, the boys were still going forward. You know the company was still going forward and soon as the firing finished, you moved in to take, over-run their position, kill whatever was there and be killed. Very serious stuff that, yeah. Very serious.

37:00 **When that's all going on, are there sounds like, is it just like a banging sound or are you hearing bullets?**

Hearing them whizzing over, 'whishhh, wishhhh, swisshhh, swisshh', yeah. Going over the top and exploding just out in front of you there. And of course there are problems there too. You get one a bit of a dud falls short and they're the chances you take. It's unforeseen happening. Killed or injured in action.

37:30 A statistic.

Can you tell us the story on tape that you were telling us just before when we went for a break about the jam?

Well yes, right, there's no good sending out if you've got an odd lot like a tin of black currant or apricot jam,

38:00 anything away from the usual marmalade or plum which you could get very boring and an odd tin that wouldn't go to the rest of the company that would stay in company headquarters and that was just an extra perk you had for being in that situation, you know, you were issuing the rations and you allotted them out as per quantity and quality.

38:30 **What was the reason that you were saying you wouldn't send an odd tin out?**

Well there would be too much wrangling amongst the thirty fellows, that comprises a platoon, three sections of about nine or ten men platoon, and there's three platoons to every hundred men, every company, so it would be no

39:00 good sending an odd tin out, there would be too much wrangling going on amongst thirty blokes whereas ten blokes could share a tin very comfortably.

When you were in the Owen Stanleys and the supplies were getting dropped, did you ever go out on any of the…?

I didn't, no, that was done by other groups, they had carrying parties, that was part and parcel of front line service, they had to allot people to go and carry supplies

39:30 and that took from our front line troops too, the few that we did have, you know, it was very most unusual situation, and how we ever survived it is just a miracle really.

Can you tell us about that unusual souvenir that you were telling us about this morning?

Oh yes, well that was up where we took that bayonet charge across the river and up the ridge and

40:00 another following party behind us had gone further and took, name of the village eludes me but that's where the ground was so hard that they, there had been a strafing right along the ridge the day before in preparation for our attacks there on that ridge and the Tomorrow Hawks, whatever they were at the time, the Kittyhawks, strafed the ridge and they apparently picked

40:30 up a few Japs and there was one, he'd been dead two or three days and he deteriorated pretty rapidly in the sun and not being able to dig a hole we pulled the roof of this old village hut and incinerated him and that's, as I say, I picked my little bit of wild cotton and tucked it in vestas, my wax matchbox,

41:00 and with the top of his mouth, gum which was all white and charred but still intact, no teeth but still intact so that was my souvenir and I've still got it around the house somewhere.

All these years later you've still got it?

Yes I have. I suppose if I'd thought about it or done more about it, I might have been able to find his owner if, because that village we took was renowned

41:30 village and later on we had close cooperation with Japanese units and they visited us and our fellas visited them in Japan and they sent a representative to Colonel Honner's funeral and a memento to honour…

Tape 9

00:31 **You mentioned that you did get some photos, a couple of the blokes had cameras there, what was the ruling on cameras there?**

Well a few of us had them but of course we thought we'd take them down the camera shop and get them

developed, but of course those things didn't happen, it all got blown away when Burns Philp got blown out of Port Moresby. One of our dispatch riders, he is down

01:00 the Gold Coast there somewhere now, he was a good amateur photographer and he went into Burns Philp and they all getting boxes of whisky and that sort of stuff but he was after the camera stuff and he got onto a bit of good stuff in there and film and whatnot, and he was able to take quite a lot of pictures until he got through to the ranges and I think he lost his camera somewhere in the ranges, somebody stole it. He lost his camera.

01:30 **When people were down at Burns Philp getting stuff, I guess some people would call it looting.**

Oh well it was nobody, no civilians there, they'd all been shipped out, if they weren't shipped out they joined ANGAU, the native constabulary, or army or whatever it was. No there were no civilians, what was there was for the taking of.

02:00 As I say, they had armchairs and lounge suites and you name it, they had it.

And you also talked about the souvenir that you got, what other sort of souvenir did your mates bring home with them?

Watches and swords and pistols and rifles and all sorts of things they made home with. No I didn't, I just wanted something that was natural that was there at the time, you know, and there was not much up on the hill anyway

02:30 to get. No, some of them got quite a bit of gold from the teeth of some of these guys, generally.

What about diaries, did blokes keep diaries?

You weren't supposed to but Bill Guest closed his as soon as he had to go over the range. Up to that point he kept a daily diary and

03:00 he thought it was highly illegal but apparently it was in World War I to have a diary but it was all right, he's found out since, it was all right to keep one providing you didn't, weren't in enemy territory, for it would give the game away if it fell in the wrong hands. So it was frowned upon yes, so there was very little kept that way. And of course

03:30 the chances of keeping any paper dry or whatnot it was just so bad, we had ground sheets but we lost pretty much everything, we had nothing eventually, nothing at all.

Did you ever receive care packages or Red Cross parcels or something like that?

In camp we did. But time and space was too valuable,

04:00 if we got a bit of mail occasionally come through, it was thought pretty important. But as I say there was no way of sending anything out bar on the back of another letter or something like that. And just on active service, you didn't need a postage stamp, Active Service, South West Pacific. I worked out, I tried to work out a code, that I try and let my family know where I was but the censoring was

04:30 so severe that as soon as the censor saw this dot, dot, dash business, it didn't mean a thing to him but he'd cut it out and you'd say, you'd just get a bit of a sentence with the middle cut out of it. And you know, it just didn't work out.

You mentioned comfort funds, did you get any packages from them?

Oh yeah, get socks and what not. A little message, I had a message from one of the ladies and a pair of

05:00 socks I got. I contacted her and she was in Sydney somewhere, but that was as far as it goes, don't know whether I got a letter back from her or not.

Did you ever get a chuckle to yourself thinking that the socks you got were maybe from the place where you used to work?

Very likely yes. Just one of those things, yeah. Mostly made army socks those as I said before earlier on. Long socks.

And can you tell us about the forward scouting that you did?

Yes, well it was,

05:30 being in a platoon, I was 16 Platoon and I didn't get to Kokoda in the first instance with the 39th Battalion because they flew over but there wasn't room for everybody and they took a portion of that platoon and but there were other times where we were out, particularly with the 2/2nd Battalion, I wasn't in the 39th Battalion again, and

06:00 we did quite a lot of forward patrols and whatnot, and I was on patrol. We were out, we were sent to find a gun that was causing a lot of trouble, it was firing into at Wewak and they couldn't locate it, so whether they pulled it back into a cave or something, and we were sent out into the foothills to find this

and we took a cable with us and sigs and we ran out of cable before, we started early in the

06:30 morning and we were out of cable by about two o'clock in the afternoon so we were on our own from then on and I happened to be forward scout when I came across, I could hear jabbering going on and I called up the next bloke behind me too, then I called up the sergeant and he said "We'll put a frontal attack and go in." So we went firing and got into, there was a village there and there was a Jap

07:00 lying on the floor there and he was terribly, terribly ill, he was very, very ill and one of the boys, the name eludes me at the moment but he said, "Look, leave him, he's mine, I'm going to get one" and 'plonko' in the ear, the whole ear. And he got one. He was going to make sure one. And you could hear the scampering going, all scampering they went up to the scrub, they were unarmed apparently and it might have

07:30 been a bit of a hospital, dressing station or something. This bloke was lying there; he was very, very low, he was, I don't think he would have ever had a chance at survival really; very, very thin and drawn and very ill with fever or something. But anyway, yeah, Carson his name was, Carson said "Leave him, leave him, he's mine." And mine he was and he got him. I always thought of that.

08:00 **What does it do for your nerves being a forward scout?**

It's pretty trying, yes, you're all on your own out front up there and you've got to be careful where you put your feet and very alert and as good as your ears can be, they're barely good enough in such situations and the worst feature of forward scouting was if you had a bit of a cold you know you are

08:30 just about to cough and oh you go through all the antics, because you get your mates killed and you get killed yourself. Just not a chance that there might be someone in hearing distance you know. And it was one of the most trying things I've ever had to experience was trying to starve off a sneeze or a tickle in the throat, a cough.

09:00 Another time there we were with the 2/2nd Battalion, we did the bayonet charge across the creek. We did this on another occasion near area, we lost some fellas the day before, from a Jap in a

09:30 foxhole and they backed off so we had to go next day and cover the same ground again and we found the foxhole and there was nobody in it. They'd evacuated the area, we're on each side of the creek having a smoke and we shouldn't have been in two little groups, there was one on that side and one on that side and we could hear some jabbering going on and these guys come down, they'd been looking

10:00 for food, or water or something and they came down the bed of the creek and they must have smelt the cigarette smoke and they dived up on our side and I, if I hadn't had my rifle, I'm sorry, Owen gun, I think I would have, if I'd done a tackle on him did a rugby, I could have had one or two all on my own they were that right close here. Anyway they are going like clappers, up the foothills and we peppered them like rabbits, rabbits running up the hill,

10:30 we peppered them all the way, whether we done any good of them or not, they would never forget that ordeal that they went close to that particular day. They were unarmed but they got a hell of a fright.

And how's the responsibility of being a forward scout and basically having the responsibility of all those other guys?

Well you had to be, you got to be right on the ball and they usually let the forward scout go through first and got the second and third

11:00 of the group if they could, because there's not much point in shooting the one when you can get a dozen. So you had to be very alert and there was times out at Oivi where the forward scout saw a group of blokes coming towards us, ten or twelve Japs, and all onto the one side of the track and knock them all that way and all concealed, all nice and quiet, and we waited and waited and they didn't

11:30 come any further. They must have, their scout must have seen our scout and they shot through. And we didn't see any more of them but that was going to be a real shoot out but it didn't happen, it didn't eventuate for us.

Can you remember the very first time you know you shot a Japanese soldier?

I don't know that I ever shot one. I did a lot of firing, but particularly with the Owen gun, I mean you fire at random when

12:00 you fire into the scrub where the noises are coming from and as I say I was in a protected position most times and I never ever, apart from that one time when I was forward scout and I met in this village where the sickie was and some live ones unarmed, that was the only once I'd ever been that I could see and was close to.

Have you ever thought that maybe that was a good thing that you didn't actually know

12:30 **whether you had killed any?**

I don't know, I suppose it was, I don't know. My son-in-law says, "Oh jeez, Arnold got amongst them", you know. But that's all in his mind, you know, I was there and I did see these things and I saw these

things but I can't say that I shot a lot of blokes, no. I wasn't stacking them up in front of me like these 2/14th blokes were and our blokes in that front line, but oh back here it's all quiet back here, unless something happened.

13:00 **Seeing that bloke shot at close range, when he was in the hospital, that must have been a pretty?**

Well these things happen, you know, it's all over and you've got other things, you could be getting shot at yourself, I mean it's all there in front of you and while we were in this building we took a grave chance of getting caught short there but we were exploring things as we went and clearing the ground as we went, and we didn't find the gun anyway.

13:30 The day ran out and we crossed waist deep in water back across the lagoons in the foothill country into the lower ground, back onto the beach and made our way back by dark back to Wewak. And next day, they sent another company out and they located the gun and they're all dead. They'd been caught up with a strafing raid by the allied force and they were all dead at their gun. So that solved that problem.

Did you see much of the allied aircraft?

14:00 Yeah pretty much and some of them were too close. I didn't get strafed but our blokes did. Yes more than once, yeah, got mistaken for Japanese and plastered yeah.

And speaking about the Japanese guy you came across, were there specific orders, can you recall specific orders about what was to be done with Japanese prisoners?

Well they didn't take any, nor did we.

14:30 No, they tell me, there were a few taken from time to time but I don't remember the natives, I don't think they liked carrying them back. I think when they got to these very nasty places where they had to manoeuvre around the corner, somehow the stretcher got tilted somehow or other and, "Oh he fell off."

15:00 **And how about smoking, you mentioned you smoked as a child, how did it go once you were in the army?**

Well we had it, we smoked, yes. Very good best export Log Cabin tobacco in tins, always sweet, beautiful smell, wonderful stuff, the import stuff. A long, long way ahead of anything you could get in a

15:30 packet out here, Log Cabin or Havelock. Yeah, great stuff. Yeah, it was treated with rum or something in it, it was very high quality export .

And did blokes use smoking as a crutch for nerves?

Oh absolutely yes, oh God yes, they found it very hard, some of them even go to the boong to get the Black Twist, the blank boong tobacco [tobacco issued to the indigenes, 'native twist'], blow your head off.

16:00 I didn't come at the Twist. I used to get hell of headaches from not having a smoke, but.

You never saw any blokes trying the betel nut?

No never, no.

And what about the local jungle juice?

Don't know anything about that one, no. We did have a fellow, I think he might have been 49th, I'm not sure, could have been a 39th bloke,

16:30 he was on, used to ferment the potato skins and whatnot and make this jungle juice and he died in his own vomit. He was dead on active service of course. And he, oh, we had another fellow, a mate of mine who was in the social club in Preston and we were in defence at the drome right back in the early days of Port Moresby, he along with others

17:00 decided that they'd had a gutful already before it started with the air raids and whatnot and they just couldn't hack it, we heard a shot and he knocked his big toe off and he was sent home, discharged, dishonourably discharged, and I knew his girlfriend we used to dance and whatnot, he committed suicide. Yeah, that played on his nerves so much. Lot of these blokes that got very involved in this war,

17:30 very close quarters, there was another one a snowy-headed bloke, a 'Snowy' Parr, at Kokoda, when they were getting out of Kokoda late afternoon, he sneaked back with his friend to look over the brow and there's this Japanese hoisted this flag on the Kokoda pole there and they're dancing around about fifteen of them and put a mag [magazine] into them and got the lot. And Snow he died when he must have been about twenty-four years of age I think,

18:00 he just drank himself to death, just to, he never settled down and gone, shot.

Did you see any person, did you see any blokes, gone troppo?

No, well yes I did, that fellow corporal,

18:30 he came back after the war and his family had sold his block of land and eluded him somehow of his personal possessions, Jack Wild he was, Corporal Wild, he finished up in these mental hospitals and whatnot. I went to see him at Beechworth in the mental hospital there and although Jack was, he recognised me and knew, but he

19:00 had a certain trait there, they couldn't trust him to be out amongst people. He'd go down to the pub of a day and he had free run of the place and he was doing a bit of painting and whatnot for them, and later on they closed that mental hospital, such a tragic thing the government of the day tried to get them out of these places and get them into nursing homes, and they put him into one. From Beechworth he went to Bright to a sort of a retirement

19:30 village sort of thing there and I went to see him but Jack was around the bend there, he was deteriorating very rapidly, and he was the one that Lieutenant Crawford pulled a revolver on, right back at Oivi, and said, "I'm on my own, you fellas get back to the and help them out back there". So that probably turned Jack, I used to talk with him a lot, he was a very highly-strung fellow and he had a Russian bent,

20:00 he was communistic, and he was always quoting Lenin and you know, he was always somewhere above my standing as far as learning went and reading. But you know he's long since gone now.

You briefly mentioned earlier on, bromide?

Yes I did slightly mention that, well it was ever present in the tea of course and as for

20:30 man to man, I never saw any of that in the army, never, it just wasn't on.

Can you tell people what bromide does?

Well it takes your sex drive away and completely deflates you and it stays in your system for quite a while yes.

Does that affect your vigour to fight in any way?

Oh I don't think so, no. Apparently not, the

21:00 army thrived on it apparently, it always tasted your tea, but they used to put it in and it did sort of keep the blokes all nice and quiet.

And do you think it affected your sexual vigour once you returned from...?

I don't think so, no. I don't know about that no. I had four kids.

Obviously not.

21:30 **The sticks you mentioned that everyone had sticks on the Kokoda Track did you ever see, did the natives use sticks?**

Yes I think they all had a stick in the other hand, yes. Some of them called them a staff, but a walking stick, a stick, a long one because you had to push it ahead of you, there was no good having a short one, that was useless, it had to be a long, much longer to be,

22:00 on the downhill, it being thrust ahead of you.

There's also a bit of conjecture these days, with whether it's the Kokoda Track or Kokoda Trail?

Well, the Americans of course, there they go again, they know it as 'trail' and it was never a trail and was never a mule on it apart from a little bit at Ower's Corner on it, they tried to operate the mules there but when they were bogged down to their waist with their load on, going down the very

22:30 steep slope that leads away from Ower's Corner right down into the valley into the river down there. It was just so impossible that they were, there were a few for starters. The Japanese brought a whole stack of horses from Rabaul and fifteen hundred natives from Rabaul to help them with their forward situations and they were the first blokes we killed at Oivi, was some Indian fellows

23:00 they brought from Rabaul or Singapore or something else and they were the first fellows we shot. They were foraging in the garden and didn't know one from the other of course, we were new chums and they unfortunately got caught, and were shot. Of course that initial firing alerted the Japanese that there was something doing and they were waiting for us up the road.

23:30 That section in beyond Oivi went to the junction and got cut off and the Japs got between they and us and we lost the two runners. Sergeant Marsh, I had a Sergeant Marsh, his brother was in charge of our company headquarters, he was a lower reef, whatever they call them, a warrant officer and his brother was an ordinary sergeant and he took charge of his, he moved back from the junction

24:00 when he found out he couldn't get a runner through from his side and he didn't know about our runners being killed, but he took off with his little group of eight or nine fellows and made off into the scrub and

stayed the night and he, Joe Dawson, said he went, I think they had a wounded fellow with them and he went to get some water, that was the pretext of him moving out, he went to get water and he got shot and the other fellow went to see where Joe went and he got shot.

24:30 So Sergeant Marsh came back and in about a week's time he landed back at Isurava, with two men short but not a mention, not a mention at all for a wonderful effort, you know.

What were the NCOs [Non-commissioned Officers] like? Corporals and sergeants?

Oh they're great blokes, yeah, great blokes.

Because when it boils down they're…

25:00 All, doesn't matter whether black, brown or brindle as long as you had somebody alongside of you. Yeah.

And you've talked about Honner and Cameron and those blokes, what about the lieutenants, the lower blokes.

Yes, they were all very good, the second time around that the 2/2nd Battalion we had fellas that had come from Duntroon and those places, hadn't seen a shot fired and they were quite greenhorns and compared

25:30 to what we'd been through over those first campaign and then back into the second campaign of Wewak and they were quite greenhorns and, you know, they stayed back at the back and said, "Go on, push on, push on." "Come up and do a bit your bloody self."

How did you blokes support each other, I mean you must have had highs and lows all the blokes having different emotional states and that.

26:00 Yeah I suppose, just made do. Yeah just, they were hungry, we were hungry, we were all hungry. That time we went out to Oivi, Joe Long, quartermaster with this withered knee I was telling you about, he was in charge of supplies and he set aside the evening before – we were going to start just after daybreak and were eating out first because it had the further distance to go, A and C the other two were just going down the hill and into Kokoda.

26:30 And we had the long haul so we started off just after daylight and we took off for Oivi and beyond and Joe he put all his bully beef and biscuits in a sandbag and forgot to take the ruddy thing and here we are no food out there and we had an emergency ration, which you had to get permission from God to open that you know,

27:00 it was such a thing to do to never open your, anyway we had permission to open our emergency rations, which was quite a good one, they had a sort of a compressed fruit, fruity sort of a thing, it was very very hard and you could only sort of grind a bit off and a little bit lasted a long time. And that was very nourishing and very filling, it swelled in your stomach and of course

27:30 there was dry powder with dry meat sort of stuff. We didn't have the facilities to cook those things and didn't want to at that point in time out there. We did have this block of stuff to eat out of our emergency ration, but it was a very special occasion that we had something to eat, because we'd been away from early morning and no lunch and then no dinner at night except for this sort of a block that we had to eat.

28:00 **How do you compare the fighting that was on the Kokoda Track compared to later on at Wewak and Buna and Gona and that sort of thing?**

Well Gona and Buna are much much harder nuts to crack I think. We lost ever so many more. We lost sixty-five or so in the ranges; as I say, we lost hundred and twenty-seven in all, so we lost the greater quantity in Gona

28:30 and Sanananda, Gona West, by far.

How about the difference, physically, geographically?

It was an easier walk. Physically it wasn't, the swamps were a bit of a worry, leeches and God knows what and waist, shoulder, almost shoulder depth holding your ammunition up and whatnot, going around a position to get a position on a flanking attack and things like that.

29:00 That was pretty crook, slimy and stinking of water. But it was a much better campaign, flat going.

Beside your gear falling apart, how did those damp conditions affect ammunition and weapons?

All right yeah, we had a little oil bottle tucked in the end of the rifle and it was up to you to keep it bright and shiny and slightly oiled.

29:30 **And how did you deal on a daily occurrence with blokes dying in the platoon and stuff?**

Well I didn't actually see any of them but they did in the platoons out in front, they had their burying

matches and whatnot and they'd say a little rite and just plant him pretty shallowly. We didn't have anything, I think the padre, he had a shovel, he used to be very handy on the

30:00 site if you could get him, dig a hole.

Being a runner and actually going to all the different platoons, did you actually notice when you went back two days later that this bloke's missing and this bloke's missing?

No I wanted to get there and get out again.

And how do you see, the Kokoda Track has such a huge mythology in Australia, how do you look at that?

I think it was really wonderful to think

30:30 that they, well showing the world, people come from all over to experience this experience and it is one to go through and to get through with it and there were ever so many, I've got lots of pamphlets there of the various groups that have been through. We had a doctor from Townsville recently and she came to interview me and when she knew that I was 39th bloke we had a talk about it and the situation and

31:00 what they would take and whatnot and the amount of climbing she had to do up Castle Hill and Mount Stuart to get in form and she got through her trip all right. But Angry Anderson, he took a party through and he didn't get on too well, he broke a leg or something and all hell played up there, he had a lot of trouble.

And what sort of things about that mythology have been

31:30 **exaggerated from the truth that you remember from being there? You said in some of the books…**

Yes they seem to plaster it up a little higher than it normally is, perhaps they might stretch the imagination a little bit. Just a little bit here and there. I found that with that bayonet attack across the creek, I mean that wasn't in my book, didn't add up to a DCM. It was hundred of situations that were forward

32:00 scouts and corporals, corporals were the number one pick, that and officers, they picked out their men by snipers, no doubt about that.

Did it get to a point where you actually hated the Japs?

Yes, we did. Yes, I still do actually. I had a Japanese car for long enough and I've got a lot of Japanese stuff in the,

32:30 they're the masters of copying and they are the world's best I think at copying other people's inventions.

What did you think when you found out about the atomic bombs and what they'd done, what did you think about that?

That was pretty good. I mean it didn't worry us one bit that they killed hundred of thousands of people. Our immediate worry was this narrow ridge that

33:00 we couldn't negotiate and to think that the war's finished after what, the best part of five years of it, for some people. Great relief.

So can you tell us a bit about what you did when you were back in Australia, waiting for your discharge and you're looking after the prisoners of war?

Oh yes, I think I went AWL [Absent Without Leave]; I went down and bought a ring actually,

33:30 we had a weekend, somebody kept it for me and I had a weekend in Melbourne, that was AWL, and anyway, you do what you've got to do. Dunklings [jewellers] was all right I think. Still got the receipt. I had it all those years, I'm a bit of a hoarder, you know, and anyway.

34:00 **And the prisoners that were in your camp, where were they from?**

All over, Italy and Germany, they were our cooks and they were a great lot of blokes, they were in behind barbed wire, they had working parties around the place, they were our cooks, they called for working parties, they had the army trucks there and they take them out for picking every day and it was all up and go and they earned a few bob and one of them did

34:30 a lovely painting of pansies on masonite with lovely wooden handles and frame, which I purchased for a few dollars, and pounds I think it was. And another time, a famous gold watch from New Guinea that I plastered mud from time to time broke a spindle so they said, I think it was a German bloke, God he was a wizard, he cut down a darning needle and made a new shaft for my watch. I mean that's craftsmanship

35:00 and I got it back a few days, I did give him some money for it and he said. "For a few years, you use and

then you sell him." The steel wasn't in the hardness of steel apparently wasn't in it, so he said it would go for some years he said but then you sell him.

Would you say that the guarding of those prisoners was fairly lax?

35:30 It was, but we had a Korean in a cage, like a large gorilla he was and it was all barred in and we'd have to take him for a bath or shower, you know, but he was quite mad. He'd just have a stick and poke his tucker through the grill. And he just like a gorilla and he was quite mad and very, very savage.

36:00 And there were murders in the camp. There was very often fights and disagreements and both Germans and Italians are great knife throwers and whatnot and very often there was a murder in the camp and that was just a weekly occurrence sort of thing, that happened.

When something like that happened, would there be a trial and an investigation?

I don't think so. I think it was just one of those things amongst themselves. No, that was just a happening that took place, I didn't hear of any trials or anything.

36:30 A lot of those blokes returned to the fruit picking in Goulburn Valley and whatnot and set up camp and made wonderful new Australians. They loved it in this country. They had wonderful days out with us picking fruit, I'd go with them and get so much for a basket of oranges or peaches or whatever and it was a bit of lucrative money for us, bit of cash, and this was all

37:00 above board and used to eke out our five shillings a day.

I was just going to say, when they are out picking fruit, would it have been relatively easy for them to have done a runner?

Of course, but why run? I mean they were getting three very good meals a day, a good bed at night and money. No, they were very likeable people. They were cooking our tucker; if they wanted to be nasty they could poison us.

37:30 **So when did you finally get discharged, demobbed?**

When my points, when I had enough points. So I loaded my bike on the train and sent it back down to my aunts somewhere to pick it up later and returned to my aunts with my bit of paper and I gathered up my gear and went home to Eildon.

38:00 And my father had this boating business going there and so he took me in as a partner in the launch. I learnt to drive the launch on tourist groups and I got a marine inland pilots license for inland waters and I was all go, go, go. It was only a thirty-passenger boat, but that suited the small passenger cars, trucks that were around, the buses,

38:30 they were only about twenty-five, thirty people, like Pioneer [bus company] and those places but they didn't have forty, fifty passenger buses there. So our little boat was very adequate until such a time as they decided to enlarge Eildon and they said, "Well, we're not going to deal with individuals, the Water Board, the State Water Supply, we'll only deal with a club". So they said we'll have to form a

39:00 boat club, a hundred and twenty boats I was looking after, and they formed a club they did, and they moved the whole box and dice about twelve miles upstream to a cove up there and to a nice inlet, on a reasonable mountain road and it didn't suit me. I had a young wife and a new baby and a

39:30 new home in a wonderful location on the bank of the Goulburn River, look down and you could see the trout rise down there and go down get him for dinner and, you know, fruit trees already made, home had been there before us, we pulled it down, and we had a tin bath that was, you couldn't buy a bath for love and money, and we had a chip heater and the family copper out, where we had to boil the clothes up with the old pot stick and the

40:00 dunny was right down in the other block where the other house used to be, right down next to the other block. Life wasn't meant to be easy. We had a good garden and we until this upset took where they, I'd go to work of a day on the boats and come home and say, "Has the bloke been yet?" He was the valuer coming around to value the property, you know, the writing was on the wall, we're in the firing line, they eventually

40:30 paid us 1939 value reparations for a house we built in 1946. And you got five pounds for a fully-grown walnut tree, bearing tree, they like that and a little bit of cash was handy. I could have gone with the Utah Construction. They said, "We'll look after you, if you come over with us, we'll really look after you, but you've got to be prepared to travel with us all around the country wherever we go."

41:00 And at the same, they were starting up a fish hatchery in the vicinity about three kilometres away and the boss boy came up and they'd been having a bit of trouble with these boys and they tried to get rid of them and it back-fired and he got rid of them and so he said, "We're short handed, would you like to come down, there's housing there, it's all there, digging down there", he said, "and we'll look after you." And I said, "Oh well, that sounds good, I'm losing my home anyway", the fellow had been around

41:30 valued it, and so they moved their house and we moved into the fish hatchery.

Tape 10

00:31 **So just so that we do get it on tape, so after that what else did you go on and do in your career?**

I did finish up because I was a bit short with the point system, I did finish up a lance corporal. After all those years in the army, they were very short on somebody to take charge of various groups and I did finish up a lance corporal, but anyway that's

01:00 beside the point. No, after the war.

After the Water Board bought you out?

As I say, we moved into the government establishment at Snobs Creek because it's just being established, it finished up the largest state fish hatchery in Victoria and a research station and we had quite a staff there and I like the outdoor work very much,

01:30 a lot of cold work. Water and gumboots and tide boots and waders and out in the snow and all sorts of stuff from time to time and I like the outdoors, I think it did me a lot of good. I had quite a good garden there, we started to have our children, we had a couple by this time, and we had temporary quarters there, they were going to build us a brick home but it was in the making.

02:00 For two or three years we had temporary quarters and we made do with that and I stayed for twenty eight years and prior to that I'd been working, apart from my boating job, in the winter there was no tourists or anything so we'd lock up everything and apart from the pumping out the rainwater from the various hundred boats that I looked after for business

02:30 people in Melbourne, we used to have a daily work job up at the forestry plantation, cutting the limbs off, making lovely straight poles for pine trees, Radiata forest for the Forestry Commission. So that two years of work went on for my long service for as far as government was concerned. And as I say, I stayed twenty-eight years and that two years put me into thirty years and when I left in

03:00 1979 on my sixtieth birthday, the government saw fit to acknowledge that service with a Queen's Medal for long and faithful service. So we had a lovely day with little sandwiches and the very best of wines and the puppy dogs at Government House for the

03:30 governor and I was allowed to take one, two people, the children I had to choose so my wife chose the elder daughter, or we did, and we had all new clothes all round and into Government House and had various photographs and my daughter, it was highly illegal to take one within a Government House but she couldn't resist to get a shot of the handing over of the medals bits and the Governor.

04:00 Ron Barassi was there, you know the footballer, Ron Barassi, and Stirling Moss was another one on the receiving end of the awards that day.

So before you were discharged in the army, what were you thinking you would like to do afterwards?

I just wanted to get back to work and you know, forgot the army, forgot that I had had a back injury and things like that,

04:30 it didn't worry me and I just wanted to get into it, earning some money, and as I say got married and built this home and whatnot, the father-in-law was a builder so we all chucked in, three in and scrounged around and got timber and iron and stuff and built a nice little weatherboard home.

That back injury, was that something that you sustained during the war?

It was, it was an occasion

05:00 when we were removing a brigade, which was three battalions, and that was an occasion I was forward scout at one time and felt pretty proud about that lot, no it was a stop start, stop start, stop start, it was a horrible movement, while I was out in front that was pretty good. Once you changed over and fall back you, it was all sit down, get up, sit down

05:30 and I reached the stage where I couldn't stand the backache so the next time I got up I just kept walking and I walked and walked right through the line, until I got up to, until I met our 2/2nd Battalion constabulary, military policemen. This bike rider, Mort Ricehart, he said, "Titch, what are you doing up here?" And I said, "Oh I got a bit ahead of the blokes and I couldn't stand my backache."

06:00 And he said, "That's your quarters over there." So I had the half of the kerosene tin on my back, as our section tea-making device, so I got over there and I found a place to go, it was marked out and set up boiling the billy, getting a brew on for the boys when they arrived and when Captain Oliver arrived and oh jeez he wasn't too pleased at all to see me there with the fire going and the billy

06:30 boiling. So he matted me straightaway, he was going to put me on a dishonourable retreating from the enemy, or something they call it. And I said, "No, no, no, you're wrong." I said, "I'm not going

backwards, I'm going forwards. I'm going up to meet them." And he said "Oh, guard duty for the next two hours."

07:00 So the boys brought me a cup of tea and they, I was sort of really browned off. I used that, many years later I told this after applying for back problems and to the repatriation and knocked back, because my claim wasn't possible. I was telling this to our local doctor and he said, "Oh, God. I'll drop them a line."

07:30 And I got a cheque in the mail for back money for, or thirty percent or something, so I got on their books as deterioration of the spine, spondylitis they call it, so I'm a pension of fifty percent and I've tried to better that for aching shoulders and neck ache and whatnot I've had all my life from weight bearing in the ranges,

08:00 but they won't accept, because I didn't complain about it at the time. It had to be told about at the time. They happened to put on one of my discharge records that I reported to the RAP that I got an aspro for back pain. And that's all it needed, you know, to, as for, I've been two or three times to the tribunal trying to get one hundred percent for my seventy-five.

08:30 I'd like to have got a little bit more but that's not possible, they knock you back all the time.

Did you have a medical when you were discharged?

Yes and I think that that recorded in my discharge papers a backache, back pain and eventually it got through but they weren't going to recognise it initially until our doctor sent in the report and he considered it a worthy case.

09:00 A worthy case it was.

Do you think you have any other health side effects from New Guinea, like anything like malaria or?

No, no, never had any, got over those problems. I've always had neck and back pain though, all my life I think. It's all stemming from the spondylitis. But they won't recognise it so it's just one of these things.

Do you feel

09:30 **like you have been appropriately looked after for putting your life on the line?**

No I don't, I think I was badly done by and I didn't worry them for many, many, many years and it was only getting on in later life that the back really worried me and I thought, "Well why not". There wasn't an RSL, well I never joined the RSL for many, many

10:00 years, God knows, late seventies I joined the RSL. I mean those things didn't occur to you.

When you actually left New Guinea, was there much sort of packing up before you came home?

They left a, there was still a group behind us at New Guinea at Wewak, the

10:30 rear echelon they call that I think, and they did the packing up and assigning it to the various bodies and groups that it had to go to. We were on a points system and we just took what gear we had to take and left.

So what gear did you come home with?

I had a haversack and a pack as well and

11:00 a bit of gear and it was, plenty of shorts and shirts and spare pairs of boots and anything you could rake up because you know you're getting out and you, if your trousers are a little bit worn, you wore them a bit more with a bit of stone. You make the knees go through pretty quick smart so you got a new pair, nice pair of greens and they ventured into the, this wonderful twill stuff, like the shining twill that the Americans had. They had lovely clothes. And they

11:30 eventually got into that sort of a twill, sort of a gabardine or a twill it was a polished sort of a garment which was very good for pants anyway.

I meant to ask you before, after the Owen Stanleys when you were in Aitape and going to Wewak, were the fuzzy-wuzzies still around then or were they only up in the Owen Stanleys?

I don't remember them

12:00 being around in that area, no, it was all, we had jeeps and confiscated, cut-down cars that they brought from Singapore, some of our own vehicles, Chevs and like and they cut the back out of them and used them as ambulances on the Wewak road and that was mostly hard sand on low tide and you could drive along the beaches you know. And in various rivers you had to,

12:30 they got pretty good at putting a Bailey bridge over quick smart. This is a metal sort of a thing that bolted together. Other than that for forward elements you had to wade through rivers and get across to the other side with covering fire and whatnot and once you gained ground on the other side, they set

about the engineers set about building a proper road across the river. It was very tidal the sections along there and

13:00 you've got very heavy flooding, which rose very fast, and they had a lot of trouble with supplies and whatnot. But we had barges to forward out, to leapfrog our food along the coast in barges. We got quite mechanised we did.

So when you actually withdrew from the Owen Stanleys, was there any kind of parting or goodbye with the natives, with the fuzzy-wuzzies?

No, no,

13:30 just went on your way. I suppose people with ANGAU, the natives, that would be a different situation because they were with the natives all the time. They were their escorts and whatnot and they always carried a rifle with them and escorting there, always a native policeman with them,

14:00 on their escort, do escort work and I suppose to stop them shooting through mainly. There was always a policeman sent with them, a patrol officer.

So when you came back from New Guinea, how did you actually come home?

On the hospital ship Manunda the first time and I was in a ward, at – a white woman –

14:30 the hospitals I'd been, field officer, ambulance or field officer, or hospitals I'd been in were all canvas tents and whatnot and were all male dominated orderlies and doctors and whatnot, but to get on a hospital ship and see these lovely ladies, white-skinned people, just sat in awe of them, even though I had malaria and was not well. I just…the salt of the earth.

15:00 **When you came home for good, how did you get home that time?**

On a corvette, Taroona, that was what it was called, yeah, a naval vessel. We got picked up at Wewak and transported home, very long narrow vessel it was, very long, gosh it was as long as you could remember.

15:30 But I don't remember much about the trip home except that you'd see the bow go down into the water about ten feet and the next thing it's up in the air and down again and up again.

So where did you say you actually came back to, Brisbane?

I think, it's a good question, I'm not actually sure, I think we landed in Brisbane for the first time on the Manunda

16:00 because I went to hospital, anyway inland, no it must have been Sydney I think and there we entrained then for Melbourne.

Do you recall when the ship actually came in, was there a big welcome home?

Don' t think so, no it was a pretty common thing for troops to be coming in, they were coming in pretty frequently, all around the war had finished and they were

16:30 coming in from the islands everywhere and it was just another happening, yeah. They did have a big march in Sydney for the battalion and but I never took part in it, I don't know where I was at the time and I never got a send-off in Melbourne or Sydney.

17:00 Melbourne they did a big parade, the 39th Battalion, but I wasn't in it. You see the battalion that was formed in dribs and drabs at Darley by wanting extra men to come in to fill to make the thousand-odd men and when they had the marches as a sort of a send off, and likewise the local community put on a dance and a welcome home to the boys in my home town but I wasn't there, I was still in New Guinea.

17:30 I was behind the times all the time. Left out. I got a wallet from them eventually. I got a wallet for service from the citizens, but I missed out on the homecomings, yeah.

The Kokoda legend is such a big part of Australia's military history and just…

It will be and it'll get bigger as it goes along I think.

Yes, like it's such a big part of our

18:00 **national identity. Was it like that straightaway or was that…?**

No it's grown, yes. Nobody, people just wanted to get on with as far as I could see. It was never, well nobody ever did anybody about it, it was just something that happened and we were there and did what we had to do, but no there was no, it's grown in size

18:30 over the years with the writings of the various authors and, like yourselves, getting around finding out things, the various walking groups that have taken up the challenge to do the track.

Now you've been back since haven't you?

Yes in 1998, yes. That was mostly air transport; I didn't do any walking.

19:00 **How did that come about that trip to go back?**

It was known as the last parade of the 7th and 14th Battalion and it was for many of them, the last parade. And there was a good many, they were all pretty aged and varying stages of decline in their life and a lot of them went with their relatives, assisted them all the way, almost carried some of them they were so ill, but they were determined to make it.

19:30 Some of them didn't last many days after they got back, just a bit too much for them, but they wanted to be there and do it. And it was quite a day at Isurava, the army, it was all army supplied, all the transport and aircraft and helicopters from Kokoda to Isurava and natives provided all the food, although we had a cut lunch, we didn't know that we were going to get fed, they walked for

20:00 days to bring in the chicken, roast chickens and you know all our taro and all these vegetables and whatnot. Some of the boys partook but I didn't want to get collywobbles or whatever. And we were issued with our man for the day, a relative of the carriers that carried our gear in the early days and they all had an umbrella and held it over us all day long in the sun and kept the mosquitos off us and went to the toilet with us,

20:30 really looked after us. They were very proud to be in this part of the Kokoda campaign, although we were only two strong the 39th Battalion, the other man, the lieutenant, was on a stick, pretty much invalided. I would have like to walk the track with the other instigators of the trek, there were only five seats in the

21:00 helicopter from Kokoda to Port Moresby to Isurava on that day, the day before we all left to go by Caribou air force planes. But there was only room for five of them and five it was and I wasn't one of them. So I told the chappie in charge, he did say his name, in charge of the 2/14th

21:30 **Stan Bisset?**

Stan yeah, I told Stan that I was a little bit disappointed that I wasn't, and he explained it to me and he was sorry that it happened that way but there was only room for five and five it was. I hope to do better this next time I go.

What were your feelings going back there?

Nothing particular because it was,

22:00 I didn't know anything, it had all grown up and they'd cleared the area, they said it was close to where the fighting took place and so much so that it was right on the spot of some of the actions, because they had rusted old grenades and Japanese helmets and spent ammunition and all sorts of relics there when they cleared the site. And they even found two bodies, which were two Australians that they hadn't located.

22:30 But they had to remain there for quite a while; they've since got them. But they closed the track shortly after that, they had a big row, all the natives own that land and they objected that they were not getting enough out of it and they wanted a million dollars for the use of the track but that was quite out of the question and now it's organised with the organised parties and they pay fifty kina [Papua New Guinea currency],

23:00 or whatever they call it, to do the trek.

Have you always taken part in Anzac Day?

No, only in I suppose the seventies that I suppose I became, I think only once I went to one, I wasn't a member, I went to one in Eildon, when I was in Eildon, I just thought I'd go up and walk with the boys. There weren't any 39th blokes there. I eventually

23:30 got interested in the 39th when they, decided to join up and got their good guts and newsletter and then of course when we moved closer to Melbourne I was able to go to some of their meetings. I did go to one of their reunions, I went down and stayed with my daughter I think in Melbourne and I went out to Prahran and God it was such an eye-opener that was. The floor was wet, just swimming in beer,

24:00 swill you know and drunk as lords they were, they were terrible. It was how they would behave on a battalion night out, you know, a reunion, and then it came to going down the steps of the town hall or wherever it was held and they were saying, "Where you going mate? Going to Sunshine." "Oh I'm going to Sunshine too." And they took a car load and one of them could drive, you know, those were the days when you could get

24:30 away with these things and I think that they didn't get to Sunshine until after midday the next day, they were driving around, God knows where. I did get a ride, got a taxi with those two Marsh boys that I spoke about earlier, I got a taxi from there to town and I walked the five miles out to where I was staying with my brother in Thornbury. It was the best part of five miles and I was quite sober by the time I

25:00 got home.

So what are your thoughts on Anzac Day?

I think it's great, yes. We had a bit of trouble with the young people but I think they've got to keep it going and they encourage the grandchildren to walk now. They haven't done for a number of years now in Melbourne, but it's different in Townsville, anybody and everybody, school children, all line up for a, make quite a march of it in Townsville.

25:30 I've been to a few of the marches here and also at, we had one over on the island, which was very impressive on your memory of, they bring a group of present day soldiers over and they, in a barge and they do a beach landing, right where the Dawn Service is taking place, at dawn you know, and then they fire a few rifle shots and then have the service. It's all very, you know,

26:00 it brings back memories.

What do you think about on Anzac Day?

I think of the boys that went around the corner and I didn't see them any more. These two runners particularly, they were tent mates and lovely blokes but young, didn't know, never seen a shot fired before and no training, didn't, just walked down the track and just doing what they would normally do as a runner and just walked straight into trouble.

26:30 I could have done the same thing but, luck of the draw. Oh no, it's very much a remembrance of the day. But it's nice to be out and about and I feel a little bit embarrassed when I walk along the Melbourne streets. I don't know why, but all these people saying, "Good bloke." Little kids walking

27:00 around with Anzac biscuits, handing them out, you know, you're a bit of a sort of legend I think. I do feel a bit embarrassed of all these wonderful people urging you on.

How would you like to see the legend of the Kokoda Track continued?

I don't know how, it'll die out eventually I suppose; they're incorporating some of the sons now into the union,

27:30 our association, and they're carrying it over with the various office jobs and tasks and they're more or less carrying it now. I think our president's maybe now an honorary or something after maybe forty odd years as president, but I guess the young people will carry on, they're enlisting our children now to join now

28:00 the association, so it'll be carried on.

When you were talking just before about your feelings towards the Japanese now, how does that, what did you think when you were saying earlier that at Colonel Honner's funeral they sent a representative?

Yes the Kyoto Association, I think they call themselves,

28:30 and they have a strong association and they particularly come out to the Cowra war memorial, you know where the break out at Cowra, just off the track a bit, Cowra. They have a very strong association and they incorporate their 39th

29:00 visits with that occasion because I think it might have been somewhere in about August too when it took place, the break out. So our fellows have been over, some of the committee have been over to Japan and met up with them over there. And I do believe that they gave them a memento from Japan and for Colonel ' to his relatives'

29:30 at the funeral.

With the Americans there's been a lot said of what people think of the Americans, besides acting as a blocking force for them, did you ever fight side by side with them?

No, we took over from them on

30:00 two occasions, but no never. No, can't say, they were at Buna but I don't know that they did such a lot there.

When you took over from them at Aitape and they were basically sitting around?

Yes, waiting to go island-hopping, they were on their way. They joined an armada of ships

30:30 leaving there and we just took over their territory. Took over.

What did you think of them when they'd been sort of sitting around having a bit of a rest and you guys got there and...?

It was just one of those things that took place. It was, we didn't go there to sit on our backsides and just, we went there to do a job and Cameron was

31:00 dead bent on getting it over and done with, although it did take us twelve months, almost twelve months

anyway, yeah. I think we got there in January and we finished in July/ August. September pretty well, September.

I meant to ask you earlier too. When you were out with the 39th and the 53rd were supposed to be

31:30 **protecting your flank and there was a problem with them?**

I don't know a lot about them but I do know a great amount of desertion took place there. They deserted them in droves and they were untrained and there was no discipline whatsoever. And on one occasion they, I have heard, instead of, they were going out to relieve a standing patrol that was out in no mans land

32:00 there, just waiting for keeping an eye on things as an early warning sort of thing. They didn't, they went without their arms and they said, "Oh, we'll swap them when we get there" and of course that's not on. There's no discipline there. And of course, that twelve or fourteen whatever it was in that group, they got cut to pieces, they had no arms to defend themselves, the Japs got between the patrol and there

32:30 and they just met a fighting a patrol of Japs and were wiped out. That's the sort of thing that could happen that shouldn't have happened.

Was that when you were heading to Oivi?

No we were still at Isurava there.

So after they let you down with protecting the flank, did you run into any of them again?

No never, never again. But apart from that, they broke the unit up and they joined our battalion. They were the main reinforcements

33:00 we had to Gona and Buna and they were good fighting men because they got a bit of discipline from the 39th blokes and it was, they're men all right, it's just that they were badly led. Their officers ran away.

How were they received when they came as reinforcements?

It wasn't a problem, they settled in with us as the same as they were all sort of a militia and they fitted in all right, we didn't have

33:30 long together but they performed very well at Gona and Buna amongst some of the heaviest casualties.

When you think back on your army service, how do you think that has affected the rest of your life?

I think it was wonderful really, I think it did a wonderful, the discipline was great, I'd like

34:00 to see national service brought in now and to straighten up the young people of today. If this country is worth living in, it is worth fighting for, giving something back. I'd love to see national service but there is no politician brave enough to put it up and fight for it because they wouldn't get a seat. They'd be out, too much money, money, money, draft for them.

34:30 **How do you think it shaped who you are?**

It didn't do me any harm. I was most fortunate I came out unscathed, apart from my back worries. I think it did me a lot of good.

What's it like now when you see mates that you served with?

35:00 You know, fitter than a good many of them. There's so many of them take a ride in the bus when I go down to Anzac. I do two marches; I double back and always get the 2/2nd Battalion. They're only a little group of about eight strong down there now in Victoria. They're a NSW [New South Wales] unit of course and there are a few strays down there, few Victorians, but transferred over like this from the 39th

35:30 and I double back and do a little walk back with those up the slope and past the saluting base again and back into, we go out to Prahran out to a barracks out there and they put on a lovely meal out there for this little group. And we usually have a lovely day. I have always had the car down there but the last time I went with my daughter and her friend

36:00 and there was a group of us went and of course it rained and rained and rained and we came straight home so I missed that outing.

Do you identify more with being a man of the 39th or…?

I'm a 39th man. I'm so pleased I have a choice. They say, "Where are you going to be, what battalion?" And I say, "Oh, the 39th" because that

36:30 was where I had initially learnt my trade and we weren't greatly received by the 2/2nd Battalion but we fitted in the best we could. But the 39th was definitely, even the 57/60th, I had no calling for them

because I didn't see any action with those people, it was only just a staging point, staging camp and

37:00 the 39th was the real thing for us.

So they let you choose that on your discharge papers?

They did yes. It was a choice, although I had two years with the 2/2nd Battalion, one in twelve months active service and the other in twelve months in Atherton Tablelands, but the two-odd years, we were together for twenty two months the 39th Battalion.

37:30 And of the fifteen hundred we had when they finished, Gona's gone and they marched out, they wouldn't give them a ride on the vehicle, they were all very sickly and poorly after such atrocious fighting they went through. They marched with Honner and honour onto the tarmac at

38:00 the airport, put it that way, and came to attention and marched as a group and there were five officers, six officers, five or six officers and twenty-five men. That was the battalion, that's all that's left out of fifteen hundred men. So a lot of the battalions were down to fifty and sixty and seventy, that was their total strength after their campaigns at the Stanleys

38:30 and the Gona campaigns. They were down to very small numbers. It's well known in their books. Somebody said, "What mob's that?" And one of the lieutenants bringing up the rear said, "That's not a mob, that's the 39th Battalion." A proud moment.

Did the 39th have a song?

No.

Do you know when most of the blokes were discharged, did they

39:00 **choose the 39th?**

I expect that they would have, yes. It was our grounding and I think that they, I'm still a member of the 2/2nd Battalion, I still belong to their association in the latter years when I joined it, like the 39th, the group. I always get the publications and whatnot now. They've been taken over

39:30 by the new battalions that are looking after their interests now and our surplus money and whatnot has all gone over to the new battalion that are operating today at Newcastle.

Looking back at your service, what are you most proud of?

I suppose the Owen Stanley campaign is the most memorable and most

40:00 effective campaign, yeah, our first campaign.

And exactly what is it about that that makes you proud?

Survivor I suppose.

So if you had a message for a time capsule, what would your message be to young Australians?

I should think that they should

40:30 be in a service of some description, some national service. That would do them all a lot of good. No harm could come of a two years in national service and that would be the makings of many, many people here. Far better than the other way.

41:00 **Is there a final thought that you wanted to say?**

No. I'm glad that I've spent the day with you and it's been a pleasure really, and I hope that it all works out really well for you in the future.

INTERVIEW ENDS