Australians at War Film Archive

Henry Sproxton - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:30 **So your parents are originally from Scotland.**

Scotland, yes.

So why did they actually decide to come to Australia?

Well, various reasons, I think the climate was one. My mother used to suffer pretty badly in the winter time, cold, you know. And they came from the north of Scotland,

01:00 Mum came from a little place, or both north of Inverness shire, but she went to the Inverness Academy until she was about 19, she was a fairly well educated lady. And my father came from Rochshire up in the north further up still. And they met up before the First World War, and then when that broke out, so that interrupted their courtship sort of thing, they were engaged prior to that. And then, and

01:30 Dad was away over four years at the war, he was in the Royal Horse Artillery. And luckily for him, he was, because they went to the Middle East which is far better than France and he was away the four years and a bit. And he got the Spanish flu on the way back so he was another three or four months getting back. Dad was away four and a half years or something, altogether

So why did they decide to settle down south of

02:00 **WA [Western Australia] ?**

There was a publicity business on at the time, advertising, the group settlements and all this, you see. And there was a, Sir James Mitchell was the instigator of all that lot, and there was a big publicity campaign going on in England and Scotland through that way. And they got a lot of migrants from Scotland and England and Ireland.

Did you have a choice of which part of Western Australia you could settle in?

Not really,

02:30 no. No, they had to take what was there, vacant at the time. So they never realised how raw it was out here compared to all the farms in England. Dad had a farm in England. They had a farm in England and one in Scotland, his people. And they were totally different, of course, everything would've been done for hundreds of years in England.

Oh, that's a bit, that'll be the phone. Do you want to get it or?

Yes, I'll get that.

03:00 **What sort of farm did they have in Karridale?**

A dairy farm. It was for the butterfat. There were no milk quotas in those days, and mainly because we couldn't get the cartage, you see, and it didn't matter if the cream went sour, because it was made into butter anyway. So ours was all cream, you had to separate it all, you see.

How do you do that?

We had a separator.

03:30 And you wind the handle on it, and you gauge it until it's got about four curls on the one with the cream coming out. There's a tiny little bit of cream used to come out and of course a huge amount of milk. And that was waste, you know, that was skim milk. And it was, all the cream went into a big cream churn and we used to put that out on the roadside there. The road wasn't even formed up in those days, it was just, wound through the

04:00 trees, you know.

So you would put it on the roadside and it would get picked up?

Yeah, picked up by the cream truck when it came through. And sometimes it'd get punctures and take a day or two to, and it used to go through to Margaret River at first and then to Boyanup. We had to send it to Boyanup and that made things a bit hard.

Because Boyanup's further up.

Yes. But then they fixed it up with the railway line, and we used to put it on the train, the

04:30 truck still picked it up and take it into the siding at Karridale.

Did you have any duties as part of the, as part of the farm did you have duties?

In the mornings and that, before we went to school, yes definitely. Yes, I used to be on the separator, and my brother who was two years older than me, he used to milk four or five cows before he went to school. Because we had no milking machines down there.

How many cows did you have?

We had about 40.

05:00 **That's a lot of cows to milk in a morning.**

By hand, oh well, there was Dad, he was a good milker, and Col and Ron, so they used to get through them.

Can you tell me a little bit about the countryside around Karridale?

Very, huge timber, terrific timber. And because, some of those kauri trees were so tall they used to knock them over and Dad used to say, even from the back of the horse he couldn't see over the top of them when they were on the ground, kauri trees,

05:30 they used to block it out, you know. They'd take a week to get one down, you know.

A week?

Take about a week to get a big kauri tree down, yeah, lopped up.

So, a real forest area that you were in.

It was, it was terribly thick country.

You've got a bit of beach around there, yeah?

We were four and a half miles from the coast. And it was good beach country, the peppermint, plenty of

06:00 peppermint country, that's why the fires were so bad there.

What sort of things would you get up to when you had some free time? Because you've got two brothers, haven't you?

Yeah, chasing booty rats and things like that.

What's that?

They're a thing with a long pointy nose. I don't know if booty rats is their right name or not, but that's what we used to call them. And the bracken was that high, when you're kids you can play through it and used to make all these tunnels through, you didn't have to make them actually,

06:30 because the booty rats would make them. We used to get through them.

I'm trying to think what they are, did they have stripes?

They're like, no.

I think it sounds like a bit of a numbat.

That's it, you've got it, yeah, they were, they were a type of numbat.

I don't know that that area has numbats any more.

Oh, it wouldn't have now, probably. No.

So where did you go to school?

Where?

07:00 At the Karridale School, which was one of the reasons we picked that, Dad came down to that block. We were away 16 miles in the bush before that, up at Nillup.

I've never heard of Nillup.

Nillup, yeah, it's just over Alexander Bridge. Alexander Bridge over the Blackwood.

What, near Bridgetown?

No, straight up from, it's on the road to Nannup now, on the Brockman Highway.

Okay, right.

If you

07:30 go across to Nannup, it's there. It's just upstream a bit from where those two kiddies were drowned.

Gotcha. Well that's also quite a nice little area.

It is, yes. Dreadful in the wintertime, extremely cold and wet. More rain than they get here in Perth.

So you actually moved to

From Nillup, yes, we were at Nillup about a year and then came down to Karridale.

08:00 **So what was the school like in Karridale?**

It was quite a large school by those standards in those days. One school, one teacher school, he used to teach the whole classes through till sixth standard. And there were about, I think there were about 24 of us there at that school. Nillup there was only about 10. 10 or 11 children.

So a pretty small environment.

They were,

08:30 yes.

What sort of subjects did you enjoy at school?

I used to like arithmetic, always did, and reading. And writing, I was pretty keen on writing too.

What sort of sports happened as, in the school or just after school?

Done there, it was soccer country down there. Soccer in the wintertime and cricket in the summertime.

09:00 **Did you like sports?**

Yes, very much so.

What was your favourite?

I think the running was my favourite because, athletics, that type of thing, yeah.

Did you get involved in any sort of athletic carnival races?

In any?

Any athletic sort of races?

Only when the inter-schools was on, you know, we used to have all the inter-school contests. We used to travel as far as a place called Forest Grove, Witchcliffe, that's all south of Margaret

09:30 River, from Margaret River down. It was such a big job travelling around in those days.

Well, how did you travel around then?

On horse and cart.

Slow.

A light, yes, a light cart, that you weren't going to take a big load on. Now known as a spring cart. And, because they were actually, they were on springs and they're supposed to be a bit more comfortable than the drays, you know, because they just

10:00 barge their way over rocks and everything on the road. You can't even begin to imagine what the roads were like. Until they were formed up, they weren't even formed up, you see.

Well it sounds like it was really cowboy territory.

It was, it was quite rough. You could take all day to get to Margaret River which was, what would it be, about 30 miles. And it'd be all day, that was in a car too. There were

10:30 only four cars in the whole area and one tabletop truck, and that was it. And that's one of the reasons Dad was keen to shift from there, because he said we were getting that way, if a strange car came along we used to hide behind the trees like, you know, like natives. We were getting quite primitive, he thought, so

Really? So he wanted his boys to have a little bit more

Yes, that's

11:00 right.

So what happened then?

So 1933 we moved up to Perth. Well, we had to anyway, I suppose because the cream what's-a-names all stopped. And all our source of money coming in was gone, you know.

Why did the cream stop?

Well they stopped picking it up because there were so few started producing it, and the schools were closing down all through

11:30 there. It was during the start of the Depression, you know,

Right.

and it was pretty bad. And we came up to Perth and, well by that time, I suppose half of Karridale was up around Perth and it was extremely hard to get work. But nothing in Perth at all, but Dad got a chance of a job on the York Road. So after three weeks in Perth, we headed off to Chidlow, which was the closest point we could get

12:00 to where Dad would be working on the road. And we lived at Chidlow for about 18 months and probably, as you know, that's about 30 mile from Perth.

Yeah.

And Dad used to come home of a weekend, he'd walk 16 miles straight through the bush from where he was working and, but if he went around the roads it was miles and miles and couldn't do it. So he used to put the, you know, a sugar bag sort of

12:30 stacked all the gear and the straps on it and on his back and away he'd go. And we'd walk about four or five miles with him on his way back, on a Sunday night. It'd be just getting dark so that we'd get home by dark and Dad used to head off and he'd go through the bush.

Sounds like a pretty hard kind of

Pretty hard existence, yeah.

So where were you living? Did you

Yes, it was quite a nice little house we had there, 10 shillings a week the rent was on it.

13:00 And there was an orchard and all with that. It was a little 10-acre property. And we used to look after the orchard and that.

What sort of fruit?

There were a fair few plums, lots of plums, stone fruit mainly. There was a couple of rows of oranges, but we used to send the plums off to market and we'd get three, up to three shillings a case for those. And then we had to take the cartage out of that, I think the cartage was about six pence a case or something.

13:30 And Ron and I used to make the cases. And that was okay until he won a scholarship to Northam High School. So he went to live at Northam. He took off on his own as, with the scholarship.

So were you going to school in your local

Yes, I went to Chidlow School. There were about 30 at that school.

Again, a tiny school.

Yes, it was big, though, by our standards, you know, from down in the bush.

14:00 Yes, it was,

But you ended up at Perth Boy's so how long were you in Chidlow?

About a year and a half at Chidlow.

And how old are you by this stage?

11, 12, was it, I was about 12 by the time we came down to Bayswater.

Moving around a lot.

Oh yes, I went to six different schools.

Gee.

And

Did that make it hard to fit in with the other kids?

No, you got used to it more or less, yes.

14:30 Because a lot of them were in the same boat in those days, they were on the move, you know, chasing work. Their parents were. And then I had about a year at Bayswater, just over a year, and went into 6A there and then got an entrance to Perth Boys' School.

And how was Perth Boys' School?

It was huge after, it was a

15:00 thousand boys there.

Would've been a rude shock.

That was, that's right, it was. But luckily by that time my brother had transferred down from Northam and he was going there. And so I had the brother there a couple of years ahead of me. And it went up to ninth standard. But I only did seventh, seventh in those days would be equal to, oh, first year high, you know.

15:30 **Were you interested in continuing on with school?**

I was, but I had, I used to work of a night-time. After I started at Perth Boy's I used to work on a Tuesday night, Thursday night and Saturday morning for eight hours at the butcher shop in Mainlands, which was next to Bayswater. At the Mainlands tram terminus, at the butcher shop there.

How did you get this job?

Through another fellow at Bayswater school. He was going on and leaving it, and he wanted to know if, so I went and interviewed them there and they said

16:00 yes, I could have the job with Dick Elmsleth.

What sort of things did you do as part of the job? I know nothing about butchering.

Well, used to cut up the fat ready for dripping and all that sort of thing. They'd give you stuff to cut up that you couldn't hurt, you know, sort of thing, damage. And that went into the huge cast iron vat and used to make the dripping. Had to boil for a certain while until

16:30 the fat was all crackled, crackling as they call it. And then we used to get rid of that to the fishermen, because it was a real big demand for berley for fishing, you know. We had no job, it wasn't very hard to dispose of it. And then when I was in my last year, they said would I like to have an apprenticeship into butchery. So I did, I left school, I was 13 and 10 months when I left school.

17:00 And, but they didn't worry much in those days. So I started working in the butcher shop. Much to my father's dismay because he was away at the time.

Why didn't he like this idea?

Well, he wanted an education for us, that was one of the ideas of coming up to the city.

But you had an interest in butchering.

Well I did, I didn't mind it. And I rather liked, you

17:30 know, chopping up the meat in all different sections and what not. And I did two years with that fellow and then he died, he'd been badly gassed during the war, old Fred Baker. And then the business changed hands and they had another apprentice, so they couldn't take another one on. I was out of a job.

That must've been extremely disappointing.

It was, it was bad, and I got a job with a green grocer for a start. And then the local

18:00 iceman in the summer, that was handy but it was terrifically heavy, those blocks of ice, remarkably heavy.

Well what do you do with the iceman job, because I don't know that this job would exist any more?

Oh, it definitely doesn't. They were ice chests, they never had refrigerators in those days, nobody had a refrigerator. And some poor people didn't even have an ice chest, they had a Coolgardie safe as they called them. Well, we had one of those until we got an ice chest. And the block of ice goes in

18:30 the top, they go up to 100 weight in weight, the big blocks of ice, and 56s and then the half of that, quarters they were called, a 28 pounder. A quarter of a hundred weight.

So how did that system work? Like, you order your ice and pick it up or what do you do?

Yes, and then you get to know how much their ice chest takes and

19:00 say, some of them would be out, out of ice quicker than others. Or some of them were very good, they used to hold it, you know. And it goes in the top in a container and you put it up in that and then it cools the whole of the, they were quite effective, they were very good. But then when the summer ended I finished up with him, so.

How would the ice get made in the ice place?

At the ice works in West Perth.

19:30 There was another one near the Mount Morley subway. You could pick up from either, I think they were connected together and the ice men used to, wherever they were, when they ran out of their, with their trucks.

How would you make the ice?

Just the water into these areas, you know, like in the, they were all this wide, they were made specifically for ice chests and they had a mark in them.

20:00 I don't know how that was put there, but you used to be able to hit it with the, with an ice pick and it would split there. And, but it was just water, ordinary water and just frozen up. In the freezers.

And so what was your job as part of that be?

That was on the delivery, I was on the delivery truck, with the truck and the driver. And it was put into a canvas

20:30 bag and it wasn't so bad in the summer time handling it, but your hands still got just about frozen. You had to be very careful putting it in the chest too, or it would jam your fingers and everything else.

I'm thinking if you run an ice works, you're in a pretty profitable situation during summer.

Oh well, they were big combines, the ice works. These, all these trucks and that, they were owner driven a lot of them. Some of them had a few fleet. Western Ice had about a

21:00 dozen trucks and things, people like that. And they were all on ice deliveries, but the Western Ice used to do mainly the shops and that. But these others were owner-drivers.

What sort of jobs had your brothers managed to get by this stage?

My brother, he stayed at school. He had his degrees when he was 19 for accountancy. AFIA [Institute of Accountants] he had them by the time he was 19. But I used to get more

21:30 money than he did, because manual in those days was, you could get the money. And after I left the ice works, I was with the green grocer, the ice works, oh, no, and then I was splitting baker's wood.

Oh, what's that?

All the ovens, the bakers' ovens were all, allowed four-foot lengths of timber. They used to just throw them in these furnaces alongside the big ovens. And I got a job in Inglewood, which is fairly close

22:00 to Bayswater. And they're all delivered as logs, Jarrah logs, dry. And they give you a sugar bag full of wedges and a couple of axes and a sledgehammer, you know, belt the wedges in, you had to split the logs. And then after you split it you took it to the axe until you got about six or eight pieces out of a log, you know, split up, and that was it. But that was too hard so I did that for five weeks.

22:30 **That sounds like a very hard job.**

It was, it was pretty hard.

Did it pay well?

It wasn't too bad. But in the meantime, I think it was about a pound a week, which is two dollars. But then my brother heard about a job that was going at the local butcher shop, my elder brother, and, or he knew someone that worked there or something, Henderson brothers. And I got a job with him, they interviewed me. They were pretty fussy

23:00 in those days, they could have a choice of anybody. But anyway, I got the job and it was driving a cart, a butcher's cart. And so I continued on with my butchering career there, up until I joined up.

How old were you when you actually joined up?

17 and 11 months. I put my age up two years and a month, as shown on the, that certificate there. Because when Kerry tuned onto it with the computer

23:30 thing, she said, "They haven't even got your birthday right." I says, "How do you mean?" She says,

“Well, they reckon you were born in 1921, January the 8th.” Well I was actually born February the 8th. But how that happened, I went down, I was going past Swan Barracks one day, and I still had my apron on and I called in there to, they had a big enlistment going on at Swan Barracks. And there’s blokes sitting behind the desks and that and

24:00 there was, I think he was a captain or something. And he got a form out ready when I came up and he was going to start taking my particulars and then he says, “And how old are you?” He says, “You’re not 20.” And, because you had to be 20 with your parents’ consent in those days, in the early days. I said, “Yes I am.” He said, “When are you 20?” I said, “Today.” And it happened to be January the 8th. So he was writing all this down and he put a signature on the corner, you know, what was going on.

24:30 And he says, “You’ll have to get your father’s signature on this,” and he pushed it over to me and he said, “Get him to sign that and come back,” you know. And I thought “This is going to be a hard battle.” Anyway, because Dad wasn’t that keen on me going at that age, he said, “When you are old enough you can do that.” And he was, by that time he was out working on the east-west road. That’s the only work that was about on the roads, you know.

25:00 And he was away out near Norseman. So I wrote him a long letter and sent him the thing, and that, and it never came back for quite a while. That’s why it was April before I actually went in, because they had a bit of a lull in the, they didn’t want any personnel much in March all through there..

Why did you actually choose the army instead of any of the other services?

Well, I put in for the air force at the same time. But I was in the army by the time the air force came up.

25:30 But it was probably just as well, because I wouldn’t have got into the aircrew, so, because education, you had to have your junior to get in aircrew. I don’t know why you had to, to fly an aeroplane, but you had to. So that was that. But the air force, I got a letter from them after I was in the camp at Northam. It was too late then, so.

So

26:00 **what did your father think about signing this form?**

Well eventually he did sign it and he sent it back. He said this is against his better judgement, he said, “You’ve made your mind up,” he said yeah. Well, some of them didn’t, they used to forge their father’s signature, so he knew that, so. Not that I would’ve done that of course. But anyway, he did sign it and send it back.

So when they called on you to

26:30 To go in camp?

Yeah, where

I turned 18 by then. We used to report down at Claremont.

What was Claremont like in those days?

Claremont was a recruiting place where they all came in. You spent your first couple of weeks training there, but it was a bit of a pull on troops at that stage, so I was only there about four or five days, as reinforcements, and I sent up to Northam camp. And that was quite a big camp, there were thousands up there.

27:00 **What were the conditions, excuse me, like at Northam camp?**

Pretty good. Yeah, we lived in huts, on the floor, they lay on the floor, 20, about 20 to a hut. They, some of the huts are still there at Northam, they used them for migrants later on. But it was quite good, it was good food and the training was pretty dull.

What happened as part of the training?

Mainly marching and drill. And you know,

27:30 drill like open order march and all this caper. So we did that for a few weeks and well, I was only there a couple weeks and I got pre-embarkation leave of six days. And we marched through Perth and all this, and some of the chaps had only been in army a few days.

Well that’s really, a very short turn around.

It is. Yes.

What was going on?

Well, they were calling on reinforcements for the Middle East at that stage.

28:00 And were in the 7th reinforcement from 2nd 28th Battalion, which is a West Aussie brigade. And there were three main West Australian battalions, the 16th, the 11th and the 28th.

And how aware were you of all the things that were going on in the war?

Oh, fairly aware. What we, because the drill, the drill and all was based on that, you know, we did bayonet, a terrible lot of bayonet

28:30 practice. I wasn't that keen on that, not getting that close to them. Anyway, I friend of mine, I joined up with him, he'd worked at a butcher shop too, Jack Wicks. And we hadn't mixed much until we found ourselves alongside each other at Claremont, and we went through together. And we got, stuck together then, I was 11950 and he was 11951, his number. And Jack was saying to me, he used to put in for

29:00 everything around the place and so did I, to get away from the marching, see. That's all we seemed to do was marching up the road, and yet we'd only been there about three weeks. And this hush-hush came up, it was called a hush-hush because it was special service. And they wanted young blokes, unmarried, and prepared to work in, on their own if necessary in small parties. So we thought, "This sounds better than being cluttered up here."

29:30 So we put in for that.

What sort of process did they have as part of…

Interviewing you?

Yeah.

They wanted to know if you could ride a horse, had you ever been in the country, you know, lived in the country, and roamed around the bush a fair bit on your own and all this caper. And they interviewed quite a few, they put about a thousand through to get about 250. And

30:00 you told all the lies in the world, you know, they wanted to know if you could swim with your clothes on and boots and all on for 100 yards, "Oh yes, no trouble at all."

What, weren't you a good swimmer?

Oh yes, I could swim pretty good, and

Can you think of any other lies?

Yes, yes. Everything, drive a motorcar, well I couldn't drive a car. My mate had a car well, he took me out a couple of times, yes, I've driven a car. Ride a motor

30:30 bike? Yes, well, I couldn't ride a motorbike. Ride a horse, yes, that's a piece of cake, you know, on a farm for, years. And eventually we got our, all those that were called up was put in a special place at Northam. And the other blokes went a bit crook because we'd left the reinforcement sort of thing.

What, your other mates?

All the blokes in the hut, yeah. There were, two huts made up one reinforcement.

31:00 **And what, they didn't like the fact that you were doing something different?**

No, that's right. Because they sort of got welded into a group after three weeks of training together, they thought. Anyhow, so

I was just wondering if there was any sort of jealousy going on.

Oh, there was a bit, because there was word out that we'd get extra money. And that was an added incentive, but that never ever eventuated of course. Still worth five shillings a day, that was

31:30 it. But anyway, we got a trip to Victoria out of it and

So how long were you still at the Northam camp after you've got past through this process?

About a fortnight. And then we were on our way to Wilson's Promontory down in Victoria.

So they're moving out pretty quickly. You know, they're not messing about.

No, no, they were quicker still later on, of course, when the pull came on it.

How

32:00 **did they inform you that you'd been successful in the recruitment?**

They announced it on parade in the morning. They say, "Trooper so and so and so and so," or private, in those, in the, Northam, "Fall out," and you'd fall out and the others would be marched off and they'd come around and tell you, "You can go and pack your gear."

How did you receive this news?

With quite, hilarious, you know, and quite pleased about it.

32:30 **And this mate of yours, did he get in too?**

Yes, yeah, we both got in.

So how were they shipping you over to Victoria?

I was extremely lucky, I went over in a passenger train and the others went in a troop train. There was about 18 or 20 of us, goodness knows how they separated them out, but I'm still quite friendly with one of the fellows, he rings me every night of my life to make sure I'm still okay. Jack Carey, he finished up

33:00 my corporal and he was on the train with me, on the passenger train. And we had a dining car and everything, used to mix with the passengers, the passengers, it was a passenger job, and use of the dining car. How they picked them, I don't know. But, and were 18 of us, I think, on that train, yeah, went over.

So what were your first impressions of the training base?

33:30 Well, were a bit low, because we had a hut at Northam, you know, an iron hut, tin hut. At, down there was tents again, back to tents. And that's what they were at, when we first joined up at Claremont, were into tents. But Wilson's Promontory, by that time it was about the first, yeah, it was about the first week in July and extremely cold down there, it's the southern most point of Australia. And

34:00 that was the idea, to pick that sort of place because they thought they were going to send us to France in those days. Or that's what that rumour was. And the, training's pretty wild, out with the hurricane lamp to read the roll and five o'clock in the morning. And it was pretty intense training, they were Pommy [English] commandos that were training us.

Can you give me an

34:30 **example of an average day?**

You'd get out of bed about five o'clock in the morning, and they'd call you out for a PT [Physical Training] parade, physical training. And then we'd run down to the New Zealand camp, the New Zealanders had a camp right down the bottom at Tidal River and we used to run down to that about a mile and a half and a mile and a half back before breakfast. And then you had to shave, clean yourself up

35:00 and put your gear on, go and have breakfast. It was very good food down there, wonderful tucker. There were six to a tent and they used to issue us an extra blanket, coming from Western Australia. All the West Aussies got an extra blanket because of the cold, you know, we couldn't stand the cold. And then we'd go out training, sometimes on the rifle range, a lot of night stunts but

What's

35:30 **a night stunt?**

A night stunt you go out, they take you out in the bush and then they, we'd have a, what's-a-name, a packed tea, as they call it, out there, sandwiches and stay out in the bush and they'd wait until it was really dark, about 10 o'clock and then they'd just say to you, "Find our way back to camp now," you know, in small parties. And it was black as your boot in that country, very mountainous and that sort of thing and we'd head back.

How would you find your way back?

The best way you could. We

36:00 used to remember it, eventually, the first time we went out was pretty bad. We had a terrible job finding our way back to camp. But after that, we used to be awake up, if we took a cut lunch with us of a night time for tea, that we'd be there late, and we used to sort of make mental notes all the way of the type of ground we were on and that.

When you say the first time you did it

It took us about six hours to get back to camp, and it was only, it should've been about an hour. But some crowds never got back till daylight,

36:30 so there was a lot worse than us.

What was the hardest part about that exercise?

Physically it was hard. Your clothes would be just about shredded, time you pulled you through the bush in the dark, you couldn't tell where you were going. One night I went over a big slippery log and dropped over the other side and I thought I'd landed on, there was a dog that used to follow us around. And I said, "I'm pretty right, I found the dog." But it wasn't a dog at all, it was a kangaroo,

37:00 because he bounded off in the bush, you know, I'd landed on him on the other side of the log. He was having a sleep there, I'll never forget that. And, it was a big red setter, and I thought it was the red setter. And I thought, "This is a bit of luck. He'll take us back to camp." But it was just a kangaroo.

What sort of, what other sorts of special training did you get?

Well, we had, saw Tommy guns down there for the first time. Thompson sub machine guns, and the Bren gun,

37:30 which was made in Czechoslovakia. Well, there was none of those at Northam. They were marvellous and the, especially the Tommy gun was a great attraction, used to fire 900 rounds a minute. And the Brens were pretty good too, very accurate. The old guns we had at Northam training, was the Lewis gun for the light machine guns. And they were from the First World War, and part of the test of

38:00 elementary training was you took them to pieces and then they'd blindfold you and you'd put them back together again and all this business. But to get them apart, the old Lewis gun, all you had to do was give it a good whack on the side of the drum and the whole lot would fall to bits. But these others, you had to take them meticulously apart, you know, the Bren gun and that and we had to do the same with them. Spread everything out on a groundsheet and you take them completely apart and put them back together again with a blindfold on

38:30 so that you could do it in the dark, you see. But they were extremely accurate up till about 600 yards, the Bren. But the Lewis gun had a cone of fire, as they call it, and it just sprayed them out. But a Bren, you could use it as a rifle, you know, single a person out and on to them.

Were you doing any training like horse riding or swimming?

No. Had to do a bit of

39:00 swimming, and how on earth they got out of it, some chaps couldn't swim. One well-known fellow that couldn't swim was Kevin Curran. A big fellow, he finished up an officer, he finished up captain of Victoria after the war, of the football. And he couldn't swim a stoke. Later on in New Guinea and these places where we used to go across the river, a big river, the Ramu and those, to get over on a patrol

39:30 on the other side, he used to be petrified I believe sitting in there. Because if he went down in there, he'd be a goner. A big man, too, you know, a big fellow.

That's extraordinary that he could get through.

Yes, it's amazing. And there were several others that couldn't swim, too.

Well, how do you cover this up?

Goodness knows how they covered it up. Because at one stage down at Wilsons Prom [Promontory] there, we took, went out in a whaling boat. Apparently they used to dodge those episodes

40:00 and we all had to tumble out into the pretty heavy waves and get ashore. Well, how those chaps got on, I don't know.

Would you do, like, long hikes?

Oh yes, yep, quite a few of them. And on our day, we got one day off a week and we used to head of through the, go on a mountain trip, go to the kitchen and order a…

40:30 take a little lunch with us, and order a cut lunch there and they'd chop it up for you and off you'd go. And we used to head out over the mountains. That's how keen we were.

Sounds insane.

It was.

What was the nearest town?

The nearest town was a place called Foster. Near, and you had to go across the neck. A little neck of land, you know, onto Wilsons Promontory.

41:00 They say that's why they chose it because it was easy to cut off from any spying.

How secret was this training area?

It was pretty top secret, yeah, very much so. And the Pommy commandos that were training us, they'd just come back from the Narvik fish factory in Norway, they did the raid on that. And they used to lecture us at night-time, there was one chap he was called, he finished up the youngest brigadier

41:30 general in the war. He took over from [Major General Orde] Wingate in Burma, Mad Mick Calvert he was called. And he was mad, he was completely mad. And

What makes him so mad?

The things he used to do.

Such as?

He was, he used to lecture us at night and he told us about the Germans, you know, and that and they got ashore there at the fish factory, over, and blew it up. And he said, "You know the Germans' helmets," you know, they were all,

42:00 they never had any weapons on them so they…

Tape 2

00:30 **Talking about that…**

Oh, Mad Mike Calvert.

Mad Mike Calvert. What was he telling you about the Germans?

Yes, he said well they weren't allowed to fire a shot, it had to be soundless, you know, the whole thing. He said he came around the corner and there was a German standing there, you know, a sentry, he said, with his back to him. And he said, "I just swept his helmet off with one hand and I brought this down." And he says, "I don't know if you've ever seen a coconut burst," and he laughed, you know.

01:00 "Have you every seen a coconut burst?" He just, "Ha, ha, ha, ha." So he was absolutely completely mad. Fancy after smashing a man's skull and he thought it was funny, you know.

Sounds quite gruesome.

Yeah, it would be wouldn't it? And

What was the reaction amongst the recruits?

Well, a lot of them didn't like it. And about once a week they used to give anybody a chance to pull out if they wanted to, you know. If they thought all the training and

01:30 all the lecturing at night-time and that was getting to them. And there used to be about oh, 10 or a dozen pull out every week.

How did you find it personally, Henry?

I think being very young, that sort of thing used to go in one ear and out the other sort of thing, you know. But otherwise I think if you dwelt on it at all you realise this is a pretty formidable show for me, really, you know.

So this Mad Mike Calvert

02:00 **dwelled on those kind of darker descriptions did he?**

Oh yes, yes.

Where did he have his service?

He was an English commando, he was in the early commandos were formed. And he'd been in the engineers and the regular engineers, and he'd been in it, see, by that stage it was 1941, well, England had about 18 months of really tough stuff by that stage.

So he'd been serving…

Oh yes, yes, he'd been there all the time.

02:30 **It sounds like he might've been suffering from war neuroses?**

Well, I think he did afterwards, because he got into strife in Germany afterwards and

What kind of strife?

after the war. Oh, he was set up. And a couple of young blokes went there, young intelligence fellows went there and reckoned that he was passing on information to a lady friend of his, this sort of thing.

03:00 He'd been leaking information. Well, at that stage, he was a general, but they were out after him because he was such an influence on things.

Sounds like he might not have been quite stable or sound enough to be in that position of responsibility?

Well I don't, oh, yes, well he got all the, he had one big stunt in Burma that went awry.

What was that?

They filled all the gliders,

03:30 they had the big transport planes pulling about six gliders. They were all on ropes, like trailers and the gliders were full of troops, all with backpacks and everything, loaded right up. And

What landing was that for, do you know?

That was in a jungle and, I forget the name of that book. But anyway, when they landed it wasn't a suitable landing place at all and I think there were

04:00 about 600 killed and all that sort of thing, you know, before they even fired a shot. And he lost a bit of favour over that. But at that stage Wingate was alive, you've heard of General Wingate, I don't know if you have or not.

I'm not familiar with him.

And I think Wingate got him out of it. He used to get up to some wild things, you know.

Any other examples you care to tell us about during your training?

There?

04:30 Oh, just the pranks you get up to and that.

What kind of pranks were you guys up to?

Well, we were in the pitch black one night on the edge of the Tidal River, it was called, and we were nine section, there were seven, eight and nine in C troop. And we all lined up along there and our corporal, he was, used to give us a bit of a hard time, Dave Ritchie. And he was okay, but he didn't like us real young blokes because we were always mucking

05:00 about. And this night he came up in the dark, we all had our faces black and everything and he says, "This 9 Section?" he says, you know, in a whisper. And I says, "No, 8 Section." And because we were right on the edge of the river and, so he thought nine would be the next one on so the next minute, splash, and down he went. And he came back and says, "I'll kill that bloke. Where is he?" because he didn't know who it was. He would've done too, he could've eaten me for breakfast.

05:30 Oh, and things like that. Oh and they used to set booby traps on the toilets and that, you know, pressure switches. With just a detonator so that it just made a big bang. The detonator was well concealed so that it wouldn't blow their bottom off sort of thing.

So it's only a loud cap gun? We'll just grab that call, shall we?

Yes.

You were just telling me about some of the pranks that you did during training and that sort of

Oh yes, yes.

06:00 Yes, there was always that, and some of the pranks were pretty bad. Oh, they weren't pranks, actually, it was part of the training. We used to have trenches and that just as though we, we had to dig them all of course, and showed you how to dig them and put the earth on one side for a firing position and that. Then when we'd have a night stunt, they used to throw plugs of geli [gelignite] about, we used to cut a

06:30 full plug of geli into about three and put a detonator in and put the fuse on and throw them into the trenches, you know, where the blokes were. And they pick them up and throw them out again. But some of the fuses were a bit short and they threw one one night and blew this chaps arm off, Mal Nichols, I knew him quite well. And he picked it up to throw back again and he never had time, and it went off, blew his arm off. And so we stopped that sort of thing after that,

07:00 because there'd been a couple of accidents before that, you know.

What kind of accidents had already happened?

Well premature going off. And one chap, he, we used to be in full gear at that time, we even used to have our gas masks strapped on your chest, you know, in a square thing. And that save him, this chap, this night. He still broke a couple of ribs and that sort of thing but

What, it shielded him from the blast?

Yes. But it was pretty dangerous though.

Were risks of this kind uncommon or

07:30 **common during training?**

Oh no, they were fairly common. Like once giving covering fire there was a couple of chaps hit and that. And we used to have to cover from view and all this and they'd fire over the top of you with a Bren gun and all these sort of things. And our sergeant, he was a very good shot with a Bren and he put a burst through a blokes pack on day, crawling along. His pack was sticking up

08:00 and it copped the burst through it.

Giving a bit of curry, was he?

Yes. So they were pretty keen, you know, the instructors and that.

Wouldn't have wanted Calvert out there on a Bren when you were doing that kind of training.

No, you wouldn't. No.

What other kind of specific skills were you being training in during this course?

In the use of the Tommy gun.

Yeah.

And things like that, that was very good.

Can you talk us through the handling of a Tommy gun, the specific skills

08:30 **relating to firing a Tommy gun?**

Yes, you've got to keep a very tight grip on it because it'll pull away up to the right with the force of it, the bullets coming out. And they're a big bullet, they're a 45 slug they shoot. And they've got terrific stopping power, that's one of the characteristics in the Booker manual, there's four main characteristics of Thompson submachine gun, great stopping power.

Meaning?

That's, well, if anybody got hit with that they didn't come back

09:00 for any more.

Stop them dead in their tracks, you could see.

Yes, oh yes, I've seen people hit with them at close range and they just blow around like a leaf in the breeze.

Is this later on during your fighting? Any other kind of training relating to weapon use that you could tell us about?

We didn't do too much bayonet practice, we did a terrible lot of that at Northam camp. And that's hard work because a rifle's fairly heavy in the first place. But then they used to make us, you know, these

09:30 sacks filled with straw and that used to do that, and you used to drill with the bayonet on. And you used to be able to hold it, you know, hold it in your hand and pushing the thing against here and hold it in your hand and it was quite heavy, you know. And used to do that for a minute or two and you could see them all going down.

What you'd just hold the rifle one arm?

Yes.

Why would you hold it in that position?

Oh, just for strength in your arms and that, you see.

Strengthen your forearms, endurance training or something.

Yeah. But the

10:00 Tommy was quite popular and very good.

What did you think of the Tommy personally?

Marvellous, beautiful gun.

Did it have many

Well, it had a lot of moving parts and they were quite intricate, they had little H pieces they called it, used to fly backward and forwards you had to keep it very clean and greased and just a film of oil on it. And you had to clean your Tommy a fair bit, but I didn't mind that part of it, it was worth it.

10:30 And I never ever had a stoppage in, I had one in Timor, I never had a stoppage of a Thompson. But the Owen gun I had a lot of stoppages, but they say it was mainly the ammunition. If the ammunition's faulty, you see, it won't recoil again.

So they were pretty reliable, were they?

They were very reliable, really, yeah, the Tommy. But a lot of people had trouble with them because they wouldn't clean them. But if you got in a bit of mud and wet you had to spend your time cleaning the gun at night

11:00 instead of doing anything else.

So some of the blokes were slouches when it came to maintaining their gun?

Yeah, some were, yeah, definitely. And I think those that had trouble with them, that's why. Yeah, but it was

I would've thought your gun would be your best friend when you're in the jungle.

It is, yep. Oh it is. I had a Bren for about six weeks, but it was too heavy for me. It weighs 26 pound for a start and then there's all the magazines and I wasn't a real

11:30 I was one of the smallest in our section. But I took over the Bren when this fellow was, he was seconded to another section, about four or five of the lads. And he was a big man, Tom Crouchy, about six foot three, he used to be able to use it like a pistol just about, he was that big, and he used to always fire it from the hip like a Tommy. And it's a light machine gun, you know, on a tripod.

Sounds like Rambo [action movie character] .

He was, he was very good.

I thought you used to have a crew when you

12:00 **worked a Bren.**

There was a number two on the Bren, yes, he feeds the magazines into the top and he carts about eight magazines too, full.

Someone to carry the tripod?

No, it's all fixed on the gun, it folds up and comes back on the gun.

Is it a tripod or bipod?

Just a bipod, yeah, flips back up. And they're only about this long, the legs.

Where were you trained in using those?

Down at Wilson's Promontory, yeah, it was a Bren range there.

12:30 **What was it like for a young recruit being exposed to these kinds of arms for the first time?**

It was wonderful, we thought they were marvellous. And a sticky tank grenade was another one we'd never seen before. It's, we used to practice down on a big sheet of half inch steel or something, down at the weapons pit where it was. And they used to come in a case, these sticky tank grenades and actually, they're a glass

13:00 bulb. And they've got a handle on them that you whack on the, actually, the idea is you lay down on the thing as the tanks are coming past and when the tanks are close enough and they can't get a shot at you from the tank, you see, they can't swivel the things around, you hop up and you dob this on the side of the tank, this is the idea. And as the handle goes in it shoot out and after that, you've got about seven seconds and it goes off. And it blows a hole in the metal.

13:30 And we used to take great delight in seeing this. And the metal turns into shrapnel, you see, because, and that's tearing round inside the tank. And it literally used to wipe out entire tank crews.

How would it attach itself once you

It's so sticky. They were called sticky tank grenade.

How was it sticky?

It's like, well, thick honey on it, and it would grab on anything, and that was the idea of having them in the case. Used to take them out of the case, hold them by the handle

14:00 and that would keep it away from you, see. And then lob it on there. And it will stick on anything, it really sticks, there's no doubt about it.

I've never heard of it.

Yeah, the sticky tank grenade.

You'd have to be cautious one didn't stick itself to you.

You're telling me, yes, especially if the little plug came of, it was the same as the thing on a grenade, you know, the leader. When you pull a, you've seen a grenade I suppose have you?

Not live.

And you pull the pin out, you see, the split pin ring, split ring. And your finger just fits

14:30 through and you pull it out. And if you let that lever go, you've either got seven seconds or four seconds. Now, the seven-second grenade proved that it was too long, seven seconds. So we had seven second ones in Timor, by the time we got to New Guinea, they were four-second grenades, which is better, because they couldn't pick them up and throw them back at you. They never had time. And so what we

used to do at Wilsons Promontory,

15:00 we'd let the lever go like this and it'd go, like this on its own. As a rule when you threw the grenade, the lever shot off. But we used to hold it away from us so the lever would fly through the air and away she'd go. That's a steel lever too, about three inches long and it curls around it. And we used to let that fly off and then count to three and then let her go, you see. And that gave you the four seconds, so turned them into four-second grenades.

Did you appreciate the kind of

15:30 **danger that**

Oh yes, because there was a couple of fellows throwing them to each other one day, they'd say, "One, two, three," and then they'd throw it, you see. And one, it only takes one to drop it and there's a scatter, you see, until they pick it up and throw it.

Did that kind of thing happen during training?

Oh yes, yeah. A couple of the officers did it one day, they were lairising around, Archie Campbell was one, one of the well-known officers. And he and his mate were throwing it to each other.

16:00 And sure enough, the other fellow dropped it. But they managed to get rid of it in time, thank goodness.

What difference does it make for, when a grenade explodes above the ground or on the ground?

Yeah, well it doesn't make much difference because it's got 36 pieces, it's called a HE [High Explosive] 36, the Mills grenade. And they're all cast iron and they're in little segments about

16:30 half an inch by three eighths of an inch. And if that goes through you it'll kill you anyway. And were a lot of accidents with grenades.

During training?

Yeah, during training and during the war itself. Because we used to use them as booby traps.

How would you create a booby trap?

Well, you used to put them in a milk tin, we used to get, have condensed milk sized tins and it just fitted in nicely and you used to ease the pin out

17:00 and push it in and the tin would hold the lever down. Because once the lever goes down, you're in trouble, you know. So it would hold the lever down and then you and then you put a little fine tie wire on that, a trip wire as they were called, onto the side of the grenade, where the lever had come from, you know, where the lever went in there. And we used to wrap it round there so when anybody tripped on it they'd pull it out of the tin and then it went off within four seconds. Well,

17:30 that used to create a bit of trouble if somebody accidentally pulled it out. Or if you went to pick them up in the morning you had to remember exactly where they all were and look for them, you see, because you couldn't see that little fine trace of wire, they're that fine, the wire.

So you put a, like a defensive parameter around wherever you were?

Yes, at night time, if you didn't have enough blokes to form a guard, you know, two hours on, or half an hour in the jungle, you used to have, was enough because it was

18:00 so black and your eyes would get bad.

It must've been quite a dangerous job making these booby traps?

Well, it was worse still when they used the orange fuse in them. The orange is instantaneous fuse, you had no time at all if you happened to mess around.

I don't even like setting a mousetrap let alone a booby trap.

Well, yes, well you had to set them if there was only three or four of you. And especially behind enemy lines you had to have some form of

18:30 warning.

Well before we actually take that journey to Timor, and New Guinea, can we just continue with your training experiences?

Yes.

How much long, or how long were you at Wilson's Promontory for?

Seven weeks, intense training.

Anything else about the training you received there which is important to discuss?

No, it was quite different from, I point out it was quite different from infantry training.

19:00 **How's that?**

Well, infantry training you're at least in a platoon strength, but we used to split up into twos and threes, which would be unheard of in the infantry. Infantry training they usually at least, oh, half a platoon or something.

And how did that, I don't know, how did that change the training?

Well it changed it

19:30 to the fact that you had to be more self reliant on your own ability. And had you to travel long distances before you did your attack or anything, had to get used to that type of thing. The same as those red berets did in the Falklands, you know, they landed on the other side that they didn't expect them and they marched all night, you know, 12 hours straight through before they got stuck into it. That sort of thing. And that was very

20:00 similar to what we were training for. You know, come from a long distance away, and the unexpectedness of it, that sort of thing.

So it's developing independence.

It was, that's what we were called, Number 1 Independent Company. Yeah.

How long were you at Wilson?

Seven weeks at Wilsons Prom, intense training.

Where did you go from there?

Well believe it or not, we went to Katherine

20:30 River. From the coldest place in Australia to about the hottest.

How did you travel?

On the Ghan [train] and then cattle trucks. Then from the rail head, when we ran out of rail, we went in army 10 wheelers, those big American trucks and went over the road, it was a shocking road too.

21:00 We were at least three days, I think it was in these trucks on the road.

That must've been a pretty rugged trip?

It was, it was extremely hard.

Where there any carpets in the trucks for you at all?

No, none at all, none at all, and the dust was incredible.

What did you do during those long miles?

Goodness knows, I think we just sat there and talked and joked and that sort of thing. And then at night-time the camps were pretty

21:30 rough, they were just tents. And one night it was blowing quite a bit at, what was the name of the place, it was three nights on the road, so it must've been four days on the road, three nights, we were three nights. Banka Banka was one place, I suppose you've heard of that have you? Banka Banka.

Never.

That's in the [Northern] Territory, going up through there.

What was at Banka Banka?

Nothing. Nothing, just a staging camp and

22:00 you line up and you had to, all the coppers, they used to cook the tea and the stews in the coppers and going and you'd march through. There were about 270 of us on, people, you know. And the tents at night, you just lay down at night on the dirt, there was nothing there in the tent. Just the red dirt. And it was blowing a bit and it was going everywhere, you know, this red dust.

No groundsheets?

Oh no, you had your own groundsheet.

22:30 **And what kind of, no other kind of bedding, blankets?**

No, no. Oh, we had a blanket each, one blanket each. But it was quite warm up there, see, you didn't want that much. But the ground was pretty hard after having a palliasse in the other camp, you see.

What were you thinking to yourself when you're forced to sleep on the ground?

I think I made a blue [mistake] , he says, yeah.

So what kind of training did you continue when you arrived at Katherine?

When we got to

23:00 Katherine, we had to build our camp then, we had to build our own camp. And there was pioneer, there was a pioneer corps there doing their bit and they would, had cement mixers and everything, putting the concrete floors in. And we were giving them a hand. You had to use bags on your hands because the, they were all steel huts and they used to get red hot and that, they used to get up to 116 in the shade.

Steel huts? As in like corrugated iron?

Corrugated iron, yep. And all steel members and

23:30 cross ways as well, the iron was just gutter bolted onto it. And we had to help build that. And we'd just finished it about a week when the Japs came in the war, and so we were off overnight.

What was the pioneer corps building the

For a camp, for a staging, big staging camp, yeah.

A semi-permanent job.

Yeah, it was, it was, definitely. Had showers, everything.

And what were you actually staying in while

24:00 **you were building the permanent camp?**

We, some of the huts were finished and we stayed in those parts and then gradually built onto the other. But it was just to get us to build a camp, I think.

And what did the pioneering corps consist of?

They were all tradesmen, those fellows were, they all worked in the building trade. Some were carpenters, concreters, plumbers, all that type of thing.

And were pioneering corps

24:30 **common in these outback areas?**

Oh, they were sent there on purpose, I think it was the 2nd Corps Pioneers. And they actually were going to come over to Timor to help reinforce, they're trained in the infantry training as well, you see, they can reverse roles pretty quickly and become infantry personnel. And they were actually going to come over to Timor to support us but the Japs got down quicker than they expected. They got down very

25:00 quickly.

Things went a little awry.

They did, terribly awry.

Japan came into the war, you, while you were building this staging camp you must've heard of Pearl Harbour and

Oh yes, well, within an hour of Pearl Harbour we had knowledge at Katherine River. And within two hours, we were under orders to move. And by daylight the first crowd were going out.

What did this spell out to you?

Well, we were going to get a

25:30 shift, thank goodness. Marvellous. Well, that's how silly we were because the, what's-a-name, Major Spence, at two o'clock in the morning got us all out. He said, "Well, you wanted action, you've got it," and everybody says, "Hooray," you know. Well they did too. They got action all right.

So you were out of there in the morning.

Yep.

Loaded back in the trucks?

We had to get a herd of cattle off to get in their trucks, and we had to throw

26:00 sand over, we had to shovel all the stuff out. Do it all yourself sort of thing, you know. And they had different working parties doing different things and then there was truckloads of sand came in and we threw it over the cow manure, it was still sloppy on the floors that we couldn't get out. And we got in the trucks and the cattle trucks took us up to Darwin.

How long was that trip?

I think it was all day.

You would've gotten yourselves in a bit of

26:30 **a mess in the back of the cattle truck.**

Oh, we sat up on top of them. Put our gear in there and sat up on the top of them. Yeah. And we got up there on, well, they bombed Pearl Harbour on the 7th of December, I think it was, and on the 8th of December we were at Darwin.

What happened when you arrived in Darwin?

The wharfies were on strike and we had to load our stuff ourselves again.

Did you have any contact with the wharfies?

Oh yes, they were there.

27:00 **So what was going on on the wharf, between you guys and the wharfies?**

Well they were calling us scabs because we, they had, some of the blokes volunteered for coal work, they were old coal burners, the old Zealandia that was taking us over.

There were, there must've been a bit of haranguing going back and forwards between you and the

Oh there was, we were crooked on the wharfies.

What did you say to them?

Oh, we couldn't say a great deal because it would cause trouble, we were told to keep our mouths

27:30 shut by our officers. But we were two days on board there, because we couldn't get all the victualling done, you know, for the ship underneath. So they loaded up with victuals, as they call them, the victualling, they're the caterers and what not for the trip. And we went on board about the 8th and didn't sail until the 10th, and arrived in Timor on the 12th.

So you're tied up there to the dock for a couple of days.

Yes, yeah. Went up and down with the

28:00 huge tides, you know. They are big tides up north there.

So what's happening amongst the troops during those couple of days, you must've been going a little frustrated.

Oh yes, we were. And there were already about 800 men on board, the Zealandia had about a thousand men on board. And

Who was already on board?

The 2/4th, the 2/40th infantry battalion from Tasmania. They'd been in the Territory 10 months, mind, and they were expecting to

28:30 go home, see it was about the 7th, 8th, 10th of December, and they were expecting to go home to Tassie [Tasmania] for Christmas. And they had their own bands in the other battalion, they were a full battalion. And they even played 'There's Boy Coming Home on Leave'. Poor devils; they went to Kupang and that was the end of it. Most of, very few of them came back.

So what were the conditions like on board the

Pretty packed. Really packed on board.

How did you get along with the boys from the 2/40th?

Pretty good, very good, yeah.

What kind of things did you get up to during the voyage to pass away the time?

Not a, you couldn't do a great deal on board because of the packed conditions. But it was a pretty old ship, they warned us about, you know, the, they've got these big beautiful polished things all the way round it, like it was a passenger ship in the early days. And they're all finger jointed, as they call it, together. And as the ship moved, these joints would open so we were warned not to get

29:30 our fingers near them or anything you know, because they opened and shut, you see. You could imagine the terrific pressure, take your finger off, or if you had your arm on it, it would nip it and that sort of thing. So she was an old ship and she was flat to the boards at about eight knots I think.

And probably overloaded.

It was, yeah. And we landed at Kupang, they didn't take us into the harbour at Kupang, we landed onto lighters, great big

30:00 lighters they were called, they were under tow. And we dropped into those.

Can you describe a lighter?

A lighter is a great, it was a wooden vessel. It was like a wooden barge, you know, and it didn't have it's own motor, they were used for transporting stuff, you know, the transport of all, merchandise and stuff. And they used to tow them behind this big motorboat. They'd put about half a dozen,

30:30 you know, on a couple of leads, and they landed us in those. And there was a big wave, you know, coming all the time like this and you had judge it right, otherwise instead of about a three foot jump into the boat, into the lighter with all your gear on, you had about a 10 foot if you weren't careful.

So, what did you have to come down rope ladders or something?

No, no, they had a bit of a landing at the side, we dropped off that.

And how many troops would fit in a lighter?

Oh, about 20 in each one.

31:00 **What were you kitted up with at this point?**

Everything we had.

Can you maybe go through and

Yeah, we had a big pack on your back, a kit bag under your arm and your rifle, because we all had leaded rifles and land with our gear.

So 303 rifles?

Yeah, 303. And haversack at the side, strapped at the side and your pouches here with your magazines in, you see. So we were pretty well weighted, if you went in the water you'd have Buckley's chance [no chance] ,

31:30 you would've gone to the bottom like a stone, you know.

What did all your kit weigh?

Oh, goodness knows. Getting up around 70 pound, I'd imagine, 70.

That's a bit of extra weight.

Oh yes, it's a lot.

So once you were towed in shore, whereabouts did you

We went to a place just out of Kupang, called El Tari.

What was there?

An aerodrome. We seemed to be bogged by

32:00 aerodromes, everywhere we went there was an aerodrome, you know. And the camp wasn't finished, it was a Dutch camp. And they gave us an area of ground that looked like a lime pit, you know, where they'd formed the drome up from it. All this limestone, pulverised limestone they used on the runways. And we had to put our tents up in this. It was hard even getting a tent peg in, let alone anything else. And we camped on this limestone,

32:30 the whole company was there. And we were there about three or four days and they decided that we would go to the Dili Aerodrome in the Portuguese end.

Why was that decision made?

Pardon?

Why was that decision made?

Because it was a point that the Japanese could land on. And the Japanese had a commercial agreement at the Dili drome with the Portuguese to landing

33:00 passenger aeroplanes there, there was a DeHavilland used to come in there. And, with a small amount of passengers, and the Japs knew all about the aerodrome so they, and that was much, probably closer than Kupang, to Darwin at the Portuguese end. But we couldn't get permission from the Portuguese to land there. So anyway, after about three or four days, we took off anyway

33:30 and a Dutch cruiser came in to take us up there and they thought that we'd have an opposition landing, you know, to, I guess to, but the, our orders were to take the drome at any case.

Even if it required?

Even if it required action, yes. And right up until the very last, we were in the shore and we thought we have a resistance, but they didn't have, thank goodness.

What kind of a landing did you make?

34:00 A landing on the, out near the aerodrome on the beach closest to the drome.

What kind of boats were you in when you landed?

We were in, again under tow from power boat because we, assembled on the far side of the boat, because they still expected opposition at that stage and the Surabaya was the destroyer we were on, or it was a cruiser actually, a big fellow. It had a 10 inch gun on it, the big fellow, and that was aimed right at the lighthouse, I had a look through the sights, you know, and

34:30 it was right on the lighthouse that one. And they had three four inch guns each side, it was a big, well-loaded up with arms. And they would've opened up in any case. And then they had a, the boat that towed us had a bit of a machine gun at the front and we were all in the back in behind, about a section in each, of these boats, brought us in. But they did a cut around

35:00 and we bailed off and over our depth when we landed. And I had to fight my way to the surface and claw my way up. Some were worse off still, they just about drowned, you know.

That must've been a rude shock.

It was, yeah, I thought they'd land us in a bit closer that that. But a pretty haphazard landing. And, but it was in a coconut grove. The, when we could see we weren't going to be opposed,

When were you able to actually

35:30 **determine that you weren't going to be opposed?**

Well, right from when we landed, because we expected an opposition landed they said it would be.

So once you were all safely on the beach and

In amongst the coconut trees, we upped the coconut trees after coconuts, you see.

Was this the first time you'd seen coconut trees?

Yeah, yeah. So they had to assemble us again and we marched on the aerodrome then.

So this attempt to pick coconuts was a bit of a

36:00 **larrikin sort of**

Oh, we got the coconuts all right, yeah. Yeah. Yeah, it was quite good.

Then you were, what, ordered back into

Yes, and off we went and marched on the aerodrome and camped there that night and

What kind of camp did you set up that night?

Well, we just lay on the drome, that night, I think. That's when we got badly bitten with mosquitoes, all malarial mosquitoes.

And, what, your

36:30 **all your gear is wet?**

Oh yes, a lot of it was wet from the thing. And we

You slept in your wet uniforms on the ground in mosquito infested

Yeah. And the next night we put some tents up, in the coconut grove, which was the worst thing we could've done because that was infested with mosquitoes in the coconuts. And we put the tents up there, but within a week, we used to lie out on the drome at night because they expected a counter attack. Because the army had moved,

37:00 the Portuguese Army had moved out of their barracks, and gone into the hills. But we didn't know they were miles away by that time, at a place called Alas that was one place, and they were weighed down at Same and these places, so they had no intention of attacking us. But if they ever got back through to us we'd have been all right. But things were pretty strained with the Portuguese authorities.

What were your thoughts on the strained relations between Australia and British and Portuguese

37:30 **authorities?**

Well, they were definitely neutral and we had violated their rules. Should never have been allowed to stay there, really, but thank goodness we did. Because we were the only ones out of the whole of the 8th Division that escaped, eventually. But at that stage, we didn't realise we were going to be there for another year.

So what was

38:00 **the plan once you had landed at this aerodrome?**

The idea then was to guard the aerodrome against any Japanese coming in, and to get it ready for a demolition. Which we did, we had a sapper section with us, you know, engineer section. And in the mean time, they started work preparing demolition immediately, you know.

What kind of defences did you set up there?

A perimeter defence, with the Bren guns

38:30 mounted all the time and blokes lying on the drome fully armed and this and waiting for any interference, getting bitten all the time. But after a week, we all started to go down with malaria of course. And there's nothing you can do.

Was there any sign of treatment?

Yes, there was, they had powdered quinine, that was about all.

How did you take that?

Used to roll it up

39:00 in cigarette paper and then try and swallow it before the cigarette paper burst, because it was foul taste this. It was just about impossible to do.

You'd quickly wash it down with water I suppose.

Yeah.

Was there any reason why you hadn't taken the quinine before you started to come down with malaria or?

Oh well, we never had it. We never had quinine. The Dutch hospital started to take us and then they realised there were far to many for us and they, there was another big house next door in

39:30 Dili and we all went there. I was in the hospital part, luckily, and then finished up out on the veranda as soon as you got a bit better.

How long were being treated there for your malaria?

About eight days, malarial treatment was. But everybody, well, then we all went down with dysentery and then they decided to give us, the Dutch doctor decided to give us a dysentery needle. Which didn't work anyway they said, it was a waste of time.

40:00 **So what experience did you have of malaria and dysentery?**

Oh, dreadful, it was extremely weak and you lose weight at an astonishing rate. We had some photos of some chaps that you could virtually see their bones like an x-rays, you know, they got that thin very quickly, you know. Very debilitating. If the Japs had landed then we'd have been in a terrible state because we couldn't have put

40:30 more than half a dozen blokes on board, I think.

How long did it take you to regain your strength?

About a month. We were just getting our strength back and the Japs arrived on February the 19th.

And how did you spend that month?

We went up to the mountains, well, C troop did anyway, the other two stayed, one at Cactus Flat and they used to rotate one crowd on the aerodrome, one section. And we used

41:00 to be, we all granted one day's leave in Dili. And our turn came on February the 18th, 9 Section, and we went down into Dili on leave that day and ate at the Hotel Portugal, thought it was marvellous. Ordered bottles of champagne because it was cheap there, it was

Sounds glamorous

Yeah, it was good. That was our one-day off that we had

41:30 and the whole section was in town. And we were a bit late in getting away and we were going to stay at the drome that night. But thank goodness we didn't because the Japs landed there that night, that must've been February the 19th, because that's when they landed. But, excuse me. I'll go and have a, or

I'll drown, you know.

We'll wait there a moment, we're right at the end of the tape.

Tape 3

00:30 **Can you tell me what you thought of the locals in Dili?**

They were pretty standoffish, the Portuguese, they were quite remote, you know. And, but the Timorese, we were quite good friends with them because we used to speak to them, the Timor people. We used to say "How are you mate?' and all this and they had never been used to that and I think that's why they took to us so much.

How important is it to make

01:00 **friends with the locals?**

Very much so, as we found out later on, because we wouldn't have lasted five minutes without them.

What did you think of the Timorese as people?

Well we thought then that they were marvellous people, especially after all the time we were there. They'd share everything they had with you, you know, the food and everything. And they knew that if they were caught they'd be in terrible trouble,

01:30 and yet, it didn't seem to worry them. And they had, we all had a creado with us, you know, that's a helper that sort of a, that's what they were called, creados.

Where does that come from, is that Portuguese?

I would say so, yes. And they adopted us and became our personal valet or you like to call them, whatever. They used to scrounge some food for you and that sort of thing. Because by that stage we were all split up into

02:00 small groups, you know. Mainly so that we could live, and also that we could molest the Japanese better that way.

Just going back to a bit of a time line of, you know, how things happened, so you had a day's leave?

Yes.

And probably got a bit of a hangover from the champagne,

No, well we walked that off really because we were camped up in the hills, Three Spurs was the name of the camp we were at. And

02:30 as I say, we were going to stay at the drome that night, and a couple of them were pretty full on champagne, they really wanted to stay there because they couldn't face up to the long walk back. And so anyway we did decide to walk because we said it would spoil it for everybody else if we didn't because there was another section due in the next day. Which was 7 Section. And, but we walked back

03:00 and by the time we crossed the Komoro River, the bridge, just out of there, I reckon the Japs must've been watching us. That's, because they would've, they landed that night, and we were fairly late getting back to camp, it was after midnight so I would say the Japs would've been well and truly landed their first parties by that time but they probably didn't want to open up on a few men wandering back to camp, obviously some of them half stung, and they didn't want to disturb things by opening up on them. And I'm

03:30 pretty sure they would've been at the Komoro River by that time when we went, because they attacked the drome shortly afterwards.

So did you hear anything?

No, never heard a thing, no. And we did hear some noises early next morning and we had an opip [observation post] up there, an observation post. And he said that he could see Japanese fighter planes, and he sent word back to say that, that was about half past six in the morning, that he thought they were Japanese planes.

04:00 And they said, "Oh no," because the Portuguese were due to land about that same time, their troops from Africa, they were going to come there. And I don't know whether the Japs coincided, I think it was just a coincidence. But they had met that convoy of Portuguese troops coming and bisect them and sent them back again and they landed there where they, about the same time, you see. So when we went to tell our commanding

04:30 officers there up on Three Spurs that the Japs, looked as thought they were Japs, they said, “No, no.” And they could hear the sound of the guns going, the big guns, although we were ten mile above them, we could hear the noises. And they said, “Oh, that’ll be the Portuguese firing the salute.” And anyway, Portuguese is right, and it was the Japs all right, you see, so. And even after this Keith Haze’s section went off

05:00 into Dili in the ration truck on their day’s leave. And they were the ones that were caught near the drome, they drove straight into them.

Can you sort of extrapolate a bit on how that happened?

They drove in and they got the shock of their lives when they were stopped by these Japs with machine guns, before they got to the drome. And, or just alongside the drome. And the drome was well out of Dili, you know, out of the township, and they

05:30 were stopped then they realised they were Japs. And of course they couldn’t do a thing, and they were surrounded by blokes with machine guns and so they had to all disembark from the truck and they lined them up and they tied their hands behind their backs with wire and stuff they had there. And Keith Haze, as he told me he said,

06:00 Harvey Marriott, a chap from Kalgoorlie was standing next to him and he said, “My God,” he said, “they’re going to shoot us.” And that’s the last he remembers of him. And there’s one little fellow, he only died about a fortnight ago, Peter Alexander, another very small man. For some unknown reason they kept him out and, for questioning and that I think, you know, so they could talk to him and that. But he wasn’t shot either, they kept him,

06:30 and all the rest were shot. But Peter finished up on the Burma Railroad, he went, taken down to Kupang and went the other prisoners of war there.

It’s just hard to believe that you didn’t hear anything.

Well we didn’t hear them landing, that’s for sure, and it could’ve been on by the time we got back to camp.

07:00 And, but I never heard a thing, and I don’t think anybody else did, but the first inkling we had was the fighter planes circling in the morning, circling Dili. And we didn’t hear the firing, the section at the aerodrome. They had the Bren guns going and everything.

How far away is the aerodrome from your camp?

From where we were it would be about 10 or 12 mile.

I just sort of like imagine in a

07:30 **jungle like noises would travel quite a bit.**

No, not really, they don’t in the jungle, no. But that was more open country there, similar to Australia, bushland and that. You would’ve thought it would’ve, we’d have heard more but we didn’t. We should’ve heard the shells exploding in Dili.

So you were literally in the right place at the right time.

Yeah, exactly, yeah.

So tell me how you

08:00 **well, got from Three Spurs back to the aerodrome to discover what had happened.**

Oh well, we didn’t have to get that far. Archie Campbell, he was quite desperate when Vince Swan was up on the opip, this fellow, he’s still alive that chap. And he said, “I’m quite sure it’s Japanese,” and Archie was quite perturbed then that he’d sent the section off, at about half past six in the morning or something. And even after that the Don R [despatch rider] went down,

08:30 that went with the dispatches, you know, the Don R dispatch riders that stands for, but he’d been a leading dirt track rider here in Perth before the war. And he took off and he was shot off his motorbike about half an hour later, killed. And, so they still didn’t realised then that, so Lieutenant Cole, he had our section. And Archie Campbell took off to have a look through and because he passed us

09:00 going down into Dili, it was downhill nearly all the way, and we went all the way down to a place called Cactus Flat and at that stage a chap came, from the section that was manning the drome. And he said, “Japanese on there,” you know, “Thousands of them,” he says. And there were, there were a couple of thousand of them. And anyhow we realised then, but we kept on, our orders were to go right to the beach and see what was there, if they’d come west at all,

09:30 but they hadn’t. There was no sign of any Japs west, so we went back to camp and prepared, then we got our orders to prepare to leave the camp.

How would, how were you getting your orders?

That was from a, the Major Spence at Railako, which was up the hill further again. Or was over the side of it, was past the saddle, as they call it. And we used to get our orders from there,

10:00 we had these little wireless sets, you know.

Oh right, so you had a wireless. Did you have a wireless operator?

Yes, yep.

So everything would go through him.

Yes, yeah. Yeah, the wireless operator, we had a big signal section and the little wireless sets, they weren't very good sets because they'd only go a small distance. But at night-time, see we couldn't send up to Dili, we couldn't, from the Dili drome

10:30 we couldn't, we had a wireless message up to us. There was a sig [signal] man there, he was killed early in the piece sig gunner but he tried to get, we had a Lucas lamp, have you heard of a Lucas lamp? It's a light that shines at night but the trouble is, if there's a fog or clouds come down, it can't go through. And it's a visual dot dash Morse code job, it's a flashing light they use at sea, a Lucas lamp. Well we had one of those down on the drome and they couldn't get through because

11:00 of really bad reception there. And he couldn't get through on that so he tried the Lucas lamp, but of course the clouds were down by that time.

I'm just wondering how hard it is to like communicate this information around to all parties.

Well that was very hard there. Getting information from the drome up. We had a post, another observation post that we manned later on and, above the drome,

11:30 but the clouds were down and they couldn't get the Lucas lamp through. Otherwise we'd have been (UNCLEAR).

How long did it take you to figure out exactly where the Japanese were?

Well they were all in Dili, every one of them just about. The water was black with them coming in when we got down to the beach and you could see them across on, to our right, they were all coming in towards the drome and where the town of Dili was.

12:00 **So they landed on troop ships.**

Yes, there were troop ships there, destroyers running up and down.

Clearly you were quite out numbered.

Oh yes, yeah.

So what's going through your mind at this point, it can't be good?

No, that's right, we thought, "Well we'll have to head back to Kupang were the big crowd is," little knowing that they landed 5000 there and really got stuck into the 2/40th. And

12:30 the 2/40th, in the continuous fighting they lost 116 killed and a couple of hundred wounded and they finished up they had to surrender because they were surrounded by tanks and they had two waves of paratroops. They killed about four or five hundred of the first wave of paratroops that tried to land and the Japs weren't too happy about that of course.

So

13:00 **what's your plan at this stage?**

Our plan then was to carry as much as we could, from the base camp and we blew the, what's known the supply dump. A couple of the sappers there set it up and we stayed there that night and stood to and Jack Carey seems to think we stayed another night, but I thought we pulled out the next day. But we were right on the road, we expected them up any minute, you know, in their vehicles, but they didn't come for a couple of days. But we pulled out and carried as

13:30 much stuff as we could.

When you say stuff, what sort of things were you carrying?

Explosive, plastic explosive. We didn't carry gelignite because you get a bullet through that you, just explodes, you know, the whole lot but plastic explosive is a stable explosive and will stand the impact of a bullet. And we carted that and as much ammunition as we could carry. And there was a truck going up, Old Joe's

14:00 truck, they called it, Indian Joe and he was taking a couple of ton up at a time on this truck and it was too much, and eventually broke down and he was getting it back to Railako. But I don't know why that was because Railako was about 15, 20 miles back into the island from where we were in Three Spurs, because that ultimately got blown too, blew it up. And we set the charges on this one and on the truck

at the same time

14:30 and then went up to the saddle as they call it, was the saddle there that goes through where the road passed through. And we lay down there to watch for the bang and it wasn't long in coming, the big bang down the bottom. And it was like the atom bomb, you know, it went straight up like that. There were over forty ton of high explosives there and things like that.

And how do you detonate something like that?

Put a time pencil on it. A two hour pencil, I think it was a two hour pencil on that one, and

15:00 then it goes up. One would be, all we did with that was take the thing out of the grenade, the base plug off, and leave the lever on it of course, so that it wouldn't go off straight away and where the, put the time pencil in where the detonator had come out of and just set it in there. And it's just like a detonator, a time pencil. And there was half hour time pencils, they're a thin thing like, remember the thermometer they used to stick under your tongue?

15:30 Something like that. Because you can put a fuse in one end, you see, and you can have a 30 second or a minute or a minute or five minute, all these different ones. And you put one of those in there, and all we had to do with that was put that one in the grenade. And of course when that went, the grenade set the whole lot, a couple of ton of explosive.

Big bang.

Yes, we rant it back into a,

16:00 ran the truck back into a re-entrant so it would take as much of the road as possible with it. And

So you were on foot by this stage?

Oh yes, yes.

And after you've blown up the

After we saw the dump blow up we kept on walking up and got to Railako just before dark.

How were your navigation at this stage?

Oh, just had to follow the road then, because the big camp was at Railako.

16:30 And we were heading back for Atambua, which is on the border of Dutch Timor, and we were going to head all the way back to the other because we thought, "Oh, the 2/1st Heavy Battery's there, but down there, they won't capture that in a hurry," but of course they did. They blew it up from the air, see, they had terrific air, they had air dominance at that stage. And it's just as well we didn't get back there, of course, we would've been in bigger trouble

17:00 still.

Are you on high alert?

Oh yes, yep. Yeah, we knew the game was getting pretty desperate at that stage of the game. And so after we left, we left Railako the next morning, and that was all set to go up in flames. And that was, I changed my clothes there and put a, because it was a gear store as well

17:30 and just grabbed another pair of boots, changed my clothes and put another spare pair in my pack, haversack and off we went again, the whole, we were the rear guard coming through. They were waiting for us at the Galaynay River because the engineers were standing there ready to let it go to the bridge and they blew that and there was bits of masonry, huge pieces. They carried over the top of us even so we were still far too

18:00 close to it when they set it off. They must've had a terrific amount of explosive under it, it was a big concrete bridge, it was a shame to see it go, you know. Because it had been obviously built in the old days, some real old Portuguese architecture.

So that sounds like a bit of a close call. If you're so close to the bridge.

Oh yes, it was. That chap who was in charge there rang me today, Major Turtin, he was in charge of the

18:30 demolitions. But it shouldn't have been blown, really, there was no need to because there was a fort alongside, all they had to do was just ford the river there alongside it And so it was a terrible waste.

So at this point, you're heading towards the camp that you think.

Yes, we're heading towards a place called Hatolia, we were heading towards the Dutch border all the time, heading for the Dutch border we are.

So

19:00 **was there anything that happened along the way that sticks in your mind?**

Yes, it's, we came to this place called Hatolia and we got there at night time and our officer said to be very courteous to the Portuguese there and that. And so we went in there in this little room, he took about four or five of us in there, and there were three people

19:30 working behind the counter because they used to work quite late at night and they had lights on and that. And so we went in there and suddenly there's this unearthly bang, you know. And this chap had walked in there and he was one of our latest reinforcements and he'd pulled the safety cap off and he must've had his finger near the trigger. And it went up through the ceiling and these three chaps that were working behind, you know, "Try and gain their confidence," the loot says to us, and

20:00 then next minute they're over the counter and they're off, you know. In a little enclosed area, a terrible noise a .303 going off. So we lost them, we were going to have a yarn to them and see what was offering around Hatolia, you know, in the way of food and that.

It was a complete disaster.

It was, yes.

So what happened next?

We decided to stay there the night and we bedded down on a, there was houses there and they had verandas,

20:30 front verandas at Hatolia, and Chinese shops, and Portuguese, you know, so went to sleep on their veranda, had a sleep there.

How were you getting hold of food?

Oh, we got a bit there from the Chinese, some food and that and had to buy it at that stage of the game, we still had a few patakas left.

Sorry, what's pataka?

A pataka is worth

21:00 one and eight pence, but it would buy as much as a pound, buy as much as two or three dollars Australian, one pataka. There were 12 patakas to the pound.

Where is A and B troop at this stage?

A and B, well A was, they had one section on the aerodrome and they actually, after they fought on the

21:30 aerodrome, they kept on going and they didn't come through us. Oh, they got cut off I think, they didn't come through Three Spurs, we expected them to come through but there was only fellow, and that was the one we spoke to earlier in the morning, the day before. And they headed for Atambua too, under their own steam, you see. And they were heading towards Atambua, but we never saw them again but that section was gone and

22:00 Bernie Langridge's section was number three of A troop and they and number one section, they headed towards the south of the island too. For food mainly. And C troop at that stage was the rear guard all the way.

Was there anything in the countryside that you could actually eat?

Oh yes, yes.

Like what?

There were plenty of bananas and that further south.

22:30 If we'd gone to the south end like A troop did, they had good tucker, they were pretty well off for tucker. I don't think they ever experience C troop's troubles with food. And they all admit that, that we had a pretty hard road to hoe with food.

Why did you have such a hard road?

Well, it was the area that was allocated to us, there was just not much there and

23:00 we were in closer contact with the Japanese than they were. We were in contact with them nearly every day or they with us, one of the two. And it was however saw each other first sort of thing.

What would be the plan? Was your plan to sort of be stealth like and hide or to actually engage them in

Oh, it was to harass them at every opportunity.

When you say harassing, what do you

23:30 **mean by harassing?**

Ambushing them, shooting them, you know, from under cover. Ambushes are quite good because you can pick out a good pozzie [position] for starters, where you can have the whip hand and just open up on them, and where you can get out at the right time. Because you can't stay there because numbers would just gang up on you. So, and then we did patrolling, we started to patrol quite a bit

24:00 then. And I think by that stage after the first few days they'd abandoned the idea of us heading for Atambua because we, word was starting to filter through that they'd had a pretty hard road to hoe down at Kupang and so there was no sense in going any further for us. But I think parts of A troop were already over the border, over the Dutch border from Atambua, they got well down.

24:30 **So what, do you actually discuss it amongst yourselves as to what you should be doing, or is it just a case of following orders?**

Oh no, we used to be, the officer used to be given his orders from the 2IC [Second in Command] and that of the company. And then about a week or 10 days later, because we'd been harassing them a fair bit I suppose, the Australian consul in Dili, a Mr Dave Ross, the Japs asked him to come out

25:00 to us and try to get us to go in and surrender. And he brought a surrender notice out and they all met in Hatolia, this is that place, the town we were in. And, all the officers, not all the troops, all the officers met and decided whether they would follow, surrender or not. And they decided definitely not to surrender, well there was not much encouragement for it with when you think what

25:30 they did to 7 section, just lined them up and shot them. So we thought, "Well, we won't be in that, we'll jut have to take our chances." And so Bernie Callinan, he wrote out a thing for Dave Ross to take back to the Jap and it said that as we were an independent company, and we took our orders direct from Melbourne, then we couldn't surrender, it wasn't up to us, it had nothing to do with us.

26:00 And that was just to shield Dave Ross a bit. And so they knew where we were so after Dave got back, he got back in a couple of days back into Dili, and they immediately sent a couple of, oh, three or four big bombers over to bomb Hatolia, because they knew we were still there. And they bombed us with pretty big bombs too, but they just missed the town, the town was on a bit of an edge, you know, and they just missed the town and they were big craters they made.

26:30 Yeah, they were 30 feet deep and about 60 feet across, they really opened the country up.

Were there any casualties from this attack?

Only a few Timorese, no Australians.

So why did you actually stay in Hatolia?

Mainly because it was a roof over our head and it was a centre point for patrolling from, we patrolled all round from there. And

27:00 we patrolled to a place called Fatobesi and then from there we were setting out for Boybow trying to contact with B troop. Now by this stage, B troop was at a place called Liquica which was up the coast a bit and we were heading, we were trying to establish contact with them. And we got to this place heading for Boybow

27:30 from Fatobesi and from Boybow onwards we'd have got to B troop the next day. But we just going up this gentle hill, it was fairly open country and the natives came pouring down the hill and said, "Japanese." So we thought, "This is a bad," we were caught on the low ground so backed back and went back across this river that we come across, we were looking for an ambush spot along the river. But it was, there was no get out for us. And we counted the

28:00 platoons coming down, there were roughly 450 to 500 Japanese and there was quite a big column of them. And there was 18 of us, so the odds were not good and we definitely wanted the high ground to fight on, being so few. And anyway they, we waited, we found a good spot just away from the river a bit and they all stopped at the river and we watched them, we could see them, a good point

28:30 to view them from, and they took their boots off and everything, actually if we'd have got stuck into them there and then we probably wouldn't have got away again but we'd have killed a lot. But the thing is I don't think we'd have had a good getaway from there because it was very steep and open country, you know, where the river is cut through so we decided to have this spot half way up the hill. And we waited and waited and they never came and a Timor came down the side and he said, "They've gone around the other way."

29:00 There's two tracks up there, you see. By this time we're on mountain tracks and he said, "They're half way up through there," he pointed out to us. They were just about behind us by that stage. So we headed back into town, into the, Fatobesi this place, nice town it was and. What have we got, did I pull something out then? No.

Yea, can you just adjust that microphone there

29:30 Oh yeah. Just a sec, I'll undo the button.

That's okay.

Okay?

That's okay.

Okay like that? Good. And we went back to Fatobesi and they implored us not to engage the Japanese there because they said there'd be, repercussions were terrible.

How big is that town, Fatobesi?

It's a rubber plantation town, there are rubber plantations

30:00 all round it and coffee plantations and it would be about two or three streets, had a couple of shops and that, Chinese shops, the chows were everywhere there, the Chinese. Shouldn't call them chows. Anyway they were all through there, there'd be about, oh, I suppose two or three hundred people in Fatobesi. Pretty little town, typical Portuguese, you know, with the Portuguese

30:30 architecture and that, nice place. And

When you're in these towns do you try to keep yourself a little bit under cover or

Well, we couldn't there very well because we had to have contact with all the Portuguese people there. And

What were they advising you?

They asked us to leave the town, you know, because they knew that they didn't want a fight in their town. Which was quite understandable because they had so much to lose. They had

31:00 everything to lose, we had nothing, we could walk away from it all, but they couldn't that had been their home for generations, you know. So we got away and we headed back towards Hatolia then, and it was a shame because we could've had a really good ambush there.

A really good ambush

In the town, or

In Fatobesi.

Yeah, in Fatobesi.

Why is that?

Could've got them coming in the open path

31:30 where it opens up, you know, could've got two or three platoons as they came in and got them, ambushed them. Because they obviously didn't expect us, didn't expect any trouble otherwise they wouldn't have been marching in platoons, you know. If we could get them in platoons we usually used to get the whole lot of them, you know, there wouldn't be anybody left in a platoon.

Is that because when

32:00 **you're ambushing it and the kind of weaponry you've got just mows them down?**

Yes, yes. Yes, later on we had some very good ambushes because

So, yeah, go on.

during the time you see our occupation the Japanese lost, various figures by they themselves admit that they lost nearly 14 hundred killed and we only lost a handful, you know.

That's a lot of people, 14 hundred people.

32:30 It is, yes. Yes, that's in that book of Callinan's.

So when you got back to Hatolia,

Yes.

Have I got my pronunciation terrible. How were you greeted there because I mean, the last time you were there, their city got, their town got bombed?

Yes, oh, never really good relations in Hatolia, because the Chinese at that stage were packing up,

33:00 they were getting out. And they all, they've got the shops in every one of these little towns throughout Timor, they're always Chinese shops. And the Portuguese were more administrative and ran the place and well, the relation with the Portuguese was not really good there either.

So what were you actually trying to achieve in Hatolia?

Existence I suppose, more than anything. And

33:30 about this time, we'd been back a few days I think and they decided that they would have to get a wireless set to get us established with Australia, you know. And this Archie Campbell that was Keith, that fellow that was shot, his officer, he took a patrol through, in his book he mentioned that it was 7 section but it wasn't it was nine, because he only had four men left I think altogether, back to Fatobesi because we knew there was a wireless

34:00 set in there.

How did you know that?

Well, there was an aerial up and all this, you know how they have the wires across. And so they wanted all these things for, to form their wireless set. And they sent us back there one night, we went back there and to get this set from the Portuguese.

Was this the whole 18 of you or

Oh no, there was about a dozen of us

34:30 on that patrol, 9 section. And it was so dark we had to hold each other's bayonet scabbards, you know, come from the back and it was, you couldn't see the man in front of you, couldn't see a finger on the end of your nose, it was that black.

Why is it that dark?

Because there was no moon and it's in pretty, what's-a-name, overgrown country. The trees were a lot of, they call it the mother of coffee, this big trees but they're shady, they shade over the top of the coffee plantation. And we were walking through virtually coffee plantation area and rubber trees and we went back and we had to cross a creek that was running very fast. It was about 20 feet across I suppose but by joves they run very fast there. Because if it's rained

35:30 up in the mountains, see, and come down. It was even washing the boulders down. And Archie Campbell, his sergeant was then, Ron Duke, they played football for East Perth league team together before the war and they were great mates. He got swept down the creek and disappeared in the dark and he badly hurt his leg that night so he didn't come on with us, we had to leave him there with somebody to help him. So that cut a couple off our number. And then this big fellow from Manjimup, this fellow

36:00 here, big Tom Crouch, six foot three I think he was, built like a tank. He held his rifle out and he was helping people across this very fast flowing stream. He helped us across that.

What were some of the insects and animals like? Were you getting any, you know, like leeches or

Oh yes, a few leeches, yeah.

What sort of

Not as bad as New Guinea, that was bad.

What sort of bugs were

36:30 **hampering you?**

Mainly mozzies used to be the big worry, mosquitoes. And that's why we liked to get into a building, you know, we slept in the school one night at Fatobesi and if you can get inside, they're not so bad inside. But outside they just descend on you in hoards, millions of them.

What's stopping you from getting malaria?

Well we didn't, we used to get malaria about every second

37:00 afternoon. Get the shakes and then you get up and go again.

Well how do you travel under these conditions?

Well you had to stay behind sometimes you got very bad. And you shake that violently at times you get somebody to sit on you to stop the shakes, you know, but otherwise you rattle, your joints ache and everything.

Because you can't move when you're in that state.

No, no, we used to have to leave people here there and everywhere on the track.

37:30 **And so how would they**

Oh they come good. After the initial attack of the shivers and the shakes you get a fever, and after the fever breaks, after an hour or so you carry on again. You don't feel like eating, you mightn't eat for three or four hours, puts you off your tucker. But about, a couple, I used to get a couple attacks a week, malaria.

38:00 **And is the procedure for somebody just to stay with you and**

Well they did but if we were pretty short handed, you know, you'd be, they'd be on your own, they'd stay.

And then you just, how would you find your, the rest of your troop

Oh, you knew were they were going, we always knew that.

And how would you navigate to get to them?

Well you follow the tracks and that, or got a, they're native

38:30 tracks, you know. Very mountainous country. There was no made up roads, bitumen roads in Timor they were all dirt roads they were.

It seems a bit like madness kind of wandering around

Yeah, disorganised chaos and what not.

So how many times in a day would you actually spot Japanese during this time?

It all depended where we were.

39:00 When, we used to see them every day of course if, once we were getting close, we never got a great distance from Dili. I wrote a thing for Colin Doye, you know, he wanted one from each section and I wrote one for him there and I pointed out for him that 9 section, of all the sections, would've got less distance away from Dili than any other section. And, so we didn't get very far away.

Was there any particular reason

39:30 **for that?**

Well, they had to have somebody keeping an eye on the Japs. The main thing was to know where they were. If you knew where they were in force, and if you, if we could see them gathering force and that, we knew they were going to have a bit of a raid on somebody.

When you say a bit of a raid on somebody, was this just in relation to Timor or other areas?

Yes, oh yeah, just in relation to Timor, yeah.

So did

40:00 **you manage to capture the wireless by this point?**

Oh yes, we got the wireless that night.

Can you step me through the process of how you managed to

Well they took two sigs with them. One of them I cobbered up with and we're still mates today, he comes over twice a year to see me from up near the Queensland border. He was a wireless operator. Took him and his mate with us, he lives in Victoria now that fellow. And, Happy Greenwald, they call him Happy, and

40:30 he's 83 now and he came with us in the dark, he still talks about it, he can't get over it, you know. And we, all the chaps with arms we watched over the what's-a-name, the procedure and kept people away from this big house. Because it was dawn, the chap was still in his pyjamas. It was a lovely Portuguese home that we raided and he and the other sig went in to

41:00 disconnect it all, you know. And commandeered the poor fellow's car, he had an old Chev [Chevrolet] Tourer. And they, the lucky ones, they took two or three Tommy gunners with them so they go back on the road with all the gear, you know, with all the wireless stuff and all that in the car. And they went back and I don't know if they took the poor fellow or not, but he was terribly

41:30 agitated. And we had no intention of shooting him, no way, he thought he was going to be shot the poor bloke. But we daren't molest them in any way because you upset the local people you're in trouble. And so we sent them back around the road which was the long way round down through a town called Mera Mera, then back to Hatolia that way on this dirt road. And there was about,

42:00 oh, four or five blokes in the Chev, there was

Tape 4

00:30 **All right, can you pick up with that story that we just left with, how you acquired the radio? You just sent a couple of fellows**

Oh yes, they went back with the thing and we had to turn round and walk back again, it was about a six

hour hike and pretty rugged territory that was because it was on a, not on a regular track. And nothing, we had nothing to eat of course, could've done with a nice breakfast at that stage of the game

01:00 but we didn't, we headed back to Hatolia. But Happy, the two sigs went in the car, Tommy Crouch, oh, our officer, Lieutenant Cole, he drove the car because he'd been in transport before he came to commando and so they all got a ride back and we walked.

What kind of car was it?

And old Chev I think it was.

That wouldn't have been too common on the island would it?

No, they were

01:30 few and far between, vehicles, very few.

How had you got hold of the Chev?

Well we knew, it belonged to the chap who we took the wireless from, took his motorcar. We knew he had a motorcar.

Who was that chap?

He was a Portuguese dignitary, one of the administrators of the island I think. He was most upset. I can understand it.

So you commandeered the car, basically.

They commandeered the car and just confiscated the wireless set.

02:00 They thought he might've been in touch with the Japs, really, that was the story but that was a load of rubbish. He was definitely, you know, Portuguese.

Having upset him and all were you worried at all that he might shift sides?

No, well at that stage it didn't worry us because we were on the move from there anyway. That was the last time I went to Fatobesi anyway, so, I couldn't have cared less what he did after that sort of thing, you were worrying about what was ahead sort of thing.

What was ahead?

Getting back closer into Dili,

02:30 for us, for our section. Which we did.

How did you achieve that?

We just kept edging our way back towards Dili and off the side tracks and then went down to right above the aerodrome to a place where we'd had our opip originally before the Japs landed to get that signal from the drome up to there. Up to Bohack was the name of this place, and we went all the way back to this Bohack.

03:00 And

How many miles was it back to Bohack?

Oh, about 40 I suppose. But there was a lot of stuff in between that you had to get through, past the villages and what not where the Japanese standing patrols were and that.

Can you tell me, you know, more detail about those encounters?

Well we didn't encounter them on the way back, we didn't want them to know where we were, you see. We didn't want them to know that we were going to go back on the observation post on the top of the drome.

03:30 It was so close to the end of the runways that it was just the Komoro River, a drop down and there was the Komoro River at the bottom, which wasn't that wide and then the drome started, you know, and the runways, and that's where we were, just right above the river.

How elevated were you?

Oh, about a few hundred feet, be about 500 feet up, I suppose, we could look right on the drome. And the planes when they were coming in, they all had their wheels down, that's how close, you know, the wheels, used to run over the top

04:00 and to get this good pozzie that was on the side with a spur running down. A huge tree had fallen, roots and all, you know, and the roots were still embedded in the earth at the bottom. And we used to crawl down alongside of the trunk so we wouldn't be seen, from Dili, and have our, we had a big telescope, you know, one of those big fellows about three or four foot long with a good big lens on it and

04:30 it made things very easy to see. Like one day a lady, they used to have ladies come onto the drome to see the officers and that I suppose, and she had a poodle with her, and we could tell it was a poodle, that's how close you could see everything, you know. And you could see it was clipped, you know, it was clipped just like a poodle and she had it on a lead and you could see that, that's how much you could see so you could definitely see the planes and all that. So we used to send a sit rep [situation report] back every night to the CO [Commanding Officer]

05:00 our CO was a Captain Boylan, we used to send it back to him by the Timorese runner boy, he would take. And we would have every hour long, you know, what happened at the drome and send that back. And we manned that right through to beginning of August. So we were there for a long time. So we didn't do any mixing with the Japs in that time.

How were you

05:30 **supplied up there?**

Where we could get the food from the, the natives used to get a bit and bring it to us. We all had our Creados with us by that time, a native fellow, and they used to bring us a bit of food. And by that time, soon after that they established contact with Darwin through all the bits of the set and they built the set up.

What did you know about the building of the wireless

06:00 **set?**

Not a great deal, I've heard various stories. George Greenald should be better and Happy and be pretty good on that, being one of the sigs. But he didn't take part in the building of it, it was the technicians that did that. He was an operator, you see, but we had technicians with us like Joe Loveless from Tasmania, a well known fellow with AWA [Amalgamated Wireless Australasia] in those days. And they virtually built the set up from

06:30 nothing. And the only, most of the stories are the ones I've read about, you know, about winning the war winner. Because that was taking place a long way from where we were, it was half way up the Dutch end.

And, sorry, where were you sending all of your log to?

To a Captain Boylan.

Where was he positioned?

He was back about oh, nearly five, six, about a six hour

07:00 march from where we were.

Who was he with there?

He was C troop headquarters. There were, he had about five men with him, he had the troop sergeant, he turned out he wasn't sending the messages on, that's the trouble. Although he had a wireless set with him, he had a wireless set and wireless operators, two there with him, and the messages weren't going on, he was too lazy. He didn't even bother to code them or anything and, he got bowler hatted anyway out of it because

07:30 all our work was for nothing there.

What was his explanation or excuse?

Oh, no explanation.

So how was he bowler hatted?

He was relieved of his command when he got back and, well, all the complaints that used to go in.

When he got back to Australia?

Yeah, his return to civilian life.

Sounds like he should've been overturned earlier.

Oh yes, it would've been, it wasn't that he wasn't probably a, he should've been

08:00 about, I reckon about a sergeant would've been his rank, not a captain. He was quite, he was a game fellow, you know, but he had no idea of managing things.

So what was your feelings when you learnt he hadn't been sending on any of your

Oh, terribly bitter, very bitter about it.

You might've been tempted to shoot him.

Well, some people were. Because you risk your neck every day for months and

08:30 it all comes to nothing.

I've read that observations that you were making of the airport there were a great help to the Allied fleets in stemming the flow there.

Oh, some did get through because B troop had an opip on the other side of the town, Darain there's was called but it was a lot further away from the town than ours. But ours was one on the aerodrome, theirs was on the town on that side of it, Major Layswall, he was a very good solider, Layswall. And

09:00 he had the opip on that side of the place. And, at ours, it's a wonder they didn't spring us eventually because one of our Creados didn't come back from a food excursion down to a village one day and we should've woke up then that they were on to us. And we were staying at a village called Kutaluta, it was about, oh, over half a mile from the observation post from where the tree

09:30 was down on the ground and we were back up at this village. And we'd even have a singsong there of a night there, that's how silly we were, I've still got the old mouth organs I used to play there, I used to play the mouth organ at night time and big singsong, you know, we used to sing all those old country and western songs, you know, 'Wagon Wheels' and all those ones.

Do you still play?

Oh, I haven't played for years because I haven't got any wind now. And so the, oh, I did play

10:00 for Hap there last time he was over he says, "What about getting that old mouth organ out?"

We might even twist your arm today.

I still remember how to, but just ordinary little, they were six shillings each. Autovalve Harps, they were, made by Honer, made in Germany, they were quite a good little set.

We might have to get you to dig one out a bit later this afternoon.

I used to play in a mouth organ band later on, and they were all those, it used to sound like a great swarm of bees about 20 or 30 people playing

10:30 all the same tune. But

So what was happening in this village where you were staying?

Oh the, well, I went down and got this tattoo put on there from a bloke and it turned out a bit of a wreck because it all swelled up, they do it with one needle at a time. And I got that put on down at the village and we used to get a bit of tucker at the same time and a couple of eggs and Nixie and I, Jack, that's the chap I joined up with, we went down there, a fellow from

11:00 the butchers, he was a butcher too, we'd been together all this time, and they put that on. With this. It should be about this big because I've lost a lot of weight of course. And they did that and very dark, they mixed the tint up and they put it on with a needle.

Looks like a coat of arms or something.

Yes, it is the Timor coat of arms with the coffee what's-a-name.

Oh I see.

And anyway, they were terribly agitated

11:30 because it took more than, you can see the part that they had to continue on with, that's one they haven't burnt off yet on Tuesday. They burn them off me all the time.

What are these melanomas?

No, they're not melanomas, they chop melanomas out like that one.

Oh okay. So Scottish fair skin.

It is, yeah, Celtic.

Celtic, right.

Celtic skin, yeah. Irish and Scottish they cop the sun.

12:00 That's what my brother died off, in 75 he was in the outback all the time, his whole life though.

He wasn't in the right place for the fair skin.

No, no, he never married and, but he was a great outback man.

Yeah. But anyway your, what do you call those young fellows again, who just disappeared?

What the Creados?

Creado, yeah.

Yes, and that had happened then, but prior to that, that's when I got this done,

12:30 that was at the same village where he disappeared.

Right.

He'd gone down there to get us a WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK [chicken] or something and we used to give him the money.

The Japs had hauled him away?

They think so, they think that's what happened. They probably waylaid him even before he got there. But it was very close to where the tree was but a bit further away from Kutaluta. But through me going there, I don't think it was that that sprung them, it was definitely the Creado.

13:00 I used to go down to this village, they were very keen that I left before lunchtime because the Japs always came in the afternoon for eggs to there, they used to send them to get the officers' eggs for them. And I had to get out before them and when we got out they always used to sweep the ground with a branch of a tree you see, so that none of our hobnail boot marks there. That's how they tell the difference. So they were game the people, they were wonderful really. They used to run that risk

13:30 **So they're looking after you and had no choice to look after the Japanese as well?**

That's right, they had to treat their, but the Japs didn't know that we were there in the morning and they were there in the afternoon, sort of afternoon shift.

Do you know if the Japs terrorised them at all into looking after them?

I don't think so, otherwise they'd have potted us, put us in. I think they would've put us in if they'd have known, if they were frightened of the Japs that much. But anyway, the came up a track half way between the two one morning.

14:00 Jacky Wicks had gone down to the opip with a fellow by the name of Bill Curtis, they took off early in the morning so they'd be there in daylight, you see to stay at the opip. And we stayed at Kutaluta and we're getting up, and luckily Jack Carey, he's my mate that rings up every day, he was down the bushes relieving nature and he looked down the track and here they come, about 30 of them, coming straight up the track towards Kutaluta, the village, and he was only about 50 yards out of the place. And here's all these

14:30 Japs armed to the teeth coming up. And they'd come up this track in between the opip, they still didn't find the opip, and along this into Kutaluta. So we got out of there smartly too, because it was all open spaces there too like those corrals you see there in Africa and the, all the huts. And we moved out and they knew that we were there all right because within seconds the place was up in smoke. They set alight the whole

15:00 village, the whole lot went up. And so we circled down from there, went downhill for a start and then around and up, and the track continued up to the village of Bohack up at the top. And we did the whole turn around and came back again and set up an ambush possie here, we thought, "This is a good spot, to probably get nearly all of them." And

Can you describe that location and why it was such a good spot?

Well it was steep country all the way up to the Bohack village

15:30 and we stopped about 200 yards beyond Kutaluta, we circled right around and came back again and we could hear them still in the village. And we set up there with the Tommy guns across the track and that.

Can you describe the current defence or ambush set up?

Yes we, well you pick out a, there were a couple of trees that were pretty near to the track going up and there was a Tommy gun between either of them, and the Bren gun was set up further back, it fired between us, that was the idea.

16:00 Straight down the track. And anyway, we waited and waited and they never came. They kept, continued down around the thing, and went down onto the Komoro River and up the other side and sprung Archie Campbell on the other side of the Komoro River. Archie Campbell with, that's the one that, Keith Hayes came from that section but he was back in Australia by then. And they got stuck into Archie.

What was he doing over there?

He had an opip on the other end of the town, you know, watching the town.

This is that one.

16:30 Yeah, and he had one loud shot through the thighs, you know, through here. Felt a burst of machine gun through there.

Through both sides?

Through both of them. And Bunny Anderson picked him up on his back, he was a big strong bloke, we used to call him Bunny because he was built like a big teddy bear, you know. A New South Welshman he was, he picked him up and put him on his back and carried him out and he carried him about half a mile because they had to get out of there, then the Japs, they got into the village too and burnt it. And

17:00 through there, and Archie Campbell recommended Bunny Anderson for a mention in dispatches, you know, for the work he did in saving him that day. And they put up a fair sort of a fight so as he could withdraw anyway. And which they did, they were about, there was about eight or nine of them there I think, and they were up against about 30 or 40. It's a bit hard because they were the ones who were ambushed instead of them ambushing the Japs. So

So they weren't expecting the Japs at all.

17:30 No, we weren't either only for Jack Carey we would've been caught hands down.

What were you doing in Kutaluta that morning, or was it morning?

I'd just got out of bed, I was trying to get a bit of tucker together. But ironically just prior to that they'd got in touch with them and knew that they'd been kybombed further back at headquarters, you know when the fire bombers come over as they call it, and they drop the tucker out. They dropped us the first tucker that we'd had in five or six months.

18:00 **Is this just after you'd made or re-established wireless contact?**

Yes, yep. That was the first drop. And some had come through to Kutaluta the day before the Japs came through. And we'd rationed it all out, we were going to save, it was going to last, we'd be able to have some doycies as they call them, they're those home made scones on thing, first flour we'd seen.

What else was in there?

In the food?

Yeah.

It was, oh, mainly flour and there were some hard biscuits.

18:30 I didn't mind those because they were better than nothing. After being on maize cobs for weeks sometimes.

What are they?

Maize cobs, you know the maize that you cook, you've had corn on the cob? It's that virtually only it's dried, not cooked and they're like eating little bits of stones really. They take a bit of chewing and we used to get those because they'd have them stored in the storehouse and that, you know, the old natives.

What you just eat a handful

19:00 **of those out of the sack?**

Oh, you get, a couple of them keep you quiet all day, a couple of maize cobs.

Oh so you'd eat them still on the cob?

Still on the cob. Yeah. But I think it was mainly flour, I remember, I didn't see the whole lot of it, but we lost the lot of course.

So you were going to cook up some breakfast with this flour and

Yeah.

you'd have been rudely interrupted by the Japs.

Yeah.

Can you go into a bit more detail about

19:30 **the description of Kutaluta?**

Well there was not a lot to describe, it was a little village.

How many huts?

Be about eight or ten.

And how many villagers occupying them?

There'd have been about 30 or 40.

What, were they a couple of families or?

Oh, yeah, they used to be in clans like that, those but, oh yeah, there'd have been about five or six families there.

20:00 **Many women and children?**

Yes, yeah, quite a lot, a terrible lot of little kids. They were beaut little kids, you know.

Did you used to fool around with the kids when you were there?

Oh yes, yeah. I had a young lad that was, he lived with me, or he was a Creado, well that meant as soon as they're declared a Creado they were with you night and day from then on. And they thought it an honour, you know, to stay with a soldado, with a soldier. And they used to carry our

20:30 gear when we were in, when we were in an ambush they'd be further back with all our gear. And they'd have a few, even few spare magazines for you waiting and things like that, so they were more than valets sort of thing, you know.

They'd have been next to mates.

They were immense help, yes. But he arrived and he was only about, he came to me at Kutaluta and he was only about eight or nine I reckon at the most, he was only a little fellow.

21:00 And all the others laughed at him, they said he was too small, you know, because some of the other lads they were all about 16 and 17. And anyway, he got that upset about it he went back home and got his uncle and he brought his uncle back, old Munlaylow his name was, this little bloke I had was Molairy. And Munlaylow came back and he was the oldest, he was going bald. And he came to me, he was the oldest Creado in the thing, so I finished up with the oldest Creado and the youngest, I had two. And they looked at, but he was

21:30 a great old fellow old Munlaylow, he was a lovely old bloke.

What, how did you spend your time together in the village?

When it was our, oh, we used to take it in turns to do the opip, go down to the opip. Usually cleaning your Tommy gun or something.

And with the people in the village, how would you spend your time together, what sort of things did you do together at night or

Oh, yeah, they used to join in the singsong, you know, they, that's when we were learning Tetum, too at that stage, you know.

22:00 Tetum is the Timorese language.

How good did you get at speaking Timorese?

Pretty good at the finish, yeah, I could make myself understood with no trouble.

A few laughs had trying to understand each other?

Oh yes, well, it's the same as all languages I suppose, like if you ask somewhere where they're going you say, "Ba," which means go you see, "Ba ina bay?" Where are you going: ba ina bay. And there's a honey, there's a lot of honey in Timor,

22:30 and it was called barney bear. And it was, I thought it was the quick word of ba ina bay, you see, they're very similar. And when they'd say to me, "Ba ina bay," I'd say, I thought they were talking about honey, you see, and I'd say, "Oh yes, honey," yeah. And he'd be asking me where I was going and I'd start talking about honey, you see, and this like that. Well I used to get, it was ages before it dawned on me that one, barney bear and ba ina bay.

23:00 **I've heard that there were some soldiers seriously bitten by bees.**

Oh yes, yep.

There's a huge bee population in Timor.

There is, yep, always plenty of honey, good honey.

Would've been great with the scones.

Oh yeah it would've gone, well we used to like the honey for sweetening, there was no sugar. No sugar in Timor. Now, A troop they got plenty of honey, milk and all that sort of thing, but we never.

What kind of food did

23:30 **you eat in the village?**

Usually bashed up maize, you know those, they had these big hollow logs and they'd pound it. And

sometimes they'd get some rice and it was pretty husky stuff, you know because, it was pretty raw rice. And that wasn't bad if you could get it.

Any sort of native animal?

Yeah, there were buffaloes and pigs and that but we, now and then we'd get a

24:00 small buffalo but it was a terrific thing for it, we used to give them an IOU for it and they never ever got paid back the poor devils you know. Even the ones from the officers, they never got the money back. But a buffalo was a, well a pig, even a pig is a lot to a native family, you know, it's a huge amount.

Did they ever share buffalo or pig with you when you were eating in the village together?

Normally they wouldn't eat the buffalo, they never ate the meat, but they'd go

24:30 mad when we killed one. And I used to take a fair part in that from being a butcher for four years, so, and we used to get their permission first.

They'd go mad, what eating it?

Well, yeah, they didn't waste a drop of it, they'd drink all the blood even. Like as soon as I cut their throat they'd be in there with a hollow bamboos, you know. And they'd drink it and have it, it'd be foaming round here because it's supposed to be very good for you. Of course, we wouldn't have a bar of that sort of thing.

So being a butcher

25:00 **you were able to cut up a few prime cuts and**

Oh yes, yep. Big Tom Crouch up, Tom from up there, used to do the killing with me.

Butchers of Timor.

Yes, yeah one night we had a whole butt of beef, that's the top of the hindquarter, you know, that's where all the good stuff is, in the butt and all the good meat there and we hung it up under the officer's hut. Ray Cole was with us, Coley,

25:30 and he was up there with his sergeant, or corporal he was at that stage, Dave Richards and they were up there, the chap I dropped in Tidal River, the same fellow. And he was there with the officers over in that hut and one night a big dog, there was a big dog come round and he's snapping this meat, you see. And Vince Swan was our corporal, and I said to Swany, "There's a dog at the meat." He says, "You got your gun ready?" Well you always slept with your gun alongside you. And I leaned up and there was a bit of a ledge in the hut and I

26:00 just leaned over and I let go and I, you know, where it was hanging and I shot at him and most of the slugs I think, with the Tommy gun, finished up in the butt of beef. And Cole and the other fellow they came out of the hut that quick up top, they were up above it, they came down that little ladder that they had and just about broke their necks and legs and everything else. "Where are they?" Coley says, and I held up the gun, I said, "Here it is." I said, "There was a dog eating the meat." Well didn't he go crook.

26:30 **So**

"God," he said, "the Japs will hear that for miles." I said, "They won't know whose it is."

When you, sorry the village was called Kutaluta, is that right?

Yeah, that one was, that wasn't at Kutaluta I did that.

Right.

That was at another village.

What kind of shelter were you sleeping in at Kutaluta?

In a hut, one of those huts, but it was an open hut, I didn't like to be confined.

Why?

Couldn't roll out of bed quick enough, you know. And some people were caught in their

27:00 bunks.

You get cornered in a hut. I'm just wondering about what other kind of relationships you had with the people in Kutaluta.

Oh, we used to eat with them, well you had to otherwise you didn't eat, but

What was meal time like?

Not to bad, because it was mainly a meal that you could split up and take your share, you know, and they'd watch it all

27:30 going out.

Would you sit around a fire or?

Oh yes, yep, a smoky fire.

And what about the village women, was there any relationships between soldiers and village women?

Not that I know of, no. I think that's why they stuck to us, the Japanese were just the opposite of course. But I think anything like that, well they were a strictly religious people, it's a Catholic island

28:00 and I think that's what saved our bacon too. The Portuguese end is strictly Catholic and they're pretty ridgy didge.

And so the Japanese were known to (UNCLEAR) women were they?

Oh yes, they did, they used to even take them back into town, against their will of course, and they'd bring them back here.

Forced into prostitution.

Yes. And

28:30 they started that business very early in the peace the Japanese and I think this helped save our bacon again because they disliked that thing intensely, that sort of thing, the people.

They must've had a lot more respect for the Aussies than the Japs.

Oh they did, it was definitely respect that saved our bacon, yeah.

What happened after Kutaluta was burnt down?

We went back to the opip and the

29:00 natives, they built us a little lean to, just behind where the tree had come from, we went down to that end of it, up the other end where the branches and all that went, just the other side it was on the top of the ridge and that's where it had really blown from, you know, that's why it had come down, it was on the side of the ridge. But we put a, built us a little lean to right behind it because we thought we better be right on the job from now on. And the village that where they put this on, they still used to send us up a bit of tucker.

29:30 **That was Buck-something?**

No, I don't know what the name of the village was at the bottom.

Oh okay.

And that's where I got that done. There was a couple of Chines people there, Chinese shops, or not shops they had come from the shops in Dili and they were living in that village.

Did you go down and visit that village?

Yeah, I used to go down there occasionally. Had to be very careful of course, because the Japs used to go in there

30:00 a lot.

What made you decide to get a tatt [tattoo] ?

A tattoo? Oh, because they, most of them had tattoos, the Timorese. And of course my mother made me promise never to get a tattoo on, she was against soldiers. And anyway, I said to Wicksie, I said, "Well we'll never get off the island anyway, so nobody's going to know about it." And even Bernard Callinan said in his book, his expectations of getting off Timor alive were exactly nothing, you know.

30:30 And I certainly never expected to get off Timor alive.

What did the villagers think when you guys fronted up for a tattoo?

Oh they thought it was great down there, yeah.

Was there any kind of ceremony to getting the tattoos or?

No, not really, no. No, we started doing them to each other after that. I put one on Vince Swan and one on Wicksie and just with an ordinary darning needle. Used to wrap

31:00 what's-a-name, a bit of wool around it, heavy wool stuff, and dip it in the tinter and drip down off the thing into the cut. You go in about an eighth of an inch.

Were you a pretty mean tattoo artist?

Oh yes, we used to put, I've got one on this arm I think it is, yeah. And Vince Swan did that one. They were all the same pattern, we did a double diamond and 2nd AIC which is 2nd Australian Independent Company. 2nd AIF [Australian Imperial Force] ,

31:30 see, 2/2nd, we had AIF and AIC. Bit of drawing to be done too, quite good.

Would've bolstered your morale I suppose.

I haven't pulled this out again have I? Have I?

You might just need to adjust that.

I better stop folding my arms.

Yeah that's good there I think.

Is it?

Is that all right, Pen?

That's good.

Good.

So what events follow?

Pardon?

What events follow once the villagers have built you a lean to up at the, from

Oh yes, from

32:00 there we saw something quite interesting one day. We could see a place called Tibar, which is very well known in the history books with the fighting around Dili. And it was fairly open country and we had a sub-section down in there, 9 Section, a sub-section of men. There was only seven of us in Kutaluta, and there were seven or eight men down at the Tibar. And it was very open country, Tibar, and there was a Portuguese house there,

32:30 even and it wasn't very far from the road. And God knows, they were staying in this Portuguese house, we didn't think they were in there. And they were, they were in there. And one day we watched a couple of trucks come out, because we liked to see where they were going to. And they pulled up and they went around to this little track around to the back of Tibar to where this house was. And we thought, "Oh, they'll know they're coming," you know. But they were inside the blinking house and they shouldn't have been in there, the section. And they were in the house. And the, we

33:00 watched them get out, all in proper formation, the Japs, you know, all in a line marching towards the house. And then the blokes, our blokes started to come out and the firing started, you know. And we thought it was funny, you know we were saying, "Caught with their pants down," you know we used to laugh about things like that. And well, then it started, this poor old Pop Hardy, he was a great mate of ours, he was shot through the arm, went through the elbow and nearly took half the arm with it. Later

33:30 on we tried to put a shell dressing on it, a field dressing wouldn't go on it, we had to get a shell dressing, which is a bigger one that you carry with you to strap on.

So you had those readily available?

And two of the other fellows were driven through the cactus. There was a field of cactus, Cactus Flat it was called on that side of Tibar, and they were, had to go right through it. There was far too many Japs there for them, there were truckloads of them, all firing.

34:00 **Anyone lost?**

No, Pop was the only one hit, actually. He was running fairly well he said and just strapped his Tommy gun down there and ran for cover, you see, to get out of the house. And as this arm came forward, they were firing side on, they took the top off the thumb, and as this arm went back that's when he was hit through the elbow from behind. So how on earth they missed his body, I don't know. But they were both

34:30 pretty fierce sort of wounds.

So when did you reunite with them after they had to escape from Tibar?

We didn't see them for weeks.

I suppose I mean, where did you catch up with them?

Because there was road in between. Well, we caught up with them after what they called the August Push. There was a push, the Japanese decided to get us out of there, they were fed up with being sniped at and watched all the time. Because they knew they

35:00 were there but they could never find us. And sot it was about, that would've been what, end of July, that

would've been end of June, July, that that Tibar affair was on. And it was beginning of August they started this push from about four directions. They had about 500 men from Dili and they came through to the Dutch border, they came, they did a landing of about 500 on the south coast and they'd reckon they'd get us on a pincer

35:30 movement. But Archie Campbell wrote a lot about that in his book and I had a go, but they had to give up eventually, they couldn't tie us down.

Were you aware of all of their movements, their strategy?

Just about, yes, yep. Yeah, we knew what was going on and they called it, referred to it as the August Push.

And how did you respond to the August Push, what kind of organisation did you

Well, we had an ambush set up on each road

36:00 and they, well we fired on that and withdrew. But they were trying to push us all into the one spot, you see, so they could get us.

When you say all, are you talking about A, B and C?

Yeah, the whole lot, A, B and C.

How were you united together or working together to defend yourself?

Well we didn't. We knew it was suicide to form a block sort of thing like the old British way of fighting. And we knew if we could keep, split up, we had a

36:30 far better chance. And, well, we did that too, right to the finish. But they just about had us in a confined area when they gave up and they fired vary lights this night, for about a week they really got stuck into us. And Arch Campbell wrote quite a bit about it and so did Sir Bernard Callinan in his book, you know. And he reckoned that was the company's finest hour, you know, when they followed the Japs back in and sniping at them again, so they must've gotten really fed up with us.

37:00 **So you just outmanoeuvred them.**

Yes. But if they had kept going another couple of days they'd have had us, we hadn't had much to eat and they,

Just how desperate was your situation when you were at that point when they gave up?

When we could've given up, when they gave up, I reckon within 24 hours we'd have had to give up because we'd had no food for a couple of days, continuous fighting, and they thought they had us all right.

How many men had you lost?

Pardon?

How many men

37:30 **had you lost?**

We didn't lose too many, there were a couple I think in B troop were lost. And, oh, C troop lost a couple of 8 section, yeah, we didn't lose too many.

And just how much area had you been pushed around?

We were pushed back about 20, 30 miles. Well, we'd withdrawn on our own initiative from Bohack and Kutaluta we came back on our own,

38:00 not from Kutaluta, from behind the log, you know, that stage we were living behind the opip. So we withdrew from the opip and made way to a place called Maubesse, which is a big centre there. And we were heading for an ambush when they came out of Maubesse, so we had quite a successful ambush there and killed 30 or 40.

Can you go into detail in describing that ambush for me?

Yes, the

38:30 we had about two Brens, 10 Tommys and a few riflemen. And that was formed by 8 Section and we were next in line behind them. The Japs took longer to get up from Maubesse than we thought and it was nearly dark when they got there so disrupted all our plans a bit and they got stuck into them there, 8 Section. And they seem to think they killed

39:00 the first platoon or so, so they must've killed about 30 or 40. And by that time it was too dark to see what was going on and there was firing everywhere, so we kept withdrawing from the same saddle, and we thought, "We'll have a bite here, because it's pretty open and we've got the high ground." But they diverted from there and went around towards A troop, down to Ainaro where they killed all the priests,

believe it or not. That was quite a big town, Ainaro, and they went around to there, went that way.

The massacre take place at this time or earlier?

39:30 Pardon?

Did the massacre of the priests take place at this time or earlier?

About a couple of days later, on their way down from, that was after we hit them, it may have been.

So they perhaps vented their frustrations following their defeat?

Yeah probably. But they came out again in September, after the Voyager ran aground. They had the same sort of movement except that they were coming all from Dili, two big mobs were coming from Dili when the, what's-a-name, the

40:00 Voyager ran aground, you've heard of that I suppose.

Yeah.

With the 2/4th on. And the 2/4th were to replace us exactly, you know, each section came to each section, they were identical body of men, you know, so it was a good idea. And we were to be replaced and that was during September. So we had a, virtually in the same place as the A section had an ambush we had one. But this time we had six Brens I think and 10 Tommys, because the 2/4th were

40:30 there that time, 2/4th Independent Company. I was going crook because missed my breakfast that morning. Ray Cole our lieutenant says, "Will you go down and bring them into the ambush position," because they'd come straight from the boat, they'd marched all night and they're in action the next morning, you see. And I led them up to where our ambush was. That's how we had so many automatic weapons, you know, about six Brens and 10 Tommys, terrific firepower.

Can you describe the ambush

41:00 **set up?**

Yes, the, on the high side of the road were the Brens and the road was in a cutting, you know, this way. And we were on the low side with the Tommys, because we were closer. And we were getting the first platoon. The Brens ignored the first platoon that came through, there's about 30, 40 men in each platoon, and they took the second platoon because they had a longer range than us.

So you're firing at them down the track?

Yes, yeah, straight onto the track, and it was a sort of a reddy, gravelly

41:30 sort of a track.

How exposed were your positions, was there much vegetation there or?

Yeah, there was a big tree and I headed for that and got behind the big tree. And the other chap, he was left handed, Wendell Wilkie, he was on the left hand side, he was left handed, he had his Tommy round this side of the rubber tree and I was on this side of it. And we saw the first platoon come through and we were hoping that the Brens wouldn't open up, but they were pretty, been told what to do.

42:00 And they didn't and because they

Tape 5

00:30 **So, we were just at that point where you're about to open up fire at the first and second platoon of Japanese marching**

Oh yes, yes, anyway then, Ray Cole he took over there was the 2/4th loot there as well and, but Ray Cole sung out "Fire," well, they all fired together it was like a wall of lead must've hit them. And I could see that there was a front mob coming

01:00 because they were closer, the Brens couldn't see them by that time because they passed out of their vision and into ours, the cone of fire. Well, you couldn't see the thing for dust, you know, because the bullets that were missing or hitting, going through them, they were into this gravelly type of stuff and it was just a heap of dust thrown up, you know. And we fired straight into them from about 100 yards and there was not one man standing out of the whole lot,

01:30 they were lying everywhere, you know, the first platoon and I think the second was even worse with the Bren guns, you know, they just them. So they lost two platoons complete I would say.

What would follow an ambush like that, what would you do after an ambush?

Well your mind's made up pretty well because they were skilled troops those fellows, they all had

backpacks on and fully armed. And, now before we, I'd spent

02:00 my full magazine, the drum mag, they were firing back from the other platoons and they were moving up too. They moved up at a trot.

You got some return fire?

Oh yes, immediately. And they were coming in big droves and quite keen too. So we withdrew because Archie Campbell, he had his section with 7 Section from the other company waiting to give us covering fire because it was fairly open there. So we had to scarper

02:30 along this track and they just about starting to get our tail enders by the time we got to the top of the Same Saddle as it was called there. And that's where I wrote a thing about that ambush because, for (UNCLEAR) and I said that it was obvious they were skilled troops because they were moving around us then while our firing was going on. And there was one incident there I thought old Wendell had been hit because I stood up to get a,

03:00 if anybody moving about so I could have a pot at them and I was still firing. And after I stood up, Wendell, he had an old shirt on, it was cut down all the way in a split, and all my spent bullets were pouring out this and they were going straight down his shirt. And he had a row of blisters, you know, from them, because they're red hot when they come out the shell, and they're brass cases sort of thing. They all finished up down his tummy. And he's rolling around on the ground, I thought he'd been hit. He was swearing and going crook, and I thought, "Oh God, he's been hit

03:30 in the tummy," you know. Because, anyway

Were any of the Aussies hit?

No, no, it's amazing because they were firing at us in the open country before we got to the Saddle. And they opened up on Archie Campbell, well they killed a couple of the, one of the newcomers, and one of each I think, that were manning a Bren gun and they couldn't get away quick enough. Their getaway was not as quick as ours, apparently, and the got that Bren gun crew.

When was

04:00 **the ambush over?**

Well that one, ours was over when we pulled out immediately. And then Archie Campbell started his, he was covering fire, he opened up. But his wasn't an ambush then because they knew he was there giving covering fire. But that didn't even stop them, they were still firing.

And how did it come to a close?

It went on all day. Leapfrogging back, that went on all day, they were behind us all the time. We'd

04:30 hold them up for a few seconds and then bang, and on they'd come again and they'd lose 10 or 12, something, each one. After the initial one we couldn't hope to get another one like that, where they were all marching in order like. But after that they were spread out.

And how far did you retreat in this kind of engagement?

Well, sometimes it wasn't far but other times it was a fair way.

Just to the next tree or?

Oh

05:00 yes.

There we go, we'll call it lunch. Right, so when we left off Henry, you were still fighting the Japs off at Same Saddle, you're backing back and

Oh yes, and they went on to Ainaro, knocked off all the priests and draped them over the alters there and killed them.

Did you witness the aftermath of the massacre?

No, no, I didn't, no.

So in the same day they massacred those priests?

Yes.

What was the

05:30 **settlement there, was there a monastery or something there?**

There was a church there, and they used to call our fellows up to listen to the news at night-time because they had a good wireless. And I suppose it got common knowledge amongst the natives and it had filtered through to the Japanese that they were friendly to us, the priests.

Had you been there to listen to the wireless yourself?

No, I hadn't, no. Happy did quite a few times. But I was only in Ainaro for hospitalisation

06:00 to get my tropical ulcers dressed and then out again.

What kind of tropical ulcers did you have?

Just the normal sort on the ankles. They got quite big and I had to get them dressed and cut out with blue stone.

How come they're occurring there on your ankles?

Well, mainly through leech bites and that on the ankles, and then they get, if you break, in the tropics if you break the skin anywhere, it's

06:30 immediately open to bacteria getting in. And you can bet your life, there were some shocking ulcers amongst them the same as, you probably saw some in those prisoners of war they had some shockers. And they grow and grow and they get as big as a cup, you know.

Certainly incredibly painful.

They are because all of the nerve ends are there and they hurt.

They're just like an open sore, aren't they?

They are, yes, and they won't heal.

What were your movements

07:00 **directly following the Same Saddle ambush?**

We went back to a village over Maubesse and, called Garema, this village and we stayed there and

What's the mood or morale like after an ambush of that scale? It sounds like an incredibly significant ambush that one.

Yeah, makes you pretty high. That was the one to stop them coming back through to the destroyer that time so that was when ours was really on.

07:30 **Well, so when you say incredibly high, can you explain what's going on between you and the other troops?**

Yeah, well between us and the, you get highly elated at a successful ambush. And because those ones were successful too, mainly because we got first whack at them, you know. After they're awake up they're never as good as that. The first one's the best. And the leapfrogging method is the best because you leapfrog

08:00 back and protect each other each time with covering fire.

So end of the day fighting, what's the mood amongst the section?

Dog tired as a rule because it's terribly, at the time it's energy consuming, terrifically, and you don't notice it until your finished. And then you're in a state of collapse really.

What do you say to each other?

Oh, just have a bit of a laugh and that about it.

08:30 **Sit back and recount the day's proceedings or?**

Oh, not very often, yeah, you just, you'd remark on how quick they were to respond and all this sort of thing.

Give each other a pat on the back?

Yes, oh yes.

What about, anyone's nerves feeling quite frayed?

Oh yes, I think so, yeah. Yeah, poor old Jack Wicks his nerves got pretty bad at the finish

09:00 and oh, a terrible lot of people.

What kind of support would you give one another?

Oh, just the general brotherly type of stuff you know. It was like, well it was like brotherly love you know, all through that, they all said that, the fellows. Well, they must be now when they ring up all the time, different people.

So you're still thick as thieves [close friends] ?

Yes, yes. Well they said, some of

09:30 the fellows they still call me Young Sprocky. And old Doc Wheatley and that, some of the fellows are around about 90 now, you know.

What event followed Same Saddle once you laid up?

Well we went back and opip Maubesse because we couldn't get back to our old one over Dili, no chance at all of getting that far back. But we got, round Maubesse was a big centre. And I was

10:00 fairly close to Maubesse when we were taken off in December, the village called Mindelo and Damien Parer came over and photographed us, that well-known photographer Damien Parer.

Yeah.

And I got to know him reasonably well and

How did you get to know him?

Well, he came out to us, we were the furthest section out at that stage. We all seemed to be out on a limb or something. And Mindelo was a nasty place and he came out there to

10:30 do the photographing of the burning down, we decided to burn down Mindelo. Because it was a nasty village, and the Dutch Timors were getting through to there and they were the ones that caused our downfall at the finish. All round Turiscai, a place out the west and they were coming across from the border and they were consolidating through to this village of Mindelo, quite a big village.

11:00 And they were taking over some of the villages on the way through and they were manned by these Dutch natives. Yeah, they're real Indonesian types you know.

And they were opposed to Aussies.

That's right, yes, yep and they were eventually our downfall.

How was that?

They used to go out ahead of the Japs and if you wanted to get through to the Japs you had to kill them first sort of thing. The Japs, whether they used to send them out and,

11:30 I suppose they did, that was the idea.

So they were like the Japs first wave of defence, were they?

Yeah, that's right, yes.

So you were fighting double the force.

Yes, and it was very hard too, because they were good scouts and that, you couldn't ambush them any more after that. They were very cunning, you know, the Indonesian natives.

Locals?

Well, if the Indonesians used to catch down the other end, when they were coming across from

12:00 Kupang, the chaps that filtered through to us, if the Indonesians caught them on their own they'd put them on a bamboo and truss them up the same as you carry a pig around, you know, with the hands and feet tied and take them into the Japs and get so many patakas for them. Australians.

Did that happen to many Aussies?

Apparently it did, yes, yeah, it happened on the other side of the border.

And what was the Japanese treatment of them when they were handed over?

I don't know what happened to them then, they were probably killed.

Think they might have been executed?

Because there was a

12:30 price on all our heads. There was a big price on the officers' heads.

What a bounty?

Yeah, a bounty.

What was it, do you know?

I don't know, it was worth about oh, hundreds of patakas. It didn't worry the Japs because they printed their own money, you see.

Before we broke for lunch, I was asking you about any other significant ambushes and you

said there was one

13:00 **that you should tell me about.**

Oh yes we, the one that failed?

Perhaps, yes.

Yes, it was one that old Bernie Callinan set up too, Lieutenant Colonel Callinan, and it was on the road and we knew these trucks were coming up regularly but, to Iramira, and they came up from this bottom of the place where we had originally blown the bridge up from Tokalili. And the trucks used to come up there and change over the Japs in Iramira, the garrison there. And we thought

13:30 we'd, we knew when they were due to change over. And Bernie Callinan sent for us, for 9 Section, because 8 Section was already there. And he wanted 9 in position and we had to get in front of Iramira. And Iramira there were a lot of Japs in there, I suppose there would have been a thousand. And they used to keep their eye on all the lands, it was all open rice fields in front of the place. And we were going to skirt around but we never had time

14:00 so we came through, across the rice fields. And it was dark and cloudy but we were half way through the rice fields, there was a lot of them there, and the moon came out from behind the clouds so we had to lie down for a while in the rice fields and as you know, it grows in about this much water. And I had the Bren gun at that stage, that's when I had the Bren, that was earlier in the piece. And we, I remember lying down with it and I, and old Corporal Wilson says to me, sung out, he said, "Down get

14:30 that Bren gun wet, mate." So I lay on my back and had it on my tummy and down through here and to protect it, you know, from going in the water because we used to rely on the Brens a lot. And after about two hours the moon went behind the clouds and we continued on. Now that little episode it was a real traumatic experience, you know, sticking out in the moonlight and that and then getting across but nothing happened so we

What kind of thoughts ran through your mind?

15:00 Well, we were expecting to get hit with machine gun fire any time from the top because they were right across, we weren't that far from the main road through to Dili. And because we were trying to get across onto the road where it forked from this place called Letphaho and we had to get across onto the other side of that road and connect up with Callinan and 8 Section. And we did that before dawn thank goodness. And Callinan in his book he wrote that he'd sent for Cole's section, Ray Cole's section

15:30 but he said, "They were late in getting there" well I should think that just because we got hung up in a rice paddy and, that's all he mentioned about 9, it was a hazardous trip getting across there. But it's just referred to in the book as "Cole's section was late in getting there." So they don't realise, I don't think they can, the trouble getting into a place sometimes. You know, crossing over through enemy territory and getting onto the other side so, but anyway, we got in all in position before

16:00 daylight along the road and 8 section was taken over, there's a Scotty Taylor, a born soldier. And he was organising the ambush and I had to stop the first truck because I had the Bren for 9 Section then. I'd stop the first truck and he was down the end, right down the end with a Bren gun too, old Scotty and he was going to stop the, when I opened up and if the truck was successful in being stopped, he said he would open up and stop the last truck

16:30 and they would fire on them from in between. They'd done this before and they were quite successful with three or four men but we had, oh, two, three quarters of each section available. So there was only a few missing. So we were pretty good strength. And we had it all set up and we could hear the trucks starting up down at Tokalili and we thought, "Oh, we'll get about eight trucks in this lot," you know, because we went right around the curve of the road and down. And it was a cut and fill job, because it was cut on our side

17:00 so we were on the high ground and the other side it fell away into the valley. Just like in the Snowys, you know, it was cut and filled. And I remember old Scotty saying to me, you know, he said, "If the truck goes over the side and goes down," he said, "you haven't accomplished anything, just go straight onto the next truck and stop that one," you know, "as long as you stop them," and block the road. So we had all this worked out, nutted out and then the trucks got closer and closer and all of a sudden

17:30 we saw Don Turtin, the chap I was talking to this morning, his blinking section's walking them down the road underneath us. And we tried to signal them away, you know, off, and admittedly we were in their territory but we thought it was okay because of Colonel Callinan had arranged the ambush. And anyhow they kept on going. And of course we could hear the trucks getting closer and closer, they probably couldn't hear them because we were on higher ground and they bang slap straight into them.

18:00 And just down below after they'd past us, and we could hear the machine guns they were outnumbered, "Oh crikey, they've sprung the ambush," and they had too. So they, and they messed it up, they might've got the one truck and that was all about they got. But we would've got the lot, we would've bottled up quite the whole reinforcement probably.

So they were troop trucks?

Oh yeah, they were all troops packed in them. Yeah, there'd be about 20 men in every truck, at least.

18:30 And, so they opened up on them then and in the meantime, they roughly had knew where the ambush was the Japs so from further down on Tokalili they opened up with a couple of salvos for field guns, they had field guns down there. And they landed on the top of our spur where we were and we were jammed in between a couple of big rocks, Jimmy Cullen and I with the Bren, and we could see the rubbish going up behind us when each shell exploded and then they'd stop

19:00 after firing about four. And bracket again you know, move across. Well they, that day they shelled and mortared nearly all day onto this spur and they never, they only hit the cook I think, an old Timor bloke. But it was, can't believe that we didn't all cop it, you know, because they concentrated on us all day. All together they fired 160 three inch mortars, 10 pounders, and 40 shells that we counted into this spur and just about

19:30 shell shocked at the end of the day. And that should've been a highly successful ambush, that one. It fizzled of course.

So what were your feelings at the ambush failure?

Very bitter. I wrote a report on the thing and what not, and it didn't get too far probably.

Who did you direct your report to?

To George Boyland, probably never got past him again.

20:00 **What did you say in your report?**

Oh I just said the contact between Bernie Callinan and Don Turtin was haywire because they did a lot of operating together, he should've drummed up Don Turtin, Don said he was ignorant of it all, he didn't know. He's told me since, you know, he says, "I know you've always held it against me for that ambush at Letpho." I said, "No, not really Don." He said, "Oh, Jack Carey said that you reckoned I was just a so and so," you know. Figured

20:30 Carey had dropped me in it with him.

What did that, what did the failure of that ambush cost you?

Well luckily it didn't cost us any men, but he certainly cost us a loss in what could've been a terrific gain.

Yeah, you would've taken a few numbers that day.

Oh yes, it would've been marvellous, marvellous isn't it, yeah.

21:00 **I mean, I suppose that laughter now is kind of ironic laughter, you know, the success is an unusual success in a sense in that it's you know, it's still human life even though it's enemy human life. Does that occur to you when you're out there surviving in the wilds of Timor?**

It doesn't at the time, no, it's just counted as success, you know.

How did you rate your enemy as far as enemies go?

Well, they had a terrific difference in the

21:30 troops. Seasoned troops and that that were, they used to stick a lot of ones there that had no experience. And this was easily told, you know, you could tell very quickly if they were seasoned troops or not, because they responded pretty good, seasoned troops, they were pretty good. Oh yes, they were not bad.

No match for you guys?

Well, not really I don't think. Their, I don't think their weapons were

22:00 as good as ours, for starters.

What weapons did they have?

Their rifle was a 26 and ours was a 303 so ours was a heavier capacity and far higher velocity, although theirs was fairly high velocity by the wounds that used to go on. But they had a very light machine gun, we used to refer to it as a pistol gun, a burp gun as they referred to them. Used to be much lighter than the

22:30 Tommy of course.

How come you ended up being assigned to the Bren gun?

Oh I only had it because Tom Crouch was, that fellow from up, he was seconded to 5 Section for a while to do a raid on, near Dili with Cardy's 5 Section, B troop. And they took about, they took a sub-section of 9 Section, a Corporal and about six ORs [other ranks] , Jack Carey was one, and he went with them.

23:00 He wasn't too happy with them, either. Their section was commanded by an English, he'd been and English officer and came to Australia. And he was ridgy didge, he didn't speak to the men at all, you know, he treated them as men, they were ORs and that was it. They were totally different in their outlook, British officers. Our blokes all called us by our name and we called ours by his name, you see.

So that went against the grain, did it?

Yes

23:30 it did a bit. Yeah.

Was he a good CO though?

Of the section?

Yeah.

Oh, I suppose he did all right eventually. Lieutenant Cardy.

You mentioned earlier to me that you were, what, one of the youngest and probably the smallest in your section and yet you're laboured with the Bren gun. Why is that?

Oh, probably, well I probably volunteered to take it, I liked the Bren. Always liked the Bren.

24:00 The number two on the Bren while I had it, I had it for about six weeks, was Jimmy Cullen, a big farmer bloke from Kyogle in New South Wales. And we were mates forever more after that, of course, I went to Kyogle two or three times and he came over here.

So you were pretty convincing with the Bren gun, were you?

Oh, I used to like it, yeah. You couldn't miss with it. You know it was a, it was what they called a peep sight, you know, it

24:30 wasn't open sights like a lot of the other old machine guns. It had an aperture and you lined it up with this, like it, way back here of course. And you couldn't miss, actually, it was beautiful. And if you fired a burst you'd know it, even at 200 yards they'd be all in about a six-inch group, you know. It was too accurate, you know.

25:00 **When you're lying in wait for an ambush and you've got your enemy in your sights, what are the last thoughts that you have, race through your mind before you give them a burst?**

Oh, you just hope that more and more will come in the picture, you know, so that you can get more of them sort of thing.

The less standing the better, I suppose. What were your further movements from where we left off in the story?

From

25:30 there when we were at Garema, we got sent back to this place at Mindelo and we operated from there and we burnt the place down while Damien Parer was there. That'd be about the end of September, October.

What did you discuss with Damien Parer, did you have many chats together or?

Oh, I had a couple of talks with him.

Do you remember what you spoke about together?

Not really, yeah, yeah. He was the same, wanted to know if there were any good spots for an ambush and he had pretty heavy camera equipment it was in those

26:00 days. And he didn't want to lose his cameras but if he had to get out in a hurry because, I don't suppose he could replace them or anything. But he was there for about a week or two, up in Timor. Then he went off, he got killed eventually, he had to get killed, he had no chance of surviving, not with his methods.

What were some of the, I don't know, the risks that you saw him take in his coverage of your fighting?

Well he exposed himself

26:30 to the enemy and he didn't make any attempt to try and hide himself. He was quite blatant, you know, they way he'd charge around with all his gear and set it up. And it only wanted one to realise, one of the Japs to realise what he was up to and they'd, could just wait and they could get a sniper onto him, you know. Be no trouble at all. And that's what happened to him eventually.

27:00 **What were your feelings or thoughts when you heard that he had eventually copped it?**

Oh, we thought he would. Yes, he's the fellow that, they took the nose gun out of a Beaufighter and he lay down in there with his camera and did the Coral Sea Battle from the nose of a Beaufighter. And you could see the bursts hitting different people, you know, on board the ships, you know, a big patch of red

come on their shirt, and all that.

27:30 Well he did all that. And the plane come right in and zoom and up again, you know.

I haven't seen that footage.

Marvellous.

What kind of a man was he in person?

He was a devout Catholic, used to get down on his knees and pray every night before he went to sleep and all this caper. We had a few of those with us. Bernard Callinan himself too was a devout Catholic. And

And they would do

28:00 **this practice each night?**

Oh yes, yeah. Yeah, there was another fellow Jack Renahan, he used to do, when the reinforcements came when we went into New Guinea he did the same thing there he was saying his prayers one night and one of the fellows, that was in 3 section he was, Jack Renahan, and he said his prayers and this chap was talking through it. He says, "Look at this bloke here," you know, sort of thing and old Jack took no notice and said all his prayers and when he finished he got up and grabbed the bloke

28:30 by the neck, throat, you know, sort of thing. He said, "If you interrupt me when I'm saying my prayers at night again," he says, "I'll bloody well kill you." So that's the sort of blokes they were, some of them.

Was there ever any other kind of tension amongst the blokes?

Not really, no. No, you get a few of those loud mouths anywhere, I suppose.

What kind of stoushes did you see?

Oh, there weren't

29:00 that many but they used to do, we had a big boxing troop in the company, they had some very good boxers. And when we used to get into a big camp or anything, you know, when we came back to Australia and that, they always used to put up about a dozen fights.

Did you pull on the gloves?

No, no thanks, no, it was too, they were too good.

They were heavy weights, were they?

No, they were all, well, we had some lightweights too. lucky good, yeah, they'd all done, had, the ones that we did have fighting they were well-experienced fighters. Like Ralph Finkelstein, he was the lightweight champion of Western Australia and Poynton was pretty good. Ernie Bingham was the brigade champion of a whole brigade, which was about 3000 men. He was welterweight champion, lovely fellow, Ernie Bingham.

You've mentioned the names of quite a few mates throughout the story, is there, like any other comments you might like to make

30:00 **about a few of them, you know, what kind of men they were and what your memories are of them, moments that you won't ever forget?**

Yes, they were tough then, as you can imagine, most of them. A lot of country fellows amongst them. And one of my very good mates, he came from Scotland, Alec Stewart, he was my immediate corporal in, he was killed in New Guinea. And he

30:30 and I were the forward scouts that day, it was a big patrol that was out. And we were both pretty experienced forward scouts. And we went right up this place, we'd been gone about, it was the longest patrol that the company did in New Guinea. I think we were out 24 or 28 days, one of the two. And we were on emergency rations most of the time and about, we'd been out about a week and we crossed this, quite a big river, a place called Jappa, it was known

31:00 as the Jappa Patrol, that one eventually, J A double P A, Jappa. And we got across the river and Alec and I were still forward scouts at that stage and used to leapfrog over sometimes. And we went across there and we thought, there was two or three big tracks and we says, "Well which one is the track to take," you know, and Alec says, "We don't have to look any further, here's their foot marks." And the water was still running into them, that's how close we were. So they must've watched us cross the river and then

31:30 we signalled them over and we signalled there were Japs there, you know, and we went on up the track about 50 yards and I was rolling a cigarette and I said to Alec, "You got a light, mate?" and he says, and he started to get it out and he said, "Oh here, take them," and he took another couple of puffs like this, and he took another couple of steps and the machine gun opened up on him and I could hear the bullets slapping him like a person getting slapped, bang, bang, bang like this, you know. Just as though they were going like that, and it was the bullets hitting him. And he went down on his

32:00 knees and he got up again, and he was, started firing his Owen gun because we had Owens at that stage. But they were on my side of the track, it was a fairly wide track, it was nearly as wide as this, not quite as wide as this room I suppose but it was, you could've driven a Jeep up it. And they were on my side of the track and they fired straight across, they must've been only about, oh, seven or eight feet away from us, I suppose. Because the noise seemed to come right up out of the ground at you. And

32:30 they didn't see me, probably, because I was too close on this side and they couldn't have been on the other side because the ground fell away.

So you were within arm's reach of him?

Yes, yes. And so they must've fired across in front of me, got him. But he had a terrible lot of holes in him when we got to him. They drove us back for a while because the machine gun fired drove us back. Must've been a fairly

33:00 light, heavy, light machine gun there.

Were you able to bring him back with you?

Yeah, no, we buried him there.

Once the firing had ceased.

Yeah, oh, we pushed on past then, we advanced. There were 68 blokes behind us so we had a fair back up of 68 on that patrol. That's where it was a mistake, it was a big patrol. I never did like a

33:30 lot of men on a patrol, it was dangerous.

What, too many men too close together?

Well they can follow you, they can know you're there, that's the thing. And when you get into enemy territory it's them watching you instead of, the boot's on the other foot sort of thing, you know. Which it was nearly always in New Guinea.

What was the outcome of that contact, did you end up cleaning the Japs off?

No, we walked into another

34:00 trap further up the next day. We didn't, we advanced up the track and then we came back and we advanced up and buried Alec within about half an hour of the first engagement. And then we came back to, through the river and camped there for the night and then pushed on the next day. And the next day, we were forward scouts by that time, 9 section was back in the paddock a bit. And we went through an area and

34:30 we thought, "Gee, this is lucky, we went through some barbed wire," you know, there was a track and it went through some barbed wire just near a river where there was, a small river, just running. And they were saying, "Gee that's lucky, that wire's not crossed there, they've opened it up." Well they opened it up to let us through, which we found out afterwards. And after we crossed the creek we went up again and they were waiting for us at the top. They opened up as soon as we got near the top, the ridge. So back we went again down

35:00 to try and get back and up the other hill. We got down there and the barbed wire's closed, all the barbed wire's closed up. And sure enough they were there with machine guns, so we were bottled in there.

So they'd corralled you up.

Yes.

What was the outcome of that?

Well there was, we had some chaps in the river by the time the machine guns opened up from the barbwire. One of them you may be interviewing, Ray Parry.

Right.

I don't know,

35:30 oh, you'll probably see him.

Has he discussed the archive with you or?

No, but I think he's our president at the moment so probably they'd have his name down I would say. He's one of the most highly decorated Australians and yet you wouldn't think he had anything and because

Very modest is he?

Yeah, very modest fellow, yeah. He's the one that's younger than me.

Right, okay.

And this was in New Guinea at that stage and Ray stood up, I remember him that day, he got

36:00 an MID [Mentioned in Despatches] that night. It was getting nearly dark by the time they pushed us back to the river, and he was standing in the water firing, I remember that, you know, with his Owen gun and he was down below me. And there was another fellow, Kiwi Harrison, a complete madman and he clawed his way up through the rocks and he was, he helped himself up the rocks with one hand and he's firing his Owen gun in the other like this, you know, as though it was a spray gun. And neither of them were hit. But

36:30 Ray Parry got the MID that night, I think. And he went on, he was one of those fellows that loved that type of fighting and he went on and went to Korea then straight after this lot. And he did well there in that fight against the Chinese, did extremely well.

So he managed to squeeze in Timor, New Guinea and Korea?

Yeah, and New Britain. We all went to the three and then he went onto the fourth one,

37:00 to Korea.

Right. Well, we should probably back track at this point to the closing stages of the time you spent in Timor.

Oh yes, Mindelo. They issued orders that, that Maubesse that we'd been opiping close by in Mindelo, they wanted it burnt down. So the barracks were built of, they had a big thatched roof, all the rooves are thatched

37:30 there. And they gave us eight gallons of petrol to pour on the place and burn it down as soon as there was a chance for the troops got out of there, you know. So we had this four-gallon, two four gallon drums they were, on a pole with Timors carting them and we took off for Maubesse under a chap by the name of Sergeant Smith. And mainly all C troop

38:00 and there must've been about 15 or 16 of us I suppose, and the idea was to burn it down. And we got close in and they said the Japs had left, well we opipped and we knew they were leaving. They'd left. But during the night they came back again and we didn't know, about a couple of hundred of them came back to the barracks during the night, about a couple of hundred of them. And a chap by the name of Warwick Crossing

38:30 he and I were both from 9 section and we bowled down there to the back of the barracks to look for a suitable place. Smithy asked us to find a suitable place to set alight to the joint and burn it down. And so we went around to the back, and I was, he was ahead of me, Ray, this fellow, not Ray then, it was Warwick Crossing. He was down the end and he goes like this to me to get down and so I dropped down and I crawled over to where he was behind some bushes. And it was a bit, pretty open there,

39:00 because it was through the open, and he gave me a dig in the ribs and he pointed like this and they're about eight or nine feet away with all these blinking military boots walking up and down. I could see them through the gap in the bushes there. And they were there, and they were like ants, they were everywhere, there was Japs everywhere. So we had to let them know back there that there were Japs, but they knew in the meantime and they left us there. We had to stay all day, we couldn't move after that, it was only this little clump of bushes.

39:30 And we stayed in there, until we thought, "We'll have to wait until dark and get out then." And we did, we had to wait until dark that night. But we were there for about six hours I suppose, and we pulled out of there, so it didn't eventuate. There was no chance of burning it down.

So what was to follow?

We still hung onto the petrol, but to my knowledge it was never burnt down.

40:00 But we had an opip on Maubesse all the time, half way to Mindelo and there was a lot of open country there. And every morning there was a couple of Jap officers, we knew they were officers because they all used to wear a leather belt, something similar to our tan brown, officers, and they had a big satchel, leather satchel strapped to their leg. And they used to come down every morning and they knew we had the opip there because they used to look straight at us, you know, we could see them with the

40:30 glasses on us. And they looked straight in our direction but we never did anything about it. And then Tom Crouch, that's the same fellow, Manjimup bloke, he said, "I reckon I can get those two blokes with a Bren." And they were about 600 yards away, that's how accurate the Bren is. And he says, "I reckon I can get him," and Lou Nicholson, the fellow from Tasmania says, "Well, if you miss them," he says, "I'll get them and we'll stop them doing this caper." And he went, there was a bit of a mountain on one side there, and he went up there and around the back and

41:00 he stayed up there with a sniper's rifle which is pretty good at seven or eight hundred yards. And, but he didn't have to because the next morning we went up there and there was a couple of us, Tom Crouch and, Tom sighted them up and they came down, they said, "Came down a bit further this morning." They came over their saddle at Maubesse and down into the open part, up he gets with the glasses again and Tom opened up with the Bren. And they weren't standing together, we were hoping they

would be fairly close together to get them both in the one burst, so he knew he'd have to

41:30 be pretty quick. And he got there, that officer with the glasses, he, we could see him crumple and go down onto his knees, and fall over on his side, and he got a good burst that fellow apparently because the .303 it fires, the Bren. And the other chap was coming, moved down towards him and moved back and Tom fired again and got him too. So he got both of them, they both lay there for a long time, we watched them for about an hour but they never moved. But that night a big patrol came down and we were on a blind spur where we had our

42:00 little camp with...

Tape 6

00:30 **Right, so you were just telling us about that camp down the little blind spur?**

Oh yes. Well they, a fair size patrol by the sound of the voices and all that going down and we had two men on the, we used to have a couple of blokes on guard where the main track went past and we were on the blind spur this way, where we used to sleep and camp. And they went right up to them and the two lads that were opipping came back to where we were because we'd have to have a go from there, we thought, on the

01:00 level ground. But it was as black as a boot that night, thank goodness. But there was a big precipice behind, when the race to get down. But anyway, Bill Curtis took the risk and he's a lad from New South Wales, Lismore I think he was, and there he went down that in the dark. We thought, "Well, he's gone, he's had it," because there was some drops there about 40 feet. And anyway, he turned up a couple of days later all scratched and cut and bruised and he was still

01:30 alive. He took the back way out. We thought, "We'll fight it out on the little bit of flat here." But it never eventuated because it got dark that night and they, after about three or four hours we knew they were leaving, so they left.

So you were kind of cornered there?

Oh yes. They didn't know what was going on. The Japs couldn't have known the area, otherwise they'd have kept coming.

What kind of little camp did you have set up there?

Oh, nothing much, just a few banana leaves,

02:00 that was all just to keep you, in case of a sudden shower and that. Because the rains were just starting at that stage, that was getting around about November by that stage. Because that's where we had to walk down to the boats from, Mindelo. We were the furthest troops out.

Did you ever light fires?

Yes, yeah, we lit fires. They wouldn't know the difference from native fires, I suppose, there were that many native fires and that round the hills at night,

02:30 it was pretty safe.

I was asking you earlier, Henry, about different, I mean you've been very good with names and places and asked you about a few of the names and you mentioned you knew Doc Wheatley or something?

Yes. Yeah, Doc and that Scotty Taylor that was organising us, Doc would've been in on that ambush too if it had come to a head that day. And Scotty Taylor was his corporal. Scotty and Doc and

03:00 Andy Smeaton and Jack Sheehan, four of them from 8 Section, they stayed a similar one on the road coming up from Three Spurs. They got right back to where we were at camp, and the trucks were coming up there then, and they got a couple of trucks. And they, and Doc calmly shot them all from the back of the, that were in the back of the truck. And they used to have a machine gun on tripods in the back of the trucks, and while they were trying to

03:30 get it mounted and every time two or three would take over, old Doc would ping them off, you see. Because he had the P14 which is a sniper's rifle.

Can you describe the P14?

Yes, it's a bigger, it's got a longer barrel than an ordinary .303. It fires a .303 but a Mark 8 ammunition. It's point blank at 400 yards instead of 200. It's a higher velocity, it's got a special barrel to stand the

04:00 terrific velocity and you can imagine the stopping power is greater. That means it doesn't deviate in 400 yards, you know, there's no go or come. But after that you've got to raise, alter your sights to counteract, because the bullet starts to come lower, you know, drop.

And sorry, was it single firing?

Oh yes, bolt firing, bolt action. The same as a Landfield rifle.

Because I

04:30 **did read some notes about Doc and it mentioned he had a reputation as a bit of a sniper.**

Yeah, and Scotty Taylor had the Bren that day too. And he was a very good. He got a stoppage that day, a stoppage in the Bren and he pulled it down and put it together again all in about a minute and started firing again. So they were pretty

Didn't waste their time

Yea, seasoned troops. No. And Andrew Smeaton he was a Scottish lad that had come out here with the

05:00 Barnardo Boys, you know, the orphan boys. Well, we had quite a lot of those with us, Fairbridge Farm boys and Barnardo Boys, they were called.

Why?

They were orphans and they were sent out here with the Kinsley Fairbridge Farm Scheme. We had a quite a lot of those. But Don R that was shot off the bike going into Dili that morning, he was another one. He was a champion dirt track rider in Western Australia, well known. Alexander his surname, and, but

05:30 Andy Smeaton he was a Scotch laddie and he was killed eventually. And he used to stick his neck out a fair bit too, so.

What was the name of the chap that we were talking about earlier when we had a cuppa, you mentioned that he was put in the flying squad and survived, because I've read about him?

Keith Hayes? Oh yes, he was, he might've been in the Double Reds was it? He gets quite a mention in Archie Campbell's book.

06:00 **And you were pretty close to him?**

Yes, yeah.

And he's told you about his story?

Only that much that he can't recall the other, you know, after he was hit he can't recall anything for four, five months.

How was he taken care of when he escaped from the firing squad?

He went back to Doctor Dunkley, we got him eventually to Doctor Dunkley, he was a Fremantle surgeon before the war,

06:30 very good doctor, he'd been in the First World War, he was a great fellow. And he had some nasty wounds there, was one chap, Alan Hollows from B troop had his lower jaw completely shot away and his tongue was hanging in mid-air. And the rest was gone. And the Doc, he cut a, one of those little milk tins with a shape cutter, cut it to shape, used to jam it up under there and pour buffalo milk here, it used to run down his throat. Used to

07:00 jam it under here where all the jaw was gone. And he used to pulverise this stuff like, oh, arrowroot it is actually I think, and crumble that up in buffalo milk and pour that into him, things like that. And about every couple of weeks, he knew that one day, if we got him back he'd be able to have surgery, you know. The two hinges of the jaw, the lower jaw were still left there, so it was shot off below the hinges. And he used to scrape

07:30 them about every fortnight, and he said they had to sit on poor old Alan Hollows. He only died a couple of months ago, Alan Hollows, this fellow. And they built him a new jaw from his ribs, the floating ribs here and they joined them on, you know, they grew onto there and around here and they shaped it into a jaw and he even used to smoke a pipe at the finish, in latter years obviously. He married a, I think the nurse that looked after him, he was in hospital for about three years.

08:00 And the Doc had them to look after all the time, and as soon as they could get them out, they got them out, you know. Some got out by Catalina flying boat, but the Caroo took a lot out, I think Keith Hayes went out on the Caroo, which was the little lighthouse cutter.

They're all incredible stories of survival.

Yes, they used to, did I tell you about the chap that used to take the Caroo?

08:30 He finished up Geraldton harbour master and he used to lie on his back and watch the sticks of bombs coming down and he used to say, "Hard left," or, "Hard right." "Hard left," and they'd drop these stick of bombs. One, he wouldn't call out until he saw them coming down, which direction they were coming. If they were coming right on him, and sometimes they used to try and anticipate their movement, you

see, and a bit to the left and he'd just head across to the right.

09:00 And they used to put up, sometimes they had 50 or 60 attacks on the way over. Amazing, and yet they come back the next week for a bit more.

Quite unbelievable.

Yes, it is. One day they were doing that, they mentioned there in the newspaper cutting, that all the ship's bells, you know the ship's bells, they had them on the, and the stick of bombs were landing that close that all the bells rang, you see. He said, "Oh,

09:30 [Hideki] Tojo [Japanese Prime Minister] rang the bell, give the man a cigar," he says, this bloke. So they're pretty lackadaisical, the fellows.

Sound like real characters.

Yeah.

So how did you see out your last days on Timor?

At the opip at Mindelo, the orders came to move, and we had to move at night. So the Japs wouldn't know we pulled out and the 9 section of the 2/4th Independent Company had taken over our place.

10:00 They'd been with us a few days at that stage and they knew our every move and they replaced all our little machine gun posts and all this. And we moved off about midnight, but I was only allowed to take one Creado because the less that were noticeable the better because they were viewing us from the air all the time, too, they had Zeros that used to go ahead of all the, and that made it extra hard at the finish too. They used to watch our every move in daylight along the tracks or

10:30 anything, the Zeros.

Was there any strafing?

They never did strafe much, no, because they were there purely to report, I think. They could've done, we could've shot a couple of them down at times, I think, they were that close.

Were you ever tempted to?

Oh yes. The opip in Maubesse I was.

Did you open fire on any Zeros yourself?

No, no, and yet they were sitting there, they had those old leather hats in those days, you know the ones that pull over like the old fashioned motor bike fellows? And he knew we were there, that bloke, Vince Swan and I were

11:00 manning the opip that day. And he circled round and came back and had another look and I said to Vince, "By gee, we ought to give him," because we only had to fire in front of him, I reckon they'd just drive straight into it with a Tommy gun. See at 900, be a continual stream of lead going through. You'd get them, I'm sure, but old Vince said, "Oh no, no," he said, "we've got orders not to do that sort of thing," so…

Would've been a nice kill if you had.

It would've been marvellous, wouldn't it? Yeah, I'm sure we could've done it.

11:30 I did that with, when I shot a big reindeer one day down on the south coast when we were coming back from one of the trips down to the south coast, when we went down to Castlemaine that time. We were coming back and he was going about 90 mile an hour this fellow, and that's all I did. He went past a patch of bamboo and I got him in front of the, and I just held my finger on the trigger. And there was, he just ran in to the stream, he got four on the way through, that's how fast they are, behind one another and he was going full bat.

12:00 The poor fellow, nearly cried when he looked up at me, those big eyes, you know. But he was good meat, we kept the meat.

You'd have been able to clean him up and butcher him and

Yeah, it was good. He had antlers too.

Did you trophy them?

He was going full boar, yeah, should've mounted them, brought them home, shouldn't I?

That would've been a bit too, a bit too much to care for or carry I suppose.

Yeah. Yeah.

12:30 **Were you there when the first ship that came to rescue you ran aground?**

The Voyager?

Yeah.

Oh, there was other ships there a long time before that. But that was bringing the reinforcements in. And because it had all the reinforcements on is the reason it ran aground, because the, he came in and he got side on and by that time there were a lot of chaps gone down into the boats to come ashore

13:00 and I've written, I've read several accounts of it. It's in writing there of the Voyager. And I've read the account of the naval inquiry in all of those. And what happened, they all had the same story, he was a new officer on board, but he thought of the men in the boats before the ship, you see. Now even chap, the fellows in the boats he would've killed about 48, I suppose of the 2/4th Independent Company.

13:30 They'd have been sucked under if he started the screws if he'd have started the main screws up. But they were all on that side of the ship and all around where these screws were and they were in these smaller boats. And they were waiting to come ashore and he wouldn't give the order to start the motor, because they'd have been, the officer in charge of this lot there, he was a captain, he said he knows what he should've done, he said he should've ignored it. He said he was quite prepared to go because he realised they were standing in the way of a very valuable ship

14:00 but he didn't. And of course, it just kept on coming and coming. Now there were very big waves on the back beach and he got side onto them and deposited him right up on the beach eventually. But he had 270 men to drop off.

They all landed safely.

They all landed safely, never lost a man and, but he lost the ship.

And gave away position, too.

That's right, yeah. It was very costly at the finish.

14:30 **So how were his actions eventually looked upon?**

Dereliction of duty, I think it was.

I think your mike's disappearing again, Henry if you could just. So had you left the island before the,

15:00 **sorry, what was the name, the Victoria? No.**

What the ship?

Yeah.

The Voyager?

The Voyager, yeah.

No, it was the Voyager number one.

I was just going to say, there's just too many names to remember.

They had a bit of trouble with the other Voyager too didn't they, the next one.

Yes.

But this is the Voyager that did all the shuttle service in the Mediterranean, on Tobruk and all that.

Had you left before she ran aground?

Oh no, no, I was still there well and truly.

Okay.

And that's how I came to meet Damien Parer, I think he came over on it too, pretty sure.

Right, okay.

15:30 **So what was happening?**

I was still at Mindelo, I went back to Mindelo after the Voyager incident.

So you were there on the shore to see that incident?

No, no, I never saw it, no, no, we were way inland at, we were at Garema, actually at that time when they came ashore, we heard they'd come up. And the Timorese were coming up smoking Craven As and all this from the ship, see, they unloaded the hull of the ship. They

16:00 unloaded it madly and then blew it up. And the bombers came over the next morning and got stuck into it, and all the sailors were taken off by two other destroyers.

And you said there'd been a number of vessels arrive there before the Voyager?

Oh yes, yep, Corvettes even. [HMAS] Castlemaine, a few of those.

What had they been doing, delivering supplies?

And the [HMAS] Warrnambool, yep. Yeah, they used to bring the supplies.

16:30 **What was the bit of coast like there?**

It was a bit of sandy beach there, very open. The day that I went down, with horses from Mindelo, we had about 50 or 60 Timor ponies to load up, they came in about four o'clock in the afternoon. I couldn't believe it, because they were supposed to be in just after dark. And we were there and we didn't even have to light any fires to guide them in, you see. And they had the fires always ready there, you know, set alight to it so they'd

17:00 glow in the dark. And this afternoon we were lagging away, we were still halfway to the beach, about three or four mile back, and here's this ship out in the bay as clear as anything. I just couldn't believe it, they sailed right in. It must've been a new captain on that or something. Lieutenant Commanders, I think were on those. And anyway, by the time we got down there it was another hour by the time we got all the horses down, and they were unloading in broad daylight. I was

17:30 petrified, I thought, "Crikey, any minute they're going to cop one," a bomb, you know. But luckily the Diner as they, the ship, the planes that used to come over, opipping, they used to call them Diners because of the two motors or something in them. And they didn't show up that afternoon, thank goodness, and we got them all unloaded and we, they, at that time they were giving us a lot of silver

18:00 money to give to the natives, you know, to try and buy them off before the Dutch bought them all.

Pay your IOU.

Yes, oh, but that wouldn't go anywhere near it. But they preferred silver to notes money, so they put a couple of big burly sailors, we used to get them to tie the two bags together on the ready and they'd put it over the back of the horse. Well this was the bloke, I had the horse in pozzie and down he went on his knees with the weight of it. Because when it's in the water, the money, we used to take them

18:30 into the water a bit to make it easier to take it out of the boat, they're sort of suspended a bit, you know, in the water, the water was taking the weight a bit. But as soon as the poor little fellow got up out of it, he went down on his knees, it was too heavy. We had to mess about and split the load then so that it could be carried on the horse. They were all two bobs, I think in that one, so it was pretty weighty.

What kind of boats were the loads being brought to the beach on?

They're a collapsible boat, I think they're canvas and slats of wood

19:00 and they rowed them, you know, rowing boat type.

What size were they?

They'd have a couple of hundred yards, they were about eight or nine footers. They weren't very big.

And they'd take the stuff in from the

Yes, the corvette used to come in fairly close.

How far in could the corvette get there?

Get within a couple of hundred yards.

What was the name of this position?

19:30 At Betano.

Betano.

Yep.

Was there any kind of a palm grove along the beach there or?

It was more bush and that, scrub, because it was pretty uninhabited there.

So it sounds like a fairly exposed.

It was, it was very exposed. Yep.

So you wouldn't have been able to conceal men or dumps of

No. There were saltys around there too, salt water crocs [crocodiles] . And, in that area,

20:00 and I thought of that the night that we left. But that was further up towards the Qwaylin River, but we left in the dark it was about midnight the time they got in.

Can I just ask you, what kind of a set up they had on the beach there? I mean, they're dumping lots of not silage, but supplies and

There was no shed or any indication there was anything there. Nothing. There was nothing there at all.

20:30 The nearest village was a place called Fatocork and anything that was over was brought back to Fatocork. Nothing was ever left on the beach because the patrols used to go up and down, you know, the Jap patrols.

So most of the unloading would've been done, you would expect, at night?

Yes it was, yeah. There'd be always a party there in the morning, to clean up that beach, you know, to make sure there was not a thing showing, nothing left.

So it looked undisturbed.

Because they had patrols up and down there.

21:00 **Until the Voyager got beached.**

That's right. Then they put a standing patrol there, made a camp there. We could see their fires the night we got off, you know. And there was fires on the other side too so we got off between two lots of standing patrols of Japs.

Standing patrols of Japs? The Japs put the patrols on.

Oh yeah, they had the standing patrols on, yep, they didn't leave it unguarded again.

How far

21:30 **apart were they?**

Oh, they'd be two or three miles apart those two, and I suppose they'd join up in the middle, have a look at each other.

And you slipped out right between them. That sounds risky.

Well they had the three fires lit. I didn't know much about it because we were about the last to get there. And we left at midnight our orders were, and we just about caught headquarters by lunchtime the next day, we never stopped walking, once we got going. And we started at midday,

22:00 it was the wet season by then, December the 15th or 16th and it rained all the time. And I was only allowed to take the one Creado and the other one stacked on a hell of a show, young Molairy. I took Munlaylow because he could carry more, he was a stronger boy. And we headed off and, at midnight, and we stopped in the morning

How many of you left that night?

for a breather. Be about

22:30 oh, about 14 of us by then I think. Left from Mindelo and we caught up with headquarters, C troop headquarters by about midday the next day. And we walked all that day, non-stop from then on until 10 o'clock at night time, so just about a 24 hour march, forced march. Up and down these mountains. And we got there and, I can't remember about

23:00 the last, oh, you put your mind in neutral and just your legs do the work.

Are you fiddling with some coin in your pocket?

Am I?

Yeah, have you got coins in your pocket?

There should be some up in there, yes. Can you hear that?

Yeah, we can hear that.

Goodness me, at least they'll know I'm not broke.

Got a couple of coins to rattle together. So

23:30 **did all of the fellows take their Creados with them?**

Down to the beach, yep. I'm sure they thought they were coming ashore with us too. It was terribly sad.

How did you say farewell?

Oh, it was a very quick farewell. I gave Munlaylow everything I had and,

What were you able to give him?

I gave him my wristwatch, things like that. I was one of the few to have a wristwatch.

24:00 And I gave him all the stuff I had and all the money I had and everything like that.

Do you remember what make your watch was?

No, it was one of the well known ones at that time. But my mother sent it over to me, something went wrong with it and I sent it back from Katherine River and it caught, it didn't catch me up for a long time, it was landed at Kupang of course

24:30 because nothing came to Dili. And then the Japs arrived in the meantime and all our parcels, it was in my Christmas parcel. And a big sergeant bloke from the 2/40th Battalion he got through to us eventually and I had heard word that he was looking for a bloke by the name of Sproxton because he had his watch. And Max had opened my Christmas parcel, liff off, you see, because they knew it would never get through to us, he said, "If there's a bloke by the name of Sproxton still alive,

25:00 I've got his wristwatch here." So anyhow, I eventually met up with him, he said, "I'm sorry to meet you mate," and he gave it to me, because they used to use it for guard, you see. And

So he was reluctant to hand it over

Yeah, he handed it over, but how he knew my name and what's-a-name, he had the parcel but my name and number were on the, written on the back of it, WX11950, service Sproxton.

What happened to that watch?

That's the one I gave Munlaylow.

25:30 **So during the whole, well, apart from the time that you were isolated without wireless contact, you receiving much mail from home?**

Well they didn't write at all for months and, because we were reported missing in about early May, said we'd been reported missing from February the 19th. And that's when Mum said Dad was pretty cut

26:00 up, you know. And he said that he wished he'd never signed it, you know.

They thought they'd lost you.

Yeah. Well some of them were even reported missing believed killed, I think Jim Smales was that one, he was one of our troop. Bu they should never have been reported believed killed because they did a lot, but they had to be pretty sure of it first. But mine, I'm pretty sure mine was only missing, missing in action they call it.

26:30 **There's been a lot said about the silence while you were on the island and the fact that, you know, being presumed**

Yes, because they used to put out the news, you see, the Japs at night time, they had Radio Saigon and they used to, there was a Tokyo Rose that used to broadcast it, she could speak English very good and she used to read the news things for them. She said, "The Japanese have taken Dili, they've taken the garrison there

27:00 and they're just now mopping up in the hills," and it sounded as though the whole mob was gone, you know. They knew I was there because I sent them some Timorese money, my Dad, and how on earth that got through the censor bloke, I don't know.

How did you feel once radio contact was re-established and you surprised the outside world, you could say?

Yes, yes, well I was a bit more contented but I still never thought I'd get off the island,

27:30 never gave it a thought. Never thought we'd have a hope in hell, sort of thing.

Must've felt a sense of defiance, though, because you defied belief that you'd all gone.

Yes. But it was still a feeling of unbelief even when we got on the boat that night.

Just before we continue from that point, you said you spent some, a Christmas on the island?

Yeah, the first Christmas, yep.

How did you spend Christmas Day?

28:00 We went out for a route march and then when we came back, the cooks hadn't done any cooking of course, they, what used to amuse us, they handed a tin of bully [beef] and we got, they opened a tin of peaches for seven men that day. A tin of bully to three and a packet of biscuits to four. Now, how are you going to split that, that's what used to annoy us. That's, that was the cooks great deed for the day.

28:30 So they weren't held in high regard at all the cooks that we took with us there, yeah.

And what about your birthday?

On February the 8th? That must've happened at Three Spurs, that went without recognition.

Did you keep track of the date, daily?

Oh, roughly, never knew the exact date, probably.

So your birthday would've just past you by, really.

Yeah, roughly, yep.

29:00 **Not something that you spoke of amongst**

No, I turned 19 then.

So you were still underage weren't you?

An old man then.

So what's going through your mind when you're on the boat and you're leaving?

Well still a feeling of unbelief and well the, they said we could be first on board because we just arrived at the beach. And thank goodness, there were millions of sand flies there near the

29:30 Qwaylin River. And they came in with these boats, they were a little bit bigger than the ones they used to bring from the Corvettes, being a destroyer and the, we could hear this noise coming and it was the Dutch navy rowing, you know. And they had a bloke, must've had about three blokes in the thing and they were rowing away and they used to say, "Eek, eek," that was the word to keep time, apparently, eek, and I can still remember him saying, "Eek,

30:00 eek," you know to dip. And they came and the first boat we got in and then there was a wave just popped up, a four footer and down she went straight to the bottom, the one I was in. So I took about three strokes and came in to the, alongside the one that was rowing in next to it, see. I didn't waste much time because they told us not to waste any time. We didn't need to be told, I can tell you. But we got to the destroyer, and they had all onion nets down the side, you know the onion nets they drop down? We clawed our way up

30:30 that because I still had my Tommy gun, we were told to take all automatic weapons with us. And Tom Crouch was ahead of me, he's going up there and the net's swinging his blinking Bren and it bounced off the top of my head but didn't worry me, so, and there was a couple of big sailors up top to pull us, you know they have a spar rail around with sort of oars are in there. Whipped us onto the deck and took us below immediately, you know.

Wouldn't be easy climbing up those onion nets would it?

No it isn't, because your blinking toes hit the sides of the boat.

31:00 And you can't get your foot in far enough and you slip and slide but can still go up pretty easy, you know.

I wouldn't be surprised if a few fellows slipped off into the drink [water] .

No, I don't think they did. But Vince Swan, he was in our crowd, he's the chap from Salmon Gums now, he's about 87, Vince. But he got his shoulder dislocated that day, he was in shocking pain. As the Dutchies are grabbing us and throwing us over the board, you know, they're working as fast as they could because they wanted to get going, and

31:30 must've grabbed Vince's arm, you know, and kept pulling and he must've been hooked up somewhere, might've been his Tommy gun hooking him up. And anyway, they pulled his arm clean out of its socket. And he never ever recovered, they made a shocking mess of him. And he went down to the ship's infirmary straight away.

That was bloody unlucky.

Yeah. So, but we were in the mess decks down below, we were crammed in there. Not enough room to sit down,

32:00 sort of stand in there. But I still get claustrophobic now and I think that was the cause of it because I never used to be claustrophobic. But I used to catch a bus or something to Bayswater after that and it was, it happened fairly quickly and as soon as people started to fill in, fill up the corridor, you know, I'm looking around for a place to get out and I'd have to get out and I'd walk the rest of the way home. And even after I was married, my wife used to go with me, I said, "I'll have to get out," and I'd just up and get out

32:30 and walk home. I couldn't stand it.

So how long were you in this mess for?

In the mess deck?

Yeah.

Oh, we were down there for about 12 hours and then they let us up for air on back, on board. We sailed about two o'clock in the morning, apparently, from the beach at Dili. At Qwaylin River up from Betano. And we got into, just getting dark and we got into Darwin.

33:00 **What was that feeling like?**

Oh, still the same, misbelief and that.

What was, I don't know about going through your mind, but what were you saying to one another?

Oh, we just, we saw the devastation there and we said, most of us, they said, "Hope they got them blinking wharfies with that one," you know, because the wharf was busted in half, big concrete wharf there, and she was blown in half from the, when

33:30 the Japs came over, see they had 250 bombers in the first lot. And it was pretty knocked about, Darwin, terribly knocked about.

What did you see in Darwin of the destruction?

In Darwin itself, nothing much, we went straight into the back of closed trucks, down to camp at Winnellie, I think it was. And they had a spread out there for us, food, you know. And

What was on the spread?

Oh, there was cakes and things that we couldn't eat. And some people would start eating them and be

34:00 vomiting madly immediately. We couldn't eat anything because we had nothing like that, all our stomachs had shrunk.

It was just too rich.

Everybody, or not everybody, but I suppose 90% of them still had dysentery badly and getting malaria attacks and there was a chap wrote in a book there once that all you could see in the train coming down after we, they sent us down to Larrimah, away from Darwin

34:30 because they were still bombing Darwin about a, everyday nearly, twice a week or something. And so they sent us out of there down to the railhead at Larrimah.

What, how were you sent down there?

By cattle trucks again.

How far away is Larrimah?

They only had cattle trucks, they had no passenger rail up there in those days, you see. Oh, it was a fair way, about 300 miles I suppose, to Larrimah.

What was the countryside like around there?

35:00 A bit sparse, it hasn't got the timber that we've got down south. And but he said on the way down all you could see was bare bottoms sticking out through the slats on the thing, people going to the toilets down the sides with dysentery and that. He said the whole side of the train was covered in it.

That's an image that'll stay in your mind.

Yeah, pretty primitive isn't it?

The countryside must've looked a lot better than Timor.

Not

35:30 really, no, Timor was prettier country, as a view, you know. But oh, it did, it was safe, you know at least you wouldn't be on guard about, all those hours a night, you know.

Did you feel a, you know, a relief, sense of relief coming over you?

Oh goodness, yes, a terrific sense of relief. Unbelievable. At night-time knowing you could sleep and wake up in the morning.

What were your sleeping patterns like when you were in Timor, did you sleep well?

Not really, no,

36:00 like a cat on a hot tin roof sort of thing.

One eye open?

Yes, and you do sleep with one eye open too, there's no doubt about that.

So how long were you in Larrimah?

I finished up a lot longer than most because I had malaria, I had two different sorts of malaria that I found out in Darwin and, MT [malignant tertian] and BT [benign tertian] , malignant type and bacterial type. And

36:30 I finished the course and I was down to go with the first group leaving,

Is that a medication course?

Yeah, of quinine, about fourteen days on it and I was due to leave and they gave us a prick in the finger to try all the blood, yeah, they used to just examine all the blood, we all had to line up at the doctor's there. And I threw a positive. They called out about three names out of a whole heap and report to the what's-a-name

37:00 and the doc says, "You'll have to do another course." And they were leaving in the morning, see.

How difficult was that for you to accept you weren't leaving with them?

Not too good, but there were quite a, there were about a dozen right through the whole company left behind. And

Anyone that you were particularly close to? Any from your section?

Billy, no, Billy Epps from the sappers was left behind. I got to know him pretty well afterwards, and from then on I got to know him pretty well. And he was a sapper sergeant, Bill,

37:30 and we got pretty good mates eventually and there were so few of us left that we went, the doc had to stay too. And we were going crook about it, and he says, "Well," he says, "I can go crook too," he says, "there's nothing wrong with me and I've got to stop here too," the old Doc Dunkley said. And one chap had brought a monkey back with him, a Sid Jones this fellow's name was, from the other end, he was a 2/40th fellow that joined up with us. And he brought this little monkey, one

38:00 of the tiny little fellows like a Rhesus monkey, you know. And he was a swine of a thing. He used to, we used to hang your washing out and he'd come along and swing on it and pull it into the red dirt and all this caper, you know. And he, it got through to the doctor's office one morning and tore up all these, the paperwork and stuff that the doc had prepared. And he actually had his old 45 out, he was going to shot it and Sid Jones raced in, he said, "Don't shoot it." And he says

38:30 "If it comes in here again I will, I'll shoot it," old Doc Dunkley says. And it came down and they must've warned them on the train, this later on but we all got on a truck each, one in the cab of the empty trucks going back, because they were carting everything up to Darwin, at that stage, there was nothing to go back except the troops. But we didn't even have to sit in the back of trucks, we got a front seat in the cab, there were so few of us. And there was a convoy of about 20 trucks going back, big semi trailers,

39:00 and we got a cab seat. So it was good, it was a four-day trip, so, but we went a different way to what we come up too. We branched off the highway and headed for Camooweal, you've heard of Camooweal, I suppose?

It sounds familiar.

Yeah, Dusty, what's-a-name, Slim Dusty used to sing a song about Camooweal, 'If I ever go back to Camooweal', that song he sings.

Oh okay.

And it's on the, it's the nearest one to the,

39:30 little town to the border at Queensland and Northern Territory. And we went through that way and then down to Mount Isa on the roughed roads and picked up a train at Mount Isa. And we got on the train there and they must've reported that this, there was a mob of provos [Provosts – Military Police] waiting at, Duchess was the next town down from Mount Isa, biggish town. And they were looking for a donkey.

40:00 See, somebody put a D instead of an M on the dit da when they sent the Morse code message through, "Man coming down with a donkey." And it was a monkey, you see. And they came to the doc, the doc was in charge of us and he said, "We're looking for a man with a donkey." And he says, "Where do you reckon he'd have him here?" you know, I can still hear the old Doc saying "Where do you think he is here?" He said, "Oh, they're not very big, mate," he said, this bloke, one of the provos, you know. They've got this horse float with them, you see.

40:30 Anyhow it was poor old Pincher, and they took him off. And old Sid Jones was crying, he used to treat him like a baby, he'd had him for a year, you see.

So he called this monkey Pincher.

Pincher, that's him, Pincher the monkey.

That's classic. Okay, I'll just ask you, what was at Larrimah? What kind of shelters and,

Oh, tents there, tents.

Any more permanent structures?

Oh

41:00 yes, there were a few, the mess hall was permanent I think, iron roof place.

And what about the first aid centre, or hospital?

Oh yes, that was a bit of a structure there.

Who was staffing the hospital there?

Oh, we had to go to Katherine River for any serious stuff, but it was only the administrative centre for the blood tests and all this was there. But you just went back to your own tent, your own hut.

So no nurses.

No, no.

A pity. Would've been nice to have seen a nurse

41:30 **after a few.**

Yeah.

So what happens, once you lose, yeah, once you lose Pincher?

Well they promised him they'd put him in the Townsville zoo and they'd put a plaque to say that it was donated by Sid Jones and all this. They said he'd be well looked after and all this caper.

And you continue on your way?

Yes, off we went then.

Where were you going?

To

42:00 Brisbane, and all the way to

Tape 7

00:32 **When we left the last tape we were in Brisbane. What happens next?**

I get to Brisbane yes. I found a telegram the other day that I sent to my mother from Brisbane, so I left there on my birthday, February the 8th and that's how long I was held up in the territory, and I got home to Perth on February the 16th. It took about eight days across in those days.

01:00 **When did you first contact your parents that you were actually all right?**

From Timor. I didn't have to because they sent a telegram, the army or something. They sent a telegram about August. They knew I was okay about August. I think about six months they thought I was gone for yes, from February to August.

Well it must have been a warm welcome when you arrived?

Yes, yep!

Any

01:30 **particular celebrations to mark the arrival?**

Not really. My Dad came from Norseman. He was there when I got home because we were pretty close.

So how long were you on leave for?

21 days.

It doesn't seem long enough really does it?

No, no and I went back to Canungra. I got into strife in Perth because I was two hours

02:00 late in getting back, two hours in reporting and I wasn't allowed on the train. The train pulled out that day with our fellas onboard. They'd been home for a bit longer than me. They'd had at least ten days longer than me most of them and some of them had up to a fortnight longer because I came in with the very last lot, about ten of us, Billy Epps and a few of us.

02:30 I was two hours over, so I had to go before a Major Flanagan down at the Head Quarters there and he had a look. They were going through like flies you know, for different demeanours and he said, “You were two hours late in getting in. What happened?” He said, “You had all the time in the world in the morning.” Anyway,

03:00 it didn’t rattle me that much at that stage of the game old Flanagan. Then he turned to the captain alongside him and he said, “The trouble is with these young blokes, they don’t realise there’s a war on!” And I just opened my mouth to say something and he said, “Keep your mouth shut!” I said, “I wanted to tell you…!” He says, “Shut it!” The captain bloke says and Flanagan says, “That little outburst will cost you another two pounds.” Well that was a lot of money in those days and I was only getting 14 bob a weeks

03:30 because I had a three shilling allotment a day, and I got 14 shillings a week, and I got knocked for two quid! So I got a big red line in my book and things like that, for a couple of hours, and he put down two days ackwilly [Absent Without Leave] , and I challenged that too. He says, “Well there’s two days before there’s another train coming, so you’re automatically two days AWL [Absent Without leave] .” So he wasn’t very forgiving. He couldn’t have read the pay book because

04:00 it would have had Timor and that in it, so they didn’t give a…and you couldn’t open your mouth to explain to them. That’s how it was. So I had a chip on my shoulder then.

I think you have a very logical chip on your shoulder for that. Yes that’s terrible treatment!

Yeah!

So it took two days for you to get back on the train?

Yes, well I was allowed home in the meantime until the train but I certainly didn’t miss the next one I can tell you. I thought I’ll be put inside!

04:30 So off I went on the next one and there were a few of our blokes on it.

So where were you heading too?

Back to Canungra, that was the Jungle Warfare School of Australia then. Wilson Promontory was no longer in being because it was all tropical warfare and Canungra was specially geared up for… The Australian Commando Training Battalion was at Canungra, and we trained there.

05:00 You had to pass through an intense training course there to go away again.

Tell me about this intense training course?

Well there was a place there called the assault course and you went through that with full gear, and infantry blokes used to do it too but they did it in sandshoes and shorts. That’s how tough it was but we used to do it in full gear and we used to give demonstrations to the infantry that were there on how you could do it with full gear on, and

05:30 there was a lot of obstacles and things in it. For instance, there would be a rope with a knot here and there, and it went up about 20 feet, and you had to pull yourself up with all your gear on, and then when you got up the top, then this pole like a lamppost went across for about 20 feet, and you had to stand up, and walk across that with these hobnail boots, and if they sat down, and pulled themselves across, they used to sing out to them. They’d blow a whistle, “Right! On your feet!

06:00 Walk!” Then there was all these…you go across on a flying fox with all your gear on, across the river at Canungra, hang on to that and away you go.

What’s that like?

It’s not as easy as it looks. You think your arms are going to get pulled out of their sockets and especially with a rifle slung on your back as well. What else was there? Oh yes, they had a

06:30 log, it was a piping it was and you could just fit through, and you had to worm your way through with your gear on. There was another spot there where they used to give covering fire. You know, you had to keep your back down and they’d fire over the top of you with Bren guns. They were pretty good shots and that.

Would it be real bullets?

Oh yes! My very word! Yep!

Any accidents happen?

Oh yes, there were two or three killed on that course, yes

07:00 and also they blew up a few people. They used to let off charges. You never knew when they were going off but they were small charges they assured us. They were about a third of a plug of geli and the sappers used to do that, and they’d see you in a certain position getting through the barbed wire, and they’d let her off you know? Bang! It would either be right in front of you or just behind you and they blew up one bloke there one day, and fairly badly,

07:30 blew nearly all the clothes off him, and that sort of thing.

That's appalling!

Yes.

Were there any other special kind of skills that you had to learn?

No not really. It was mainly all…we did another school on the Tommy gun and hand grenades. We had to know all their characteristics and things like that.

I thought you would have been pretty good at this by now?

We'd probably forgotten it all you see,

08:00 you know the written stuff because we had to write it all down. I think there was four characteristics of the Tommy gun and about three or four on the grenade, and I think the Bren gun had about seven characteristics.

When you say characteristics, what things…?

Well, you had to know…the number one characteristic of the Bren gun was its lack of cone of fire and deadly accuracy. That was one of its main characteristics.

08:30 See with the hand grenade it was ideal for searching ground that is otherwise immune to small arms fire and that sort of thing, you can't get at it and all this caper. You had to know it word perfect too.

But how effective is that in the field?

Not a great help I don't think.

It just seems to me that experience in the field is going to be a lot more helpful than being able to parrot fashion…?

Well that's right. They used to pop these questions at you, these

09:00 instructor sergeants. Like a bloke asked me one day, he says, "What's the first characteristic of the grenade?" And he pointed at me and I said, "It's got great stopping power." Well that's the number one of the Tommy gun see? I said, "It's got great stopping power," and he says, "It has not!" I said, "You get behind one you'll find out!" "Sit down!" I was still cheeky at that stage and my answering back I got X Listed there at Canungra.

What's X Listed?

Sent into general reinforcements.

Which means?

09:30 Well you go to another company but that was our new captain that came over. I answered him back and fell foul of him. When we got back on parade that morning…that happened during a night stunt and I got to parade in the morning. After breakfast we were all lined up ready to march out and the old sergeant of C Troop calls out, "Trooper Sproxton, fall out!"

10:00 So I fell out and he right turned the mob, and they marched off the ground at Canungra, and it wasn't long until we were going away then. It was about three or four days and he came over to me, the sergeant, and he didn't particularly like me either I don't think. He said, "As from 900 hours this morning you're X Listed." He said, "You go back and pack your gear, and there will be a utility over within half an hour to pick you up, and you're going over to ACTB." I was sent over there.

10:30 That was the Australian Commando Training Battalion. I went over there and reported there, and the bloke showed me a tent, and I got in there, only one person in it. Then in the afternoon about two o'clock Jack Denman, our lieutenant, he was a wonderful fellow Jack. He took over from Lieutenant Cole at the tail end of Timor and he came over, and he said, "I've managed to pick you up and bring you back but from now on just keep

11:00 your mouth shut, and don't answer back or anything like that because they'll be watching you now."

How did he get you back?

I don't know. He went to the boss and he told him. He said, "I want Sproxton with me when I go." So I went with him, old Jack, under his wing.

Very lucky.

Very yes but I still never learnt my lesson really because I still answered people back,

11:30 being young I suppose and I still had a chip on my shoulder from Claremont down there, Major Flanagan. Then we got up to Townsville and then got all the way up to Cairns, and we had a forwarding party to go up onto the Cairns Tablelands at Cairns. This was in June. That's how quick it was and

12:00 we were there. We were sitting in a tent near Mackenzie. He was our boss. He said, “Have you got your list of NCOs [Non Commissioned Officers] there Jack?” He says, “Yes,” because they allocate them after the training and towards the end of the eight NCOs he called out, he had Sproxton down see? Jerry Mackenzie, he was the captain at that stage before he was a major, he said, “I won’t have Sproxton!” And we pricked our ears up. Carey and a few of us were in the tent near where they were

12:30 and Jack said, “Well…!” He said, “It will have to be Maloney then.” He’d been a sergeant before anyway, Laurie Maloney and better fitted I suppose but he never had any active action time. Anyway Jerry Mackenzie, then he added fuel to the fire. He says, “Sproxton’s lucky to be here!” And I said to Jack, “Yeah he’s bloody lucky I am here too!” Anyway, they heard me

13:00 outside! Jack Denman heard me but I don’t know if Jerry Mackenzie…he couldn’t have done. Jack came in and he was ropeable after that! I upset him completely and we were good mates really.

So where you are at the moment is that extra training?

No. We were on route to come away then. We were going to go and do extra training up on the Tablelands but we were only in Cairns

13:30 about two nights, and they called us back. There was a ship waiting for us at Townsville. That was to fool the enemy in case they didn’t know we were coming. We came up to Cairns and they thought we were going up to the Tablelands. This was the story they told us. So back we go to Townsville and we were on the way to Port Moresby, and off we went to Port Moresby. We got there on about June the 16th.

How long did it take to get to Port Moresby?

About four days on the Duntroon.

14:00 **What were the conditions like on the Duntroon?**

Pretty packed but it was a better vessel than we’d had before, one of the best ones we’d been in, except for the Dutch Cruiser. That was the best one I’d ever been in, beautiful!

How did they inform you that you were on your way to New Guinea?

I think after we were onboard we were told we were going to New Guinea.

Did you suspect?

Oh yes

14:30 because things were pretty bad in New Guinea.

Are you still keeping up with developments as far as the war is concerned?

Oh yes, yep! So that exactly four months after reaching Perth I was in Port Moresby on the way back again.

What were your first impressions of Port Moresby?

New Guinea? I could see straight away that the mountains were bigger, bigger and higher, and a lot more

15:00 activity around the place. The Americans were as well around Moresby, a big aerodrome. We were very close to a big aerodrome there and the Japs were still coming over every night, and dropping one or two. We were camped in a place they called Shrapnel Valley because that’s where the refuse of the ack-ack [anti-aircraft] fire used to come down, in Shrapnel Valley. You had to keep your head in when they opened up because a lot of the refuse used to land in there.

15:30 They didn’t keep troops there very long as a rule and we all flew up to the mission strip at Goroka.

Did you have any time off to just have a look around New Delhi?

Around Moresby?

Sorry, around Moresby?

No not really, no.

I’m just wondering if you managed to talk to any Americans?

Oh yes, yes we had a yarn to them.

16:00 **What do you think of the Americans?**

Well we had seen a bit of them on the trip down from Darwin and they were the black American truck drivers, and I thought they were nice fellas. They were quite scathing of the white ones. They said, “You won’t talk to us once you’ve mixed with white Americans.” He said, “They don’t talk to us.” It seemed remarkable because these were quite well educated fellas. Montgomery was the fella that I was

assigned to, to come down and I spent four days

16:30 continuous time with him, and he seemed a nice fellow.

That's certainly an enormous comment on the racism at the time!

It was yes and there was racism. There's no doubt about it.

Did you notice that?

I did between them but there was no racism with Australians with the dark fellas. We just treated them the same as anybody else but the white American troops didn't.

Did you notice that the Americans were really well equipped or…?

17:00 They were very well equipped. They were very well paid of course, which we noticed when we got to Brisbane. You go into a restaurant and you wouldn't get served. You could sit there all day. The waitresses wouldn't serve you because they knew you only had a couple of bob in your pocket and these fellas, they had…I think an American private got as much as an Australian lieutenant colonel or something.

That's an enormous difference.

It was yes.

Did that cause a bit of resentment?

Oh did it ever, yes! Yes there were lots of fights

17:30 in the restaurants and places like that in Brisbane.

Did you ever witness any of these?

Yes.

So it would just be a bit of a goading and a stoush?

Yes that's right. They were pretty easily started too. I used to say to the waitresses, "What's the matter with our money love?" And she'd just go like this sort of thing. [shrugs] They'd come in about half an hour after you sort of thing. Then the

18:00 Yank would say to her, "Is that chap annoying you at all lady?" You know and the bloke wouldn't wait any longer. He just up out of his chair and he says, "I'm not annoying her. I'm going to annoy you now mate!" They'd start punching straight away. Oh there was ill feeling.

It sounds pretty tense.

Mm.

So do you know what your orders are at this point when you're heading off in the plane?

We didn't know where we were going to,

18:30 no, no and there was about a full section in each planes, Douglases they were, and that's the first time I'd been in a plane.

How did you find it?

Pretty scary because we had all our gear, we had that stacked down the middle and the seats were aluminium folding seats that go down the sides of the plane, and so you're sitting side on, and the Douglas in those days, they used to sit on their tail wheel like this until they got a bit of speed up, and then they'd lift, and you were way down

19:00 like this when you start off sitting, and then it lifts, and away you go. That was quite a challenge and we had…I think they said that day in the convoy we had about 40 Kittyhawks up above us, and about…oh no, they were Lockheed Lightnings up top, and Kittyhawks underneath. That's what it was but it was about 60 fighter planes, escort

19:30 because we were going through pretty heavily…Japanese territory.

How many of you is there?

About 270-odd in a full company.

That's a lot.

Yes and it was a pretty bumpy trip because we had to pass through Ewon Pass and you get a bit light on for oxygen because the Douglases, their only means of ventilation was a rubber ring in the window. You might have seen them with a round rubber ring thing?

20:00 That was to poke your machine gun out of if a got a bit woolly you see? The Bren guns could be moved

out of those but we didn't have to intercept anything on the way. It was pretty bumpy in the mountains. You know when you go over the mountains you get a lot of lift and thermals, and that, and the Armorous plane I believe…I didn't witness it of course but the Armorous plane had an anvil in it that use to work on guns and that on, a pretty heavy thing. It's like just an ordinary blacksmith anvil

20:30 and when they went over a bump it went out through the bottom of the plane because everything goes up to the top of the plane. Some bloke had their heads cut on ribs because they're not lined those old Douglases. They were just troop carriers and your load on the floor, and up the middle, it lifts every now and then in bumps.

That certainly demonstrates some pretty rough weather!

Yes, oh yes! That can happen though even

21:00 in clear. Clear air turbulence they get too because we passed through Ewon Pass at about 10 000 feet and we knew because we marched over it later on, on the way to the Ramu Valley.

So where did you land?

Goroka, that's a pretty well known place in New Guinea, right in the highlands.

Can you tell me a bit about Goroka?

Yes. It was a very big village even in those days,

21:30 a big village. It's a big gardening area around there, a good food area and lot of irrigation, and stuff like that went on there but we didn't stay there long. We were all dispersed everywhere and B Troop was the vanguard. I think they led the way out towards the Ramu River, where

22:00 we were heading. C Troop was held in reserve this time. So we went up into the mountains to a place called Shimbu, about three days long march from Goroka to a mission there at Shimbu.

Is there any obvious difference between the kind of countryside you're seeing to Timor?

Totally different yes, a lot heavier, a lot thicker jungles. The mountains

22:30 are bigger. See they go to nearly 16 000 feet.

[break in interview]

Sorry you were talking about…

Yes the terrain, pretty rugged terrain all right. We were at Shimbu about a month and there were sheep there during the

23:00 peace days, and we slew a couple every week, had fresh meat, lived off the land. I saw afterwards that the army had been very irresponsible cutting down the herds but there was no sense in saving them. The sheep, they were not shorn and things like that. The mission had left them there, so it was the obvious thing to do, to live off the land. That's what we'd always been taught. So

23:30 our officer gave us the okay to kill a couple, so we used to do two a week and have a bit of roast lamb, a big change from bully beef.

Yeah! Was there any sort of native wildlife that you would come across?

Yes there were some beautiful birds of paradise there, lovely. I had a stuffed one and I carried it for years. The natives had a way of stuffing them and taxidermist job on them, and it was in hollow bamboo, and it had this

24:00 beautiful plume feathers at the back. It was a complete bird but I finished up I left it somewhere. I carted it for weeks and weeks.

What made you do that?

Well, they're very valuable if you get them back to Australia, especially the tail feathers but this was a complete bird. I could have probably got a hundred pounds for it but I got tired of carrying it. I'd have carried it for a long time because we were 15 months in New Guinea eventually.

So it was a good decision to lose the bird?

24:30 Yes. So we went from there back to Goroka and then…

What's the main mission that you're trying to do at this time?

At there? Our job was to keep our eye on the Mount Hagen Valley and we had a patrol go through to Mount Hagen, and another patrol that I was with went through to Kerowagi, which was another mission strip,

25:00 and they were all strips capable of the Japs landing troops on them. So then we got orders to destroy all the mission strips, so we went back to Kerowagi to destroy that.

When you say mission strip, what do you mean by that?

They were put there by the missionaries. The whole of the Hagen Valley was missioned by those German missionaries, Lutheran. They were Lutheran missions and they did quite a good job,

25:30 and they used to land by plane. They used to come up by plane and every mission had its own airstrip, and they were very good too. You could land a Doug on them no troubles.

So your job was to basically…?

Yes to get rid of the strips and we had a patrol go through as far as Mount Hagen, and we did the one at Kerowagi, and

26:00 split the section up. Then I went right down to the Wagi River. I took a couple of men down there and ANGAUs, the Australian New Guinea Administrative Unit, they heard that we were going to go down to the Wagi, and they sent some natives after us but they didn't catch with us because we got too far into the area, and they weren't game to go any further. We shouldn't have gone there apparently.

26:30 **Why was that?**

Because they were still cannibals down that way pretty much and they heard we were coming, a big village down on the Wagi, and they had petals of hibiscus spread for the last two or three miles, and they'd never seen a white man before.

How was that for an experience for you?

Well we didn't know at the time we were having such an experience, didn't realise that…

27:00 you tread where Angels fear to tread, idiots!

Could you actually explain what the petals were? That must have been kind of strange?

Oh yes, we knew it was a form of greeting and then they gave us a demonstration when they marched us into this big village. They'd come racing up towards us with long bows they had down there and they had these big bark, heavy bark things, and they used to fire

27:30 at a bloke, and then they started coming up close to us, and they'd turn off, and swing away, and stick it into a tree or something. They were pretty accurate at about 50 yards too! They were good and then they gave a demonstration of a bloke rushing up with his shield on his arm, and he was actually fending them off, and it was a thick shield you know? So we thought we'll give them a demonstration. We better, so we had a lad there with a sniper's rifle and I had an Owen gun,

28:00 and we had a Bren with us too. So we put his shield up against a tree and we lined it up with the sniper's rifle, and it went straight through it of course, and they, "Ooh aahed," like this, "Ooh aah!" And they wouldn't go near the guns or anything like that. Then they gave us a wide berth, so they'd obviously never seen any firearms before.

What must have been an extraordinary experience for you? How did they react to you being white?

Oh they were looking at your

28:30 skin and everything, same business, "Oooh!"

Were the adults acting any differently to the children?

Oh no, no the adults were quite childish themselves! They were pretty primitive all right.

How did you go communicating?

It wasn't very easy I can tell you. We just had to wave our hands and all this caper but apparently, we didn't know at the time, but there had been two patrol officers killed there

29:00 less than a year before in the Wagi area.

What happened?

They went on patrol through there for administration work and they were both ambushed, and killed.

By the natives?

Yes.

Did you see any examples of cannibalism?

Not really, no.

I'm just wondering what the locals are like, if there's a dark side to the…?

Oh there must be to those because they're very primitive

29:30 people.

Did you find that intriguing?

Yes, yes very much so.

Did you attempt to pick up any of the language?

No because the language spoken in New Guinea is mainly pidgin English, “Lose this fella place,” and all this kind of talk, “Come up along this fella place,” and, “Sunny come up,” and that means another day has come over.

30:00 “Lose him this fella place. Kess him up this fella place.” In the morning you’d say, “All together boy line him,” and they’d know they all have to get in a line.

Where does pidgin English actually come from?

It was made up especially for…it is a recognised language, pidgin, because you hear the Lord’s Prayer in pidgin, “Big fella boss, he stop along on top.” That’s how they say, “Our Father who art in heaven.” “Big fella boss,

30:30 he stop along on top.”

That’s quite bizarre!

Yes, it’s a recognised language.

Any local customs that you observed?

Not really, no except that they had big kim shells dangling in their noses and things like that, and spikes.

31:00 **How did you get on with them as far as respect was concerned? Did they treat you sort of like godlike creatures or…?**

They did, yes.

Can you give me an example of how that would eventuate?

Well, after we fired at this shield and they chaired us out of the area…

Chaired you?

Yes you know how they lift you up on their shoulders, like they do with the footy blokes and they wouldn’t let us walk anywhere.

31:30 “Aayeee,” they’d say and lift you up!

How many of you blokes is there at this point?

Three of us. There were three Aussies. We were gone about…we were out about six days.

Where were you staying while you were in this village?

That was from Shimbu, a well known mission up there.

What were the living conditions like in the village?

In the village? They were quite good huts, very good huts.

32:00 They gave us a big open hut to stay in.

So you had like one of your own huts?

Yes.

What was normal to eat in the village?

Well they had some good bananas and things like that there that were good to get onto but we had our own tucker with us.

How much of the rationing did you actually use

32:30 **or did you live off the land?**

We used a lot of our own rations in New Guinea because unless you got to a fertile area like the Wagi, there was nothing. No, after you left those missions you had to rely on food. Like on that 28 dayer there was no food along the way at all.

How can that be? Is it like landscape?

Well, it’s jungle country and nothing grows

33:00 in the jungle of course, and even the villages were pretty few and far between. Even around Jappa, the village of Jappa, I never saw any bananas or anything growing.

Are the locals growing any crops?

They didn't seem to there.

I'm just wondering what they're living off?

We used to wonder that too, yes.

Did you manage to pick up any survival techniques from the locals?

33:30 Yes well they picked up a few from us because they used to cart our wounded. They had a wonderful name but I still don't think that they were anywhere near like the help that the East Timorese were and they used to cut out, and disappear when things got a bit hot, where the East Timorese didn't. They were used to that but the cargo boys in New Guinea, they…

34:00 well they weren't armed and that sort of thing, so I suppose you couldn't expect them to stick their neck out.

What did you see as the difference between the people in New Guinea and Timor as far as the locals were concerned?

There was a total difference between the New Guinea native, the Papuans and the East Timorese, totally different. The other ones were more friendly and they were like

34:30 us, and you could never really get close to a Papuan I don't think, not like the East Timorese.

Would that be like a bit of a custom thing or…?

Partly I think and they didn't seem to owe us an allegiance anyway.

Had they at this point come in contact with any Japanese?

Who, the

35:00 Papuans?

Yes.

Oh I think so, yes, yes they must have done. There was even a Papuan Infantry Battalion, PIBs and we had a couple attached to us for a while as forward scouts because they knew the country better, and then there were the AIBs. They were mainly black, dark fellas, Allied Intelligence Bureau.

What was their job?

Their task was the same, reconnaissance

35:30 and all that type of work.

What sorts of incidents did you have during this time in New Guinea?

In New Guinea we didn't have any action until about nearly Christmas time. It was all patrolling but we never struck any Japanese until around about…until we got into the Ramu.

Was this expected?

36:00 Oh yes. Yes we knew the Ramu was our ultimate goal.

Can you tell me how you actually got to Ramu?

We crossed the Ramu early in the piece before we had any transport. We had canoes across it eventually. You've probably seen a lot of photos of canoes coming across the Ramu with men in and we crossed over, and went to a village at Usini. That was

36:30 the first big village across the Ramu that was on our main track through and there were about four or five of us in the first group that went across, and Jack Denman was there, the lieutenant. We used to put all our gear on a…make a raft, a bamboo raft. There was bamboos all there and a bamboo raft, and put our rifle, and machine gun on the top, and dog paddle across the Ramu.

37:00 You'd loose about half a mile because it was very wide. We didn't know at that stage that there was big crocodiles in it and we swam it the first couple of times, and pushed the stuff ahead of us. Then got on the other side and got dressed in your clobber [clothes] , and got all your gear together. If the Japs had been waiting on the other side, which they should have been it would have been on but they never seemed to. Then we got through to this village the first time

37:30 and one of the chaps says, "Ah this is a bit of luck!" There were Golden Circle pineapples, a big case of them. A chap was just going to grab one and Jack Denman says, "Don't touch it! Don't touch it!" He

could see a cord coming from underneath. It was a booby trap and they were all full of high explosives. It must have been gun cotton because they had a primer in them. You know gun cotton is a high explosive, very big fella and there was a case of about 16

38:00 cans of this stuff, and it was all gun cotton. It would have blown the whole place up and there was a pull-switch on it. That's how it was to be…and Jack Denman was a full bottle on pull-switches. There are pull-switches and there's closure ones that's caused by the compression of the thing but that was a pull-switch, and so as soon as anybody pulled it, and all the tins were connected. It must have been made up very well. They had three point plugs in them,

38:30 just all set up, proper insertion plugs, you know holes for them to go in.

Sounds like you investigated it?

It was a pretty elaborate on yes.

How do you defuse something like that?

Well Jack found the master switch, where it was and tracked it down, and he could see it was the same type as ours, Murray Switches they were called. He tracked it down. They make time patches and all that sort of thing

39:00 but it was instantaneous because it was the same…it's a cordite instantaneous fuse. It's a speckled fuse, the wire, the fuse wire.

So what are you doing in this area?

Reconnaissance again.

And you do know that you are going to come in contact with Japanese?

Oh yes. We expected them in Usini but they weren't there. They'd left they're booby trap, so we knew they

39:30 must have pulled out because they wouldn't have set a booby trap if they were coming back, in case they caught someone.

So what happens next on this recce [reconnaissance] that you're doing?

We went a bit beyond Usini and I remember it fairly well because the lad behind me hadn't had an Owen gun before but he had one, and they were very dangerous, because you could…there was purely a big spring

40:00 on them, and you pull them back to bring the cartridge forward, and he didn't pull it fully back. It was far enough back to pick up the cartridge though and he picked up the thing, and fired one shot off, and it had it pointed just about squarely at my shoulders, so goodness knows how it missed me. It just about deafened me in one ear and I dropped flat straight away. That was always my method because I'd done a lot of forward scouting and I found that was the best method,

40:30 to drop flat on your face.

What did you have to say to this chap?

I didn't say much. Poor old Alan Mitchell, I knew him. He's still alive that lad. He'd come to us as a reinforcement.

I would just be pretty ticked off if someone did that to me.

Oh he was pretty nervous old Mitch.

Did you notice a really big difference between the new recruits and the…?

Not really, no

41:00 but ones like that, Alan was pretty inexperienced, but most of the others were marvellous. The ones we picked up at Canungra were wonderful fellas. The only trouble is they were all New South Welshmen, very few West Aussies.

There's a difference is there?

Yes they play Rugby instead of Aussie Rules! They were all Rugby men!

So what else happens as part of this recce you were on?

41:30 Well nothing much on that trip. We left and came back, and we came down to a place on the way down, then we had to go back to another place called Fita, about two days march down the Ramu River down stream or up stream rather. It was away from the way the water was flowing and crossed over

42:00 a couple of rivers than ran into it and…

Tape 8

00:32 **So we'll pick up where we left off I suppose.**

Where they're building the strip, the mission…the what's-a-name strip? It was on the Kunai Flat. That kunai grass is like very heavy swamp grass, you know? It's very dense and very hot in there, and they cleared it all out, and they were able to bring in DC3s on the strip.

01:00 **How long did it take to get the strip up for landing?**

Only about three or four weeks and it was going.

And what were you doing during that period?

We went back up to Fita and had a bit of a spell for a couple of weeks, and then went across the river again.

How did you spend your spell in Fita?

At Fita it was up the mountain a bit, which was good because the others were making a big base camp, Head Quarters was getting a big camp down near the Ramu and that's no good, because

01:30 it's very flat country, and terrific heat but we had to climb up about 2000 feet to Fita Camp, the original one.

What was there?

Nothing except the huts and that. The natives had all gone from there.

Why had they gone?

Probably because of the war activity and B Troop had three fellas there before we got there,

02:00 just down from Fita, and the Japs crossed the Ramu one night, and came over. There were five actually and they killed three of them. They were still in their sleeping bags. They never had a guard out you see, with just the five of them and they thought the Japs would never find them but obviously the natives had told them, and they must have been friendly with the Japs.

This was just before you got there?

Yep that was before we got there. They had an opip of the Ramu there.

02:30 They had an opip on the bottom camp.

It sounds like it would have been quite ominous for you to be staying there?

Oh no by that time…they had to get through the mob at the bottom first, below us where they were call camped through there. There was company headquarters down there and A Troop, and B had gone by that stage. There was the whole of A Troop and headquarters, company headquarters.

03:00 **So how did you spend that time resting?**

Oh just playing cards and things like that, playing bridge, and crib [cribbage] . Crib and bridge was our main card games.

Did you set up a bit of a card area in one of the huts?

Complete rest yes.

It sounds like it would have been quite a spell?

It was a good spell because it takes it out of you those long patrols.

03:30 **You'd be ready to sleep for 48 hours after a patrol like that!**

Oh yes, you have a fair sort of a snooze!

[laughs] That sounds like an understatement!

Then we crossed the river again and advanced a bit further the next time, went up to a village called Origana, Orgaruna rather, Orgaruna is it. We went up to this Orgaruna place.

What did you encounter there?

04:00 We knew the Japs had been in there and Jack Denman split the group up there because the road split there. A road went through to Same, not a road but a track, a well defined track and another one went through to a place called Koolau, which was our bit of a nemesis for us.

Why was that?

Because there was a full company of Japanese there and they patrolled from there, and that was the ones we were frightened of coming from Koolau. But Jack took off

04:30 with half the section and left about five or six of us. There was no corporals or anything. He just left five or six of us at the fork in the track you see, near the fork in the track, so that they couldn't cut him off when he came back but there was another track back and he didn't know at the time. But he went out and had an opip on Koolau, had a look at it, on Samau rather, and

05:00 he was gone about three days. During that time we manned the track. We had a Bren gun mounted and we good view about 100 yards up the track. We had 100 yards view and we even had guards at night. We knew we had insufficient guards at night, so we lay on the track, so they'd have to fall over us to get past because I wasn't going to let them shoot us out of there, because

05:30 Jack left me in charge of that little group, and so I thought the best way is to lie on the track at night, which we did in the dark. They never came up but we knew they didn't come at night time much and in the meantime they came down behind us, although I didn't know at that stage. Jack Denman eventually came back and he sent a native up to let us know

06:00 that they were back. They'd come back to the track and they'd come back about a mile behind us, and there was a river, a track down on a riverbed that came back, and Jack and his troops came down on those. When they got back there we found that the Japs had been there not…probably the day before, in between and they didn't come up the track this way. They'd have caught us looking the other way if they had but they didn't. They must have gone back the way they came obviously. They'd eaten

06:30 when their track met the one that was behind us, met our track and then went back on it.

How were you able to tell they'd eaten?

There was all tucker there. There was what's-a-name stuff, their packaging stuff and that.

What kind of packaging would their rations be in?

It was a sort of a heavy, greasy brown paper with Jap writing

07:00 on it, so it must have been a sort of a cut or something like the Yankee [American] Big K rations, something like that. That was the sort it was. There was a ration in there, probably rice.

It must have been an anxious period there waiting on the road for expected confrontation?

Yes.

How would you while away all that time in anticipation, just finger on the trigger?

Yes, yes

07:30 just watching all the time.

That must be incredibly tiring?

It is. It's very stressful because you had to watch in order to get the drop on them if you could, be the first to sight them. We didn't want them to sight us first of course but it's amazing how you miss them you know? They were actually behind us and they could have walked in, and plugged us all.

Yeah! What followed that incident?

08:00 We moved back again then. We were out about the limit of our rations and I think we might have been getting a bit short of rations actually. We came back and that took up about eight days all together, by the time we got back across the river to headquarters.

How was the strip looking at this stage?

The strip was looking pretty active and we knew the planes were coming in. They used to drop tucker there too as well, drop

08:30 it in parachutes.

While you were on patrol or just near the strip?

They used to drop it near the strip for the headquarters because we used to take our rations out with us. We carried them out. That's another thing you were limited by, the amount you could carry because we didn't take cargo boys with us on those trips. They wouldn't be in it anyway.

09:00 then it got right through to nearly Christmas then. It was getting towards Christmas and I finished up with an abscess on the jaw from one of my teeth, a big double tooth. So I went down to the doctor where it was on the river. The doc had his hospital down there and saw him, and he said he'd have a go at pulling it. He admitted he'd never pulled a double tooth. He'd pulled a single tooth

09:30 but not a double tooth and he couldn't numb it because of the infection of the abscess. You can't numb a tooth that's got an abscess on it.

Why because it doesn't work?

It doesn't work, the stuff and he put buckets of it in. Every time he grabbed it with the big forceps and he had me sitting on a big flour drum you know, outside the hospital part, outside his hut, and I just about rose off the seat every time he grabbed it. The pain was intense and it was very

10:00 swollen, and anyway he said he'd have to get it out, and I said, "Yeah I can't stand the pain much more." Anyway he said, "Well I'll have to give you anaesthetic and knock you out that way." He even tried the knock out punch up in here with a needle at the back, the one that knocks you out and that didn't work. He couldn't find the…well he admitted he had to get it right on the nerve to knock it out that way, and he couldn't find that. So he

10:30 got Alan Looby, he was a very good RAP [Regimental Aid Post] man. He was a sergeant and Sergeant Cliff Paffy. He had two sergeants there at the hospital with him, to help him with gunshot wounds and things like that. Anyway, his mode of anaesthetic…he got one of those sieves from the kitchen and he covered it with lint. You know one of those sieves they use for cooking? He covered it with lint and he

11:00 poured this ethyl chloride stuff on it to put me out, and he had Alan Looby doing that.

So he held it over your face?

Held the thing over and when I was out he said, "Yes he's unconscious." But administering it neat you had no way of knowing how much you were getting and so I must have had plenty, so anyway he…

It can be lethal can't it?

Oh yes it can kill you because

11:30 my heart stopped beating and he knew he had a cardiac arrest but in the meantime he grabbed my tooth, and pulled it apart, and tried to get it out, but he broke it off level with the jawbone underneath, and he cracked my jawbone. Then they lifted it off to see how I was going but I was gone down. Then I suddenly sat up he said and then fell backwards. Well that's pretty typical of a

12:00 cardiac. You get all your forces together to lift you up and then you fall back. It's pretty typical. The other chaps in the hospital…he had me in the hospital by that time, in his little hospital, on an operating table that he used for an operating table. He still had the forceps in his hand and they said he hurled them across the room, and he said, "The bastards died on us!" The poor old doc and it wasn't the doc we had in Timor.

12:30 This was one that had been in New Guinea for a long time, a sort of flying doctor up there, Macinerney. He was as rough as bags, a big man. Anyway Alan Looby says, "We'll have to use artificial what's-a-name on him!" "No," he says, "You're wasting your time. He's gone!" He said, "He's got a cardiac arrest that fella!" He says, "He's gone." And Alan Looby with that, he rolled me over. They'd both been qualified in resuscitation and they used it.

13:00 It wasn't mouth to mouth in those days and all this business. It was just the pummelling. They pummel you and work your lungs, then hit you in the chest again, and all this caper. After a while I did. I sat up again. My eyes were black by that stage, my face and that, and I sat up. He definitely saved my life, Alan Looby. He finished up…he was superintendent of the whole of the ambulance system in New South Wales. He got pretty high up in the game.

13:30 When I had this massive heart attack I mentioned to them that I'd had a cardiac arrest and it was a Pakistani doctor down at Repat [repatriation hospital] , he said, "No you couldn't have done. He wouldn't have saved you." I said, "It was!" anyway, in his report he wrote, "Claims what's-a-name… claims he had a cardiac arrest but obviously it was just a deep faint," because he said there was no resuscitation for a cardiac arrest in those

14:00 days. So I sent it over to Alan Looby and was he incensed you know? Crikies and he made out a statutory declaration right away, about three pages of it, wrote and told them all that had happened, and to accept the…because they didn't want to accept it as a cause of heart trouble, because it had a fair sort of a jolt that time you see. They wouldn't go along with it and they got Doctor Toffler as their

14:30 what's-a-name, and I had a what's-a-name inquiry after it, one of the big administrative appeals tribunal things. Doctor Toffler, he stuck up for my case. He said, "Obviously," he said, "what's-a-name knew what he was doing. He said, "Doctor Macinerney would have known it was a cardiac arrest." He said, "He would have just said if he'd had a deep faint."

15:00 "Obviously," he said, "it was a cardiac arrest." So they accepted it then, my ticker!

That's incredible!

Yeah!

So what was your recovery after…?

After that?

Did they actually get the roots out?

Oh I got put on a…the Kai bombers were coming over that afternoon but they signalled them in and I went back to Nadzab Casualty Clearing Station because Lae had just fallen.

15:30 There was no hospital at Lae at that stage. Lae had just fallen and I went to the 111th CCS, Casualty Clearing Station, and they nursed me up for about three days, and then took me into the operating theatre there, and there was two specialists there had a go at it. They opened it up, all up through there. They said they should have wired it up but they didn't thank goodness.

Why was that?

Because they wire your two jaws together

16:00 and it's most uncomfortable but now I've got a bad cross-bite. It twisted it all see? I bite crossways now because this is gone here. It kept on and not being wired in place for long enough it slipped across. It just mended where it wanted to, the crack in my jaw.

Right.

So I was back with the unit in about eight days after that.

16:30 It was still bleeding when I got back because it was still haemorrhaging a bit.

It must have been very uncomfortable!

It was! I couldn't eat for a long time. I couldn't eat on that side.

It's the last thing you really need is a toothache when you're under duress in the jungle!

Then a piece of bone came out eventually, a big piece too! It was long. It was about inch. The shell of the bone came out. I could feel it on the side of the jaw.

You spat it out?

No I pulled it out eventually. Oh it was too big to spit out.

17:00 It was a big piece, a nice and shiny piece of white bone!

It just worked its way out?

A piece of the jawbone where it had come off the side.

I don't know what to say!

Yeah that was under there. Soon after that we went back up to Goroka for a spell. It must have been early in February because I had my 21st birthday up there at Goroka.

17:30 **How did you celebrate?**

The cook had been making jungle juice for about a fortnight, a week or whatever it was we were there.

How did he concoct that?

Out of the fruit juice tins. You know if you had a tin of peaches that were opened, he'd leave the juice out and give them all the peaches without any juice, and all this caper, and let it ferment.

Was it a good drop?

Terrible but we said, "This had got no kick in it." So Jimmy Richards, our RAP bloke corporal,

18:00 he put all the regimental what's-a-name in it, the metho [methylated spirits] from the regimental thing because they used to make the flavin out of the methylated spirits. So he always had about a pint of metho with him, so he gave us about three quarters of a pint of metho in the jungle juice with the stuff for about 18 blokes. They got pretty full on it all right. They were violently ill too afterwards because it was pretty near 100% alcohol we were

18:30 drinking.

How were you feeling afterwards?

Not too good, not too good.

It had the desired affect though did it?

Mm!

What did you get up to once you all got full of this grog [alcohol] ?

Well they went over to headquarters where the officers were. There was Jerry Mackenzie, the bloke that I'd had a couple of brushes with and the captain, and Jack Denman, and there was a swimming pool there put in there by the mission, near the officers' quarters, and we used to use it in the daytime but

19:00 at nigh time it got terribly cold. It was about 5500 feet Goroka above sea level, so it used to get pretty cool up there and they said they were going to throw Jack Denman in the pool you see. They didn't mention Jerry Mackenzie. They were heading for Jack and Jerry Mackenzie heard them talking before they got there, the blokes. He says, "Pull your rank on them Jack!" He says, "Pull your rank on them! Don't mess about!" Pull your rank on them is right with those blokes! They were that full they didn't know what they were doing

19:30 but they never threw Jack in because they thought too much of him anyway you know?

Did you cause some strife?

They did for a while. Mackenzie went crook. He read out the riot act the next day.

What kind of riot did they…?

No more making jungle juice and all this caper.

What kind of riot was there though?

Well, it wasn't too bad. We all hopped in the pool afterwards to try and sober up a bit I suppose! It was icy cold too.

So what kind of disturbance did you

20:00 **create?**

Oh they reckoned we caused a terrible disturbance, a ruckus and that.

What kind of a ruckus?

Threatening officers and all this caper.

You got a bit out of line did you?

Yeah must have done! But I the meantime before we came up to Goroka Jack Denman had gone into this Koolau place and they'd ordered that he try and capture

20:30 an officer, a prisoner, preferably an officer. So he went with Jack Carey and six other lads, and they left one night, and got right into Koolau, and Company Head Quarters. They walked into a place and they got right into the place, and it looked like the officer's quarters. It was pretty obvious. We'd opipped the place and we

21:00 knew where the officers and all this were there. They got in close and then the guard opened up with a machine gun, and hit two of the lads. Don Ramshaw, one of the fellas I'd taken down to the Wagi River with me and he was a champion swimmer too. He was hit through the stomach area and Laurie Maloney, he was hit through the head, and they were both killed. So there was only four of them came back

21:30 but we'd never had success getting prisoners, especially when they make it a bit hard and say preferably an officer they want for a prisoner. I don't know if they could get that much information from them anyway but it was a terrible risk trying to get prisoners. It was always ended in tragedy.

What number of these tragedies did you have?

There were two or three all together

22:00 trying to get an officer. We tried it in Timor and lucky we didn't lose the whole section there at one stage.

What would be the claim when you were attempting to capture an officer?

The idea was to knock him out, hit him on the head to make him insensible because you couldn't do anything otherwise and then tie him up, and then you had to carry him you see, which made it doubly hard. That was the only way of getting a prisoner out

22:30 because they certainly did have any intention of letting you take them. So that was the only way and hit them on the head.

It sounds a lot harder than just getting in there and…?

Oh yes terribly hard.

How were you supposed to penetrate their guard or defences?

Goodness knows! The best way you can.

Were you on a couple of these attempts?

One I was in,

23:00 in Timor on an attempt.

Can you describe the events of that attempt?

Yes. We went in and as soon as they wake up that you're there, and they open up, well you can give it away really.

What about you tell us where you were, who you were with and what the plan was?

The idea was to get in and get them when they were coming out at wash time early in the morning, when they were coming down for a wash, and grab one then if he happened to be

23:30 on his own, that's if he did. They usually came down in groups to the rivers and that.

Where were you? You were you with?

Grab them there in the Glano valley. Well that comes to light, the biggest one, I wasn't right with the crown that day. There was about six of them went down. We never used to send the whole…put all our eggs in one basket sort of thing. They went down

24:00 to the wash place and we stayed back on the hill, and then we thought they'd been sprung. We could hear the Tommy guns going and that, and the firing, and they were going to come back to us with a prisoner but they never got back to us. They never even came that way because they got routed before it succeeded. So our wait was in vain there

24:30 and they just never turned up again.

You never saw them again?

Oh yes we saw them a couple of days later but they had to go right the way around them. They couldn't come directly to us and that was the whole section. There was Jack Carey, Sep Wilson, and Jacky Wicks.

What about yourself? Did you actually get in on one of these plans?

I never got right to the finish of it thank goodness, not right down in amongst them no because

25:00 I've never seen a successful one yet, no.

They sound like the impossible really.

It is impossible I would say, just about unless you're terribly lucky. You've got to sort of get them split up but New Guinea was incredibly hard. It was much harder than Timor to anywhere near their camps.

How would you compare the patrols from

25:30 **say New Guinea to Timor?**

I think New Guinea were the toughest.

What made them tougher?

In all ways. Well, we had no advice from the natives and that's a terrific thing if you've got advice exactly what the enemy is and what it's doing, and how many there are there. That's a terrific assistance but in New Guinea the boot was on the other foot. We had to find all that out ourselves and it wasn't too easy.

26:00 Apart from that the terrain was tougher in New Guinea I think. We had to carry everything ourselves, all our gear. The Creados carried it in Timor. You had all your gear with you and it was pretty hard to move with all your pack on and everything, much harder.

You mentioned earlier that the boot was on the other foot as well.

That's right because we were the ones going into ambushes instead of the Japs coming into

26:30 them and at the finish before we went back out to Goroka, practically every patrol that went out was ambushed somewhere along the lines sooner or later.

Are there any particular ambushes that you experienced that you might care to share with us?

Well, I told you about the Jappa one. That was a bad one. We walked right into that one and didn't know they were there. We should have realised when we saw the footprints but

27:00 we had to ignore it because the ones behind were wanting to advance you see.

Any others?

No not…I was never a forward scout when it happened on another one like that, otherwise I probably wouldn't be here because they used to go off pretty readily.

The forward scouts?

Yes.

When you were on those patrols what sort of lengths did they average

27:30 **in New Guinea?**

Around about eight days, eight days on patrols.

Eight days up to close to a month is that right?

Yes very close to a month on the Jappa one.

In the evenings how would you camp down for the night?

You just camped down where you were with all your gear ready to move immediately.

How did you shelter for the night?

Well, if it was

28:00 out in the open air if it was raining you just had to use a groundsheet and you got pretty wet I can tell you but in New Guinea it was jungle country. There was no villages there.

You must have been wet through most of the time?

Yes we were and the rain would come on you and wash the perspiration off you because you even sweat in the rain with the humidity.

What kind of formation would you camp down

28:30 **for the night in?**

Spread out as a rule if we were a big patrol but mainly luckily they were small patrols and you'd camp all close to each other, and with those smaller patrols we didn't mount a guard all night.

So you'd sleep in any fashion on the ground?

Yes just on the ground with your head on your haversack. It was very pleasant if a native had been carrying your haversack

29:00 because they used to get lathered white with perspiration and they'd have it against their body, and you could smell it when it started to warm up at night with your head on it. It wasn't good.

So the natives would get a lather of perspiration?

Yes they did. Yes bush kanaka they used to say. We used to call them bush kanakas.

What does that mean?

They didn't smell too good you know, the bush kanakas.

How was that name coined?

29:30 That's what they used to call the natives that came across on the sugar cutting early before the war they were Solomon Island kanakas and all that, a bush kanaka. A kanaka was a black fella.

What transpired in the time that you remained in New Guinea?

We cross the Ramu River eventually and

30:00 then went right up through there, and over up the Finisterre Ranges, and met up with the Japs again up there, and Six Section was ahead of us, and they ran into the Japs. They had quite a successful go there because they more or less ambushed them and waited for them. That was Six Section of our company and we moved through them

30:30 then, and finished up at a place called Mataloi. Mataloi was on the main route through to Madang and we were full steam ahead then because the Japs were pulling out all the time. They'd open fire for a while and then they'd disappear, and we knew they were withdrawing. We had several photos there of terrific spots they had but they never defended

31:00 them. We called the Hudsons in once at Mataloi, the Hudson bombers and they came in, and strafed, and bombed, and the Japs just moved out. They built in coconut defence logs. You know those logs they have half buried in the ground, firing slits and that, very well built. It must have taken them ages to build them and they never defended them thank goodness. They just kept withdrawing and we could have followed them right through to Madang but we didn't.

31:30 We had orders to stop there and let the militia battalion take Madang, the 58th, 59th.

What were your orders then?

To hold where we were, to stay at Mataloi. We were there cooling the air for about three weeks I think, three or four weeks.

When you say cooling the air, there wasn't much to do?

Nothing to do, no. We could have got right through to Madang and had a good look around in there but

32:00 there was a bit of feeling then about what's-a-name. They didn't want Special Forces going in there, so they let the battalion go in.

So what happened then?

That was getting towards the finish of our activities. Although they took us all the way back from there to the Markham River, down to near Lae, where the Markham River flows in

32:30 and we came down into Lae. We were there about a week and they decided to send us up to Wau, and we went up to Wau in the trucks, shocking road.

What was happening there?

Nothing then, the 2/3rd Company had cleaned that up. They were on their way out too.

So were you enjoying you vacation or were you missing the action?

No, not really. We thought we might as well…they were sending the troops home after six months in New Guinea. The divisions went home after about

33:00 seven or eight and all the 9th Division had gone. They went home and we'd been there three months before them. So we were getting a bit upset.

Did you think you were overdue for a trip home?

Yes we did! Then it got to 12 months and then we were still hanging around Wau and Bulolo, and these places.

What were you doing in those places?

Just like working parties.

What

33:30 **kinds of jobs did they give you in the working parties?**

We had to dig slit trenches for the toilets and all this caper.

You weren't too happy about it were you?

No! No!

So what eventually happened to you?

At that stage I was seconded to the Intelligence Section.

You yourself?

Yes.

Anyone else?

No none from C Troop. I was the only one

34:00 from C Troop. I got a rise in me pay a couple of bob a day.

How were you seconded?

They just…what's-a-name called your name out on parade in the morning because we used to parade every morning of course. We had to maintain discipline and they just said that I had been…going to I Section. It wasn't much of a move on but my pay book was recalled and altered

34:30 in that to a higher trade group reading, a bit more money see?

Why do you think you were seconded from the others they could have chosen?

Don't know, might have felt sorry for me, thought I'd stop answering back if I got this job? So anyway, it wasn't bad. There was nice fellas that were in it. Our first intelligence officer was Jerry Green, a good bloke. He'd been the

35:00 what's-a-name… the sapper sergeant he was when I first met him. Then he became a sapper lieutenant and he was the sapper lieut. He took over and there was about nine I think in the I Section. There was a Neil Bray. I think that's his son now that's on the television a fair bit, Bray, Gordon Bray. That's his son. There was Neil Bray and Alec Bowst from

35:30 A Troop, and Dick Crossing A Troop.

So you felt like you were in good company?

Oh yes but B Troop were quite well educated blokes. They were Norm Tillett and Arthur Hurst.

You raised your eyebrows when you said Dick Crossing?

Dick, he was a wild man! He shouldn't have been with us but he was on the Voyager. He was sailor

36:00 and when the Voyager ran aground he decided…he told the commander there of the destroyer that he was going up into the mountains to find his brother. His brother was in 9 Section with us and Dick came up, and joined up with Wok, and stayed. Of course he missed his chance back with the boat and normally he would have been up for desertion.

I think I've read about him.

Yeah you probably have, that fella! He was the only one of the destroyer that stayed behind.

Do you reckon he was mad for that reason?

36:30 That's one of the reasons but he was. He was a bit like Calvert you know? He really loved that sort of thing and so did his brother Warwick. I was with Warwick on that occasion in Maubesse when we walked into the Japs there, and on another occasion at Iramira, where there was a lot of Japanese. Bernie Callinan sent Warwick and I in as close as we could get to the town, into the city, a little city it was. We got up behind the school and right down,

37:00 and they were everywhere, Japs. They didn't see us of course and we were coming down behind the church, and I said, "No this will do us mate. We're not going any further. We've got to get back up that open ground, up the hill." Anyhow he says, "But Bernie said to try and estimate the enemy. The only way we can do that is to walk around and show ourselves." I says, "Like hell!" I says, "We can get a fair estimate without drawing their fire!" He says, "Yes we'll have to draw their fire and we'll get an idea then how many are there."

37:30 I says, "The whole lot's not going to shoot us anyway. It'll only take a couple to get ya!" So he was quite mad. He said to walk around and show yourself, and draw their fire!

Go home!

Yeah!

And blood thirsty?

But they must have seen us anyway because it wasn't long before they came around after us. We went back to Bernie Callinan and told him. He finished up the supreme commander there. They came forward and I still had my Bren at

38:00 that stage, so it must have been in that period. Anyway, I had a good spot with Jimmy Cullen and Bernie Callinan, he was lieutenant colonel, he sings out, "Go forward with the Bren!" Well that was a stupid idea! Go forward with the Bren? We'd have been in front of our own blokes you know? You always protect your Bren if you can under all circumstances, in case you lose it and there was no

38:30 cover where he said. We had a little bit of a fold in the ground where we were and I had the Bren over the other side with the two legs down on it, and so we were quite well hidden. Anyway, as soon as we got up to move forward they opened up, this mob coming down and Bernie was standing near a bit of a wire fence, where there were some good ponies, horses behind this wire fence. A bullet hit the wire just near his elbow and the wire, you know how

39:00 it curls around when it's tight, it spun around and grabbed him, and he must have thought he was hit in the chest or something. So he ordered us to withdraw. Now if he hadn't have given that order we could have had the firing first. They'd have never known we were there. As soon as we stood up they knew immediately. So that was another bad point about it.

So what happens to you now that you're in I…is it I Section?

Yes the I section.

39:30 Well nothing happened much except that we still stayed in the lines where we were, in the same tent and everything with C Troop but when we got back to Lae about a fortnight later, that's when there was a vote on or something, in Australia there was voting on, and I was what's-a-name. All the I section were returning officers in different camps. They delegated us as returning officers and

40:00 we had to do the vote counting. They were in two envelopes, so you didn't know who cast the vote, all double envelopes. We were counting all the Lae votes. They were intelligence sections that were doing it.

So you had to supervise the vote?

Yes we counted the votes. You'd open the envelope and call out who they'd voted for, and that was it.

You didn't know who the bloke was because you'd open a big pile of envelopes and throw the outside ones away with their names on it, and

40:30 number, and we'd just read the vote out you see? I was there about a week doing that.

Counting votes?

Yes counting votes for the Swan Electorate. We went to the electorate we lived. I did it for the Swans.

That would be a tedious job wouldn't it?

Terrible job! That was my first introduction to the I Section.

Did it get a bit more exciting than that?

Well it would have been

41:00 if I'd have been with 3rd Company because they used them all as…they're the only ones that did the opipping for them there with the I Section. They manned all the opips but by that stage we were on our way back really.

The war was over?

That part of it was. We went into New Britain after that. That's where it ended for us. We did nine months in New Britain.

When we you informed that you were going to New Britain

41:30 **and did you go with the I Section or did you go with your old section?**

No, no I went with the I Section. When I came back off leave I went with the I Section there.

Where did you have leave?

Back in Perth, 68 days we'd accumulated.

That would have been good?

Marvellous!

How did you make it back to Perth?

On the trains. We came back and it was about a week's trip from Brisbane.

So what, boat then train?

Yes the Taroona, the Taroona to Brisbane

42:00 and then…

Tape 9

00:30 **Well George just came up with a good point, you must've relied on your senses a lot in the jungle?**

Yes.

What would you do?

Oh for noises and that and hearing any twigs break or anything like that or things snapping, you could hear it all right.

Did it, did that affect you on a long-term basis?

Oh yes, you found that you were listening all the time and things like that at home and

01:00 especially when I came home, I used to smoke during the night, I'd roll three or four cigarettes and put them beside the bed and wake up about every hour and a half and have a cigarette and things like that.

When you, while you were on your leave, you know, your 68 days that you were very happy about, did you actually know then that you would be going to New Britain?

No, no.

What did you think was

01:30 **going to happen to you?**

I thought that the war would be ended by that time sort of thing because it was, I think it had ended in

Europe, or just about, or might have done. And we, well to save spending much money, any more money, we were going to be broke, you know, after 68 days and going into town every day, and I was in at the butchers, I used to go into the butchers, Mum, my mother, Maisy, at the old shop that I used to work at for two years, I worked two years

02:00 at the butchers shop at Maylands. And the chap that was there, Jack Dawson, I said to him, he was the boss there then and he said, "What are you doing with yourself?" I says, "I don't know, but I'll run out of money soon," he says, "What about, do you want a job on a Saturday morning?." And I said, "Yeah, that'll be okay," so I'd have got hung, drawn and quartered if they caught you in there, you see, you're supposed to be never out of uniform. And so anyway, I used to work there of a Saturday morning. It was good too,

02:30 a good break, and because they were pretty busy and they'd open up and I'd work there. And then I even got a bit game and I wore my suit into the Savoy Hotel one day and, a suit that I had just before I went away to war. And it was fairly tight on me by this time, of course. And, because I was a couple of stone heavier, and I had a hat on and all, you know. And they said, "When did you get out?" and I said, "Oh, I've been working at the butcher shop at Maylands there

03:00 for a couple of weeks," you know, they were all at the Savoy drinking, our mob. And I walked out past the provos, well gee, if they, well, a couple of weeks later they did grab me for wearing shoes instead of boots, the provos, they caught about half a dozen. And when we got back to camp I'm up on my thingamy again, being improperly dressed, not having my boots on. Well they were terrible in Perth, used to slip and slide, you could break you neck, and I these brown shoes on,

03:30 I don't know, they must've been pretty good how they could tell they were shoes and not boots. So I was up before a major from the 2/16th Battalion, Buck Salem I think his name was, and the chap that marched me in was a VC [Victoria Cross] winner old Jimmy Gordon, he was the sergeant down there from the same brigade he was as Salem. And he marched me in there and he read the offence out and he said, all Salem

04:00 said to me, he said, "Get Jim to give you your belt back, will you?" because they take your take your belt off when you go in there, you can't run around with your trousers falling, hanging yourself or something, but they always used to take your big webbing belt off. And he says, "Give him his belt back, Jim." He says, "This is a ridiculous thing, isn't it?" and he put a big cross across the thing and out I walked, that's all I got.

Lucky, lucky, lucky. So how were you informed that you were on your way to New Britain?

04:30 Well we didn't know we were going to New Britain, we did think we were going to the, we thought we'd be going to the Philippines, because that's apparently where we put in for, or the boss did, to go to the Philippines. We didn't want to go to New Britain because there was nothing doing there anyway. And they had orders not to fire on the enemy there. But I think what prompted it, the, there were militia battalions there, a militia brigade

05:00 from Western Australia and the 16th, 11th and 28th battalions from there. And the 16th battalion was, there was a narrow neck on the Gazelle Peninsula that went across and it was the narrowest part of the island. If you really pushed yourself you can force march across it in 24 hours, in one day you could do it, right across New Britain. And the 16th battalion were in this centre post, or one of those, I think it might have been centre post,

05:30 they had four posts across the island, you know that they man full time. And there was a, they had about two platoons there, they had far too many men, anyway, in that type of country. And the Japs followed them back in one morning and they killed about 16 of the 16th battalion and we were sent up there to have a look and that's what brought us to New Britain, I think, was that one offence.

06:00 And so we went up and we manned the post there, just one section of us went up there and then we sent for axes as soon as we got there. You couldn't see out of, they all lived in two man tents and that sort of thing, and no wonder they got badly mauled because there was no line of fire or anything, they had no protection and they could get right up against you. It was just never touched and one of our lieutenants came back a few, well, a couple of weeks later on,

06:30 and we'd cleared it all. And a big clearing, we cleared the whole spur, made a camp of it, and we cleared up the track, 200 yards at least, you know, so we could have a fixed Bren gun on that part, so they couldn't get into you that way, and he was horrified, you know. We used to have hurricane lamps going there at night-time and everything. And, but they lived in secret there and I think that was the trouble too. The Japs would obviously find out you're there, sooner or later, and you want a bit of open country

07:00 and things like that, so we had quite a few axemen in our crowd and sent for half a dozen axes, things like that. It was pretty good chopping that timber.

That would've been very hard work.

Cleared it all, oh yeah, it was good though.

So why did they not set up the appropriate defences?

I don't know, I can't understand it. I might've been just that particular officer's idea that it was safer to be,

07:30 but it wasn't safe to be living in a hole like that.

By the way, how did you get over to New Britain?

On the Taroona. That was a flat bottom thing, especially built to go up that river, is it the Derwent in Tasmania? I think it, but it went on the Tassie run anyway, the Taroona, and it went back on that run afterwards. I got a, there was all the history on the boats, you know, it's got a sort of

08:00 flat bottom so you could get right up the river, and it's got so many tons of concrete set in the bottom so it'll be reasonably worthy. But on a trip to New Britain, big waves and that, the screws used to come out of the thing and then shudder the whole way, you know they come out in the open air and they, and go down into the water again, and the whole boat would shake.

Sounds like a pretty bad idea.

Yes, it was.

How many fellows

08:30 **were on the Taroona with you?**

On the Taroona, the whole of our company was on there, and there was a couple of other branches of troops, there was probably about 600 on board.

It's quite a large ship.

Yes, it's nowhere near as big as the Duntroon, though, Duntroon's bigger.

What were some of the other duties you that you had to start doing in New Britain after you'd arrived and cleared the camp area?

As the I section? That's

09:00 when I was I section in New Britain. Oh, the duties we had prior to that, we used to prepare all the training for the compass marches and things like that at night stunts, we used to plan all the night stunts, half a dozen I section blokes for the whole company.

Well that sounds like it was pretty interesting.

It was, it was very interesting.

How would you go about planning all those?

Well, we used to pick out points that were easily definable, you know, the

09:30 points for a compass march, so they could pick it out at night-time, you know, a certain point. And they used to do a traverse on it, compass traverse, and all this, they still do those today even, and that sort of thing. And when, the only trouble was, we had to man the posts, all the I Section at night time and you had until the last lot came through. We'd give them the drum where we were sometimes, we'd have to, not supposed to indicate where it was, you see.

10:00 We'd say, a little whistle, "Over here mate," because we wanted to get home, you know, be thrashing around in the bush, otherwise.

Were there any incidents as part of those night activities?

The night stunts? Oh, there used to be a few disgruntled about it, but they went off all right reasonably well. But when we got to New Britain, you had to do the track report and I'd been across the other side to Open Bay with

10:30 Maisy Laidlaw and Captain Fox and, Laidlaw's batman, were four of us in it. And we went over to Open Bay to the other side and there was a battalion over there. And went over and made contact with them and I just had to take the notes or whatever over there. And Foxy and I, Captain Fox and I came back ourselves, on our own and Laidlaw stayed there another couple of days. And I came back from that

11:00 one and I'd been up there at that stage for about four weeks on centre post and doing a lot of the paperwork, you know, for the administration, making, you made a report every day, what the activities were going on. And I got back to camp and Duncan Campbell, he came from B troop, because I was the only one from C that went to the I Section. Duncan Campbell, he was the Geelong Grammar fellow, and pretty well educated. I don't know how on earth I got in the I section.

11:30 And, but he'd gone out on a two day patrol and he'd been back in the base camp all that time. And I'd been up there, and during that two days they wanted to set out on this, it was the longest patrol that was ever done in New Britain by the 2/2nd, that was another 24 day job, it was a shocker. And we had to go right up behind Rabaul, straight north, straight up through the jungle country, so the only way of getting up was to follow the Mevelo River and the day

12:00 that we left it started raining. And that was really rain, too, I've never seen rain like it. New Britain is probably, they say it's about the wettest place in the world and it's nothing to get four or five inches in a day, you know, and then the next day another four or five. It was colossal. And I think it's the only thing that really saved us because we got so far up we crossed over a couple of big roads and was all reconnaissance stuff. And I thought, "Well, if it

12:30 stops raining we'll never get back, because the Japs will go back to their camps," we passed through their areas, "and they'll get us on the way back for sure." But it never, it kept on raining and the people back on the coast, they had a wonderful sight, there were trees swept down the Mevelo, it was a pretty big river, swept down the Mevelo river and roots and everything came down and the whole tree were coming down on the river, the tides. And we were walking in water a foot deep,

13:00 we couldn't get away from it. And at night time you used to prop yourself in a tree so you wouldn't drown. You used to prop yourself in the branches of a tree at night time and sleep sort of hanging up, sitting half up. It's the worst patrol I've ever been on in my life. And Doygie mentioned us in his book. He said Jack Carey said he was on the two worst patrols that were even done by the company and one was in Jappa in New Guinea and the other was on the Mevelo

13:30 River, well, I jagged the other when I shouldn't have done that. Duncan Campbell should've done it but he was sent out for a couple of days and I copped the big 24 dayer.

So you were literally soaking wet for 24 days.

Absolutely, yep.

Doesn't that, like, affect your skin and

Oh yes, it gets all puckered up like a prune and that, all over.

There's nothing you can do about it.

No, not a thing.

How about with the

14:00 **weapons, does it affect the weaponry?**

Well, you take care of them more than yourself you have to, but when I went to the I section I was given a sub-machine gun, we all had submachine guns in I Section. And then I had to write a report, I did the track report on that.

What did you say in the report?

Oh, it was pretty harsh, old Jack Fox said he'd have to edit it and go through it, because I didn't used to

14:30 pull any punches with what I thought of it. I told them what a mess it was from start to finish, it was totally ridiculous, you know. All this, well he had to eradicate all that sort of stuff. But it was, it was ridiculous. And we ran out of tucker at the finish because we had a chap with a very high temperature and we had an RAP fellow with us because it looked like being a fairly extended exercise

15:00 and Jimmy Ritchie said, "His temperature's far too high for malaria." He said, "He hasn't got malaria. I think he's got scrub typhus." And they were terribly frightened of that because it used to knock them about terribly, the fellows. We had about seven or eight cases of that, and some of them were quite drastic, pretty fatal. And Bluey Bone, and we decided we'd have to carry him because there was no cargo boys would come up through there, they wouldn't come past the first half day with you. Because after that you're deep in enemy territory

15:30 and they had no intention of coming. And so we had to carry our own gear, and we had to take turns in carrying Bluey Bone, and he was about a 13 stone man. Not that tall but very nuggetty. And so it slowed us down to the extent that we ran out of rations and we had to send for more, send a message and I forget who the sig was on that, but

16:00 he sent a message and got through. And they sent a chap to meet us with rations and I think we were right out by the time he got to us. A George Timms, he came on his own which, he's a good bushman George, and he knew exactly where to find us and he came and he met up with us, thank goodness. Oh, I think he brought a few cargo boys to carry Bluey Bone, because we never carried him after that.

Did he actually have

16:30 **the scrub typhus?**

No, no, I don't think so.

Were you blokes still coming down with malaria?

Oh yes, yep. Yeah.

It's just a constant.

Well, we shouldn't have done because we were on Atebrin at that stage, we were quite yellow like, from the Atebrin. All your clothes went quite yellow, even your green shirts were quite yellowy green, your jungle greens.

Are you saying you're even sweating it out?

Yes. That was, it came out in your perspiration.

17:00 Real yellow it is too, Atebrin.

How many Japanese do you think there was at that time in the New Britain area?

Well, we thought there was anything up to 50 thousand in Rabaul. But at the final count, because we had to go into Rabaul at the finish to take over the surrender business, and they found there were 92 thousand there. Now, what on earth could a battalion,

17:30 or a couple of battalions do against 92 thousand? It should've been, there should've been no one on Rabaul at all except the Japs, left them there, bypass it completely. But I think what it was, they wanted to place the Australian troops and that's why they sent them into Borneo, there was no need to go to Borneo, they could've bypassed it. That was another thing were MacArthur didn't want us near the Philippines, he wanted to return on their own. And I've read books that said he didn't want the

18:00 Australian divisions, like the 9th Division, to show up the American type of warfare because they were far superior than the American warfare, the 9th Division and those fellows.

Is that, are you saying that your time in New Britain was a complete and total waste of time?

Absolutely. Should never ever have gone there.

What do you think should've happened with New Britain?

It should've been left. Bypassed like the Yanks bypassed it and got out of there. They wouldn't leave them in there.

18:30 But I think Blamey and a few of those, they were hopeless, they were yes men for the Americans then. I think that's why there's so much animosity towards the Americans amongst the older men because of things like, see, Borneo, everybody killed there I think was a complete waste. And the 7th and 9th Divisions were there in force in both places. No it was,

19:00 and that's not in hindsight, it was obvious then even.

Is that the general consensus that was going on where you were?

Yes. Yeah.

Did you know how long you'd be in New Britain?

No, we had no idea. Had no idea that the atom bomb was going to be dropped, otherwise we'd have been up there still, probably. That's the only thing that ended the war so quickly.

So how did you actually hear about the atom bomb?

I think we heard pretty quickly. Because they opened the canteen up at about midnight, and away she went, the fanfare and the yelling and the streamers, it's all over, you know. And we said, "As long as the Japs know that." And Mick Morgan took a patrol out over the area that we'd been on the Mevelo River and the Japs were on the other side of the Mevelo River well down, and his first half day out he struck a big Jap patrol. And they

20:00 immediately tied a white flag on the end of a rifle, and held it up, you know, the officer with them, the Japs. So Mick did the same, you know, so they knew all about it immediately as we did, as soon as we did.

Are you saying they knew that the war was over after the bomb was dropped or after it was

Yes, after the bomb was dropped, yeah.

Like directly after the bomb

Oh, very soon after it, yeah, didn't take very long at all. Of course they'd be very well informed at Rabaul because that was a big area, see,

20:30 a huge base, was probably a couple of generals and that there, it would've been obviously, several generals perhaps at Rabaul.

Were there still Japanese in patrols that probably wouldn't have known?

That's it, yes, if they didn't know then you'd be in trouble.

What sort of precautions then would you take?

I think the best one would've, not to recce too much, you know, keep out of the road for, give them enough time. Because in some isolated cases, they

21:00 never knew for months.

Well yeah, that's what I'm thinking, they might still

But I think being such a high density amount of troops there they were pretty well, and it was well condensed, you know, they were pushed up into the Gazelle Peninsula, a lot of them too.

So how, what did you do after it was all over?

Well, after that the I Section was put to finding war criminals, tracking them. And you get a name like a Captain Tanako, well, there might be 600

21:30 Captain Tanakos in the Japanese army and then you'd have to start to, you'd find all the Captain Tanakos for starters. And then you'd have to weed them out, because if he was an artisan or a highly skilled administrator or something, that singled him out, or he could've been a sapper captain or something like that. And we used to weed them out that way.

Would you actually do an interrogation?

No, no. All done on paper, we had all their lists, we had all their manning lists and that.

22:00 **What would you do with them?**

With the ones that we thought were the criminals, the war criminals, sort them out and we had a chap with us called Sailor Ward. And he got very involved and even helped to design a hanging thing for them, you know, they were going to hang the war criminals there, you see.

Would you actually take any sorts of eyewitness accounts in regards to

We didn't but I think some of the other I section did further up, you know, the higher

22:30 ranking I sections did. They took over from the list that we got, we narrowed it down pretty well. We'd just about pin point the blokes.

Was it easy to do?

It wasn't too easy because a terrible lot of work on one fellow sometimes. But you could soon sort out, sooner or later something would give him away and you could drop out that particular person, then you'd follow another one that looked most like. And sometimes they hadn't even been in the immediate area at that

23:00 time, you know, we could find that out. So eventually you got onto the right one, I'm pretty sure.

How would you actually target somebody for, you know, the possibility of the fact that they created some sort of a war crime? What were you looking for, like, you know

We were given their names and what they did, you know, like war crime is committed in where ever it was, New Britain, New Guinea,

23:30 I think mainly New Guinea ones that we wanted.

What would you do with these fellows once you've

Well they were singled out and they were segregated and put behind barbed wire. And they still had a lot of work to do on them, the higher-ranking officers. They interrogated them from there on.

And how many of these blokes that you identified ended up dead?

Quite a few I believe.

24:00 **So your hit rate was pretty good.**

Oh yes, yeah. Yeah, they did, but there was a lot of wheels and deals again. Like the ones that did all the atrocities up in Ambon, you might have seen that picture, our friends again didn't want them killed because of politics, and MacArthur heading over that way.

24:30 He had a big finger in the pie too, MacArthur. And he didn't want anything done with the, but the Ambon one would've been a terrible lot of high-ranking officers died there, they should've been too. Because, I think there was a picture made of that, wasn't there?

I think so, yes.

Blood Oath it was called.

That's right.

And because they were terrible atrocities.

Did it actually surprise you when you started hearing about the atrocities?

No,

25:00 no, not one bit. Not after what happened at Kupang area too. They were bad, well, they were quite bad with our platoon, they were prisoners of war, they weren't to be shot, they shouldn't have been shot. But they were totally disregarded the whole, well, to lose 14 out of a platoon is a lot, isn't it? Just shot in cold blood, they were murdered. No

25:30 doubt about it.

So what happened after that time where you were sorting out who should be going to the war crimes? Is that all you were doing?

Yes, full time on war crimes, yes, full time on that. Until we got our points system, we were going home on that system. But the reason, well, I lost a lot of my mates on that because they had an allotment, if their

26:00 mother was a widow they had an allotment to the mother of three shillings a day and they got a higher points system than we did. And married men got a higher points system, and any that had been married on leave and that sort of thing, you know. And or if they were married at all, of course, after a certain thing, doubled. So, but my, I had a fair few because overseas service got you a fair few points and I had a fair amount of overseas service. And I was set to go home just after

26:30 Christmas and in the meantime, they split our unit up, they didn't send it home as a unit, which they should've done. And we were all shot of to different units, to militia units and that. And that got up my nose again, and very much so. And Duncan Campbell and I were sent off to the I Section of the 37 52nd Battalion.

27:00 And then I had to officially become a member of the 37 52nd, I said, "No way." Anyway the captain there, the 2IC bloke, adjutant I think he was, he got Duncan and I lined up there, and he said, "Now, you'll have to take your colour patches down," because we had a distinctive double red diamond, you know, from commandos. And he said, "You'll have to take that down and put our colour patch up," you know. And next morning on parade they attacked us again and they actually took

27:30 my puggaree off with the colour patch on it, you know. And he says, "If you don't want to lose your puggaree, take that colour patch off." So I said, "I'll take it off," I said, "I'm not putting yours on," and anyway, he went crook again. And after about three or four days of this, then they wanted us to go drilling in the morning, rifle drill, and we didn't turn up to that, Dunc and I and he called us up ever

28:00 again. And Duncan had nowhere near as many points as me to come home and this captain rooster again, he said, "Well," he said, "obviously you're not going to soldier on.," He said, "You might as well get out of here." I said, "I thought that a long time ago." So anyway he, I went home in a couple of days then.

So your mouth actually worked for you instead of against you for one of the first times.

Yes. Poor old Duncan though, he was devastated,

28:30 he was left on his own then, I don't know how he got on or what he did. But it was very demeaning, you know, for people that have been

So how did you get back home?

On the Vico, it was one of those ships that were built by the Kaiser Company, I think it is in America. They're all welded together and there was no studding or anything like that. They're the ships that used to snap in half sometimes in rough seas. Those sort, but they used to pack the troops on board.

29:00 **Doesn't sound very comfortable.**

Terrible. And I was right down towards the bottom, I was about 12 feet below the water line, I think. And used to have to go down these steel steps and there, and there was three bunks on either side of the thing, narrow, just room to walk up in between. And they were against the bulkheads and that, and all steel. And I was in the middle one, in the middle bunks. And there was a big bloke up above me and used to bulge it down, it was a sort of a, just like a big

29:30 cyclone gates, you know. And it bulged down, I couldn't turn over in bed, I had to lie on my back and all this. Whenever I could I used to get up top and sleep on top of the hatches, you know, on the hatch covers. And then they'd find you there during the night and they'd send you down to your bunk again. It was as black as, and it was like an oven down there, no ventilation.

Did it take about four days to get home?

Yes, I think it did.

What was it like coming home?

Landed at Brisbane. It was pretty good.

30:00 There were a few of us, our blokes on that boat, there were about 10 of us I think. They had come from everywhere, and they were all different units by that stage and it was a very sad time, breaking up. Because it was like a, just a gang of brothers, you know. He hasn't gone to sleep there, has he?

No. Okay, thanks.

30:30 **So what happened after you came back, did you decide to get out?**

Yes, I could've got out, but there was a chap I knew fairly well, he was in the returned stores section, a sergeant major, the Herron WO1 [Warrant Officer First Class] , Arthur Wardley. He was a, he was in charge of one of the floors in Bowens, in civilian life, and he, we were in charge of, he was in charge of the returned stores section. He says, "Have you got a job to go to?" I says,

31:00 "No, because," I said, "the butchers have changed hands again so I can't get straight back to them." He said, "Well, until you find a job why don't you stay in the army, stay here, and you can work with me." And Tom Crouch was already working there, this fellow from here, he came in from Z Force, and he was working at returned stores section. They were all blokes that had been, seen a lot of action. And we were behind there and we had to mark off the chaps coming through for discharge off their books, you know. And if they were short we used to just let them off and Arthur Wardley,

31:30 the first day he gave us a great lecture, he said, "Look," he said, "we're about 60 blankets down the drain." He says, "you've got to make them, if they haven't got them, don't let them off, make them pay for it," he says, "because otherwise we're going to get shot." So after that, if there was anything missing we used to have to ask them, you know, "No, we can't." "What are we out, mate," you know, they'd say. Anyway, one bloke went crook at Charlie Leeder that was on the desk next to me, we used to sit on high stools and we'd take all their gear off them and that.

32:00 And it was quite good working there, we used to check their haversack and all this had to come in, water bottle and all. And we had to finish up, and put them in different big bins. And Charlie Leeder says to this chap one day, he came from the 2/32nd, Charlie, 9th Divvy [Division] , and he'd been shot badly in the stomach and he had half of his intestines removed and that sort of thing. He had a burst of machine gun through there. And the chap says to him, "It's all right for you mate, sitting here all war in your cushy

32:30 job," and Tom and I never said anything. And Charlie Leeder said, "Yeah, too right." He says, "I've been here all the war, mate," he said, "and I'm not giving it up, a good job like this." And the bloke was going to get over and deck him and then somebody said to him, "Wake up to yourself, mate." He says, "The poor bugger's had half his stomach knocked out with machine gun fire," you know. They don't stop to think, you know. And a bloke tackled Tom one day, he reckoned he was a base walloper, "All right for you base wallopers," sort of thing. And old Tom finished

33:00 up Z Force after Timor and New Guinea.

It's quite amusing.

It is.

So how did you end up in the building industry?

When I first come home then, I got out of the army and Jim Haffel had been the foreman at Henderson Brothers butchers, he says, "Why don't you use your deferred pay and come in with my and we'll buy the, buy a butcher shop somewhere?" So I said, "Sounds all right to me," and because it was all knew, you see.

33:30 And the North Perth butchery was for sale and it was 11 hundred pounds, well I had 550 okay, but Jim had to mortgage his house because he never had quite enough saved up. It was a fair bit of money in those days, 11 hundred bucks. And it was a big shop on the corner of Charles and Ango Street.

Yeah, I know.

There's a huge garage there now, and it was a very busy corner and the tram used to come, the tram terminus was at the end of us.

34:00 It had a marvellous turnover. And, but it was all due to the round, we used to do a butcher's round and finish up at Wanneroo and, or actually, Yanchep Park, used to finish up at McNess House about dark. Used to take 16 hours to do the round. Well I did that and Jim took over the shop part, we had, and I had a man with me and Jim had a man with him in the shop. So there were four of us, flat out. We shifted a lot of meat,

34:30 but we weren't getting the coupons in enough, you know. The same old story, there was coupons, once you start a butcher's round they're always suspect. And anyhow they let us off pretty well the first month and then they said, "If you're short again we'll have to close the round down." We thought, "Oh, they wouldn't do that." But we were short of coupons again, so to avoid closing the round down, which they threatened, we got onto a farmer up at York. And he bought a truckload of about

35:00 60 sheep down, and it was black-market, if you were caught was jail. But anyway, we weren't too happy, but we had to do it. Well we had them killed locally there and we had an accountant, a bloke that had

lost his licence as an accountant, he came round and he used to mark all the sheep for us, and the lambs, and he had all the appropriate rollers and the health inspector's numbers, from one to six and he used to mark them all for us. And every stamp that went on, we had to pay him a certain amount of money.

35:30 So time we paid the accountant bloke that was a bad fellow, that was well known in the circles, and he used to run his roll right, you know, lamb and that on the sides, on the thing, to make it look legitimate. You couldn't hang them in the shop otherwise, they'd know straight away they were black-market. So it wasn't worth it, so we tried to get the coupons in and all that sort of thing and we got, we killed a couple of bullocks there. I did that one

36:00 night out were Dog Swan Shopping Centre is now, right there. And knocked him and he hadn't been killed, stunned properly and complained bitterly, he was a big fellow, and he complained bitterly when Jim stepped in to cut his throat, because I swung the sledge hammer and dropped him and he went straight down. I thought he was gone all right but it must've been towards the horn box a bit and he flung Jim off like a heap of overalls, you know, Jim was shot through the air. Oh

36:30 dear. So we had quite a few adventures there. But the only ones I got away with, I used to, every time, every Thursday on the round I'd come back and I'd kill a vealer at one of these places, they all had vealer, you know. I didn't like that but it used to go without a hitch because they're about a six month old beast, quite a good beast. And that built our coupon supply up quite a bit.

This is just an extraordinary story

37:00 **of butchering in Western Australia.**

Yeah. But anyway after six months they did close our round down so we had to sell out then. He discovered pork in the shop, the bloke, the inspector was outside the window and you weren't allowed to sell pork at all, under any circumstances.

Why was that?

It was all being kept for bacon, and export to Britain and these places, and you were just not allowed, if you sold pork in a shop, we had no trouble getting rid of it, but you

37:30 mustn't show anything. And some smart, one of the other fellows had, was a little bit of pickle belly pork. And it accidentally got outside, it had been in the pickle tub and they were cleaning it out on the Saturday morning, all the tongues and that, and they were putting them in the shop window. And one of the inspectors went past and it was supposed to be full of tongues and that and he spotted this little pickle belly pork with, the piece with the buttons on, you know. That's how he caught it, and he saw it and he came in, all over. We had to go up before the tribunal then

38:00 and they threatened us so we put the shop up for sale to quieten them down, and we sold out. But while I was in there, I had two lots of malaria pretty badly and then I went into Hollywood again with it and I told them, I said, "No, I think it's due to going into the refrigerating chamber all the time and it's not doing it any good so I'll have to give it away." So

The butchering business was not meant to be.

No. So

38:30 Colin Doyge, this chap we were talking about today, he was, he'd been my captain during the war and he said, "Well why don't you put in for rehab course?" I said, "I'm too late now." He says, "No you're not." He said, "I'll fill one in for you and put it down to health reasons." So I changed courses then and I put in for the building construction. And Doygie endorsed it all and got one of the fellows there to sign it up and then I was called up in the next intake of carpenters and joiners.

Do you think with all your

39:00 **experiences that you've had during the war, that it changed you as a person?**

Oh I think so, yes.

For the better?

Yes, I think so, definitely. Yes, it didn't do me any harm.

Can you extrapolate on that, why do you think it changed you for the better?

Because I think you understand people a lot better than ever before. And you get so close to people and such amazing friendships.

39:30 You know people that, they risked their life for you everyday and you do for them too.

So you wouldn't have changed the fact that you had these extreme experiences?

I think it was part of that, yes.

And how do you celebrate Anzac Day?

Well, I don't go in any more, I used to. I never missed one for many years on Anzac Day, but I'm not well enough now to

40:00 go in really, I can't walk very far. And I haven't been too well for about 10 or 12 years.

Do you think Anzac Day has changed a lot over the years?

I think it has, yes.

How?

Well after Anzac Day once, the whole of the city has changed of course, because we used to just go down under the palm trees and open a keg of beer. And that was that, but now of course, you can't do that, you've got

40:30 to go into a place, you know, and pay through the nose for it and that sort of thing. But the other way was good. But it was far freer and easier in those days, but I think it was probably wrong doing it that way, I don't know. But I think young people have taken to Anzac Day much better now than before because once all the old fellows were looked on as just old drunks,

41:00 you know, on that day. But they weren't celebrating the war, I think it was just a chance to get together, that's all it was, to see their brothers.

Yes. Considering the fact that these tapes are kept for perpetuity for the archive, do you have any philosophy or words of wisdom that you've kind of gained from having the experiences you did in the war that you'd like to pass onto future

41:30 **generations?**

Yes, I think it, I think you must regard that discipline is very necessary, even although at times you break yourself. But in other ways you're far more disciplined than younger people today. And I think it taught us that, and the value of friendship as I said before, I don't think you could ever replace that.

42:00 And…

INTERVIEW ENDS