

Australians at War Film Archive

Keith Irwin (Scoop) - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:35 **Keith I was wondering if we could start today by you giving us just a brief overview of your life during the pre War years, during the War and then after the War.**

Right back to the days when I was born?

Right back to then.

I was born on 18 January 1923 in a little nursing cottage called

01:00 Cosy Cottage in Fairlight Street, Five Dock. Just after that, my mother and my father moved to Petersham and I stayed in Petersham right up until 1952, I beg your pardon, 1950 when I got married and during that time of course as I progressed from being a

01:30 baby I went to Public School at Crystal Street Public School at Petersham. Later on of course I went to Stanmore Commercial School where I did a commercial course mainly with shorthand and bookkeeping and those sort of things and the shorthand I never ever used. When I left school in 1938 I got a

02:00 job as a Copy Boy at the Sydney Sun, the old Sydney Sun. The idea was that I would have hoped to have become a reporter later on. But of course as a Copy Boy it was a wonderful experience. In those early days with reporters, when they went out on a job they had a small pad and they would write down what they thought about the story they were writing about and they would tear off the

02:30 pages and I'd have to race to the nearest telephone and I'd ring back to the office and there would be two men sitting at typewriters and I would have to read the reporter's words over the phone and the chaps at the typewriters would take it down and they would race those copies to the sub-editors who would edit that particular story and in the meantime I'd be back get ready for the next few pages. But I did

03:00 go out with some very, very prominent reporters in those days, one who comes to my mind straightaway was Paul Brickhill. Paul Brickhill was a famous reporter in his day who joined the RAAF and was taken a Prisoner-of-War at Colditz, the German POW Camp and as a consequence of his being a prisoner he did write two or three remarkable books about his time in Colditz. Of course,

03:30 getting back as a Copy Boy at The Sun I was 16 years of age and just to get a little bit of extra pocket money I did join the militia which a lot of young fellows did in those days. It worked this way. If you went to the drill hall eight nights over an eight-week period that counted as one day's pay and that's what you got. We also had every now and then there would be a weekend

04:00 away in a camp somewhere and later on there would be a three month camp but of course on 3 September 1939 war was declared with Germany and of course my battalion, I was in the 1st Battalion, the City of Sydney Regiment and we were mobilised on that day and we did take up defensive positions all around Sydney. The 1st Battalion, our defensive positions were from South

04:30 Head right through to La Perouse and my post was right in the sand hills at La Perouse and one of the amusing things that did take place in those days and I'm sure you'd love to hear it we did have a search light and the little bit of fun we'd have at night, we would turn the search light and put it right across the beach and you'd see all the young couples jumping up, getting dressed and going for their life. We thought that was a great thing to fill

05:00 in our spare time. I was with a mortar crew a 3 inch mortar crew and we did have a mortar gun station right in the sand hills at La Perouse just in case they thought there may have been attacks coming from that part of the world. Of course eventually we were moved from La Perouse and we were in camp at one time at Liverpool camp which was a First World War

05:30 camp and I think the most thing I can remember about the old Liverpool camp was that during World War 1 they were all tin huts and of course the soldiers training in those days used to race up and down

with their bayonets and make holes in the tin and of course when the winds came up they used to blow straight through these holes and in the middle of winter it was probably the coldest camp we had in Australia and of course the next move was over to

- 06:00 Ingleburn camp and one thing I'd like to mention too which I think was very, very important to myself, the colour patches of the 1st Battalion were black over green oblong on the arm and of course whilst I was at the Ingleburn camp I volunteered to go to the 53rd Battalion and the colour patches of the 53rd Battalion were the same colours but turned up end on end but the important thing is my father
- 06:30 was a Gallipoli veteran and he was in the 1st Battalion during World War One and of course when I joined the 1st Battalion he gave me his old colour patches and I actually wore his colour patches in the 1st Battalion and when I went to the 53rd I just had to turn them up on end and I wore them again and I was very proud of the fact that I did wear my dad's colour patches for all that time. With the 53rd Battalion it was a battalion that was formed for service in Darwin.
- 07:00 We went to Ingleburn Camp, I think it would have been November 1941 just before the Japs came into the war and of course the 53rd was formed all the infantry battalions in NSW had to provide men for the 53rd Battalion and consequently a lot of the men that we did get, the Colonels and
- 07:30 Commanding Officers of these Battalions it was a golden opportunity to get rid of all the dead wood so we finished up with some characters is the word I can think of at the moment, we finished up with quite a lot of characters but the battalion was made up of volunteers and of course chaps had been sent from other battalions and when the time came I was lucky enough to get home for Christmas lunch
- 08:00 with my mother and father and sister at Petersham and my father said to me, I'd said "I've got to get back to camp now Dad" and he said "You're leaving now aren't you, you're going overseas?" and I said "Yes, we would be leaving on Boxing Day". I beg your pardon we were leaving on the 27th and he said "We won't tell your mother at this stage" and so when I got back to camp and the whole battalion was busy putting everything together
- 08:30 and was all transported down to the ship which happened to be the Aquitania tied up at the wharf at Woolloomooloo and at that time the Aquitania was the third biggest ship in the world. There was only the Queen Mary and Queen Elizabeth bigger than that ship and we left about 5.00am in the morning in buses which took us down to Ingleburn Station where there was an old steam train waiting for us, supposed to be top secret and nobody knew where we were going and what was going to happen and when the
- 09:00 train set off and made its way along the line towards Sydney there was banners up outside the houses everywhere saying goodbye 53rd Battalion. Everybody including the Japs I think, knew where we were going at that particular time. The steam train eventually went down to a branch stop at Marrickville and went down the old train line which went down to Darling Harbour and it went right onto the wharf at Darling Harbour and we got off the train and
- 09:30 we got onto ferries tied up alongside the wharf and when the ferries moved off, I'd might like to add at this stage, from the Sydney Sun, I was very friendly with one of their best photographers a chap by the name of Ted Hood and he happened to be down on the wharf as I got onto the ferry and he called out to me and to this day I've still got quite a nice photograph of me on the ferry taken by Ted Hood the photographer which I'll show you after. Anyhow
- 10:00 the ferries went round under the Harbour Bridge and we did board the Aquitania from the sea side they had a big barge, a flat barge and we climbed up onto the barge and went into an open port right on water level and I was a sergeant at the time and to our delight there were six sergeants and we were given a state room up on 'A' deck but to get to that state room, the decks went from 'A'
- 10:30 up to about 'L' and 'M' I think it was so we had to climb up these companion ways with all our gear to the state room right up on top of 'A' deck but it was a magnificent state room the original bed had been taken out and bunks had been put in and we thought we'd got it made and of course they still had a sergeant's mess, they had an officer's mess, a sergeant's mess and a men's mess and it was a British ship and the stewards were still dressed up in their
- 11:00 white coats and the tables had beautiful crockery and cutlery and we had some of the best meals I think I've ever had in the Army and of course when the time came the blast on the horn when we pulled away from the wharf and we started to move down the harbour there was small boats everywhere with relations all on them and somehow or other everyone knew it was the 53rd Battalion and we were going out through 'The Heads'.
- 11:30 When we did get out through 'The Heads' we hadn't gone very far out to the sea and an announcement came over the communications system that we're not going to Darwin we're going to Port Moresby in New Guinea and I think at that time nobody even knew where New Guinea was or anything about it. It was one of those mysterious countries we knew that sat on the top of Australia. So we had special tropical gear to go to Darwin. We had
- 12:00 light khaki uniforms. I think we were the only Battalion that ever had these. We had light khaki uniforms, shorts, which we called 'Bombay Bloomers' which buttoned back to make shorts and at night time you could unbutton them against mosquitos. We had long socks with colour patches in the sock and

to top it all we had a lovely superman cape which went over our shoulders and tied up around our neck and of course we thought we were just right with this lovely uniform but of course

- 12:30 once we got to New Guinea it was absolutely hopeless, we didn't use them at all. I'd like to add too that this was the first convoy that left Sydney to go to Port Moresby and we were escorted by five cruisers. One of the cruisers was the New Zealand cruiser the Achilles, which had been one of the ships that fought the Graft's Bay battle on the coast of South America and sunk the German battleship
- 13:00 and because the convoy was thought to be so important we were escorted, there was only three ships in the convoy, there was the Aquitania there was the Sarpedan which was a supply ship and there was the Kerstein. The Kerstein was a Norwegian ship and of course once we did get to Port Moresby the Kerstein unloaded some of its supplies and continued on its way to Rabaul in New Guinea and in February
- 13:30 just after it was sunk in the first air raids when the Japs attacked Rabaul but we did arrive in Port Moresby. We left on 27 December 1941 and we arrived in Port Moresby on 3 January 1942 so it took quite a while to get there because of the route that the ship took. It did zigzag way out to sea and kept coming back. We did have a good time on
- 14:00 the Aquitania, I might add. We took up a whole bunch of nursing sisters and they were the first nursing sisters to go to New Guinea but unfortunately the only people who could get to them were the officers and that's what always happens in the Army. But later of course when the first air raids took place in Port Moresby and they were very severe air raids, all the nursing sisters were evacuated back to Australia. They never got back to New Guinea until
- 14:30 things quietened down around about late 1943 early 1944. Going good am I?

Going well. In New Guinea

In those early days in Port Moresby the civilians were still there, the town was not a big town. There was two hotels. Steam ships big trading store, Burns

- 15:00 Phillip, big trading store and we were actually able to go into milk bars and buy milk shakes served by native girls. The biggest village at Port Moresby was Hanuabada. Huts out of over the water a huge village and of course all the natives wore their normal dress in those days which was grass skirts all the girls were bare top
- 15:30 which was quite a nice sight to see. It made life a little bit interesting for a lot of the fellas I would say. It was a dreadful time apart from that because the bulk of our work was making reinforcements. We had to put up barbed wire mile after mile of barbed wire all through the mangrove swamps and you can imagine what that was like. We dug slit trenches all over the place.
- 16:00 Food was very very scarce. One of the main reasons the Aquitania when it was loaded back in Sydney. All our tents, all our supplies were put on the bottom of the hold and on top of everything went all the heavy gear, all the ammunition and all the weaponry so that when we got to Port Moresby we had to get into one of the cruisers and that took us up to the wharf and we marched right around the foreshores to
- 16:30 a place called Simpson's Gap and for the first week, 7 or 8 days actually we had no tents whatsoever so we slept in the open and if it hadn't been for the RAAF had a Catalina flying base down at the foot of the mountain and if it hadn't been for the RAAF chaps a lot of us would have starved because they actually took us in and fed us and they didn't have to do it. There was one of the greatest shemozzle of all time to think that they could put a whole
- 17:00 body of troops in fact there was 2 Battalions. There was the 53rd which was the NSW battalion and the 39th which was a Victorian battalion. We both travelled up in the Aquitania and it was an absolute nightmare those first days because at night time down would come the rain and we were just sleeping out in the open and it wasn't very, very long, only a matter of days and the fellows were going down with dysentery and it caused an awful lot of trouble.
- 17:30 They were going into hospital there. Sometimes 10 or 15 chaps every day were being admitted to hospital and the rest of us still had to carry on. There was absolutely no training given to us at all and I would like to just go back for one moment when the Aquitania, the day we left Sydney, about one hundred odd soldiers were marched on board the ship and they came from a staging camp and these were fellows who had just come into the army and they'd
- 18:00 never even handled a rifle of any description and they were given no final leave and they were brought on board this ship and all young chaps they were, 18 upwards and they didn't have any idea where they were going, what they were doing, they didn't even know where they'd come from. So we got off to a very, very bad start both these battalions. The army had a lot to answer for when you look back and think what happened in
- 18:30 those early days. Anyhow as the time progressed and we got up to about July the word came through that the Japanese were heading towards the North Coast of New Guinea and the 39th Battalion was given the task of going up into the Owen Stanleys first of all but prior to that one part of the 39th Battalion went round by small boats

- 19:00 and they landed where Buna is today and they headed up to Kokoda had to take up defensive positions from the North Coast and the rest of the 39th went up from the Port Moresby side. The 53rd we were then ordered to go up after them. Now I was in the mortar platoon again in the 53rd Battalion but because the 53rd we lost so many men with sickness our numbers were depleted dramatically so what happened was
- 19:30 the Headquarter Company of an infantry battalion is a specialist company that's where you have your platoon of mortar men, men who operate the biggest machine gun, your signal platoon, your pioneer platoon, they are all specialists. But because the rifle companies were so depleted in numbers they took quite a few of us out of the specialist platoons and we became riflemen and we were attached to the rifle companies. So as a Mortar Sergeant
- 20:00 I was attached to A Company of the 53rd Battalion and we started up over the Kokoda Track. I don't know really how to describe the Kokoda Track there has been that much written about it over the years. A dreadful place is all I can say. There were parts there where it took us, you could be standing on top of a mountain and about 400 or 500 yards away you could see the point of another mountain. To get to that other mountain
- 20:30 it took all day to get right down to the bottom and up the other side to reach that point. A lot of the tracks we went round you had to carry your rifle in one hand and hang on to bushes and trees to get round the sides of these mountains. Raging streams of water. You could set your clock every afternoon at the same time down came the heavy rain and when I say rain, many, many inches would fall in an hour so you were constantly
- 21:00 wet all the time and even if you put your, we had a rubber ground sheet which we used to lay on, but that was also used as a cape, so you'd put that around your shoulders and being a tropical country apart from all the rain you were sweating so much under the cape, from this rubber cape. In the meantime the 39th Battalion, the Japanese had landed behind them and made their way up to Kokoda. Now we'd always been told
- 21:30 that the Japanese were small and every Jap was supposed to have worn glasses. Not these fellas. They were great big 6 foot Japs and they come from a special unit that had been in action in China for many many years. They were very, very jungle conscious. Their training was absolutely terrific what they done. The Japanese attacked the 39th Battalion and their colonel at that time
- 22:00 he was killed and so they retreated out of the Kokoda back towards Moresby, hadn't gone too far and then they regrouped and they put in an attack and re-took Kokoda once more. The Japanese put in a bigger attack and this time they pushed the 39th out and of course by this time the 53rd we never got to Kokoda we got to a place called Nenagee [probably means Deniki], which was the nearest village to Kokoda. We met the 39th coming back
- 22:30 and we all took part in what was called the fighting retreat. We retreated almost back to Moresby. In the meantime three battalions had been brought back from the Middle East. The 2/14th, the 2/16th and the 2/27th and they'd landed at Port Moresby and they immediately went up into the mountains and these were three battalions that had fought in the desert over in the Middle East so they couldn't believe
- 23:00 the country they were now fighting in. It was so different to fighting out in the open in the desert. But anyhow the three battalions eventually caught up to where the 39th and 53rd were but they were also caught up in this big retreat. The 2/27th Battalion for example was one unit, the AIF battalion that was completely lost no one knew - they were lost in the jungle. I've got a good friend who I'm still friends
- 23:30 with today, Peter Hayman - 53rd chap. He and a small bunch of 53rd chaps they saw this large body of Japs coming and they left the track and went down into the jungle to get out of the way and they were lost in the jungle for 42 days and eventually made their way and came out west of Port Moresby many many miles west of Port Moresby living on whatever they could get out of
- 24:00 the jungle and they were in a dreadful state when they eventually got through and there was a commando unit where they came out of the jungle. This commando unit had been told by a native that there were soldiers coming and of course they naturally thought they were Japanese soldiers coming and when they saw these fellas coming out of the jungle and realised they were Australians they just couldn't believe their eyes. Anyhow the group were put on luggers, small boats, brought back to Port
- 24:30 Moresby and after they'd been interrogated by the intelligence part of the army they eventually got back to their own unit but this fighting retreat it was an absolute dreadful time. We were totally outnumbered by the Japanese and at that time they were much better in the jungle than we were. Incidentally our own Colonel in the 53rd Battalion Lieutenant
- 25:00 Colonel Ken Ward he was killed in an ambush. He was killed in an ambush and that put the battalion in disarray because the second in command of the battalion Major Farrell was back in Australia doing a school to be promoted to Colonel and it just threw everything right out of order it was absolutely dreadful. A lot of my fellows, a lot of the chaps in both the 39th and the 53rd
- 25:30 who were killed never even saw the Jap that shot them. The Japs were masters for camouflage they'd get up in trees and you just couldn't see them and it reached the stage that if you heard a shot being fired and you knew it come from up the trees you just opened up with everything on top of the trees

hoping that you'd get somebody up there because you just never ever saw them and of course the other thing was too quite a few of the fellas who were taken by the Japanese when we did look

- 26:00 it was always policy to try and find somebody who had been killed we wanted to bury them and they'd been taken by the Japanese alive and their bodies would be found tied to trees and they'd been used as bayonet practice by the Japanese and eventually the 53rd was pulled out of the line because of the way we were depleted in numbers but the three battalions did get back to Moresby
- 26:30 and in the meantime more fresh battalions had arrived back from the Middle East. I think there was another six battalions arrived back from the Middle East and they were immediately sent into the Owen Stanleys but one of things that turned the tide was the fact that the 14th Field Artillery which was the Militia 25 pound artillery unit manhandled one of their guns assisted by the 2/1st Pioneer Battalion, you can imagine
- 27:00 the number of men involved here and they manhandled this huge 25 pounder gun up the track to a position on top of Imita Ridge. That's one of the first mountain ranges when you get on the Kokoda Track and they actually when they opened up the Japs got the shock of their life. To sum it up in a nutshell the Australian soldiers had advanced so far their lines of communication were stretched out
- 27:30 so they couldn't get ammunition or food. When the Japanese pushed them right back to Port Moresby the same thing happened to them. Their lines of communications were extended right back to the north coast and they weren't getting food either so that was the turning point and when the artillery gun opened up with its shells the Japs turned round and started to retreat and they retreated all the way back to the north coast with Australian battalions chasing them all the way
- 28:00 and fighting all the way through. When Kokoda was re-taken a lot of people think there was a big battle at Kokoda. There never was. The Japanese had retreated and the first troops who came into Kokoda there was not a soul there so they raised the Australian flag there and part of history is the fact that Kokoda was re-taken by the Australian and it was really the beginning of the end as far as the battles took place over
- 28:30 the mountains but of course the Japanese took up defensive positions at Sanananda and Gona which were two villages right on the coast. In the meantime the 53rd Battalion had been linked with another battalion and became known as the 55th/53rd Battalion but before they did that the Army took forty soldiers out of the 53rd of which I happened to be one of them and we were transferred to the
- 29:00 36th Battalion and I stayed with the 36th Battalion all the way to the end of the war but with the 36th Battalion that was one of three battalions, the 3rd Battalion, the 55th Battalion and the 36th who left Australia in June 1942 and arrived at Moresby some weeks later. The same thing they were still doing unloading ships and
- 29:30 loading ships and all the hard work and in the meantime the Japs were still putting up a huge fight in the Sanananda - Gona area. I might add that other battalions had landed at Milne Bay, which was the pointy end of New Guinea on the east side. They'd actually this was the first area where the Japanese were defeated by Australian soldiers and Milne Bay was the closest
- 30:00 point to Australia. If you look at the map of New Guinea it dips to the right so that would have been the closest point the Japanese fought to Australia and those battalions at Milne Bay eventually made their way right round the north coast and they landed at Buna so you've got the three major places, Buna, Sanananda and Gona all together and they took up a fight at Buna. In the meantime the 36th
- 30:30 Battalion got a battle order and we were immediately there was 46 DC-3 transport planes took the battalion flew them over the mountains this was which was a big difference I can assure you to walking over. None of these DC-3 planes had any doors and they had no windows and they were all American pilots and they said "Look if a Japanese Zero fighter comes all you gotta do is stick your rifle out the side of the
- 31:00 windows" which would have been absolutely no use whatsoever. Anyhow the 36th Battalion with the exception of one plane which did a forced landing down at a place called Wairopi up in the mountains. Fortunately everyone survived on the plane. It was one of my mortar crews as a matter of fact. What they did was of course when they got out there was an ANGAU. ANGAU was the Australian New Guinean
- 31:30 Administration Unit and they were the ones responsible for all the natives in New Guinea and this ANGAU fella came out of the jungle and said "what are you chaps doing here?" and they said "well the plane did a forced landing". What had happened they unloaded all the ammunition and all the heavy gear out of the plane. There was ten of my fellows and the plane turned around and eventually was able to take off and head back to Moresby. This ANGAU chappie said "What's going to happen to you?"
- 32:00 and one of my fellas said "Well the American pilot said they're going to get another plane and send it for us to pick us up". He said "I'd forget all about that. They'll tell you anything, the Yanks". He said "They won't be coming back". But at that time there was a lot of donkeys and horses which the Japanese had and they left them behind when they retreated so my fellas grabbed these donkeys and horses and loaded everything up and they eventually

- 32:30 many, many, many days later they finally arrived at the battalion riding on these donkeys and horses and these poor old donkeys and horses they hadn't had a feed and if anything really they should have carried these donkeys and horses because they had no weight on them or anything at all but they did use them to carry all the ammunition. In the meantime the 36th Battalion we were in action. We commemorate the 19th December
- 33:00 1942 as the day the Battalion went into action. Sanananda. You've heard lots and lots of stories about the Kokoda Track which was bad. It was nowhere near as bad as being in action at Sanananda. We were nine weeks at Sanananda. The whole area was a swamp. You'd dig a slit trench and you'd go down about 18 inches and the water would all seep up from underneath and that's where we'd have to sleep in those slit
- 33:30 trenches. Once again we were continually wet all the time apart from fighting the Japanese. We lost an awful lot of men. I think we lost something like over the nine weeks that we were there we lost just on 100 men killed. I think there was over 200 wounded and our biggest casualties of course there was well over 200 evacuated sick. If you got a temperature of 105 it wasn't enough to have you
- 34:00 evacuated sick. When I say evacuated sick I'm talking about malaria and there are three different types of malaria. Cerebral malaria is the worse type. A lot of people who got cerebral malaria died as a result of it. Scrub Typhus was a dreadful disease. It was a tiny little mite you couldn't see in the bush and once it bit you a lot of the fellows with Scrub Typhus died. Those that didn't die were left
- 34:30 with bad hearts, bad eyesight. Absolutely no good for any more action and most of them were repatriated back to Australia and discharged out of the Army straight away. Some of my fellas had Black Water Fever which is another dreadful disease. Anything that crept and crawled was there. It was a dreadful place and of course I know it's a dreadful subject. By this time
- 35:00 the Japanese had reached the stage where they absolutely had no food. They had cut down a lot of coconut palms and they made bunkers out of them. They'd put coconut palms one way and criss-crossed them with other and they built it up to about probably 4 to 5 feet from the ground. They lived inside these bunkers and lived inside the bunkers and what they'd do at night time they'd send some Japs out and
- 35:30 send them up the trees and in the daylight of course nobody could see them up the trees and they would then pick off any Australian soldiers they saw. Once again, it's absolutely true and it's part of our history and its on record. The Japs would come out of their bunkers at night time and any dead Australian soldiers they would drag them into the bunkers and this is what they were living off. Not only Australian soldiers they did the same with their own
- 36:00 Japs. It was an act of cannibalism that was practised by the Japs up there and after some weeks we were moved from Sanananda to Gona which was the next village along and it was at Gona that we did one of our patrols went out and one of our fellas, a fellow sergeant a good friend of mine he was killed and of course the next day we sent another patrol out to get his body
- 36:30 and when we eventually found his body all the skin had been cut of his arms his legs, his kidneys were gone and his liver was gone and the Japs had virtually cut him up just to eat him. We were supposed to have gone back to - what we did first of all we dug a trench in the sand and we just used bayonets to lever his body into the ground and covered it up and
- 37:00 the patrol carried on. We were supposed to report it back to the battalion but the officer he said "I think we'll go on and see if we can find these Japs". So we did go on. We crossed a river and there was a native village on the other side of the river and we sent a couple of scouts forward and they came back and said there were four Japs sitting in this village around a fire. So the order was given. We split up and went round the four sides and on the order opened
- 37:30 up and we did get these four Japs but the point is they were sitting around a fire and they had dixies and in the dixies were the remains of our Sergeant who had been killed. So from there on in no prisoners were ever taken just couldn't do it. It did happen with other units. They lost men who were cut up by the Japs and this sort of thing. Some prisoners were
- 38:00 taken and they were sent back by plane to Port Moresby and when they arrived at Port Moresby they weren't on the plane. Somebody had helped them out the door, the open door of the plane before it landed. It got so bad our Army intelligence was desperate for information it was very important information and they offered a prize of a
- 38:30 certain number of days leave back in Australia for anyone who captured Japanese prisoners. Nobody took any notice of it. There was 2 things. Mainly because of what they did to our people and secondly if we did take them prisoner we'd have to feed them and we didn't have enough food for ourselves let alone feeding them. When the time came it was nine weeks from the day we landed at Sanananda to the time we got on the plane to come back to Moresby.
- 39:00 There was 46 planes took us over and it was only 5 planes needed to take the survivors of the Battalion back to Port Moresby and of course we were granted 14 days combat leave and I didn't get the opportunity to go back with the rest of the battalion. I went down with another bad attack of malaria and was hospitalised along with a lot of other fellows and eventually about five weeks

- 39:30 later we were given the all clear and we were taken down to Port Moresby and put on the troop ship Katoomba and we were brought back to Townsville and I went down with another attack of malaria. They took me off the ship and I finished up in the 116th. It was called the 116th Australian General Hospital which was a tent hospital right on the water at Townsville and it was quite a beautiful spot.
- 40:00 Then I still wasn't well. Next thing I know I'm put on a hospital train and taken up to Charters Towers where there was a big hospital up there and all the attention under the sun going up in the train. It was a white painted train with big red crosses and all the nursing sisters and nurses looking after us and I spent quite some time in hospital at Charters Towers. In the meantime all those who were able were home on leave. Not only home on leave but a lot of the
- 40:30 fellows, we had fellows in hospitals from Townsville to Sydney. Some of them started to go on leave and they'd get an attack of malaria and they'd have to be raced off to the nearest hospital on matter where it was. Eventually I did get sent down for my leave and one of the things I always remember about this. There was about eight of us who'd come down from Charters Towers and we had to report to the officer in charge of transport at
- 41:00 Townsville Railway Station and he said "Look I'm sorry". The troop train was parked there. "This troop train is absolutely full of fellows and I've got no room for you" and I said "Well look Sir" and I gave him a little brief history of all the fellows and what we'd done and how we'd got to that point. He said "Would you wait there for a minute" and I said "Yes, sir I will" and he went away and he come back about 5 minutes later and said "If I put a louvre van on the back of here. A louvre van was the one that normally
- 41:30 carries produce milk and all those sort of things and he said "If I put a louvre van on the back would you be prepared to travel to Brisbane in that?" and we jumped at the opportunity and what happened we put all our blankets on the floor of the louvre van and we had plenty of space and we laid back and we could rest. We sat sometimes with the doors open and our feet dangling out the side and we went all the way from Townville down to Brisbane like that and it was really something special and all the other troops were jam packed
- 42:00 into the carriages of the train.

We just have to stop there

Tape 2

- 00:32 **Keith, you left us at, you'd come back to Australia on your leave. So where to from there?**
- Okay. We had the 14 days of combat leave and as far as I'm concerned everyone else was lucky enough to get malaria and go to hospital and stay there for quite some weeks but I never had an attack of malaria at all in those 14 days.
- 01:00 I had a wonderful 14 days with my mother and father and my sister and next thing I know I'm reporting back down to Central Station and I'm on the train going back to Brisbane with a troop train of course. Once we got to Brisbane we were all put up in the Brisbane Royal Park Showground and were all allocated a pig pen
- 01:30 each of which I think 2 soldiers slept in a pig pen and it was very very hilarious because at night time before they put the lights out everyone was going oink oink oink all through this whole great big hut there were all these pig pens. They were clean I must confess they were clean. That's the accommodation they gave us. When you got to these - when troop trains got to a particular spot it wasn't a case of getting off one train onto another.
- 02:00 You had to wait until a train was available. So you might spend two days in the showground you might spend a week there. So consequently we did get plenty of leave and days where we could go into Brisbane and wander around and these sort of things. Eventually of course you'd be notified you're on a certain troop train so you'd go to Brisbane Station and board the train. They were wonderful trips
- 02:30 on these troop trains. I'm not a very tall fella and some of the railways carriages had the iron luggage racks on the top each side. They were all separate compartments on the carriages. So I was always the one who had to sleep up on the luggage rack and there'd be usually two fellows on a seat, feet to feet. Two there, two there, one up in each luggage rack.
- 03:00 and then there was another two on the floor and you made the best you could of the conditions around you but on the way up I can recall Rockhampton was a classic example. The train line ran right through the main street of Rockhampton and it would pull up to get water on it or whatever and of course everyone would jump off the train and race to the nearest pub. You always had an arrangement with the
- 03:30 driver. When he was ready to go he'd give half a dozen blasts on the whistle and it must have been a very very funny sight. He'd give these blasts on the whistle and all the pub doors would open and

everyone would race out and jump back on the train and it would go on its way. Every now and then on another occasion I can recall the train for some reason or another had to pull up right along side a pineapple plantation and before you could say "Jack Robinson" half a dozen fellas

04:00 would race out and be pulling pineapples off the bushes or whatever they grow on. The poor old farmer if he went through his paddock and found all these missing pineapples he must have wondered in the name of God what happened and then I can remember, it was just like a I believe like a long party on the train. It's a long way from Brisbane to Townsville, it really is. On another occasion the train pulled up and we were right alongside a goods train

04:30 with open carriages and on all these carriages you wouldn't believe how lucky we were. There were big barrels of beer so once again you know we got teams and they'd jump out of our train and jump up there. They'd grab as many barrels of beer as they could and bring them back into the carriages. Of course you weren't allowed to have beer on the train and I can assure you 'cos I was the Sergeant and I wasn't supposed to take part in these things but I had my share anyhow but it was really

05:00 really funny there was some wild nights on the train when they got stuck into these barrels of beer and of course eventually we got to Townsville and there was a staging camp at a place called Clune which was near the old racecourse in Townsville and once again these staging camps you've got fellas from all Units. This is where you've got to go. They've got to find your Unit where it is for a start. Anyhow

05:30 the 36th Battalion had been sent to a place called Christmas Pocket up in the Atherton Tablelands to be reinforced after we lost all these people at Sanananda and Gona. Be reinforced and re-equipped so we spent quite a few days in Townsville. I remember the one thing there.

Can I just stop you for one moment Keith we just need to pause the tape.

One thing that did happen in

06:00 Townsville because of all the crook food we'd had up in New Guinea a bunch of us thought one thing we'd like here we'll go and have a nice steak. We'd go into every café and have a steak in each one. Talk about having ourselves on. I think we went to the first place and we did have a nice steak but that was it. We couldn't eat another thing after it. We couldn't eat any more meals because of the type of diet we'd had in New Guinea it interfered

06:30 with our tummy and we weren't able to eat the food that was available there it was really incredible. The word came through that the 36th was up in the tablelands and so we went by road up to Cairns in a big truck convoy and then we were put in another staging camp at a place called Red Lynch and

07:00 we get word to say then a train would take us up to the Atherton Tablelands. I don't know whether you've been up there. You know the railway that goes up through Barren Falls? Well that was an old troop train that took us up there and you could walk faster than the train going up the mountain. As a matter of fact to get a little bit of relief from the cramped conditions we would get out and we walk alongside the train line and we could actually walk from your carriage

07:30 up to the engine. That's how slow it was going up the mountain. Halfway up at Barren Falls itself the train stops to get a breather and we'd all race up to the engine and he would provide us with hot water to make tea in our little billies. We eventually got up to, I can't think of the name of the station up there now. Anyhow we got to the top of the mountain and we were then taken by trucks

08:00 to this Christmas Pocket. The whole of the Atherton Tablelands was taken over as campsites for all the troops. It didn't matter where they came from so there was literally thousands and thousands of troops up there but one thing I'd like to add too. Before we left Cairns we were not permitted to go out into Cairns at night because the locals there thought that we

08:30 if we touched them they'd get malaria from us. It was an incredible situation. Cairns is a tropical country and must be used to malaria and this is exactly what happened. We were not permitted out and when we got up to the Atherton Tablelands there were other units, infantry battalions who would not permit anyone from the 36th to come into their lines because they thought they'd catch malaria from us. You know, malaria is caused

09:00 by the bite of a mosquito and the ignorance that took place is absolutely incredible. A better story, when I eventually got up to my unit in Christmas Pocket. This was a camp right up in the jungle. It was a very isolated spot and that's the reason they put us there because of the malaria and in those days the big timber was still being pulled out of the forest by bullock teams so it was quite an interesting

09:30 place to be. Word came through that we were going to be sent to Darwin so we got an advance party together and they came back down to Cairns and they went by ship all the way around to Darwin. The advance party was a party of probably about 30 fellows, an officer and 30 fellows. When they landed in Darwin you wouldn't believe this on the first day one of the fellows went down with malaria and was put in hospital. Talk

10:00 about panic! You've never heard of such panic that went on in Darwin. The whole place went into shock. The Army authorities got their heads together and they said we can't have this Battalion up here it's a malaria Battalion. Everyone will catch malaria so what they did was anybody in that advance party who had never had malaria and these were some new reinforcements they will stay here and be put in

another Battalion

- 10:30 which happened to be the 40th Battalion and they took the equivalent number out of the 40th Battalion and brought them to us. So they sent the advance party back to Townsville over land. It took them days and days all by truck all the way from Darwin back to the coast over land. The Army authorities had a re-think about this and
- 11:00 we'll tell you what we'll do, we'll send them back to New Guinea and that's exactly what happened. In the meantime because of our numbers the 3rd Battalion Militia, the 39th Battalion Militia, the 49th Battalion Militia had disbanded and from the 3rd Battalion we got 200 reinforcements and we got lesser numbers from the other two battalions so the battalion was brought
- 11:30 right up to date with numbers then of course next thing we know we were on trucks and we were taken back down to Cairns again and we boarded the Duntroon, the troop ship this time and before we knew where we were we were back in Port Moresby and incredibly the Army authorities flew us over the mountains and they put us in a camp at Soputa. Now Soputa was a little tiny village right next to Sanananda.
- 12:00 We had the battlefield right on one side of us and we had the little War cemetery on the other side of us and whilst we were there and I might add that Soputa was probably one of the worst malaria areas in the whole of New Guinea but also while we were there it gave us a wonderful opportunity we sent parties into the battlefield and we actually found the bodies of half a dozen of our fellas that we missed out before and we were able to have
- 12:30 them interred into the little Soputa cemetery. Soputa cemetery of course eventually when the war ended all the bodies from all the battalions were taken out of there and they were re-interred in Bomana War Cemetery in Port Moresby and Bomana War Cemetery is a magnificent war cemetery. It's an absolutely incredible place and I've been there three times now back and it's just an atmosphere that is very very hard to believe.
- 13:00 There's row after row after row of these fellows and I'm reminded of the fact that back in those days with the Labor Government the Minister for Defence was called Francis Forde and he got up in Parliament and he said there is nobody under the age of 21 in action up on the north coast of New Guinea. Now if you go along to see the 36th Battalion you'll see one fella 18, 19, 18, 19 row after row
- 13:30 fellas that never even got near their 21st birthday and it just proves the governments of those days were no different to the governments of today. There we were at Soputa and what we did there of course was a lot of training. Boredom was starting to get the best of us so we put together a magnificent concert party. I mean it
- 14:00 when I say magnificent and we had our own stage which was called Austerity Auditorium. We had a pair of comedians, Aspro and Epsom and I happened to be one of the comedians and my partner was called Aspro because he gave everybody a pain in the head and I was called Epsom for reasons I'm sure you'll know about and we had some magnificent singers, real nice singers and
- 14:30 my partner and I used to write all the sketches and the Padre of the battalion of course he was always in charge of the concert parties and he always had to censor the scripts. He went through them and checked them to see if they were right for to be performed before everybody. What used to happen, Eric Esdale and myself we'd
- 15:00 do two scripts, we'd do one for the Padre and of course we'd do you know some of them would be a bit of colour I suppose being in a bunch of men like that and when the time came the night of the concert the poor old Padre would be sitting down in the front row and we'd perform our sketches and you could see his jaw starting to drop down but it was too late we were up on the stage and we used to carry on but they were, not because I was in it myself
- 15:30 but they were really good concert parties and we had some really good acts. I think the biggest performance, as a matter of fact General Blamey at one time got word about this concert party and he came and sat in on one performance. The biggest night we had, that part of the world in the north the Japs had all been pushed further westwards and it was a fairly safe area. Buna was a great big port and there was a
- 16:00 big Australian General Hospital the 2/5th Australian General Hospital at Buna and the biggest performance we did was before an audience of 15,000 people at the Buna Hospital and all the ships in the harbour, there was a lot of transports bringing up supplies, all the crews were in the audience all the Americans were in the audience and of course there were Australian Units from all around and the front row was usually taken up of the
- 16:30 all the Nursing Sisters and all the Officers so we always had a few sketches which included the Nurses and the Sisters. It made life a little bit amusing for them of course. That was one way of getting over boredom and of course the other way was we did have plenty of sports we kept in touch with a lot of the American units and we did end up with a lot of softball equipment so we had softball teams
- 17:00 and being near the coast we had swimming carnivals and at one time at Soputa we had a big race meeting where we used donkeys and horses. It was just exactly like a race meeting back here in

Australia. There was bookies there, course stewards. You've got no idea what the crowds were like. They'd come from miles and miles and miles around and it was a real good day.

- 17:30 I think I've still got a program from the racing days there but we still had a lot of - Soputa was a bad area for the malaria we had a constant stream of fellows going in and out of hospital. I spent 4 weeks in the 2/5th Australian General Hospital myself just with dermatitis on the soles of the feet and even today I can't walk across sand barefoot otherwise my feet will start to bleed straight away
- 18:00 but it did turn into a great big port area, the Buna area. Then Oro Bay which was also a little bit further round that there was another big port area. We did provide a lot of working parties to unload ships and this sort of thing. We'd be detached from the Battalion and we'd have to spend time in these working parties and we'd be taken out by barge to the ships and then
- 18:30 we'd unload off whatever they had on board and of course it wasn't very long - we finished up what they call being a 100% malaria battalion. Everybody in the battalion had malaria at least once and some had multiple attacks of malaria over and over and over again so it was decided to move us out of the area because of that and so we went by ship, the Duntroon again from Buna to Lae
- 19:00 and we were taken across to the mouth of the Ramu River and we were loaded - we were taken over there by barges and we joined a convoy of trucks and were taken up to Bulolo. Bulolo and Wau were the 2 big mining places in peacetime days and where we were camped at Bulolo right on the river was the great big
- 19:30 gold dredge which had been destroyed by the Australians so the Japs couldn't make use of it. Bulolo was an area where at night time we were issued with 10 blankets which you can imagine the difference between that and being down on the coast in the tropics. It was very very cold at night. No malaria whatsoever but unfortunately we'd only been there a few days and one of our Captains
- 20:00 went down with Scrub Typhus and he died. He was the only casualty we had up there at Bulolo. But we got a dreadful fright because we thought we'd got away from that. Right up in the mountains at Bulolo was a little tiny native village called Mankee and the natives that lived in this village were called the Kuku kukus. So it was decided to send a 3 man patrol
- 20:30 just to keep an eye on these. They were little fellas, almost pygmies so three Sergeants, three other Sergeants and myself we were selected to go up there. So we set off on this particular day and as we climbed up through the mountains we couldn't see these little fellows but they were yodelling all the way up letting the next group know that somebody was coming up and you'd get to that group and you'd hear this yodelling
- 21:00 again and we eventually went up and up and up this mountain, through the clouds, clouds were down over it, broke out the other side and perched right on the top of this mountain was this tiny little village and these - couldn't see anyone at all - they'd all disappeared. The point was no white man had been to see these natives since the war started. The Government used to send the Civil
- 21:30 Patrols up in the peace time but nobody had been near them. So we stood there and waited for a while and waited for a while and all of a sudden out came 3 or 4 of these little fellas - crept out of the bush with spears in their hands and one in particular he had spears in his hand and a grass skirt and a little peaked cap on and he was the Government Official that they'd made before the War he was the head man of the - the head Loolye I think they called it and eventually come up there
- 22:00 and it was through a mixture of poor pidgin English from my three fellows we got to understand what was happening and what they wanted us to do was - the previous night the village had been raided by another enemy band of Kuku kukus and stolen some of their women and they wanted us to go with them and get the women back. We had to refuse because that wasn't part of our order to go out, you know,
- 22:30 getting native women back again. An amusing thing that did happen which we've never lived down to this day. We'd taken some rations with us of our own and we took a tin of peaches. Here you had three highly trained Sergeants versed to the absolute hilt in life in the Army and we suddenly discovered we didn't have a tin opener with us. So my mate, Ronnie Ryan said "I'll fix it". He pulls out his
- 23:00 revolver, puts it on a stump and he fired at it. Well eventually that tin exploded and I think peaches were spread 50 miles around on all sides so we never finished up with anything to eat out of the peach tin and as I said we've never lived this down to this day to think that three fellas who should have known better went all the way up there and never had a tin opener. We didn't even have our bayonets or anything we didn't think we'd need them but that was a very interesting little episode in my life and I've written
- 23:30 that was written up in our history, war history. They were Kuku kukus and they were in their day they were cannibals. Twice in our time up in the islands of which I'll tell you later but we did come across another tribe of natives in New Britain they were called the Macolcols and they didn't care whether they killed Japanese soldiers or Australian soldiers so
- 24:00 if we were ever out on patrol we had to be wary for looking for Japs or looking for these natives the Macolcols. But anyhow we spent some time up at Bulolo and Wau probably in all the time we spent we were there over 3 years in the islands and that was probably the best place we'd been in all that three

year period. Anyhow the word came through again that we were to

- 24:30 go to New Britain and I might just add when we went up by truck to Bulolo halfway up the mountain it was some distance it was probably about might have been about 70 miles from Malay up to there. We had a Sergeant and one Private and we erected a tent and this was the tea tent so right in the halfway journey the trucks
- 25:00 would pull up and everyone would get out and the Sergeant would stand there and his offside and they stayed there all that time on their own and they reckoned it was the greatest job they ever had in their life. They had tins of biscuits there and they knew when the convoy was coming and they had big pots of tea made for them. We'd have a bit of a break there and they did that going up or convoys coming back. Eventually we got back down to Lae and of course by this time
- 25:30 there was no more Japs there. It got back to a real city. Matter of fact the Army took over again a soft drink factory that had been evacuated when the Japs landed there and they actually started to produce soft drinks again. Also there was a ,strange as it might seem, there was a Bath Unit and the Bath Unit had a
- 26:00 big semitrailer enclosed all in and it had one part had a tank full of water and they had means of heating up the water so you could appreciate the fact that we never had a proper shower or bath anywhere usually if there was a river we would clean up in the river but with this Bath Unit there were steps up the back and we'd all have to line up and all get undressed and they provided
- 26:30 you with soap and you walked up and you walked right through and it was all showers with hot water coming out and you could soap yourself up there and by the time you got to the end you went through the clear water one and that was always a wonderful experience because I think that was the only hot water shower we had in the whole time we were up in New Guinea. Anyhow when we got back down to Lae in October 1944 we went aboard the
- 27:00 Swartenhont it was called it was a dirty old Dutch steamer and it was so dirty that a Colonel went down first of all and when he saw the accommodation on this old Dutch ship he refused to let the Unit go on board until it was cleaned up. They did clean it up and a very interesting little story took place here. When we left Lae in truck convoy to go down to the wharf where the ship was, halfway along the way was a
- 27:30 Provo [Provost] camp, nobody likes Provo's in the Army as you probably realise. On of the trucks with a bunch of fellows from my company and one in particular, we used to call him Rowdy, he had a very loud voice and as we drove past the Provo camp he called out at the top of the voice doubting the parentage of the Provo's that lived in the camp
- 28:00 and you never heard anything like it in all your life. Anyhow as we kept going all of a sudden a jeep comes flying out of the camp and races up to the start of our convoy and it was the Colonel in charge of the Provo camp and he stopped the convoy and he came back and he knew the truck there were about 20 fellas on the truck and he put them all on a charge sheet, they were all going to be put under arrest. Next thing my Colonel, Colonel Isaacsen, he came back
- 28:30 to see what was going on and why the convoy had stopped and this Colonel told him. "These fellows here" he said and went on and on and one about what they'd called all the Provo's and the Colonel he said "You leave it to me, I'll look after this." He said "These fellows are on their way". He said "We're due to get on a ship." He said "These fellows are on their way. They're going into action in another area" and the Colonel from the Provo's handed him 20 charge sheets. He had the names of every fellow on. And
- 29:00 the Colonel, my Colonel said "I'll look after that. I'll see that they're handled." Anyhow to cut a long story short, when we got on the Swartenhont and got out to sea, the Colonel stood out on the deck, tore all the charge sheets up into little tiny pieces and threw them overboard. That's the sort of fella he was. He really looked after his men. Anyhow we kept going and landed at a place called Cape Hoskins on the north coast of New Britain. We were the first Australian soldiers to land
- 29:30 on New Britain since February 1942 when the Australian garrison was overrun by the Japanese at Rabaul. Cape Hoskins was quite a pleasant place. Our camp was right on the ocean itself and we were able to put our tents up in good areas. The Unit made quite a name for itself there. We were there 8 months. Most of our operations were long range patrols and these long range patrols
- 30:00 might have comprised 5 men on one. Sometimes a platoon roughly 32 men. Sometimes a company patrol would be 80 men. Big patrols. The patrols would go right into the Japanese lines as far as they could. Most cases they were reconnaissance patrols after information. Other times we did get caught up. The Japs knew we were coming and there were quite a few skirmishes. My Colonel, Colonel
- 30:30 Isaacsen was a brilliant tactician. As a result of the New Guinea campaign he was awarded the Distinguished Service Award [Distinguished Service Order] later on. But he was responsible, the main thing he was responsible for our casualties were very very light. We did lose about probably 7 or 8 fellows but that's all we lost in the whole 8 months we were in New Britain. One sad thing happened. Our doctor at Cape Hoskins, Captain Roskin, only a young doctor.

- 31:00 he developed appendicitis and actually operated on himself but unfortunately peritonitis set in and he died. He was our first death and he was buried just outside the camp area. I did have another good friend who was a 53rd Battalion chap. He'd been back to Australia on leave and he came back to Cape Hoskins and a few 53rd fellas we went up to see him.
- 31:30 We were all good mates in the old 53rd welcome him back and he looked good, really good. He was telling us that when he got back his girlfriend had left him gone with somebody else. Anyhow just then the call came to have our lunch the bugle blew. He said "You go ahead". He said "I'll catch up to you". We'd only gone about 50 yards and we heard this shot and we turned round and raced back to the tent and he'd put the rifle in his mouth and shot himself.
- 32:00 That was a dreadful thing. It really was. One of those things. He was a student, a university student so he was a very very clever chap he was. But mainly because he lost his girlfriend back home he did that. So all sorts of things go on like that. Plenty of good times. Lot of bad times but we tried to concentrate on the good times. Anyhow eventually
- 32:30 we got within 40 miles of Rabaul and the word came through because the 36th Battalion had been in New Guinea so long they were going to pull them out and send them back to Australia. Just before they did that. Only a week. We were in this area called the Mavelo Plantation. And we were actually in action and my Company Commander calls me in and he said "Sergeant Irwin, you're being sent back
- 33:00 to Australia to go to a school". I said "What, now?" He said "Yes". He said "Nothing much you can do about it". I mean it's nice to know you're going back to Australia but when you're in action with all the people around you, your mates the last thing in the world you want to do is leave them behind. But anyhow I didn't realise at that time that it was very close to the end of the war. So to get back home it took me eight hours from Mavelo
- 33:30 Plantation by barge back to the Cape Hoskins Base and I had a fella called Les Parish, one of the Sigs who'd been shot in the back and he was on a stretcher along side me and we get back down to Cape Hoskins and there was a tiny little tent hospital there. It would only hold ½ dozen people and Les was put in there and we had to wait for about five days there and then a RAAF transport plane landed at Cape Hoskins
- 34:00 and Les on a stretcher and myself. We were the only two passengers on the plane and this was just before dark. We flew to Finschhafen and Les was taken off and send to the big AGH there. Then I flew then on to Lae and I was about a week at the staging camp and then they called for me to go on the troopship Charon and we actually sailed on the Charon all the way back to Sydney but on the way as we went past
- 34:30 Townsville we were caught in the middle of a dreadful cyclone. This cyclone was on record. There was two American destroyers that turned over and went to the bottom with all their crew. I've never been so sick in all my life. You could stand in the middle of the ship and you'd look forward and the bows would disappear under the water and then you'd look to the back and it would come up and the back of the ship would disappear down in the water. Anyhow I'm prostrate on my bunk
- 35:00 there and they had an old Dutch doctor and they brought him in. I didn't care if the ship had gone under it wouldn't have worried me one little bit. All he kept saying was "Coffee, coffee" and they were pouring black coffee into him. Anyhow eventually I cleared and the cyclone cleared and we continued on our way back to Sydney. I only got two days leave and I had to go on a troop train down to Seymour where the school was and as long as I am alive I can always
- 35:30 remember my first lesson at this school. I'd come out of New Britain in the middle of an action and my first lesson was how to handle a .303 rifle. I could never believe it. There was a whole bunch of us that had come from all different units and we all Infantry men. All been in action somewhere and we started right from scratch again as if we'd just joined the Army that day. But then of course after the school, we did get a few leaves down to Melbourne from there. Then I was sent up to
- 36:00 Greta camp and I was posted to the 16th Australian Infantry Training Battalion. Now what was happening in those days the Infantry men, they were in Bougainville, New Britain, New Guinea, Morotai, Borneo and all those places and the Infantry men were going down all the time. So the Army in their wisdom decided to use specialist units. People out of Search Light Units, some Artillery Units,
- 36:30 BOFA Units and train these fellows to be Infantry men much to their disgust. They were specialists in their own right and the last thing they wanted was to end up in an Infantry Battalion so that's what's we did up a Greta Camp. Some of them, Warrant Officers and Sergeants actually dropped their rank voluntarily because they didn't feel they were up to carrying on in an infantry battalion
- 37:00 with that rank which I thought was a pretty decent sort of gesture, I really did. During that time at Greta I was detached from the training camp and I was sent down here. If you're heading out to - are you familiar with the area round here? If you're going out to the old Army camp at Liverpool heading out towards the Holsworthy camp and you turn right
- 37:30 past the engineer's camp at Casula there and you go down over the viaduct and head up towards Campbelltown Road I think they call it. On the left hand side before you get to that viaduct was a cadet camp from the schools and would you believe a highly trained Sergeant like myself was sent down there

to look after these school kids. But they were good. They gave me a tent all to myself and they called me Sir and they didn't have to call me Sir. They were kids from that high up there

- 38:00 and every rifle they had was taller than themselves and I spent about three weeks down there in charge of this camp and the only person I had to answer to I think was the Headmaster of the school who he had a uniform on. I had an Army utility which I could drive home to Petersham every now and then to see my mother and father. Anyhow I went back to Greta camp and the war ended. Next thing that happened to me of course is the
- 38:30 we had a points system in the Army in those days. If you were married and had half a dozen children you'd be the first one out. That was fair enough. I was at the other end of the scale. I was single and had no dependents so I had a very small number of points. So I was sent to the Prisoner of War Camp at Hay. Fellas ended up in all sorts of units but I was sent to the Prisoner of War camp at Hay and of course they had compounds
- 39:00 of Italians and a big compound of Japanese and these were the Japanese who made the breakout at Cowra. They were bad devils, really bad devils. Under the Geneva Convention you were not permitted to take weapons into the compound. So twice a day you had a count and what used to happen was the Japanese would be lined up in rows of 5. So it was 5, 10, 15 - I think there was about 40 a block. Then
- 39:30 there'd be another 40 and another 40. So what you had to do was you had to walk along and all you had was a truncheon. What you were going to do with that truncheon I'll never know. You'd start from the front and you'd just cast your eye along the 5 and that's how you'd come up with the numbers. You'd walk past and you've never seen such looks of hatred on the faces of people like these Japs and you're there walking along with a piece of wood in your hand and
- 40:00 thoughts at the back of your mind what they did at Cowra will they do it here because that was a dreadful one. There was a lot of Australian soldiers killed at Cowra because of the Japs breakout. Anyhow the Italians of course was a different proposition. They were farmed out to farms all round the area. One of the jobs I had to do also another Sergeant and myself we'd have a jeep and we'd drive round all the
- 40:30 properties. These Italians used to sit up at the table with the families and eat their meals with them. They had a great time and we'd just check with the farmer. "Are you happy with these people" and every case nobody ever said a thing. They thought the Italians were really lovely. Matter of fact as you probably know later on of course many Italians went back to Italy and came back out to that area and opened up farms themselves. Of course at night time they used to if they were out in the town they'd come back and knock on the
- 41:00 gate to be let in but you couldn't do that with the Japs, it was a different kettle of fish.

Can we stop you there Keith?

Tape 3

- 00:32 **Okay Keith, you've just finished talking to us about the Hay POW Camp. So can you give us an overview of your life after that.**
- Whilst at the POW Camp at Hay. The Prisoner of War Camps were a group. They were called the Prisoner of War and Internee Group. That was the actually Unit. I got a direction from
- 01:00 the unit to report down to Sydney and I think there was about ½ dozen other fellas who came with me. We came by train which is an awful long train journey from Hay to Sydney. I was taken out to the old Anzac Rifle Range out the back of Milperra here and we were put in - in peace time all the gun clubs
- 01:30 used to have a cottages out there with their name on and they were taken over by the Army so we spent some days in one of those cottages. What we brought to Sydney for - during the War a lot of Indonesians escaped from Java and although they were our allies they were interned out here in Australia when they got here but when I say interned it was quite a liberal form of internment
- 02:00 because most of them did have jobs. They worked in cafes and restaurants. Some of them even worked in small bands and this sort of thing. Anyhow now that the War was over they were being repatriated back to Java. So the reason I was brought down from Hay was we were to act as guards on these Indonesians taking then back to Java.
- Sorry Keith, I'll just get you to pause there. You were coming down**
- 02:30 Yes, the idea was to act as guards to take the Indonesians back to Java. We were taken back on the HMAS Manoora, Royal Australian Navy Ship which in peace time was a coastal passenger liner went round the coast of Australia from Perth, right round. During the War it had been turned into a landing ship for troops. There were barges down both sides of the Manoora.

- 03:00 When they went to an area where there was going to be an invasion or a landing made troops would get into the barges. The barges would be lowered into the water and taken ashore. But of course now that the War was over there was no blackout conditions and it was really the best way I could describe it was a cruise, a peace time cruise under the most beautiful conditions.
- 03:30 Whole crowd of Indonesians. Went down to Walsh Bay and that's where the ship was tied up and when we went aboard and the Indonesians came aboard and they brought with them. They'd brought pushbikes and they'd old ice chests or bought new ice chests a whole lot of equipment and they were allowed to take everything with them back to Java. We left Sydney and it was wonderful life because we were known as seagoing soldiers.
- 04:00 There were 2 other Sergeants and myself. We had our own cabin right up in the bows of the ship and the only thing that was wrong with it every time they dropped the anchor it was like an earthquake going off and particularly when they pulled the anchor up again. We sailed from Sydney and as I say no blackout conditions. It was really great. These Indonesian bands played music at night and we became very very friendly with them. They turned out to be
- 04:30 wonderful people. We sailed up the Brisbane River to the Hamilton Navy wharf and we picked up another bunch of Indonesians there. When we left there and went out into the sea again we went up inside the Barrier Reef and when we got to Bowen the ship apparently during the War no navy ship had ever sailed into Bowen for some reason or other and the civic fathers at Bowen decided to give the sailors
- 05:00 the key to the city, a big lunch in the local town hall. Being seagoing soldiers we became part of that also so we did a march through the city. Told them what good fellas we were. What we did during the War and this sort of thing. When we left Bowen we still sailed up the coast again inside the Barrier Reef. Beautiful tropical conditions it was.
- 05:30 At night time lovely big moon out and you could sit out on the deck and we ate. The food was very very good of course. Much better than when we were in the Army and more importantly we got an issue of 2 bottles of beer every day from the Navy. We turned round the top at Thursday Island. Sailed real close to Thursday Island. All the people were standing out waving to us. As we sailed across the top of the Gulf
- 06:00 of Carpentaria just in the middle of the gulf there's an island with a lighthouse on and the lighthouse keeper and his family they were all standing there and they were waving to us as we went past. As we got a little bit further along we were heading towards Java. Word came through that at that time Sukarno who later became the President of Indonesia. He was the leader who started the
- 06:30 uprising against the Dutch who owned the country and word came through that he was going to make an attempt to stop the Manoorra and get all these Indonesians off and take them wherever he wanted to take them because we knew they were going to be handed over to the Dutch anyhow and of course what the Captain decided to do was go very very slowly so we just cruised in and out of all these little islands and as a matter of fact on a couple of nights we did pull up and dropped anchor
- 07:00 the guards, ourselves and some soldiers went ashore on one of the barges and we were allowed to wander around these little islands in the Gulf of Carpentaria which was an unusual experience. When we got going we went very very close to Bali. We went through the Lombok Straits at Bali and turned north to go across the north coast of Java.
- 07:30 I was only saying to my wife just recently it was a wonderful experience. At night time in the tropics this beautiful big moon was shining on the water. There were literally hundreds of small boats, fishermen, out at night time and they had lanterns with fire lanterns on the back of the boat and you could just picture these lanterns flickering in the moonlight. How they never got run over by our ship I'll never know
- 08:00 but there were hundreds of them. It was just like a dream. A story that you'd write about this beautiful time in the tropics. Eventually we reached Tanjungpriok which is the port of Batavia. In those days it was called Batavia the capital. It's Jakarta today. Tanjungpriok was about 14 miles from the coast. That was where the ship tied up. We tied up at the wharf there.
- 08:30 All the Indonesians were lined up. We saw on the wharf this line of Dutch soldiers. All with their weapons. We were wondering what was going on. All the Indonesians were taken ashore and all their gear was taken ashore and they no sooner got on the wharf than the Dutch soldiers went forward, picked up all their gear and threw it into the harbour. We were absolutely incensed. Next
- 09:00 thing we know this line of trucks pull up and all these Indonesians were herded into these trucks and taken off to goodness only knows where and we were so upset that at one time we felt like firing on the Dutch soldiers on the wharf. Batavia was a very troubled spot in those days because the Indonesians were rising up and through the middle of Batavia were canals. In peace time they were beautiful white marble canals but they
- 09:30 had been desecrated a lot by the Japs but every morning there was always one or two Dutch soldier's bodies fished out of these canals. The guards, we did get ashore and were able to travel around and have a look at everything. Batavia was like a big perimeter all the way around with little outposts spread out all the way and these outposts were manned by Gurkha troops and I did get the opportunity

- 10:00 to go with a Gurkha patrol. They used to patrol around all these outposts to see if everything was okay and of course they were absolutely fantastic fellows. Anyone who has read the history of the Gurkha soldiers realises they were really good soldiers and many Gurkha soldiers had won the Victoria Cross at different times. One of the things that really upset us. One day there were three of us and we decided to walk into Batavia and were going to hail a lift if we could find one.
- 10:30 We were walking along the road and this beautiful big Packard car came along and sitting up in the back of the Packard car was a Japanese General with a Jap driver and just having fought the War against Japanese we couldn't believe this. We stood in the middle of the road and stopped the car. I don't know what we were going to do but we stopped the car and before we knew what happened from nowhere a bunch of red capped Pommies came
- 11:00 Provo soldiers and they wanted to arrest us for interfering with the Jap General and he could see we were very upset about this. Anyhow eventually what happened was the Jap General went on his way but it was dreadful to think what went on during the war particularly with units like mine where we lost fellows to the Japanese and the cannibalism that went on to think that there was a Japanese General still driving around as if nothing had ever happened.
- 11:30 When the time came to leave we did leave and as we pulled out from Tanjungpriok we moved a little bit further westwards into the Sunda Strait. Now the Sunda Strait was where the HMAS Perth went down during the war and the ship stopped. The motor was stopped and we did have a service there for the sailors who went down with the Perth in Sunda Strait which was a very, very moving ceremony. No argument
- 12:00 about that. Ship turned round and we went back and on the way back home we first of all called into Koepang which was the Dutch part of Dili [Timor] and we picked up Australian soldiers there who had been doing garrison duty and we moved on again. We went around to the north coast of Timor to Dili and we picked up the remainder of them. It was the 40th Battalion the Tasmanian battalion and we picked these soldiers up that had been on
- 12:30 garrison duty and we brought them back over to Darwin. They were all offloaded at Darwin. We spent a few days in Darwin where I did get a chance to go ashore and have a look at the damage that was done in the air raids. A lot of people remember the main air raid that took place in Darwin but what they don't remember is the fact that there was more than 60 air raids in Darwin so in that period of time there was a lot of damage done. As a matter of fact the Neptuna
- 13:00 which was a ship that was sunk and the actual wharf was built over the ship so when we went ashore we had to go off the Manoora and walk over the top of the Neptuna to get onto dry land. When the time came of course we moved on again. We had no passengers. It was an empty ship and we sailed from Darwin all the way back to Sydney doing absolutely nothing. You can sunbake on the deck all day and it was really great.
- 13:30 When we got back to Sydney of course I was sent back to Hay and by this time there all the prisoners there had been. One other thing that did happen whilst I was away another bunch of fellas were taken from the Hay POW camp and they were assigned to escort the Germans back to Germany from another camp so I missed out on that trip and those fellas
- 14:00 sailed from Sydney to Italy and they went overland to Germany with the German prisoners. Then the guards themselves went on to England and they had to wait in England until the ship came to bring them all the way back to Australia. So I missed out on that one by a just a matter of days. But it didn't matter. I was quite happy with the one I did. Not long after I'd been back to Hay. Hay POW camp was a self-supporting camp. They had their own dairy herd. They had their own
- 14:30 pigs, their own vegetable farm all looked after by the Italian POWs. We even had our own paddle steamer tied up right at the bank at the camp. The paddle steamer had a big barge on the back and we used to go out in the paddle steamer. There was an old garrison WW1 fellow and his wife who permanently living on the paddle steamer and they'd take a bunch of Italian prisoners and they'd go down the river collecting
- 15:00 firewood which the Italians thought was a great job and that paddle steamer did sterling work. It really did because without collecting all that firewood we would have been in a lot of trouble back at the camp and because the camp was self-supporting we did provide quite a lot of the institutions in Hay with milk. So one of my jobs was I'd go out in a truck each morning. We took this in turns of course.
- 15:30 I'd have to go out with a driver. We'd got up to the dairy. Our own dairy. They'd load up with cans of milk and off we'd go and I'd have to go to the hospital first of all and dole out whatever ration of milk that they got there. I'd go to the jail and do the same thing there. There was a couple of Government institutions there that were on the list to get milk. For a time in the Army they were most unusual activities we had to take part in. Anyhow the time
- 16:00 came of course I was getting into August and we did have a great big auction sale at the camp. You name the type of farm equipment we had and we had it. We had tractors and everything under the sun and of course during the War time all of the farmers couldn't get hold of anything. These farmers came from all over Australia, land owners just to try and get some of this farm equipment. It was a huge auction, incredible

16:30 and my job at the auction was to represent the Army and I had to go everywhere with the Civil Auctioneer. Every sale he made I had to record it down on a ledger that I had at the time and of course eventually everything was gone out of the camp. It just became completely empty. So with the last remaining men I was brought back to Sydney. I think it was 6 August 1946

17:00 twelve months after the war ended. I had to present myself to the Army Depot in Addison Road, Marrickville and that's where I was discharged from the Army. My service was over 3 years in New Guinea but I was actually in from 3 September 1939 so I did have a very, very long spell in the service.

Certainly did.

Yes. Since the War ended of course I've been back to

17:30 New Guinea 3 times. The first time I took my wife back and she's never forgiven me for this because I took her to all the old areas where I went to before. I hired a car in Lae and I took her up to Bulolo and Wau and as we were going up one of the mountain rocky roads a bunch of natives jumped out of the grass alongside and frightened the life out of her. She swore then she'd never ever go to New Guinea again. The second time I went back of course was many years later.

18:00 My son worked for the Commonwealth Bank and he did 12 months in New Guinea at Wewak where he was training the indigenous people to take over the bank when they got their independence which was around about that time. Of course the third time I did go back in the Australia Remembers Year. I was one of the lucky 117 pilgrims from all over Australia. I went back on the Russian cruise ship Mikhail Sholokhov and we did go back to Port Moresby

18:30 of course. We picked up more pilgrims at Brisbane. We had a service just outside Brisbane at Moreton Bay for the hospital ship Centaur that went down during the War sunk by a Japanese submarine. A very moving ceremony where the ship turned off the engines and some of the female service girls who were on board with us threw wreaths over into the ocean in memory of those people who lost their lives on the Centaur. We continued on

19:00 and just outside the Coral Sea, Townsville we stopped again and we had a service for the Coral Sea battle which took place around about now as a matter of fact. Same thing, motors turned off, lovely service, wreaths thrown over. We sailed on and landed at Port Moresby. We had services at the Bomana War Cemetery and then we had an official reception at the Australian

19:30 Ambassador's home. We lived on the ship at night. We never stayed ashore mainly because New Guinea is a very, very dangerous place nowadays for white people. So whatever we did during the day we came back at night and stayed back on board the ship. We sailed from Port Moresby to Milne Bay and we had two services there. One at the

20:00 lovely Catholic Church and another one for an air force fellow who died during the War in Milne Bay in his fighter plane. We left there and we went around to Oro Bay and we landed at Oro Bay and we were taken by small buses to Popondetta and there was a magnificent service arranged for all of us. All the natives came in in their native

20:30 dress going back to the old days and I was talking to some of the native girls afterward and they all worked locally in the Government offices and they got out of their office clothes to get dressed up in the old-time grass skirt and whatever. We had a lovely service there. We were given the opportunity - the groups could be divided up. One group flew up to Kokoda with the RAAF.

21:00 Another group went over to Rabaul and I offered to go back to Sanananda because that featured very, very prominently in the life of my battalion. It was a long bus trip out to the village of Sanananda. Naturally after all this time the jungle has grown over everything but the one thing that was quite prominent was the fact that all the coconut palms in the area were cut off. The tops were all gone and that was caused by the artillery

21:30 shells back in 1942 when the fighting took place. But as for seeing the battlefield itself it was just virtually impossible. We did go back down the old Sanananda track to the village of Sanananda and once again we were given a wonderful welcome by the natives from this village all decked out in their grass skirts, etc. There was an old fellow, a real old New Guinea chap and he had a table

22:00 with bags on it and he called me over and he said "would you like to have a look in the bags?" I said "Yes, what's in there?" When he opened the bags they were all bones, skulls and bones. I was a little bit astounded. I said "What are these?" He said "Jap bones." I said "No Australian bones?" and he couldn't tell me. He didn't know whether there were Australian bones there or not. I hope they weren't Australian bones because we did think we picked up all our own fellows but he kept all these bones which he'd

22:30 found in the jungle at different times. He also had a lot of which I thought some were still alive, he had shells and things which he'd picked up out of the jungle. I don't think they could have been alive. I'm sure somebody would have defused them by now but it was wonderful experience to go back to that village. During the War at Sanananda we had an American Unit right along side us at a place called Huggins Road-Block. Huggins was the Officer in Charge

- 23:00 and this American Unit was surrounded by the Japs and a company of the 36th Battalion along with a company from another Unit were responsible for rescuing the Americans from this place. Huggins himself eventually became a Colonel has visited Australia since the War. Then of course we went back to Oro Bay. We then sailed to Lae. We had a magnificent service
- 23:30 at the Lae War Cemetery. Now the interesting thing about the Bomana War Cemetery and the Lae War Cemetery. In Bomana all the headstones are white marble headstones standing up but in Lae they were all brass plaques flat on the ground and this is because Lae is an area where there is plenty of earth tremors and if they had the white marble ones they'd be cracked and they'd fall over. We had a lovely service there. In both Port
- 24:00 Moresby and Lae everywhere we went the police were there in force all with police dogs. We were never allowed to go anywhere on our own. Mainly because of the natives. They're called the Rascals up there. When it was time to go of course we left Lae and we sailed from Lae all the way back to Cairns this time and once we got to Cairns we were given a lovely
- 24:30 reception by the RSL in Cairns and we were allocated certain plans because the pilgrims came from every State including Western Australia. Those going to Western Australia left first. The Sydney people, we were the last flight out of Cairns. We were there all day. We were given a lovely tour of the area, particularly Trinity Beach where the 9th Division was trained before the landing
- 25:00 at Lae during the War where they were trained in landing from barges so we had a good look at Trinity Beach. Then we went back to the airport and because we were pilgrims we were given the pleasure of sitting in the, I think they call it the Golden Lounge, the Ansett Golden Lounge which is usually reserved for First Class passengers and they looked after us royally and then of course we boarded the plane late in the afternoon and flew from
- 25:30 we did have to land at Brisbane on again back to Sydney and there was the family waiting to welcome me home again.

Beautiful

How about that?

That's a great story thanks. How are you going?

Alright. Yes.

What I'd like to do now, if that's okay, is to go right back to the beginning and we'll have much more question and answer now. Going back to before the War back in your days as a kid really.

- 26:00 **Just wanted to know, I read in some notes that your father was a Gallipoli veteran, you mentioned that.**

Yes, he was in the 1st Battalion in World War I and landed at Gallipoli.

And of course you wore his stripes but did he actually talk, did you hear any stories from him about his experiences?

He was a very, had a very dry humour. He always talked about the funny parts

- 26:30 that went on. He'd tell you about in the French villages the little estaminets as they call them, which are small restaurants and cafes where they'd be sitting round drinking red wine and this sort of thing. Very rarely did he mentioned anything about actual fighting which I mean the fighting in New Guinea was bad enough but when you read the histories of World War I they were infinitely worse that what I ever went through. My dad, he served in France
- 27:00 and Belgium and he had two brothers. One was 15, my Uncle Ray and an older brother, Uncle Jack. Dad was in the 1st Battalion and the two brothers were in the 19th Battalion and the 1st Battalion was just coming out of an action that they'd taken part in, in this French village and as they were coming out the 19th Battalion was going in to take their place and to his amazement
- 27:30 there was his two brothers and he didn't even know they were over there, particularly the young brother was 15 at the time and they both served in the 19th Battalion. He just could not believe it. He used to tell me that story over and over again. He just could not believe - he'd never heard from home to say that his two brothers were over there with him and he just had a moment or two to talk to them because they were moving two different ways right there.
- And did they all survive?**
- Yes they all survived and an
- 28:00 interesting little thing, my Uncle Jack that was the one who was in the 19th Battalion, when I first joined the Militia in May 1939, the 1st Battalion in those days was called the 1/19th. It was a link battalion. My Uncle Jack was the Sergeant in charge of the horse transport and he used to wear the insignia of golden spurs on his arm. He was the number 1 horseman in the Australian Army. I did serve along side him and right

28:30 up until I left the First Battalion and went to the 53rd. My Dad and his family, his brothers were born in a place called Umaralla outside of Cooma about 14 miles outside of Cooma and they were all really great horsemen because they all had horses in those days. I'm talking about the late 1800's. So they were really good horsemen and my Uncle Jack he was the top of all the brothers as a horseman. He took me under his wing of course

29:00 when he found out I was in the 1st Battalion.

Were you curious about their experiences in World War I as you were growing up?

Yes. I've always been. I've always made a point of reading as many books as I can about it. I like to consider that, not just World War I any where Australians - right back to the days of the Boxer Rebellion who I think were the first Australians to ever leave the country to fight in another country. They were all Naval people and we did have casualties there

29:30 and of course onto the Boer War, I've always been interested in the Boer War and I've got books here to that effect. I was particularly interested in World War I. My mother's brother Jim Cameron won the Military Medal over in France somewhere. When you asked him what he got it for, he'd always tell you it was for carrying a cask of rum up to the troops. That's all he'd say, he'd never tell you why but I did find out later that

30:00 the Germans were throwing over grenades into their lines and every time the grenade landed over he had a bag and he'd jump on top of them to make sure they didn't hurt any troops. I think he was wounded as a result of it but he'd never tell you why he got his Military Medal.

That's incredible!

Yes it is.

Jumping on grenades.

In my 36th Battalion when we were in Sanananda a Japanese shell, a grenade it was

30:30 came over. We used to have 2 fellas in the slit trenches and this Japanese grenade came over into a slit trench where the 2 fellas were and it landed - the second fella jumped straight away and it landed on right on top of his mate. The grenade went off and killed him and saved his mate.

Wow.

This is what does happen. Whether you do these things without thinking I'm not sure.

31:00 Anyone who'd tell you they weren't frightened they're telling you a fib. They really are. We've always believed that the one thing you've got to fear is fear itself. If you can overcome that fear you're home and dry. Usually somebody who turns out to be a hero he's probably taken 5 minutes longer to get frightened than the other fellow.

That close?

Yes.

Just going back to your pre-War days.

31:30 **What are your recollections of the Depression?**

My father worked for Mungo Scott's Flour Mills. In all my time, the Mills were at Summer Hill. I don't even know if they're still there today. Originally when he came down from Cooma he went to work. They had a Mill down in Sussex Street in the City. He went to the War from there and then of course

32:00 when he came back, not long after that, I'm a little hazy about this, I believe the Mill might have been burnt down and they built another one out in Summer Hill and my Dad graduated from a Miller to Head Miller right up to the day he retired. During the Depression years because the Mill was producing flour he did get a couple of days work a week so he was infinitely better than those people who didn't have any work at all. So

32:30 we probably found it hard like most families but we were better off than most families because Dad did get a couple of days work producing flour because bread was about the only thing they could bake and send out to all the people. I mean, if you read the history of the Depression fellows were lined up in queues to be handed one cabbage and this sort of thing. We didn't have to put up with anything like that.

Did you have friends in the neighbourhood who were a little bit worse off?

Yes, there would have been people in the neighbourhood who had no work

33:00 at all. Some of them of course, I remember the husbands might have left to go out to the country to look for work out there somewhere but whether they got it or not I don't know but it was a very very difficult time. Young people today just can't realise how bad it was. I must stress we were better off than a lot of people mainly because my Dad did get a couple of days' work.

I'd read in some, well in a conversation

33:30 **with our researchers who you spoke to before we got here. I'd heard that you joined the Militia but you didn't want to join the Army because of the War stories or stories that you had heard from World War I?**

I don't think that's right.

No? Okay. My mistake. Sorry.

The mere fact that I joined the Militia

34:00 would indicate that I wanted to join the Army because it was purely voluntary in those days. As I've said before, if you went 8 nights, that was 8 weeks, that was equivalent to one day's pay. I was after that little bit of extra pocket money like everybody else. There was quite a few of us from the old Sydney Sun. We all joined together. Also they gave us in those days. I had to report to the Moore Park Drill

34:30 Hall. That was one of the depots for the 1st Battalion and the Army used to give us tram tickets so it didn't cost us anything. I lived at Petersham and I used to get the tram into the City and another one out to Paddington. This Drill hall was at the back of the Victoria Barracks down in Moore Park Road. I mean, I did join to get that little bit of extra money.

But there were some other reasons?

Well I was proud of the fact

35:00 that my father was in World War I, I really was. Probably wanted to emulate him just a little bit but I'm sure I didn't say that.

I'm sure it's actually my mistake.

Don't worry about it. It's not important. My biggest concern and disappointment was that because I was young I wasn't allowed to join the AIF. I would have liked to have gone to the Middle East

35:30 in the early days. The first Australian troops left Sydney in 1940 the 6th Division to go to the Middle East. A lot of fellas transferred out of the 1st Battalion transferred immediately to the 6th Division and I would have liked to have gone with them. I was a Corporal at the time and what they wanted to do was keep certain NCOs back to train these fellas coming in to join the AIF and that's what we did do.

Can you tell me how you, yourself actually advanced

36:00 **through the ranks in the Militia to Corporal?**

Well I was very very young at the time there and I was rather surprised to be even promoted to Corporal because there were fellas much older than myself. The War itself would have made promotions easier than if there had not been a War. I wasn't a Corporal very long and then not long after that I was 17. Incidentally, and I want to be truthful about this,

36:30 I told a white lie and jumped my age up a bit but I had my third stripe when I was 17.

That's pretty good.

Yes, it was really because I had a platoon of fellows much older than me. As a matter of fact in those early days just after the War started there was the first call up of troops and they were called UT's, Universal Trainees. They'd have UT and then their service number whatever it was. The first lot that came into the

37:00 1st Battalion and I can tell you now who they were. I've never forgotten. Billy McMahon, who became Prime Minister, a fellow named Booth who owned the Mayfair Hotel up Kings Cross, the Blayney brothers from Blayney's the Tailors. That was a very famous high class tailor in the city and the 2 brothers. Now all those fellows they came and they were called up. They were with us for a few days and they

37:30 all disappeared and we wondered in the name of God where they'd got to and then to cut a long story short about a week or two later they all turned up and they had pips on their shoulders. They were all made Officers. In the early days you could buy a commission and that's what they did. They were all wealthy people and had the know-how how to go about this and they all came back as Officers. Now I don't know what happened to them after that. I don't know if they were good Officers or bad Officers.

38:00 One of the Blayney boys, I know, went to Timor with the Commandos so I'd give him full marks because they were the Commandos that were left behind and fought a battle for 12 months afterwards on their own before they were pulled out of the place. But there was a whole lot of those fellas because the 1st Battalion - the call ups came from the Eastern Suburbs, you now Rose Bay, all those good suburbs along the way there Double Bay. So

38:30 they soon found out it was easy to buy a commission. Hordern was another one of them and eventually he became a General. Obviously, although they might have bought their commissions some of them did turn out to be good soldiers.

What do you think they were looking for, for those who didn't have that luxury. What sort of qualities were they looking for in people to advance through the ranks like yourself in the Militia?

Well I suppose

39:00 that was the first time I learned how to stand up in front of people and give an address and whether they sensed that and gave me a try. When new recruits, they've got to learn a lot of things. How to handle the rifle and all about the various weapons. Field craft,

39:30 even how to stand to attention. That's probably your first lesson - the drill. Foot drill and that sort of thing. I was selected to give a lecture. I must have done it right - did the right thing because I just sort of went on from there. I was promoted Corporal very quickly and that first group of trainees that came in they were 21 years of age every one of them and I finished up with a platoon of fellas who were all much older

40:00 than I was. But I had the rank so they had to take notice of me.

Did you cop any trouble from them because you were younger?

No not really. I've always believed there's a certain way to treat people and I've done it all my life. You've got to be nice to people and they'll be nice to you. I really believe that.

You carried that through into?

I did yes. I found out that if you treated the fellows

40:30 Fairly and right, they did what you asked and they soon - it happened all the time when we were away. They soon know if an Officer or an NCO is no good and without telling him that he's no good in their own way they let you know. An NCO or an Officer who can't get on with the men doesn't last too long, he's either sent out of the Unit

41:00 back somewhere to Australia or a non-combat Unit or something like that. They soon get rid of them. Of course if you've got stripes, they'll soon take a stripe off you. If you're doing the wrong thing.

We'll just hold it there Keith.

Tape 4

00:30 **Your nickname was Scoop.**

My nickname was Scoop, mainly because I worked as a copy boy at the Sydney Sun. But everybody in an Infantry Battalion in most units have got nickname. All sorts of nicknames. We had an officer who was called Lolly Legs. Now the reason he was called Lolly Legs he could stand to attention and stand easy both at the same time. His knees hit together and his ankles went out at an angle.

01:00 so he was called Lolly Legs. Can I talk about that Spit and Wink one?

Yes, yes please.

We used to have a Staff Sergeant, Bertie Ferguson his name was and he was always known as Spit and Wink because when you were talking to him he'd always wink for some reason or other and he spat at the same time. So when you were talking to him you had to stand to one side otherwise you got showered with spit. He was a fellow incidentally who went to sleep under a coconut palm. A coconut

01:30 fell out of the tree and hit him on the head and he was evacuated back to Australia because of the injury he got from being hit with a coconut. He's the only person I know who never got shot in action but left the Battalion because he got hit by a coconut. Every Clark, didn't matter whether it was C L A R K or with an E on the end they were always known as Nobby Clark. I can't tell you about that other officer

02:00 because he's still alive but we had a Major and for some reason or other which I'm still not aware of he was always known as 'Bat eye'. We had, I've still got a good friend of mine today, his nickname was Tojo. Whether they thought he looked like a Jap I don't know but he was always nicknamed Tojo. We had another officer who was a thorough gentleman and he was always

02:30 known as Prince Kanoye. Prince Kanoye was very high up in the ranks of the Japanese Army. He had that nickname. As I said if you had a bald head you were invariably called Curly. If you had a bit of extra weight on you were known as Fatso. Tall and skinny you were always known as Slim. I had a Wimpy Woodford and I had a

03:00 fella called, one our Majors was called Snakey, Snakey McGlynn. The Sergeant Major in charge of the company who was his Sergeant Major was always known as Snake Learner. He learnt off Snaky McGlynn. You had all these sort of things. Really weird nicknames.

Do you want to put the record straight for Ike in terms of his marines?

Yes, our Colonel of course, Colonel Isaachsen.

03:30 He has always been known as Ike. The battalion was known as Ike's Marines mainly because when we were in New Britain sent out on patrols along the north coast of New Britain we had an American Barge Company who was attached to us and we'd go by barge and we'd be landed a certain many miles along the coast. We'd go ashore and continue on the patrol we had to do. Because of being on the water

04:00 all the time the Unit became known as Ike's Marines and of course on occasions when the Colonel comes over from South Australia to march with us, commentators on the march on Anzac Day refer to him as the American Colonel Ike and they are genuinely mixed up with Eisenhower, the American General but he's a dinky-di Aussie and no way does he want to be referred to as an American Ike.

Did you find that with the US Troops that you'd mix that they would

04:30 **do the same thing? Would they have as many nicknames?**

Yes they would have.

You don't have to go into it - I was just curious.

One thing we had an American regiment along side us at Sanananda which we weren't happy about because the Americans are inclined to shoot first and ask questions afterwards and they could become very dangerous. You talk about this business that they called today, a dreadful expression

05:00 to me, friendly fire. At Sanananda we were in slit trenches. When they brought this American regiment in and put them along side us, the first thing they did they pulled out of their packs, hammocks and tied them up between trees and we said "You can't do that". "Why not". "The Japs will open up and they'll get you". They took no notice of us. The first night during the first night the Japanese opened up

05:30 with their woodpecker machine guns which were just the height of these hammocks. Next night they were all down on the ground same as we were. Further under the ground than we were I think they were. We were very very thankful for all the equipment they provided us. They had a lot of good gear - much better gear than we had. They had plenty of it. But they had this awful habit. If they heard a noise, they'd fire at it. It could be anybody. Most times it was

06:00 on our side. So we were never ever that impressed with them. I did take a Yankee, some Americans out one day we were sent out to them as instructors just to give them an idea of the Australian way of doing patrols and of course they started off everyone with a cigarette hanging out of their mouth which I had to get rid of straight away because smoke is a dead giveaway particularly in the jungle. It's lying down low in the tropical

06:30 humidity all the time. So there were things that we would never do in our training which they did.

So did you consider them a burden in that sense?

No, I can't say a burden. We were amazed - I can give you a good example. When we left Gona to come out of action and go back to Port Moresby it was a long walk from the beach to the airstrip. A dreadful track all through mud

07:00 and we were very sick and very exhausted from the fighting we'd done. It was a real effort to get back to the airstrip and when we get to this airstrip there's this tent with a big black American sitting on a deck chair outside eating ice cream. He had a kerosene refrigerator and they were making ice cream and this was only a few miles behind the front line. Absolutely incredible. What we'd been through and the food we were eating to see somebody sitting there eating ice cream.

07:30 not that we could eat it. When we did get back to Port Moresby there was our parcels that had come up in the mail. There was cakes and all the goodies in it. As soon as we had a mouthful of the goodies that was it we couldn't eat another thing. A lot of chaps were physically sick because of the rich food which had come up. All we were having was bully beef and biscuits and something like that.

And so how long on a stretch would you actually go with just bully beef and biscuits?

Well,

08:00 we were 9 weeks at Sanananda and Gona but even when we were back in the base area. The diet was really bad although I never heard from anyone dying from it. Tinned butter - can you imagine tinned butter up there? You'd put a hole in it and it all pours out. We got plenty of what we'd call goldfish which were herrings in tomato sauce and after coming up and being stored in the heat it was awful. It was like

08:30 hot juice coming out of the tins. We had scrambled eggs at different times which was all dehydrated eggs. It came out of a 4 gallon drum like powder. We had meat and vegetables which was a tin and they served it 3 ways. I'm talking about back in camp now. First time they'd put a layer of meat, a layer of dehydrated mashed potatoes and a layer of meat. They'd call that a certain name.

09:00 The next night you'd have the potatoes on the bottom, the meat and the potatoes again and that was a different name. The third time you'd have 2 layers of potato and one layer of meat and that was a different dish again but it was all the same thing. Tasted the same no matter what they did to it. Incredible.

Did you ever, was there ever a feeling that the illness that a lot of troops were suffering was partly because of the bad rations?

Well, as I say, I never heard of anyone

09:30 dying from the food we got. I would think a lot of thought went into the rations we got. I think it's just a case of the monotony of what we got. There was very very little difference. We got plenty of tinned fruit in base areas and they used to make. We'd always have the tinned fruit served with custard. They'd make big - the cooks would make big pots of custard for us and those sort of things.

10:00 But you either had bully beef which in the tropics is a dreadful dish because anything that's got fat inside it - it all melts up there. There was no way of avoiding that. All we got was the bully beef. Never got bread until much later in the piece. We did have a couple of pastry cooks in civvy life with us who made bread rolls at one stage but that wasn't until 1944 when we got to

10:30 Lae. You got goldfish which was the tinned fish - herrings and of course you got the meat and vegetables. Sometimes we were able to grab pawpaws. You weren't supposed to touch them. Any trees that belonged to the natives you really weren't supposed to touch because they're poor people and they depended on what they grew. But we would get some pawpaws and use that like a marrow, cook it up like a marrow. On other occasions

11:00 we'd go out and throw a grenade in the water and the fish that came up, the cooks would cook up a nice fish meal. Once you got those fish you had to eat them straight away. Cook them and eat them straight away because the explosion shatters all the inside of the fish and if you leave it too long the insides go bad. Any fish you got as a result of a grenade going off had to be brought back straight away and cooked straight away even if it wasn't meal time.

11:30 How long could you leave it before it would go off?

Virtually had to eat it straight away. Had to cook it and eat it straight away. Naturally the explosion would shatter all the inside there. We'd go out in native canoes in safe areas and just drop a grenade over the side. The tropical waters were full of fish of all sorts. And that's the other thing, you didn't know what sort of fish you were eating anyhow. You couldn't identify it.

12:00 It went down well, fish meals I can tell you. Everything was either artificial or dehydrated. You never got a potato to peel. The thing that I missed most of all was bread. I still love bread. I can sit down and eat a slice of bread and butter and really enjoy it.

Did any ration swapping go on with the Americans at all?

At one time there. One place, when we went back the second time there was an American unit not far away

12:30 and we'd get 6 lb tins of Californian cherries. Absolutely beautiful. And you know what? They loved our bully beef and we'd give them a few tins of bully beef and we'd get these beautiful cherries. Big tins like this full of big cherries the biggest cherries and they were lovely. Californian cherries. They had some very very good rations. They really did.

What were relations like between Australian Forces and US Forces?

Quite good. Quite good with the Americans. Particularly in base areas.

13:00 They came to all our concerts and we used to have picture shows there too and they always joined us for the picture shows. We had a film unit that would go round and show films and I don't know if you've ever seen pictures. It was just a screen that was put up in the middle of the jungle, a clearing. We'd cut down logs and you'd sit on the logs and invariably halfway through the film the film would go off or something like that. It was always believed but nobody could ever prove it

13:30 that the Japs were sitting on the other side of the screen looking at it too. I don't know whether that's true or not.

What do you reckon?

No, I don't think they were that close. Anyhow with the break down of the machine, they'd get all the advice with the most flowery language you've ever heard in your life to get it working again and also it was nothing for sitting halfway through a picture down would come a heavy shower of rain and nobody moved they still sat there looking at the picture. It was a real event to go

14:00 to the pictures, I can tell you. But the Americans they'd come over. When they heard there was a picture on they'd come over from their camps wherever they were and see the picture with us.

Do you remember any favourite movies you had at the time?

In those early days, I don't know if you've ever heard of Betty Grable. She was probably the most favourite. Gorgeous long legs she had. They'd show that and there'd be all the cheers and the calls out, you know. If you could ever understand and hear what was being said

14:30 about her, I tell you what she would have been blushing.

That's great. I'd like to go back just for a moment, back to your time in the Militia. Something I have read and correct me if I'm wrong. There were certain men in the Militia who didn't actually want to join the AIF?

Oh yes, there would have been, yes.

What would their reasons have been

15:00 **do you think?**

Well, it's very hard to say. Later on the Militia Battalions went to New Guinea as you know. Now our Battalion, the 36th Battalion you had to have 75% of your Battalion AIF fellows before you could say the 36th Battalion AIF. Ours was the 36th Battalion full stop. Now

15:30 a lot of fellows, particularly later on, there was always a big move to try to get us to join the AIF. Incidentally I joined the AIF myself as soon as I could and a lot of the NCOs did. But a lot of the fellows turned around and said "Why should we join the AIF when we're fighting alongside an AIF Battalion, losing people, getting the same casualties doing the same job. The only thing with being a Militia man

16:00 you were limited to where you could go. You could go to New Guinea but that was it, full stop. You couldn't go to Borneo or any of those other theatres of War. You could go to anywhere in New Guinea, New Britain, the Guadalcanal, the Solomon Islands. There was a lot of people who were most unhappy about the fact that they were being pressured to join the AIF and they wouldn't do it. Back in the early days when I was with the 1st Battalion there were fellows there particularly those who were called up.

16:30 Those UT trainees, they were disgruntled by the fact that they were called up and no way were they going to join the AIF. Not all of them. Some did join the AIF. Once they got training some did go and join the AIF. Before the 36th Battalion sailed, the left Greta Camp in June 1942, the got an intake of AIF reinforcements from Dubbo. These were fellas

17:00 who joined the AIF to go in the 8th Division to Malaya but while they were in Dubbo, Malaya fell so they were as they called it shunted off into the 36th Battalion and for a while they hated it. They were AIF men and they had been dumped into a Militia Battalion. But it wasn't long before they changed their mind and they won't have a word said against the 36th Battalion today and yet they were AIF fellows joined up expressly to go overseas

17:30 **Okay.**

When we went away with the 53rd, they still had these big drives to get people into the AIF. We had a dentist, the company dentist, Captain Stevens and his surgery was out in the jungle, not in the jungle, very little jungle close in Port Moresby its all trees and things. Under this big tree he had this old dentist chairs. Everything's done with the foot.

18:00 If he's going to use the drill on you, it's attached to a wheel. To get that drill going he's got to pump a pedal, like this and the wheel goes round and he gets a Militia fella in the chair with his mouth wide open, trucks running up and down, dust everywhere. He's have this drill and he'd poise it right here and he say "Have you ever thought of joining the AIF?" and he got more recruits that way I think than anybody else because people even today are frightened

18:30 of dentists aren't they? He did, that's a true story. Somebody'd say "Yeah I'll join" rather than get this drill. That dentist was a local fella from Petersham. He had his dental surgery down on the corner of Parramatta Road and Norton Street Leichhardt for years. He was the Recruiting Officer for the AIF. He got some recruits, I can tell you.

When did you first, or

19:00 **Did you at that time become aware of some of the flack coming back from servicemen regarding the Militia?**

Well, there was always dissention between the AIF and Militia right from the word go even before they left Australia. In fact at one time and I think I'm right in saying this, there was a Militia Battalion at Ingleburn and an AIF Battalion. Of course the AIF fellow there, these are fellows

19:30 who just joined the Army so they had no right to lord themselves over the Militia Battalion and there'd be riots and this sort of thing. They'd get stuck in and say the wrong thing and before you knew what happened they weren't worrying about the War over the other side of the world they had their own little War here at Ingleburn camp and this sort of thing and that went on all the time. There's always been, they call you Chocos or chocolate soldiers and all this sort of thing. Even today. When I went up to

20:00 when I went on the Mikhail Sholokhov in 1995 with the Pilgrims, the first night out at sea. There was 117 people went, men and women some were widows, some were nursing sisters and this sort of thing

and 117 from all over Australia and I think NSW provided about 30 of those of which I was one of them. The first night out we were

20:30 given instructions what we were going to do, you know there were programs and things and when it was finished an AIF fellow got up and he said "I just wanted to say we've got fellas from the 6th Division here, we've got fellas from the 7th Division, we've got fellas from the 9th Division. I think it would be a good idea if we had our own separate little reunion". Okay? There was a 9th Div fella along side of me still a good friend of mine. He'd been in Tobruk

21:00 and all those places and he jumped up straight away and he said "I don't want to hear any more of this so-and-so" There was dead silence. He said "We're all here together and we all did the same job. Most of us are from Infantry Battalions and we all fought the enemy at different places". He said "There's no such thing here today as AIF and Militia". That put a stop to it straight away and I really admire that fellow because

21:30 he was a long serving 9th Div fella. Spent a lot of time in Tobruk and this character just wanted to have - no mention of the other fellows having a reunion. Just the three AIF divisions. I mean, that's 1995, years and years and years after the War and they still go on with that baloney. Even today on Anzac Day, the Divies, 6th, 7th, 8th and 9th they always march first. Never ever, since there's been an Anzac

22:00 Day since World War Two has a Militia had the chance to lead the marches even today. We're always on the tail end of the march.

That's incredible considering the fighting you were in.

The march starts at 9.00 in the morning at Martin Place. My Unit falls outside the Sheraton Wentworth Hotel in Bligh Street with other Militia Units and invariably we march off at about quarter past 11, 2¼ hours after the march starts.

22:30 We're right on the tail end and yet we made applications to why not have the Militia lead the march one year and nobody takes any notice of us. We believe that's the reason why he's AIF, you're only Militias.

Did the AIF that joined the Militia up on Kokoda, for example, did they have a similar attitude?

No, no I must confess those early AIF

23:00 Battalions, when they saw what they were letting themselves into, they suddenly woke up to the fact that the Militia Battalions were doing exactly the same thing. As a matter of fact, 2 of the Battalions that came up after the big retreat was the 2/3rd Battalion and the 3rd Battalion Militia, 2 Battalions and that's the only time in the whole history of the War where 2 Battalions, the same number fought right along side each other and the 2/3rd were happy that the 3rd were there

23:30 and the 3rd were happy that the 2/3rd were there. There were times when things turned out alright for them but when you consider the severity of the fighting that took place, particularly at Sanananda, Gona and Buna and there were AIF Battalions and Militia Battalions there. Not only there, Milne Bay there was the 61st Battalion Militia, the 25th Battalion Militia fought alongside Battalions out of the 18th Brigade.

24:00 There were Militia Battalions alongside AIF Battalions at Guadalcanal. The big campaign up at Wewak there was AIF and Militia Battalions all doing the same job, exactly the same job. Losing same fellas being killed and wounded so why the difference, why the difference. You saw what happened to the poor devils from Vietnam when they came back. They were ostracized here. Even the RSL was at fault. They wouldn't accept them.

24:30 I can remember an Infantry Battalion just arrived back from Vietnam when they had to march through the street. Some stupid woman, excuse the expression woman when I say that I don't mean present. A woman raced out and poured a bucket of blood over the Colonel of the Battalion. Covered his uniform all in blood. That's dreadful wasn't it?

That's very dreadful. Yes.

That's why even today the Vietnam

25:00 fellas they still stick together themselves. They won't have much to do with anybody else at all. They got a real raw deal.

It's a bad time to get a raw deal isn't it?

Oh yes. That's a dreadful thing to do to pour a bucket of blood over the Colonel.

Do you remember where you were and what you were doing when War was declared?

Yes. I was at work at The Sun. I can't remember what day

25:30 it was. I used to work. Always worked Saturday too. There was the Sydney Sun and there was the Sunday Sun so I used to start work about 2.00 on Saturday afternoon and work right through to about 1.00 in the morning on the Sunday Sun. I'm not sure - I can find out the day War started because I've

got one of those perpetual calendars out there.

I was just wondering if anything specifically stuck in your mind?

26:00 I had an idea that I got a telegram at home to say to report back to the Battalion straight away because we were mobilised on that day. It was a big shemozzle. Nobody knew what was going to happen and they wanted to get people back into uniform. Those that were already in the forces got going straight away. They started straight after that the big recruitment drive to get members for the AIF. That's the other thing too. Most of those AIF Battalions

26:30 in the early days they were filled with Militia fellas anyhow. They transferred straight away. A lot of NCOs dropped their stripes and went into the AIF Battalions. They soon got them again afterwards because they were trained soldiers so it was incredible to think that there was all this trouble between the AIF and the Militia when most of the Units started off in the Militia in the first place.

It's very silly. Working as a copy boy

27:00 **Were you aware of the larger picture in Europe. Were you aware that War was coming?**

We got more news. We were right on hand to receive the news as it come in. One of the, Eric Baume, you may have heard that name, he was a very prominent War correspondent. He came from the Sydney Sun and he was stationed over in England and he wrote a book called "The Wounded Don't Cry". I think it was about all after the air raids on London

27:30 the places around there. Naturally we did have War correspondents in the various theatres of the War so we did get probably knew quicker and before the general public got it, yes. So we were aware of what was going on.

Did you know much about Hitler before the War?

As soon as it started I learnt because, what do you call it, we had a special

28:00 room where all the newspapers, all newspapers. They used to get the other papers every day and they were filed there. A file room it was called. So you go and ready anything out of any paper and we had access to that all the time so I could catch up on anything that was going on. I think that may have a had a little bit of a bearing on the fact that I wanted to get into it myself but I was restricted a bit mainly because of the job and my age.

Did you think at the time that you were

28:30 **going to War for Britain or for Australia?**

Oh well, King and Country. That's what it was in those days. It's part of Australian history. Every time there was trouble, Australia was always called upon and nobody objected in those days. Not like they've done now with the Australian soldiers over in Iraq but you just did it. The King was a very very important part of all our lives in those early days

29:00 and particularly when you saw pictures of him walking amongst all the ruins of the bombed towns in England and he was always there. Buckingham Palace was bombed at one stage. He and the Queen at the time were well and truly into it. No, I think that the old message "King and Country" was a good one which we got.

What you signed up for. Keith, can we leave it there for today, if that's okay?

Okay, whatever you like.

Tape 5

00:33 **Keith, I was just wondering if you could take me back to your days as a copy boy and tell me what working in a newspaper was like in those days?**

Well I was very fortunate. That period wasn't very long after the Depression years so I left school and got a job straight away at the old Sydney Sun or Associated Press I think they were called in those days because they did publish

01:00 other magazines apart from the Daily Sun and the Sunday Sun. I thought it was the greatest thing that had ever happened to me at the time to become a copy boy. I didn't know much about it of course but once I settled in it was an absolutely terrific job. I had access to all the newspapers that were put out and put into the file room. They had a magnificent special room

01:30 just for photographs and in the quieter moments particularly on the weekend when I was working at night I used to get in there and I used to pull all these photographs out. There was photographs about every conceivable subject that you could imagine. It was really special. As I've explained previously, some of the reporters were very very famous, particularly later on in their day. The job of the copy boy was to go out with the reporter and as he, whatever he was

- 02:00 covering at that time he would write his story on paper and once he had written about 4 or 5 or 6 small sheets of paper I'd have to go to the nearest telephone and I'd ring back into the main office and sitting in the main office were 2 men in little cubicles on the old typewriter. I'd just read the whole script off the paper and they'd take it down on the typewriter. They would then call for another boy and another fella
- 02:30 would get up off the seat and he would be given a copy and he'd take it into the sub-editors who would check it right through either add to or deleted what they didn't want. It was sent to the Chief Editor and eventually made it's way to the printing area. It was a particularly interesting job because as you could appreciate, reporters covered all sorts of assignments. I had been out with the police reporter in courts
- 03:00 I'd been out on, I think the only time I ever visited a race track with a reporter covering the races. I did mention before that I thought it was absolutely wonderful when I was sent out to the Sydney Cattle and Sale Yards and I finished up being known as our representative at the sale yards when I'd get sent back with reports on the number of cattle, sheep and pigs that were going to
- 03:30 be sold that day but unfortunately although I was the official correspondent of the sale yards, my name never came onto the paper. It still felt great to be out there and doing this sort of work. It was a good place to work for and they did print a small paper which they called the Sun Junior. The idea of the Sun Junior was as most copy boys eventually, hopefully would become reporters
- 04:00 so the Sun Junior was an outlet for the copy boys to write their stories and they all did that. Some of the copy boys that never ever went to the War finished up to be very very famous reporters. One or two cases towards the end of the War and they'd got to their 20's and 21 they did go away as War correspondents. Fellas like myself and there was a few of us we thought
- 04:30 we had our duty to go to the War so that's what we did. By the time, after 6 years of War and I came back under the Rehabilitation Act which was in effect at that time, you had to be taken back in your old job but of course I was 16 when I left the Sun to join the Army and I was 22 by the time I came back. They couldn't put me on as a copy boy.
- 05:00 I would have been the oldest copy boy in the newspaper. So that really sunk all my chances of going ahead and furthering my career as a journalist or reporter. But we did part on a friendly basis and I did go into sales, various types of sales and I kept that up right until the day I retired.

What was your, you showed us an article from the Sun Junior, I was just wondering if you could tell me what your first article was about?

As I was in the Army

- 05:30 at the time most of the articles I wrote in the Sun Junior was dealing with Army life. I was very happy to think I did have my name in the Sun Junior and these reports were directly from the soldiers on service themselves. Most of my articles were about what happened in the Army and apparently they were very popular from what I can understand. It was a good life
- 06:00 a good life and even to this day I'm sorry I was never able to continue on in that particular field because who knows. I might have been one of those famous reporters that wanders around the country today attending Wars and this sort of thing. I think I explained before, I am a frustrated journalist and to get rid of my frustrations by writing a journal for my Battalion Association and apparently it's successful because I get a lot of very
- 06:30 nice comments about the journal and more important thing about this, the surviving members of my Battalion come from every State in Australia and the other states never get the opportunity to come over here to Sydney so the journal goes out to all these people and at least they keep in contact. They know what's happening to their mates and they're kept up to date with their health. Anything doing with them. It's the
- 07:00 the one thing that keeps the association all together at the moment.

That's wonderful. What was the thing in the newspaper in the lead up to War and after War had broken, I wonder how the newspaper changed when War broke? Did the newspaper change?

Well there was naturally a lot of War news particularly - the War was over the other side of the War at the time and

- 07:30 we did keep up to date. Those of us working at The Sun were able to keep up to date with all the War news at that time and The Sun did have War correspondents, senior men, over in England who reported back to The Sun their thoughts and what went on and what they saw in London particularly during the time of the Blitz and air raids and of course when I was mobilised
- 08:00 in September 1939 which got me out of the office so I didn't have anything more to do with the newspaper right up until the end of the War when I reported back to still see if I had my old job which I didn't have unfortunately. Whilst we were there, I was mobilised on 3 September 1939, the day War broke out and after we'd taken up battle stations all round Sydney.

- 08:30 That took about 2 months and then I had a 3 month break back at The Sun and I was able to keep up to date then until that 3 months was up and I was called in full time again. Of course once we were away overseas it was very rare to get newspapers. The Army itself put out newspapers
- 09:00 Guinea Gold I think was one of the more famous ones which had a wide circulation amongst all the Australia soldiers and all the American soldiers and all the crews of ships that went up there and on occasions at home my parents would send me a newspaper up. You never always received them because quite often a lot of the things that were sent to you came up by ship and the ship might have been either sunk
- 09:30 or damaged and a damaged ship usually turned round and went back again, back to Australia. I wasn't able to keep up with the changes in the newspapers. Certainly I know the newspapers we've got today are nothing like the ones back in my day.

How long would it take, do you know for a story to come back from a correspondent in London?

Well of course

- 10:00 censorship was probably much harder in those days than it is today. I think the War in Iraq was a classic example where the journalist over in Iraq are talking direct back to the newspaper office in Australia straight away without any censorship involved. In those days it was rare to see, I'm using New Guinea as an example, it was rare to see a War correspondent up close to the front
- 10:30 not because they didn't want to get there but they weren't allowed to go there. In fact I can think of only one Wartime photographer, a famous chap and that was Parer. He was one of the few fellows. When we were on the Kokoda Track he was actually go ahead in front of us, climb up in a tree and he'd take camera shots of us heading toward the front. Damien Parer. He was a fine cameraman and of course later on in the
- 11:00 War in one of the islands that the Americans went ashore to capture he was killed there. He got right in front of them as they landed and unfortunately was killed by the Japs there. But I believe that the censorship would have been much harder in those days. Journalists had to be very very particular what they wrote. There was no such things as mentioning the names of native villages and this sort of thing I used to, just digressing
- 11:30 for a moment, I've always been an artist, a black and white artist and a cartoonist. I used to illustrate everybody's envelopes. I do have quite a few of them in my book out here and I was always asked, it didn't matter if it was for the Colonel, officers whoever, I was asked to illustrate their envelopes so I would draw many times a cartoon of some sort right on the front of the envelope and
- 12:00 being a sneaky at times I'd try to indicate in my drawings where we were but invariably the envelopes would come back home and my mother and father got the envelopes there'd be this piece cut right out which would - that was where I was trying to say where we were. In fact I was even written up in a newspaper at the time this person up in New Guinea sending back these colourful envelopes to the people back home. A lot of my
- 12:30 fellas in the association today who are still alive they've still got the envelopes sent to their wives at home and their families which I did in those early days. They were just something to break the monotony and it kept me on the good side of all the officers and those sort of things. But it was good. I used to love drawing and this was one way of helping all the fellows and of course a lot of the fellows in the Army in those days
- 13:00 had very poor educations. No fault of their own but that was the time they lived in. They had poor educations. Because of my background they knew I was with a newspaper I'd often be asked to write a letter for them so they could send it back to their loved ones back home in Australia. I loved doing it for them and I felt privileged to do it for them because what they expressed
- 13:30 things which I knew I shouldn't be reading anyhow - shouldn't be writing. But it helped the fellows out and this one reason after about the first 12 months up in New Guinea a new Unit was formed. It was called an Education Unit and it was made up of all ex-school teachers. What they did they sent one of these fellows to every Unit or every Unit that needed one and we got one
- 14:00 in the 36th Battalion. He was an ex-school teacher and his sole job was to help these fellas to sign their name. In a lot of cases they could only put X down. They couldn't write their name. He was responsible for giving elementary lessons on writing their name and a few little things like that and actually some of those fellows did reach a stage where they could sit down and write a letter back home to their families. It must have been a wonderful
- 14:30 thing for the families to get a letter from their son who they knew could never write in the first place. That was a great asset to the soldiers in the Army but it was just the period we lived in. Just around the Depression times and after the Depression times, the young fellows were sent out looking for jobs and of course a lot of them were still at school and had to give up their school work and consequently they lacked the proper education. I was very very fortunate

15:00 I went to my school right through until the end and I'm sure my education was furthered when I was working for The Sun as a copy boy. You were learning as you were going along, It was great.

Thank you very much for that Keith. I'll just have a look at my notes for a moment. I might just take you to when you arrived at - or on the ship on the way to Port Moresby.

Can I just

15:30 mention first. A lot of people don't - they hear stories about the War. Good stories, bad stories. Very very few people know how the soldiers got into the Army in the first place. Now both the Militia Battalions and the AIF Battalions started off with the AIF in particular, made up of volunteers. The Militia Battalions were mainly made up of

16:00 volunteers. There were the fellows who were in that Unit in the Militia days before the War and the rest of the Battalion was made up with conscripts for the sake of a better way to describe them. They would see the notice come through the mail at home to say they report to such and such a place and I can only talk about the 36th Battalion because although I did sail away with the 53rd, I was a volunteer and the

16:30 I am sure that most other Militia Battalions the same thing happened. With regards to the 36th Battalion it was a Sydney Battalion and the call-ups all came from Haberfield, Leichhardt, Abbotsford, Annandale in that particular area. The people who were called up were all fellows 18, 19 to 20 and in the peace time days a Battalion, a Militia

17:00 Battalion usually had A, B, C, D and Headquarter Companies so around the suburbs there would be drill halls and in the case of the 36th Battalion there was a drill hall at Ashfield, Drummoyne, one at Petersham and there was one at Hill Street, Leichhardt and Hawthorn Parade, Haberfield. The notices that went out to the call-ups to say that to report to the 36th Battalion they had to report

17:30 to Hawthorn Parade, Haberfield. Hawthorn Parade is right on the old Hawthorn Canal. On the particular day that all these fellows, they'd roll up and they had their suits. Some had shaggy old suits on and others were well dressed. Some had hats on and some had open necked shirts and some didn't worry about coats. They all had either a brand new suitcase or a dilapidated old suitcase and when they reported into the drill hall

18:00 at Hawthorn Parade, Haberfield they were all told they were going up to Greta Camp. So they were all issued with a big thick corned beef sandwich each and I think it was probably an orange or an apple that went with it. They were all lined up outside. They didn't actually march, they strolled because they didn't actually know how to march and they strolled all the way from the drill hall up to Summer Hill Station.

18:30 There would be an old steam train waiting for them there and they'd all board the steam train and it would chuff off and take them up to Greta Camp which is probably about 20 odd miles out of Newcastle. When they got to Greta Camp, they all got off the train and they were taken in. The camp was made up of huts. One was called Chocolate City and the other was called Silver City. Most of the 36th

19:00 fellows were sent to the Silver City area. First day in the Army they didn't have a clue what was going on. They were allocated huts to go to. Usually something like 30 men to a hut and one of the very very first things they had to do. They had to have a medical examination. So 30 men would be - have to go into a special medical hut and they were all asked to take their clothes off.

19:30 It was probably the first time in all their lives when they were in a group of men standing there with no clothes on waiting for the doctor. If you can picture what went on there. Fellows looking at each other. They didn't know anybody. They looked at each other. Some of looking with envy. Some are looking with shame and of course the conversations that went on. I was told of one conversation that went on. One fella said to the chap standing along side him "Look at that fella

20:00 over there - 2 inches". And the other fellow said "Yes, and that's from the floor". Then of course the doctor comes in and he goes up and down the whole line of all the troops there and he did things to those fellows that they had never had done to them in their life before. Once upon a time when you went to the doctor with a cough he always put a spatula in your mouth and were told to cough. But this fellow put the spatula in a most awkward place on the fellow's anatomy

20:30 and told him to cough and nobody knew why. What he did next was he went round the back all the line of soldiers and they were all told to bend over. In those days that was a dreadful thing to ask someone to do. Nowadays it wouldn't make any difference at all. The type of things that are going on today. As he walked down the line the doctor, usually a young doctor with 3 stars on his shoulder and he'd have an orderly and I think one of the conversations was "Look at that chap there"

21:00 "funny place to keep your wallet". So these were the sort of conversations that went on all the time. After they finished the medical examination they always received their first shots all their injections. The funny thing about giving new soldiers injections, it was always the big 6 foot fella who collapsed first. It really was. The other thing that happened was, there might be 30 fellas lined up to get a needle and the same needle was used right from the first fella to the

21:30 last one so you can imagine how blunt it was for the poor last fella to get the needle jabbed into his arm.

We did get shots for Smallpox, Typhoid, 2 or 3 different ones like that. That's we got for. Then of course, once the medical examinations were over and they were - everyone was issued what we called a Giggle Suit. A Giggle Suit was khaki trousers and a khaki blouse and they'd be issued with these horrible

- 22:00 old orange boots and of course an Army hat. Then they were all taken over to another big hut and they were issued with what we called a palliasse which was a huge bag type pillow and the hut was filled with straw. Every soldier had to go along and he filled the palliasse with straw. He went back to his hut and it would be flattened out and that was your bed on the floor. You were issued
- 22:30 with the various blankets and everything that went with the palliasse and you were instructed how to fold your blankets. Everything was done neatly. In the morning when you were, the new morning, the old palliasse had to be folded back into 3 pieces and the blankets were placed all round it in a certain order and everything was lined up. Probably one of the first lessons those fellas ever learnt in a camp area if you see anything that moves, you saluted it.
- 23:00 If it didn't move you painted it white. That was the first lesson I think they ever learnt. From there on in it was the first lessons you'd ever get to become a soldier. The first lesson you ever learnt in the Army was a drill. How you could stand to attention and the various drill movements that were in place in those early days. As the days and weeks went by of course you were instructed
- 23:30 on all the various weapons, you were allocated a Company. So many men to A Company, B Company, C Company and D Company and as I explained before Headquarter Company was a specialist company with various types of weaponry including a Transport Platoon and a Pioneer Platoon and a Sig [Signals] Platoon. Sig platoon was probably the most important Platoon in a battalion because they were responsible for all communications. Even back in a camp like Greta Camp
- 24:00 there was a special area set up and switchboards were put in that area and the telephone lines ran to all the Companies to the orderly room of every Company. It was just like a normal business, a commercial business with a telephone system. As the time went by, these rookie soldiers became fair dinkum soldiers. That's how they were first introduced into getting into the Army.

That's amazing.

- 24:30 **Can I ask, were they quite upset about that first treatment?**

Yes a lot of fellows didn't want to be in the Army in the first place. Naturally they had a chip on their shoulder. There were others who were evenly distributed, they had a chip on both shoulders. One thing for sure, it was a different life to what they had in civilian life so a lot of fellows found it very very difficult to be in amongst other company

- 25:00 all the time. They'd slept in their own bedroom at home and now they were in a hut with 30 other fellows and probably a shock to the system particularly at night time. A lot of fellows were bad snorers and a lot of fellows couldn't go to sleep because others were snoring. But after a period of time when they got to know each other. That was the big transition. Once you got to know the other fellows
- 25:30 it became a very very close knit group of men. When you went overseas and eventually got into action you would do anything at all to help each other. It was a different life, absolutely different to what you'd experienced before and particularly in an Infantry Battalion it was something that you remembered to the last of your days and if the fellows were along side you and still alive today that's why Associations are so very very
- 26:00 close and they really are brothers.

Just going back I'm just astounded by that first day. Do you know if the new enlistments to the AIF had to undergo the same sort of treatment?

Yes, they would have done the same but what you've got to remember is that they were volunteers. They went in there with a better frame of mind. They volunteered to join the Army and go overseas whereas the Militia Battalion didn't go overseas. They were restricted to the areas they could go to. They could

- 26:30 go to New Guinea, the Solomons, Guadalcanal, New Britain; full stop. They would not have been allowed to go anywhere out of that border at the time. Two different frames of mind. The AIF fellows joined voluntarily and the majority of Militia fellows were called up. Later on in the War of course when reinforcements were needed in Militia
- 27:00 Battalions we did get a lot of AIF fellows and at first they really hated the thought of coming to a Militia Battalion but after a short period of time they realised that these Militia fellows weren't so bad after all. Any AIF man who served in a Militia Battalion fitted in real good eventually. It's only some of the AIF Battalions themselves that caused all the trouble between the AIF and the Militia. I think I might have mentioned
- 27:30 previously it wasn't until the Kokoda Track when the AIF Units were fighting right alongside Militia Units that they did discover that these fellows were doing the same job that they were doing and their attitude did change I'm happy to say.

I've heard, I've read actually about conscripts from the United States and Italy their hearts

weren't in it. They weren't good fighters.

That's quite true. At Sanananda we had an

28:00 American regiment along side and I have personally seen with my own eyes American soldiers refusing to fight. Refusing to go in action and I've actually seen their officers standing over them pointing his revolver at them to try to get them up to go into an attack or whatever it was they had to do. These would have been American conscripts. It's a different system with the Americans. The Marines were always

28:30 volunteers and I would say they were probably the equivalent to our AIF soldiers but they did have a lot of conscripts and one of the things that did upset me in New Guinea the white Americans had no time for the Negro Americans. They caused the Negroes an awful lot of problems. They gave them a bad time. I don't think it's changed a great deal today in certain parts of America. That's why the

29:00 American Black soldier was always given menial tasks and to my knowledge there was no such thing as a Negro Infantry Battalion in New Guinea. I may be wrong about that but I don't think there was. No matter how rough or how dirty the job was it was the poor Negro soldier that was delegated to do that.

How did the Australian conscripts compare to the American ones?

I put it

29:30 all down to training. We had a different type of training altogether and the Australian soldier, it didn't matter if he was an AIF soldier or a Militia it was a more disciplined soldier and I found that with the American soldiers there was very little discipline. I think I've mentioned before, the Americans would go out on patrols smoking cigarettes which is a real no-no when you go out on patrol because just the smoke from the cigarette drifts through the jungle

30:00 and the Japanese only had to sniff the air and the knew somebody was coming who was smoking but no such thing happened with our soldiers. Before we went out on patrol we made sure everything we had on us didn't rattle. We had made sure that no noise would come from us. If anybody made a noise it was really bad news and of course smoking, no way anyone was allowed to smoke when they went out there. We moved,

30:30 on a patrol we moved very very slowly and of course our set up was we always had a forward scout and that was probably the most dangerous job on a patrol and his job was to keep a very very good eye out for what was ahead of him and look very closely into the bush. Now if you had a 10 man patrol, one man always looked to the left and the next man always looked to the right and they did that all through. I had been out on patrol with the Americans

31:00 they just amble along, shuffle along taking no notice of anything at all and frankly I was glad not to go out with them again. They were bad news. It's all lack of discipline that's all it was. But the Australian soldier, once he learnt what he had to do and particularly in New Guinea. After a period time he did become as good a jungle soldier as the Japanese were. He really did.

31:30 He had to anyhow. It was a matter of life or death.

I've read, and I think you said yesterday too, that when you did leave Australia, some of the Militia troops had had very little training.

Yes. We left from Woolloomooloo wharf on 27 December 1941 and the day we left we got a consignment of soldiers that had come from a staging camp somewhere. All young fellows, 18, 19.

32:00 This had been their first day at the staging camp. They had been issued uniforms. They'd never ever seen or handled a .303 rifle and there they were, never received one day's final leave. Final leave was essential. It really was. Most cases when the Battalion left you knew you were going to have some hard times ahead. A lot of those soldiers would never ever see their families again because they became casualties. So we did get on board

32:30 about 100 of these young fellows and the job of fellows like myself, I was a Sergeant and all the Sergeants and the Corporals it was our job to actually train them on the deck of the ship as we made our way up to New Guinea. We had to train them in the first aspects of being a soldier from drill. Next lesson we had to give them a gun to handle a .303 rifle. Explain

33:00 how to pull it apart, Put it together again. That was the only training they had until we got up into Port Moresby. Of course, they didn't get a great deal more training there because we were thrown straight into labouring work as I explained, laying down barbed wire, digging holes in the ground and gun positions and all this sort of thing. Nobody was ever brought to account for sending those young soldiers away like that.

33:30 It's a blot on the record of the Australian Army that this was allowed to happen. Obviously somebody higher up was responsible for it and it should never been allowed to happen because a lot of those young soldiers, particularly on the Kokoda Track and later on in Sanananda and Gona they were killed up there. So it's really a blot on the Australian Army that this was allowed to happen.

How much could you teach them in 6 days at sea?

Not a great deal.

34:00 I can tell you. Not a great deal because if they'd gone into a camp it would have been 3 months from the first day and until at the end of the 3 months they'd come out as a reasonably good soldier. So what we had to do in 5 days was teach them as much as we could in that short period of time. Really bad news it was.

Unbelievable.

It is, yes.

Why did they decide not to give them final leave?

Well the Battalions needed

34:30 building up. On board the Aquitania was the 53rd Battalion, which was a NSW unit, the 39th Battalion, a Victorian unit plus a few specialist units. I think there was an Artillery Unit. I did say that there was a Hospital Unit which comprised Nursing Sisters. They were the first Nursing Sisters to go to New Guinea and after the first air raid they were evacuated back to Australia because it became a very dangerous place. All the civilians were evacuated

35:00 at the same time and the civilians were only allowed to walk out of Port Moresby with one suitcase. They just walked out of their houses and left everything behind as it stood. In those early days the natives went berserk when they saw all the white people going and they looted all the houses. I can recall going into the museum which had a lot of lovely artefacts. They destroyed everything in the museum.

35:30 There was steam ship companies and Burns Phillip big stores and they were huge department stores carried just about everything and there was a case of the natives going in and starting to smash up everything and we thought this is no good. I suppose today it's called looting but we did go in and rescued all the liquor that was in the place. People living in the tropics always had very expensive tastes

36:00 and they had the best of cognacs and all these things. I must confess we did clean all those out and take them back to our camp areas and we were quite happy for some time until the bottles became empty.

What was New Year's Eve like aboard the Aquitania?

New Years Eve. Well we must have had New Year's Eve because we arrived on 3rd January in Port Moresby. I don't think it was any different now I come to think

36:30 of it. Probably the only people who enjoyed New Year's would have been the officers because they were the ones who had access to the Nursing Sisters. They probably had their own parties - but the Aquitania. One thing I can remember about the Aquitania and I did describe it before - the third biggest ship in the world after the Queen Mary and the Queen Elizabeth. You went from A down to about K decks and of course right down in the bowels of the ship

37:00 was the big two-up game. We were so far away from all the brass that we used to have this big two-up game with the 39th Battalion and all the other soldiers and a couple of interesting points. We put a couple of guards on just in case an officer wandered down there. Some of the biggest two-up games I've ever seen in my life that took place down there. When you stop and think about it we did

37:30 earn a lot of money. I got 10 shillings a day as a Sergeant and a Private got 6 shillings a day and usually I know in my case, I allocated about 8 shillings a day to my mother so that left me with 2 shillings a day so you really didn't have a lot of money to spend but the only thing you could spend it on was gambling. There was always somebody who had a pack of cards

38:00 in their gear. Some fellows had, I can't think of the game now, it was a dice game. No, gone out of my mind but there were various dice games that you could play and even members of the crew, we conned the crew into coming down and joining in when they were off duty and they joined in these gambling games. Crown and Anchor was the game I was trying to think of which was another gambling game. So it was a - we had an

38:30 interesting time on the ship but every now and then they would sound a warning. They had a particular signal which came from the big funnels on top and we'd have to take up positions on the decks just in case the ship was hit by torpedos from Japanese subs and there was this drill to evacuate the ship and to put your life jackets on and this sort of thing and we all had a special place to go to.

39:00 It was organised chaos when this whistle went because a ship that size you were running up and down decks, companionways, down corridors and you usually ended up in a place you weren't supposed to be in the first place. It took us quite a few days to get used to the spot. I always remember somebody said if one of the fellows falls overboard, what do you do?

39:30 The instructor who was telling us this said "Well?" he said to the first fellow "What would you do if somebody fell overboard? Would you save him?" and he said "No, it just depends on who it was" and that was the answer he gave. That brought the ship down anyhow just about. That's, once again as I

was talking about earlier, this is the Australian humour and just digressing for a moment, I was very fortunate to

- 40:00 go back to New Guinea in 1995 with the Australia Remembers Year and we were on the Mikhail Sholokhov, the Russian cruise ship. On the first night out at sea they wanted to introduce all the officers of the ship to all the soldiers, the Old Diggers. We were sitting in this big lounge and there was the Captain, the First Officer, the Second Officer, the Third Officer right down to the Junior Officer
- 40:30 all lined up in front of us and when they got to the end somebody said "Any questions?" and a voice came from over the back "Who's driving the bloody ship?" because all these fellas were up on the front there. This is the sort of thing, even then, I mean these were all fellas like myself well on in years. Even to this day the Australian humour is still well and truly evident no matter where you go or whatever you're doing.

Tape 6

- 00:05 ...Araluen there was a tent camp. They were all tents there. There was another one on the old Western Highway, I can't think where that was now but that was a tent camp. Singleton was a hut camp. Ingleburn was the newest one that was actually built just after the War started. It was a brand new one.
- I just think it's unbelievable. The thing I find most interesting about that - the images.**
- 00:30 **I was wondering Keith, if you could tell us about when you arrived at Port Moresby?**
- Yes, as I said the Aquitania we were escorted by 5 cruisers which was most unusual but the Army authorities decided that it was a very very important convoy. First soldiers going to - when I say the first soldiers who went to Port Moresby I am wrong there. The 49th
- 01:00 Battalion which is a Queensland Unit, they had been up there as a Garrison Battalion for almost 18 months before we got there. Purely a Garrison duty. Because they'd been there 18 months they were in a very very bad way. Caught every tropical disease under the sun. So we became known as the 30th Brigade and the 30th Brigade comprised the 49th Battalion which was already up there, the
- 01:30 39th the Victorian Battalion and the 53rd the NSW so we were the 30th Brigade. We were the first full brigade of troops. A Brigade comprises 3 Battalions of men. The Aquitania was so big it couldn't tie up at the wharf up there. We were right out in the middle of the harbour it was. The cruisers one by one came up along side the ship and we were
- 02:00 transported through open ports on the Aquitania onto the cruisers and they took us ashore and tied up at the wharf and I did explain yesterday once again the Army authorities in their typical fashion, when they loaded the Aquitania all the food, all the tents, everything we needed to build a camp was right on the bottom of the ship. Everything we didn't need straight away, all the ammunition, guns this
- 02:30 is all the heaviest gear you've ever seen. They were all put on top. What did they do? Once we landed on the wharf - I won't say march because we had our packs on our back and we had our kit bags and we were absolutely loaded up with gear. We get off the ship, in January of all times and you can imagine what the heat was like in Port Moresby and we ambled all the way round the shoreline
- 03:00 until we came to a place that was known as Simpson's Gap. It was a gap between 2 mountains probably about 2 or 3 mile out of Moresby and we had to go all that distance. On top of one side, the closest to the town side was a hill called Parga Hill and that's where the Militia ack ack gun was. I'm telling you that now because they played a very important part
- 03:30 later on. We went up the hill. I was Headquarter Company of course and Headquarter Company we were given a position on top of the hill in between the saddle and for the first week, more than a week we had to sleep out in the open on the ground. Nothing - we didn't even have blankets or anything to put over us. Everything was still on the bottom in the hold of the ship. It was sheer misery. If there'd been a way of
- 04:00 getting back to Australia that day we'd have found our way and gone back. That's how bad it was. Everybody was cranky and upset and the food they were able to get for us was so small we were starving and down at the foot of the mountain was a Catalina Base. A Catalina Flying Boat Base from the RAAF. If it hadn't been for the RAAF for my company. They took us down to their messes and fed us
- 04:30 from their own rations which was a wonderful thing to do because if we were using their rations, their rations weren't going to last too long until they got supplies. In fact the Aquitania did take supplies up for these other Units up there but they couldn't get them out either. So the RAAF came to the party and they did feed us and of course most nights down would come a shower of rain usually between, roughly between
- 05:00 late October and early February is the monsoon season. The same as it is in Darwin and the Northern Territory here. So every night down would come the rain and there we were sleeping in between rocks

and on the rocky ground. Nothing to cover us, not even a blanket to pull over us. So I can tell you it was a pretty hectic time for that period. After the first about 7 or 8 days, things started to pick up and we did get our

- 05:30 gear off the ship and the Battalion, the 53rd Battalion was given an area of operation. Our area took from Port Moresby westwards right round the harbour of probably nearly - we were over an area of nearly 20 miles over the coast. We were all allocated positions, Companies were allocated positions and I had 2 mortar guns - 2 Detachments. A Mortar Detachment
- 06:00 comprised about 6 men at the time so 2 guns I had 12 men. I was given a spot about halfway round the distance. We were going westwards. Quite a nice little valley and was able to erect 2 tents there. We were extremely isolated. We were very fortunate. We were so isolated there we got very few visits from Officers so
- 06:30 we virtually could do what we wanted. We dug the necessary pits and put our mortar guns in the pits in case they were ever needed. Once the first air raids started - incidentally the 39th Battalion, the Victorian crowd - they were from Port Moresby the other way eastwards round what we called Bootless Bay or Bootless Inlet. They took up their battle positions along there. We did have to erect a lot of barbed wire all through the mangrove swamps
- 07:00 which was a dreadful job I can tell you because a mangrove swamp always full of mosquitos but when the tide came in or course it was almost impossible to walk through the mangrove swamps and there was smell about them all the time a mangrove smell. When the civilians were evacuated and I'm not telling tales out of school here. This actually happened. I'll tell you the result in a minute. My fellows went into town and next thing we know they all come out
- 07:30 and we finished up our 2 tents we put them along side each other opened up the 2 sides and put another big canvas over the top so we had a great big room and we finished up with carpets all on the floor, cane lounge chairs and we reached the stage where we were dressed in white suits and panama hats. We looked like anything but soldiers. We had the time of our life.
- 08:00 I made friends with the fellow who owned the picture show when the civilians were there I made friends with him and when they were told to evacuate he sent a native around to where I was. He knew where I was. The message was could I come back and see him straight away. So another chap and myself we went right back down, walked back to Port Moresby and I saw this chap and he said "Look, in the garage I've got a Studebaker Commander Car. Brand new it is" and he said "You can take it"
- 08:30 so he handed me the key to this beautiful old black Studebaker car. We thought it was great. We drove back to our little valley and we found a spot where we hid it under the trees and of course he left then and we must have had that car for about 6 or 7 weeks and all of a sudden the Naval Officer in command at Port Moresby got word that the soldiers had a Command Studebaker car
- 09:00 so he sent round a detachment of sailors who took it off us and that was the end of our lovely Studebaker car. The way we kept it filled up with petrol there were fuel dumps all over the place. They were filled with 44 gallon drums of aerial fuel for the aeroplanes which is a very very high octane petrol so we used to fill it up like that. Of course once you put your foot on the accelerator it almost took off and flew. At the same time that high octane petrol
- 09:30 doesn't do much good for the engine of the car. We had that for quite some time and we found also a VJ sailing boat which we sneaked out one night from Port Moresby and brought it back to our valley and tied it up under the mangroves and we used to go out for the day in our little VJ sailing boat. Catch a bit of fish and that sort of thing. All this time, sometimes we might have got a visit from an Officer one a week which suited us right down to the ground.
- 10:00 If you'd have seen us there and a couple of the fellows were pretty good amateur chefs and we lived pretty high for quite a while when other parts of the Army detachments were down for very little food at all but we did real well. Then we had a, we accidentally found a 3 ton truck which we added to our list of vehicles but eventually the word gets around that
- 10:30 we were living too high and all these luxury goods were taken off us but it was great there. That was probably the best time I had in New Guinea with the fellas. We were so isolated what they did in those days, everyone who wrote a letter the Officer in charge used to have to censor the letters but because we were in such an isolated spot I was given special permission to censor their letters, read their letters so I lined them all up the first time
- 11:00 the authority come through and I said "Look fellas, I've got the authority now to censor your letters - read them" I said "If you genuinely tell me that what you're going to put in these letters doesn't break any rules and regulations then hand them to me and I'll sign them and I won't even read them". To my knowledge they kept to that all the way and they never did anything at all that they shouldn't because if a letter had been picked up by the censorship people
- 11:30 if there was something in it that shouldn't have been there, usually the person responsible was court martialled so it was very very important. I know my fellas were very happy about the fact that I didn't want to read their letters particularly if they were letters to their girlfriends or wives and things like that so that's really what happened. We did a lot of - with the borders of course we had after a period of time

- 12:00 we were issued with Bren Gun Carriers. Bren Gun Carriers are a track vehicle. They used to be 8 cylinder Mercuries - Ford. In the Middle East they were quite good because of all the desert. The Units that had Bren Gun Carriers could scoot across the sand anywhere but they weren't really good up in the jungle. Very hard to get through the jungle with it. The good thing about it was we could put our mortar guns. A mortar gun is broken up into
- 12:30 3 pieces. Barrel, base plate and a bipod. They were all very heavy. Three very heavy pieces of equipment and the mortar bomb weighs 10 pounds and usually you carried 3 containers in each hand with a mortar bomb in each container so you're looking at 60 pound you'd be carrying if you were walking so the Bren Gun Carriers came in very handy. We were able to - they used
- 13:00 we did use a Bren Gun Carrier at one stage we called to make an airstrip out in one of the areas where it was all grass. So we had 8 Bren Gun Carriers in the Platoon when we got together as a Platoon again and we'd go side by side and race up and down through the kunai grass until it was all flattened down and actually turned it into a real good airstrip and that's the airstrip the RAAF used when the first fighter planes came up. We were up there for a long long
- 13:30 while without any fighter planes and I mentioned before about the big ack ack gun on top of Parga Hill and this was a Militia Unit and when the Japanese bombers came over they concentrated on this Unit. They'd open up with their big ack ack gun and you'd actually see the shells exploding underneath the planes and that would make them veer off either right or left and they'd go round in a big circle, come back and they'd plaster that hill with bombs
- 14:00 and we'd absolutely in horror it was, we'd all stand round and we'd see the whole area disappear with all this dirt, dust and all this smoke and soon it all dissipated and as soon as it was all gone they fired one more shot and everyone would cheer and jump up because we knew they were alright. It was a great feeling believe me to see this gun fire this extra shot. They were responsible for getting quite a few Japanese bombers. They didn't shoot them down over Moresby
- 14:30 but you'd see them heading off to sea with smoke coming out the back of them so they wouldn't have got too far. Apart from that also we had to provide working parties to load ships and unload ships. A lot of manual labour particularly the Mortar Platoon. The pit that we dug for a mortar gun would have been roughly about 7 foot long, probably 4 foot wide and it went down one end
- 15:00 about 3½ feet and then one end only down about 2 feet and that end was where all the mortar bombs were stacked. It was a very hard rocky soil. Very hard and all done with pick and shovel. If you were a good Sergeant, which I liked to think that I was, I used to take my shirt off and get in with them, dig with them. Other fellas used to stand there and just oversee them. If you got in
- 15:30 and got stuck in and worked with them you were right. They'd put a lot of faith in whatever you did. Also we had to provide - there was a couple of hills just around the outskirts of Moresby and we used to have to send 2 fellows up every night and they'd go up and spend 24 hours on top of the hill. Now the idea was that if there was Japanese bombers coming in, they'd fire
- 16:00 3 shots out of their rifle and that the air raid Warning to say that Japanese planes are coming. They were in such a position that when they fired these shots you could hear them all over the valley. If at night time - we all had kerosene lamps in the tents at night time so all the lamps would have to go out and usually outside every tent we'd make slit trenches which after all the heavy rain we'd get everyday they were always half
- 16:30 full of water. On some different occasions there somebody would dive into a slit trench and there'd be a snake in there and this sort of thing. It reached the stage there it was too dangerous to get into the slit trenches so we'd sit on the edge and just hope that a bomb never come down and hit us. It was a weird life we were living, it really was. Certainly different to what we put up with at home. Very interesting life, it really was and as I say you made your own fun and all this sort of thing
- 17:00 when the going got real tough we were ready for it. At different parts around the coast too and we've got in our own history. Lot of crocodiles and we never ever worried about crocodiles. Never entered our head that there was such a thing there. We used to swim in the little creeks and things there and this was before we discovered there were crocodiles in the creek. On 2 or 3 occasions our fellows - what the crocodiles would do they'd get out
- 17:30 they'd get out of the creek up on the bank and there was always a slide. When they went back into the water they'd slide back down into the water and on more than one occasion we'd have 2 or 3 fellas there having a swim in this little creek there and they'd hear this "whoosh" and they'd look up and see this big crocodile sliding down to get back into the water again so they sure went for their lives I can tell you. Everything that crept and crawled was up there. Every night when we took our boots off we'd have to fold them up and cover them up because
- 18:00 the biggest scorpions you'd ever seen in your life and they used to try and get into your boots every now and then. Later on of course when we went to New Britain there were crabs every night. We were right on the coast. These crabs were so big with one big nipper that we had metal dixies. These are what we got our food in. It has been known for one of these crabs to cut a metal dish - put a big dent in it with this

- 18:30 big nipper he had. It was really weird. You're watching out all the time for everything. We had a lot of fellas bitten by different spiders. Another spider that although it was not harmful to ourselves it was called a Bird Spider. It was as big as your hand, covered in fur all over it and it would wait on the bough of a tree and when a little bird came on the bough it would come down like a flash and grab
- 19:00 the bird and that's what it used to eat, these little birds. It was called a Bird Spider. Incredible. The most horrifying spider you've ever seen in your life. Never attacked human beings which I'm happy to say. It was a great experience.

Amazing. Was New Guinea and Port Moresby - was it a beautiful place?

- No. Not really. Particularly when we were there. Once they evacuated all the civilians it went to rack and ruin. There was that much damage done by bombs and it became dirty and dusty. It was a dreadful place actually. As a matter of fact, I've been back since as I did explain before, and it's probably worse today than it was even back in the days when I was there, 60 years ago. It's a more dangerous place today. I'll put it that way. There is very very little employment for the natives and
- 19:30 they've all turned into gangs and to be a white person working up there, you're really taking your life in your hands. I did work for Standard Telephones and Cables for quite a while. We had a Manager up there. He had 4 daughters. I'd been up to see him on 2 different occasions and he had 4 posts round his house and spotlights on the 4 and his 4 girls if they went out at night he had to make sure he took them in the car and
- 20:00 when they come home he went and picked them up to bring them back in. White people were actually told, if you're driving a car and you happen to knock over a native, keep going, go to the nearest police station but don't get out to see if he's alright. Good place to stay away from today.

When did you find out the Japanese were in New Guinea?

- Well, first of all the Coral Sea battle took place. Now that was a
- 21:00 force of Japanese that were heading for Port Moresby and the idea was that they thought they'd take Port Moresby very early, which they would have without a shadow of a doubt. As a matter of fact we were given instructions that the word would come through. If the Japanese had landed they would have landed in force and we were told that when the time came the word would come to the troops every man for himself and it was up to us to get out of the place and make our way to safety
- 21:30 if we could. Of course the American aircraft carriers and the fighter planes they attacked their convoy. The Americans lost a lot of men. I think they lost certainly one aircraft carrier. The Japanese lost a couple of aircraft carriers and the invading force was turned around. So it never came to Port Moresby which was a good thing because if the Japanese had
- 22:00 invaded Port Moresby obviously their next target was to land in Australia somewhere near Queensland. The fact that the Coral Sea battle took place and they turned round and went back again really that stopped the invasion of Australia. That was probably one good thing. Anyhow I think it was round about May the Coral Sea battle was. So the next thing we know is of course
- 22:30 'round about July / August - I'd have to check those dates but I think I'm right. 'Round about July / August the Japanese landed on the north coast of New Britain and nobody ever thought that anyone could go over the mountains. Come to Port Moresby that way. Consequently, really we had no guards on that part of the world there. As I explained the 39th Battalion they sent a Company of men
- 23:00 around by lugger right round past Milne Bay and came up on the north coast and they landed roughly in a place called Buna. Then they headed up into the mountains from that side into the village of Kokoda itself. Just after that the Japanese did land and they started to push towards Kokoda. In the meantime the 53rd Battalion we were told to come up.
- 23:30 The rest of the 39th left to go over from the Port Moresby side and we were told to follow the 39th Battalion up. The Japanese got to Kokoda and there was a big battle there and they forced the 39th out of Kokoda and in doing so their Colonel, Lieutenant Colonel Owen was killed and the 39th reassembled and put another attack in again and re-took Kokoda.
- 24:00 The Japanese again put a bigger force in and they took it again and kicked the 39th Battalion out. The 53rd, we never got to Kokoda. We got to a place called Deniki which was a few miles short of Kokoda and that was the start of what became known as the Big Retreat. The 39th and the 53rd we started to retreat back towards Moresby. In the meantime there were 3 Battalions from the Middle East
- 24:30 had arrived. New Battalions. The 2/14th, the 2/16th and the 2/27th and they came in the mountains and eventually joined up with our 2 Battalions but they were caught up in the Big Retreat and before we knew where we were the 5 Battalions were in retreat. An interesting thing took place here at Isurava which was one of the major battles. Lieutenant Colonel Key, Commanding Officer of the 2/14th Battalion
- 25:00 the Victorian battalion. He was separated from his battalion and nobody knew where he was. Later on

at Gona which was on the north coast, a village there was an Anglican Priest, there Father Benson. For some reason or other he had a couple of lay preachers there, ladies they were and he had a staff. All his staff were captured the next day by the Japs and executed.

- 25:30 But they never executed him. He did get away from the area eventually and get back to Allied lines and he was the one who said that whilst he was at Gona the Japanese came in with this tall Australian with Colonel insignia on his soldiers. He tried to talk to him and the Japs hit this Father Benson with their rifles and told him to get away from this Colonel. The next thing he knows
- 26:00 a party of Japs turned the Colonel around and took him out into the jungle and of course he was executed and that was Lieutenant Colonel Key who got parted from his battalion. One of the unique things about what took place up in the fighting from August through to January there was five Lieutenant Colonels lost their lives. I think you can go right through the whole of the Middle East with all units over there and there never one Lieutenant
- 26:30 Colonel who lost his life. We lost my Colonel, Lieutenant Colonel Ward, there was Colonel Owen. Lieutenant Colonel from the 7th [7th Division Cavalry Regiment] was killed at Sanananda [Lt Col E P Logan]. Lieutenant Key was executed and there was another Lieutenant from the 2/33rd Battalion who died from Scrub Typhus. So there was 5 which is something very very unique, five Colonels lost their lives in the battles up there. Very sad when you stop and think about it. Once you lose your Colonel
- 27:00 unless you've got somebody very, very good to take his place, the unit is thrown into disarray. You come to rely on your Colonel. He's the old man. He might only be 20 but he's the old man and the Colonel is always somebody - he can't go wrong. The Colonel never does wrong. He's your god. He's the man who looks after you all the time. So when the
- 27:30 when our Colonel got killed, he got killed in an ambush. He went to see where one of the Companies was and the Company wasn't in the spot where it was supposed to be and he walked into a Japanese ambush and he was killed. The Intelligence Officer, Roly Logan was killed and both the orderlies were killed in this ambush. It was great blow to the battalion and it took us a long, long while to get over that. So those early days in Port Moresby
- 28:00 were very hard days. We did go through a period in Port Moresby before we met the Japs where we went for 4 or 5 weeks on 2 meals a day because there was a shortage of food and I did explain to you yesterday I think the monotony of the meals we had and when it got down to 2 meals a day we were just glad to even get those. We didn't worry about the monotony of the food we were eating. It was a very very strange period in my life.
- 28:30 **Can I go back, I want to come back to Deniki but just to go back to during the Coral Sea Battle. What was your plan when it was every man for himself.? Did you have a plan?**
- Yes we did have. We were going to make our way westwards to the Fly River if we could. Westwards to the Fly River. If we could get to the Fly River which is one of the biggest rivers in New Guinea
- 29:00 it goes inland for many many hundreds of miles. There is a chain of small islands which run from the New Guinea coast to roughly Thursday Island. So with a bit of luck, I don't know whether we could have done it or not but with a bit of luck and the right crafts, canoes and things if we could find canoes we could have come through that chain to Australia. In miles it's not a big distance
- 29:30 and that was the plan but of course all plans could go astray. If the Japanese had landed there and chased us and followed us we may never have got to the Fly River but we did have plan. What we finally did, groups of us would get together and you'd decide what you were going to do. You'd ask everybody do you all agree and if they all agreed we would have stuck to that plan but some fellas were saying
- 30:00 no, they didn't like the idea of that plan and they'd come up with one of their own. Now when the time came they might have gone their own way and I think a classic example is when the Japanese, if you've read any books about this. When the Japanese landed at Rabaul, the 2/22nd Battalion, that was the Garrison Battalion and AIF Battalion with support troops. They were overrun by the Japanese and lost a lot of men. A lot were taken prisoners. The same thing happened
- 30:30 to them. They had plans but they got out of Rabaul. Those who survived I'm talking about they got out of Rabaul. Might have only been 2 fellas went their way. Another group of 5 might have went their way. Some groups of 10, some were making for the north coast. Some were coming down the south coast. They all had different plans and what happened was the authorities in Port Moresby, they
- 31:00 sent boats, mostly they were manned by people who were plantation owners, white fellows who lived up in New Guinea before the War and when the Japs came into the War they were pulled into service. They were given commissioned ranks in most cases. They knew the country and the Lorabarda was one I can remember. That was the Governor's Yacht and that one was sent
- 31:30 to the south coast of New Britain and ANGAU was Australian and New Guinea Administration Unit. It was made up of soldiers. Many of them were New Guineans who lived up there and worked up there and they were responsible for all the natives, anything that happened to the natives. Some of those ANGAU fellows got ashore and made contact with these 2/22nd fellows and said at a certain place on a certain day this ship

- 32:00 this boat will be there. The word got around to a lot of these groups and they all made their way to this point and you can just imagine it was a hazardous journey. Not a big boat by any means and Japanese planes flying all the time. A lot of times they'd travel by night and they'd hide up little creek beds and camouflage the boat and everything. Anyhow they eventually they were evacuated off. Quite a large number. I think it was more than 100
- 32:30 people were evacuated and brought back to Port Moresby again. Of course a whole lot of the 2/22nd fellas were eventually captured by the Japs and taken prisoner and a lot of them unfortunately were put on a Japanese submarine and they were taken back to - they were going to be taken to Japan but unfortunately on the way that boat was sunk by an American boat of some sort
- 33:00 I think it was the other way round. They were put on a ship, a Japanese ship to be taken to Japan and an American submarine sunk that ship and everyone of those 2/22nd fellas lost their lives on that. Nobody knows to this day what happened - they went down with the ship. Of course there was a whole lot of civilians who were taken prisoner by the Japs and the Myoka [Rakuyo] Maru I think the ship was called and they were lost also on board.
- 33:30 Dreadful time in our history. The Japanese committed an awful lot of atrocities and another thing is on the south coast there was a place called the Tol Plantation and a lot of the 2/22nd got to the Tol Plantation and the Japs caught them and one by one they were taken into the jungle and all executed with the exception of 2 fellows. One his name was Cook
- 34:00 and he finished up with 8 bayonet wounds in his back. He laid down and pretended he was dead until the Japanese - these Japs had come ashore off a Japanese destroyer and they went back to this ship and sailed to wherever they went. This Cook eventually was rescued and he was brought back to Port Moresby and he survived the walk and after the War
- 34:30 he moved here to Bexley I think it was and one day he worked for the railways and was involved in an accident and lost his legs. After all that what he went through up in New Britain. Incredible story it is when you really get into it.

Were you ever worried about being taken, before you went into combat?

That was our greatest fear was being taken prisoner because the Japs when they took prisoners invariably they were all executed.

- 35:00 If anything was going to happen to us that was the last thing we wanted to happen to us. I think it would have been - when I say executed in most cases they either tied you to a tree and bayoneted you. You had to kneel down on the ground with your hands behind you and they cut off your head with a sword so that was our greatest fear. It really was, being taken prisoner.
- 35:30 Consequently, as I did explain before, we didn't worry about taking Japanese prisoners. It wasn't worth it.

Had you heard anything coming from Singapore and Malaya about what was happening up there?

The word came through that Singapore had fallen but the greatest worry we had when we were up there was when the Japanese subs came into Sydney Harbour.

- 36:00 We were thousands of miles away from Sydney and all our families and loved ones were back there and we felt at the time they were facing a bigger danger than we were and that was a real worry. The word came through that the Japs had got in. I don't think they did a lot of damage. If you go down to Fort Dennison for a start in the harbour there the USS Chicago, the big American battleship was in the harbour at the time.
- 36:30 Typical Americans they were firing guns in all directions and one shell hit the wall at Fort Dennison and you can still see the dent there if you go down there today. One period too I think some Japanese submarine opened up fire and shells landed round the Bondi Beach area and again they fired into Newcastle and shells came there and that really got to us that really worried us because we were so far away and
- 37:00 no way of getting back home in a hurry and to think that Sydney people were being fired on by the Japanese. That really got to us. We thought that was the preliminary to the invasion of Sydney. We really did. Fortunately it didn't happen that way but to get the word through that this was going on in Sydney it really got to us. It was a very very anxious moment. Particularly at that time the mail
- 37:30 stopped for a while and we didn't know what was going on. One thing in the soldier's life that he really looks forward to is mail and if you miss out on mail all sorts of funny thoughts go through your mind - I wonder why I'm not getting a letter and this sort of thing and some funny things happened. My mother sent me up - I used to love condensed milk. In my growing up days I'd get a tin of condensed milk and suck all the milk out. I used to love that. No wonder I've got diabetes today. Anyhow
- 38:00 what happened my mum sent me up a lovely parcel and the people back home would do it up in calico cloth and in that parcel there was plum puddings and there was fruit cake, all the goodies under the sun and right in the middle was a tin of condensed milk. On the journey up from Sydney to New Guinea,

somewhere or other that condensed milk tin burst open. So when I opened up the parcel and pulled the tin out

38:30 and everything came out with it. They were all stuck together. Everything in the parcel was stuck together. You've never seen anything like it. Anyhow I amputated every piece off there and I still got stuck into it. You took a risk with your parcels because sometimes there were all the goodies might have been put in parcels that had been thrown up against the engine in the ship. There might have been things in there that would melt. You were lucky to get an intact parcel with everything proper. I would like to mention

39:00 one very interesting thing, have I got time have I? I had written to a girl in Canada. She's not a girl now she's about my age. I started writing to her in about '36/'37 as a penfriend at school. Gladys her name is. She lives in a place called Canowna in British Columbia. I've been writing to her for 67/68 years. We've been writing to each other. She used to send me parcels from Canada

39:30 during the War and when you stop and think about this. Those parcels came all the way across the Pacific. Through which was a total War zone to Sydney and they'd come from Sydney right up to New Guinea and they found me wherever I was and they were the most beautiful parcels you've ever seen. There was maple syrup in it and beautiful chocolates and all those good things which we never had in Australia. I always think about those parcels came all that way

40:00 and boy was I popular when they turned up these parcels. They didn't last long. Everything was split up with the fellas in your tent. You shared everything. To think that that happened so many years ago and such a great distance. I've spoken to her on the telephone. I'd love to see her, I really would, She's got cancer at the moment and I don't think I've got much chance of getting over there to see her. We were in Canada once, Beryl and I and we stayed

40:30 a couple of nights in Toronto but that was still too far away to get to where she lives. I would dearly love to see her just once before her time is up.

That's wonderful.

Lovely story isn't it. It is a lovely story.

Tape 7

00:34 **Okay, Keith. If I can, I'd like to go back to some of the things that you've mentioned as you were talking to Isobel and one particularly was the Kokoda Track. Your first time on the Kokoda Track. You mentioned losing Colonel Owen I believe?**

My Colonel was Colonel Ward. Colonel Owen was the Commanding Officer of the 39th Battalion. He was the first Colonel killed up there.

01:00 **I was just wondering if you could tell me a little about what went through perhaps the mind of the troops and yourself in that experience losing someone of a higher rank who was actually leading you?**

Well, it was a dreadful shock to the Battalion because very very quickly the word goes through the Battalion, it's incredible how swiftly the news gets around and of course I think I would be safe in saying that all of us who were up there

01:30 were in a state of shock when we heard that the Colonel had been killed because he'd started the Battalion off. The 53rd Battalion, as I've mentioned before, was formed with fellows from every Militia Battalion in NSW. The Colonel was the first fella to report to Ingleburn Camp and all these troops came in from all these other Battalions and he was responsible for our training right from the word go. He took us away on

02:00 the Aquitania and he supervised all the - not that we did a lot of training as I said. Most of our work was labouring work. Getting the country ready in case the Japs invaded and when the order came to go up into the mountains unfortunately a lot of our fellows were sick in Port Moresby. Awful lot - a lot of gaps in our ranks. A lot of

02:30 the fellows were in hospital with diseases and things mainly because of the inadequate food we were having. We took fellows out of the Specialist Platoons to make up some of the numbers and the Colonel led us up into the mountains which I think was probably August '42 - I'm pretty sure it was August '42. Either late July or early August. The 39th was in front of us.

03:00 On the Kokoda Track before you get to Kokoda in there is another track that branches off to the right at a place called - I think it was Alola and that joins up the main track again at this place called Deniki. So the 53rd Battalion, their job was to go via this Alola Track. The 39th went up the other track straight to Kokoda. But when we joined up

03:30 it was while we were going up there that one of the companies was given the order to proceed to a

particular point and be there at a certain time. The word was coming back that the Company had not reached this point. Now that probably hadn't reached the point because of the lie of the land. It's more likely they had a lot of difficulty getting through the jungle to this point. The Colonel was getting a little bit worried about the timing of this.

- 04:00 So he picked up his Intelligence Officer who usually travelled with the Colonel, a chap called Lieutenant Roly Logan and their two orderlies. He told whoever he left behind in charge that I'll go and see where this Company is. When he set off he got to the point where this Company should have been and they weren't there but the Japs were in ambush and they opened up and he was killed straight away
- 04:30 along with the Intelligence Officer and the other fellas. There is another side to this story. It is also believed, and I won't mention his name that the Company Commander, the Captain of this particular Company might have been a bit slow deliberately getting to the point where he should have been and we do believe that Colonel Ward should never have been killed. It was one of things that should never have happened
- 05:00 because he really believed that the place he was going to this Company should have been there and if it had been there he'd probably still be alive well not today but he would have been alive a long while afterwards. When he did get there the Company wasn't there and later on I do believe that the Company was well short of this spot that they had to go to. Whether the Company Commander was a little bit hesitant
- 05:30 in getting there, had second thoughts about the country he was going into and deliberately went slow it's hard to say but we do believe that the Colonel should never have been killed. Or course the fact that he was killed was a big blow to the Battalion. The second in charge of the Battalion was a Major Terry Farrell and he was already back in Australia doing a Colonel's course to become a Colonel himself so we really had no competent Second
- 06:00 In Command to take over the Battalion. Another Major did take it over on a temporary basis and when we eventually got to Deniki the Battalions in front of us, the 39th Battalion and the 2/14th Battalion by this time were in front of us and they were in retreat. I was with A Company and we'd taken up this defensive position right
- 06:30 on the track itself and as the 39th came through first and then the 2/14th came through our line and this Officer, I don't even know his name from the 2/14th he said "The Japanese are advancing this way. We're going back to take up defensive positions" and he said "You hold the line here and we'll let you know when it's time to come back and join us" back in the rear positions.
- 07:00 He never let us know for some reason. We never got the word. The next thing we know we can see Japanese in force coming down towards us and they were dividing up into 2. We were on a sort of a ridge and they were going down both sides of the ridge and obviously their task was to encircle us and cut us off. So we did a fighting retreat out of there. We didn't lose a man. We were able to - all of us got out of it.
- 07:30 We kept the Japs at bay and we eventually got back to where the other Units were and all the Units then took up this fighting retreat all the way back to Moresby. A new Brigadier came up a fellow called Brigadier Potts and I think he was a Middle East fellow. He'd never ever commanded a Battalion but he was a Brigadier. He'd been there one day
- 08:00 and he pulled the 53rd out of the line and he nearly broke all of our hearts. We don't know for sure why but we felt that one of the reasons might have been the fact that our Colonel was killed because the Company Commander never was in the right place he should have been. So he pulled the 53rd out with the excuse that they were insufficiently trained to be going into action and of course the sad part about this was
- 08:30 later on, which I did explain, the 53rd was merged and became a link battalion with the 55th Battalion and became known as the 55th/53rd now the 55th/53rd went into action at Sanananda minus the 40 including myself who went to the 36th and they did an absolutely fantastic job at Sanananda and lost very
- 09:00 heavy casualties and a matter of fact the 55th/53rd with fellows from both those battalions in one day lost 119 killed. Killed in that one day. These 53rd fellas absolutely acquitted themselves as well as possible which belies the fact that they didn't perform well further up on the Kokoda Track itself. That's one of the reasons the Unit was linked with these Battalions and can't prove it but
- 09:30 the word went around that this Brigadier Potts who wouldn't have had a clue what the Battalion could do because he was only there one day. The incredible thing about this was that prior to Brigadier Potts getting there, the Brigadier in charge of the 30th Brigade which was our Battalion, the 53rd and the 39th one of our companies did this fantastic - A Company which held the front. When we got back to
- 10:00 Port Moresby he lined the whole Company up and congratulated them on this magnificent job they did up at Deniki but this other Brigadier after one day pulled them out of the line. It was a real topsy-turvy situation and we reached the stage where we didn't know where we were, what we were going to do and what was going to happen to us. A typical Army blunder. It goes on all the time. I can remember very well

- 10:30 indeed that when General MacArthur, the American commander leading the fighting from Brisbane he went crook because we weren't building a road over the Kokoda Track. No way in the world could you ever build a road over the Kokoda Track. That's what it was, a track and a dreadful track at that. General Blamey who was our Commander, I believe, and from a lot of the things I've read
- 11:00 that whatever MacArthur told him to do he went along and did it. Now one of the Battalions, the 2/14th Battalion, I think it was the 14th. It was either the 2/14th or 2/16th. When they came back out of the line and lined up in Port Moresby, General Blamey addressed them. You may have read this somewhere. He turned round and inferred in his address that rabbits don't run and of course they were absolutely incensed.
- 11:30 Later on of course he paid a visit to the hospital in Moresby where all these wounded from this Battalion were, sitting in bed and when he comes through the ward they're all sitting up in bed eating lettuce leaves and he never forgave them for that. Absolutely never forgave them. Of course he made that comment, rabbits don't run. I don't know where they got the lettuce leaves from but they were all sitting up in bed chewing lettuce leaves as he walked through the ward. That's on
- 12:00 record in our history. I read it in all the books. That was one of the AIF Battalions who did a very very good job over in the Middle East and to have the Commanding Officer make a statement like that it really got to them. There was another Battalion, the 2/1st Pioneer Battalion that was another AIF Battalion. Pioneer Battalions, they're a mixture of Infantry Battalions and hard yakka
- 12:30 Battalions. There the ones who do all the pioneering work when it comes to digging and all this sort of thing and making things but they also act as Infantry Battalions. When they got to Port Moresby somewhere along the way they upset General Blamey. They were put in the stone quarry in Port Moresby and were given virtually hard work digging stones out.
- 13:00 They tried to make roads and puts stones on and all this sort of thing. They were there for a period of time and then they were pulled out and said they were going back to Australia. Of course as they got on the ship at the wharf at Port Moresby and they were all standing along side the deck and Blamey came down in his car and they called him for everything under the sun, General Blamey and he immediately pulled the whole Battalion off the ship and sent them back to the stone quarry again.
- 13:30 That's a story that's not known a great deal but it actually happened. That was another AIF Battalion who performed very well in the Middle East. So Blamey often he had adverse comments to make about Militia Battalions but he wasn't afraid to make the same comments about his AIF Battalions also. It was a peculiar set-up all round but the whole of that campaign, particularly the Kokoda Track part was a complete shemozzle. There's no argument about that
- 14:00 a complete shemozzle. A lot of it was through lack of reconnaissance. We didn't have the opportunity. Usually when the battles are going to be performed it's imperative that you go out and do good reconnaissance work to know what's ahead of you, what's going to happen. Try to pinpoint the enemy where they are. Of course it doesn't happen like that all the time. Although eventually we did
- 14:30 overpower the Japs at Sanananda, Gona and Buna those places and they started to retreat westwards, the campaign itself was a complete shemozzle. Particularly Gona. Gona was a dreadful campaign and the whole campaign was carried out with no reconnaissance whatsoever. So it was nothing for the person in charge who was a Brigadier to send a Unit to do a particular job against
- 15:00 an enemy with no reconnaissance so consequently that's why the casualties were so high. The casualties of all the Battalions at Sanananda and Gona were very very high and it was for that reason. Despite all this we still won the War in that part of the world. I think later on of course when the battles moved further along the coast to Salamaua, Lae and those places right up to Wewak. The higher command
- 15:30 did a much better job. By that time they got commando units in who used to go out and do a good reconnaissance job and the information they brought back enabled the Infantry Battalions to do a much better job. You hear about winning the battles at Sanananda, Gona and on the Kokoda Track but we only won them through a whole series of dreadful mistakes that were made and those mistakes cost a lot of lives
- 16:00 awful lot of lives.

Did you have a sense of that's what was happening at the time?

We were - a lot of the time we weren't sure what we had to do. In other words the higher orders weren't filtering down to us. We might be told to hold a particular spot but we didn't know why we were going to hold that spot. Nobody could tell us where the Japs were. All they would say is the Japs are coming along the track.

- 16:30 You really didn't know where they were coming along the track. They were such good jungle fighters, the Japanese. One of the things they did all the time, if they were advancing towards you they'd break up into 2 and try to go down the sides of the ridges of the mountains so they could encircle you and if they got round behind you it was a case of fighting right through them which happened on more than one occasion.

- 17:00 They were all dicey operations because very hard places to fight. Not much room to manoeuvre. I've got a very good friend, Peter Hayman - from original 53rd fellow. I keep in constant contact with him. He and a group of fellas - the Japs were advancing towards them. A huge crowd of Japs and they dived down one side of the ridge to prevent themselves being encircled. 42 days later
- 17:30 they turned up on the coast, west of Port Moresby. They were lost for 42 days in the jungle. In all that time they were trying to live off the land and you can imagine the condition they were in by the time they got right back to the coast and when they did get back they had lost so much weight from lack of food and apparently a native. There was a commando unit in a defensive position
- 18:00 west of Port Moresby about 30 or 40 miles west of Port Moresby and this native told them that there was soldiers heading towards them and of course they thought they were Japanese that were coming so they took up an ambush position. They kept quiet and they were waiting but when these soldiers came into view they were our Australian soldiers and they couldn't believe their eyes when they saw these fellas. More so they couldn't believe the story when they found out they'd been travelling for 42 days.
- 18:30 Peter Hayman, early in those 42 days he crossed a fast moving stream and in doing so he lost one of his boots. So he had to make a temporary boot out of whatever and he did that whole journey with virtually one bare foot so you can imagine what his foot was like by the time he got to the coast. Anyhow when they got up to the commandos they
- 19:00 gave them a pretty good meal. They radioed down to Port Moresby and some luggers came and picked them up and took them back to Port Moresby where they were interrogated by the Intelligence people to find out if they could come through like that did they think the Japs could come through. Well the answer would be yes. If we could come through like that the Japs could come through. So I think that the Intelligence people, what they did finally then was to put - got more troops up to where the Commandos were jut in case the Japs did come through which they didn't do anyhow.
- 19:30 That was a pretty torrid time for a bunch of fellas. Not just that little group. There was lots of groups from those Battalions who got away from their Battalions couldn't find their Battalions and nobody knew where the positions were and so that's where it was a complete shemozzle. It really was.
- You mentioned before that the Australians after a time in there became very good jungle fighters, as good as the Japanese?**
- Yes I believe that is so. Yes.
- 20:00 **I was just wondering given your experience as one of them after a while what was it that would actually make a good jungle fighter?**
- Well you've got to learn to not be frightened of the jungle. The jungle can be a frightening place. For example, if you went out on a patrol and you saw some Japanese and knew Japs were coming and this was a small patrol. You have to just get off the track a little bit and lay down as flat as you could in amongst
- 20:30 the jungle and the grass. Now while you were doing that. This happened frequently. All the ants under the sun were walking over you. Up in New Guinea most of the ants were a big ginger ant with a vicious bite and when they nipped you they felt like yelling out at the top of your voice. So you had to lay there and let these ants and sometimes they walked up your uniform and go down the neck of your shirt and all this sort of thing and if they nipped they really hurt but no way in the world could you yell out.
- 21:00 You had to learn to combat the jungle and what was in the jungle at the same time. Not only ants there were all sorts of spiders and things creeping. Anything that creeped or moved could be found in the jungle in New Guinea. If you overcome that fear of those things, you were on the way to becoming a good jungle fighter. You had to turn your mind off to all the nasty things. Sometimes we felt that the nasty things were the things crawling around in the jungle rather than the Japs themselves.
- 21:30 We knew what to do with the Japs but there's nothing much you can do when you got ants crawling all over you and things like this. Of course we learnt very much how to - when we first went up to New Guinea we went up with khaki shirts and shorts. You can imagine what they stood out like in the jungle. We had those on in the Kokoda Track. Once we got to Sanananda before I flew over the mountains with the 36th Battalion, my Colonel, Colonel Isaachsen went
- 22:00 and from somewhere or other he obtained huge bagfuls of a sort of a green dye and he bought them back and we had 44 gallon drums and this was before we flew over the mountains and they mixed this dye up the way it was supposed to be mixed up. All our uniforms were dipped into this dye and they turned into a sort of camouflage. The worst colour you've ever seen in your life. Supposed to be a green camouflage but turned out a horrible dark blue
- 22:30 with bits of yellow in. You've got no idea it was awful. He acquired this dye unofficially from a source. After it had all been mixed up a party of soldiers came looking for this dye but it was too late. It was all used and we dyed all our clothes. As soon as we started to sweat all the dye came out and it was all over your body underneath your uniform too. It was very hard to get off if you found a place to have a bit of a sluice in the water. But

- 23:00 at least we did have camouflage when we went back the second time into the jungle there. A little thing that happened to me at Sanananda at one time there, a Japanese patrol came out at night and made its way right through everybody's lines, a big loop right round the whole front line. Nobody knows how they did it. Way back behind us, quite a few miles behind us was the 2/1st Field Artillery.
- 23:30 They had their guns all lined up and they used to fire right over our heads into Japs position. This Japanese patrol got right into the Artillery lines and they stuffed gun powder down one of the barrels and they were able to set it off and peeled that gun barrel back like a banana skin and then got away. Anyhow I think it was the only gun that's ever been blown up like that by the enemy anywhere and of course there was hell to pay over this.
- 24:00 So the next day a patrol had to go out and who was selected to lead the patrol - it was me. I beg your pardon, there was an Officer but I was the Patrol Sergeant and there was only one chap from my mortar platoon came with me. They only took the 2 of us. I had to go back to Brigade Headquarters and they made up the ranks of the patrol with Officers Batmen, Cooks, people who had a non-firing
- 24:30 role at Brigade Headquarters. They were the greatest bunch of odds and sods you'd ever seen in your life and that was my patrol. Anyhow when I reported to the Officer I said "I don't like the look of this, sir" and he said "Why what's up?" I said "These fellas, they might be Infantry men but half of them don't even know how to use a weapon". We had no option. Anyhow we went out in a great big circle and we got to a Company which had taken up a position between themselves and the front
- 25:00 and we had to go through this Company and I can still remember a fella said "We're ya going?" and when they saw the fellas we had in our patrol we said "We're going out to try and find the Japs who blew up the artillery gun" and he said to me the guard "Well don't worry about it. Well come out and bring your bodies back in" was the comment he made which cheered us up immensely as you can imagine. We did go out and we went out in a big circle right round the Japanese
- 25:30 lines and we reached a place where we could actually see the Japs and they had a sort of a tower up. The Japs were on guard up in this tower. There was only about 10 fellas in our patrol and there was dozens and dozens of Japs. Anyhow I said to the Officer "What do you think about this sir?" I'm happy to say he was a fella who'd never done a patrol either, this Officer and he said "I think we better go back and report it to Headquarters" and that was the best decision he ever made in his life and I think with a decision like that he would have
- 26:00 become a General eventually and we did, we backtracked back the way we'd come and got right back to Brigade Headquarters and said no way in the world would we be able to get this Japanese patrol that blew the gun up. An interesting thing happened. When we went back the second time and they sent us back to Soputa which was part of the battle area. We actually found that gun barrel and we manhandled it into our company lines, into our camp and we mounted it at the entrance to the camp
- 26:30 with a little plaque. It was a monument we had there. I don't what ever happened to that. People used to come from all round to look at this gun barrel. It was peeled back, like a banana it was. Blown up by the Japs and we used to as our own monument.

That reminds me of what you were telling me earlier about Australian's sense of comedy and the sense of humour that got you through a lot of the time.

Yes it did.

- 27:00 Without a doubt. Without that humour it would have been a very boring set up it really would and God knows what would have happened.

Do you have any clear memories or particular stories about times where you really did find it helpful?

Yes. I think I did make mention of the fact that one way to get rid of boredom we introduced a concert party and it was a very very good concert party if

- 27:30 I do say so myself. It was made up of artists, we had singers, we had instrumentalists. There was acts of all sorts. Some of them were very very corny and probably wouldn't even get a laugh today but just to give you an example. One of the acts was called the Indian Rope Trick and one of our fellows was dressed up with a turban on his head and put boot polish all over his body to darken him up a little bit and he had
- 28:00 a turban on his head and a great big napkin. That's all he had on him. He came out from the wings and he had this big rope over his shoulder and of course the audience couldn't see but there was about 6 fellas in the wing holding the other end of the rope and he was really struggling to get this rope across and it must have taken him a good 5 minutes to get right across the stage until he disappeared outside the wing. Then for the next couple of minutes all you could see was the rope going across
- 28:30 and then of course in the meantime he'd raced right around the back and he got on the rope at the other end and then the rope's pulling him. He's coming out pulling the other way and the rope's pulling him right through. So that's the Indian Rope Trick and it was absolutely hilarious the way it was done. But today it's probably a very very corny yarn and another group we had were dressed up as Salvation Army Officers. Some were dressed up as Salvation Army lassies with tambourines and there was one

- 29:00 civilian with this big drum. The band was playing the tune "Come and Join Us, Come and Join Us" and at the end of the chorus this fellow with the drum would go "bang bang" "I'm so happy, I'm so happy". Then they'd start up another chorus of "Come and Join Us, Come and Join Us" "bang bang, bang bang". Singing stopped. "I'm so happy, I'm really so happy joining the Army"
- 29:30 (Salvation Army) and it would start up again "bang bang, bang bang, bang bang". Once again the music would stop and he'd say "I'm so happy, I could break this bloody drum!" full stop. "Boom boom" the drum would go and that was the end of that sketch. As I said probably very corny but got lots and lots of laughs. So they're the sort of things. We had some magnificent singers, we really did. We had some beautiful baritone voices. Some
- 30:00 of them were trained voices. Bill Taylor was another one. His nickname was Melba after Dame Nellie Melba and we had another chap, Cyril Telfer, a Canberra chap, both beautiful tenors and they used to sing magnificent duets together. All the old musical comedy songs from The Merry Widow and all those old beautiful shows we used to see before the War.
- 30:30 Many members from the band gave solos on their own particular instrument. I'd just like to add at this stage a band is very very important in an infantry battalion and we were very fortunate that we had a magnificent band. What happened was that a previous Colonel before the 36th Battalion sailed away. The Colonel was a chap by the name of Colonel Perso and he was an old World War I veteran
- 31:00 because of his age he wasn't permitted to go away in charge of a Battalion but while he was CO of the Unit he went down to the Salvation Army Depot in Charles Street, Petersham and they were the only Salvation Army chaps who used to wear white caps. I don't know whether you know this but all Salvation Army chaps use a dark cap with a red band round. But the Charles Street
- 31:30 Hall, these fellows had a white top on their cap. He went through and out of that band he got about 12 fellas to volunteer to join the 36th Battalion. They were beautiful musicians, every one of them and that's how we built our band up. Real great band. Out of the band, bandsmen don't only just play the music. They're always the stretcher bearers so when they're
- 32:00 not playing music for the Battalion on marches and this sort of thing, they work with the Battalion Medical Officer and when your in action they're the fellows who go out and pick up all the bodies and pick up the wounded people and bring them back for medical attention. So they're got a very very important job in the Battalion apart from being bandsmen. When we were back in a static position like when we went back the second time into the Soputa camp. There was about 6 or 7 fellas out of the band
- 32:30 formed a swing band and it was a beautiful swing band. It played all the songs of that era and they were the ones who used to play for the concert party. So we had a real good band to back us up with them. As you know we always had 2 resident comedians which I happened to be one of them. We had fellows who recited poems, good poems I'm talking about. So we
- 33:00 had the Signal Platoon which is the most important platoon in the Battalion because they handle communications all the time and they were the ones who did all the lighting and all the microphone work and kept everything going at the concert party. I'm trying to think now. We made our own stage in our permanent camp which was known as the Austerity Auditorium. We did
- 33:30 travel round to other Units. Any Units that were far out we'd go by truck and give performances there and I did tell you the biggest performance we ever gave was at the 2/5th Australian General Hospital at Buna and it was believed that something like 15,000 people in the audience and of course as I also told you, all the Nursing Sisters would be sitting in the front row and we always made a point, the comedians, of singling them out for a little bit of needle, you now, that sort of thing.
- 34:00 My offsider would turn round to me and he'd say "Do you see those 2 sisters sitting down there?" and I'd say "Yeah, what about them?". He said "You know what happened to them" and I'd say "No you tell me what happened to them" and he said "Well, they were coming in through the gate of the hospital the other night and as they were coming in 2 male Officers were coming out. The male officer said 'Good night Sisters,
- 34:30 How are you?' And they'd say 'We're alright'. And the 2 men would say 'We're just going out after hours' and the sisters say 'Well that's alright we've just been out after ours!' Boom Boom again, you know finish up there. Of course all the Sisters go hysterical. I'm telling you this, a lot of the things weren't really funny but in that situation up there they were really funny because people love to laugh, anything to make them laugh and being part of the
- 35:00 group in the concert party was great. You could get away with murder you really could. You could always have a little dig at the Colonel in charge of the Battalion and there's nothing much they can do about it. My mate, Eric Esdale, as I told you, we'd always single out certain people like that and you could have just a little dig at them and you got away with it. Any other time you'd be put on a charge sheet. But it did work out real good and it was great fun.
- 35:30 As far as the dress is concerned, a lot of the situations required being dressed up and a lot of the fellas had written back to their families at home and asked for particular clothing and I'll show you pictures of mine. I'm dressed up in a Zoot Suit as we called it in those days. I don't know whether you ever remember a Zoot Suit. Brightly coloured red and white suit with an old Army hat turned up in front of

me, great big bowtie and this sort of thing.

36:00 This was made by the Battalion tailor for me and my mate was dressed up in a typical clown type suit. We even had a female impersonator. One of the fellas had a beautiful evening dress sent up from somewhere down in Sydney and a wig to go with it and when he came out, you've got no idea of the howl that went up from the audience. We had no women there apart from the Nursing Sisters so it went over really good and filled in that

36:30 gap of doing something which made you laugh, it really did.

Do you remember any of your, did you have any favourite jokes that you could tell us now?

Well, a lot of them I wouldn't be game to tell you now.

Why not?

Well, I know my offside, we'd go through this little action of going into action and I'd say to him "We'll creep forward and we'll take up a position."

37:00 and he'd say "How far forward?" and I'd say "We'll go forward until you can see the whites of their eyes" and he'd immediately get up and run off the stage. I'd yell out "Where are ya going?" He said "If I've gotta see the whites of their eyes I'm too bloody close!" This sort of thing. The big roar went up again from the crowd because they could put themselves together with that sort of thing happening. Having been in action. If you've got to

37:30 go up so far to see the enemy's whites of his eyes, believe me you are too close. You're really close. There the sort of things that happened there. But I don't know what we would have done without that concert party I really don't. We did plenty of shows and they all had a different name. We asked the fellows from the Battalion if they could come up with ideas for sketches apart from what we wrote

38:00 ourselves and always somebody would come up with something which we could turn into a reasonably good sketch. There was a song written by somebody and it was rather a rough song, some of the words in it. It was called "In the Führer's Face" it was having a dig at Adolf Hitler of course and the chap who sung it, this Melba with his baritone voice and he stood up on a box in the middle of the stage with his hand up like a Heil Hitler singing the verses out of this song

38:30 and everyone appreciated that.

Do you remember the words?

No I don't remember the words. You're testing my memory now with those sort of things. Those programs I showed you out there you can see the acts that took place on it anyhow. They're all different acts. One thing that did happen that the members of the 36th Battalion really loved. At Soputa when the concert was finished, we'd go

39:00 back to our own camp lines and the Warrant Officer caterer was a fellow named Tom Freeman and what he used to do was he'd make up drumfuls of - we used to get plenty of tins of unsweetened milk and he'd fill up these big buckets with unsweetened milk, sugar them up there and pour vanilla essence into them. So we'd all go back and finish up with milkshakes to finish the night off. Believe me they

39:30 went down real good. They were really great, Tom Freeman, yes. I'll always remember those milkshakes. So all those little things helped. We'd been at Soputa for quite a long while and I explained to you what a dreadful place it was and it was becoming a worry for the Colonel because of the malaria we were going down with and it was decided that one thing we'd do to raise morale. Soputa was about 7 or 8 miles back from the coast.

40:00 So we went out - took an advanced party out and we came to a place called Cape Endaiadere right on the water. So we made a holiday camp there. So on a rotation basis what we used to do was send one Company and they could have a week at this holiday camp. This holiday camp was no work, no Army work whatsoever. They could swim all day in the surf if they wanted to and they had to the best

40:30 of the cook's abilities they gave them special food and a portion of the concert party we'd go down and we'd put a performance on at night. Not the whole crowd because we couldn't get them down there but that really worked wonders for the fellows. Their morale went right up like that. It was just like going on holidays for them. No drill, they could sleep in in the morning, not have to get up on the bugle call and this sort of thing. You could not imagine what a difference it made to the morale of those fellas.

41:00 That's one of the reasons why we had such a lot of faith in our Colonel. He tried very very hard to come up with things to keep the fellows occupied apart from being a soldier all the time. I remember I was sent to the

I'll stop here. That was fantastic.

00:31 **Keith, if you could just complete the picture of the holiday camp for me?**

Yes Cape Endaiadere was some miles from the camp at Soputa. It was on the coast and we turned out an advance party to check the area out and decided it was a good place to set up a holiday camp. So tents were erected there and cooks were put down there on a permanent basis

01:00 while the camp was open and each Company went down on a rotation basis. We've got A Company, B Company, C Company, D Company and Headquarters. So A Company might go down and they could have a week down there doing absolutely nothing. No Army work of any description. A complete holiday camp. They could swim in the water if they wanted to. Just lay on the beach all day and I would like to emphasise that there was no such thing as white sand there.

01:30 It was a volcanic area and it was all black sand but it was alright to lay on in the sun. As a matter of fact Cape Endaiadere, behind Cape Endaiadere was Mount Lamington and you may remember some years ago Mount Lamington exploded, blew up and many many hundreds of natives were killed and white people were killed also when the volcano erupted so that was the area. The Army Cooks

02:00 went to a great deal of trouble to make a special meal for these people. Same ingredients but they tried to do something special with it and perhaps called it by a different name. We did go down, a portion of our concert party would go down and put on a small performance at night with these fellows and give them a little bit of entertainment. But it was just an area where they did nothing

02:30 absolutely nothing. I would just like to add too at this stage. At one stage I was sent to the 2/5th AGH Hospital. I was in there for some weeks for dermatitis on the soles of the feet and they had a great scheme too. People who were well enough, the Nursing Sister would have a day off and they got hold of one their own Army a 3 ton truck and they would select patients of which I was one on this particular

03:00 occasion and we'd drive down to the beach and the Sisters would arrange picnic lunches made in the hospital kitchen and we'd get down to the beach at Buna and the Sisters would all get into their swimsuits which they must have had with them and we spent a whole day absolutely nothing to do but enjoy ourselves. Believe me, because we'd been so long without seeing women it was a really

03:30 great thing to be able to spend the day with these lovely Sisters. They'd forgotten all about their work at the hospital and we just had a whole day of enjoying ourselves. We'd go in the water together and play ball games there. We'd take balls down and play with them in the surf. Come lunchtime the sisters would prepare this picnic lunch for us and we'd have singsongs and all this sort of thing. At the end of the day they took us back to the hospital and we got back into our hospital bed again but it was

04:00 a day to remember. A special day to remember in the life of a soldier in active service. Something really good.

Just one final quick question on the concert party. What did it mean to you personally to be making so many people laugh?

I enjoyed it very much indeed. I liked being on stage which I've just given up recently. I've been a guest speaker and I've

04:30 spoken for - I've done 178 talks around clubs, Probus Clubs, View Clubs you name it. My subjects were of course, I've made a study in the history of the names around Sydney Harbour. Most people are aware of those places but they don't know the origin of the name. Of course I have a two-part talk and I talk about the good old days and the good old days I'm talking about are before the War when the word "gay" meant happy and "fairies" were

05:00 little people at the bottom of the garden. I'm one of those fellas that I think if I ever come back to this world again I'd love to come back as an actor, a singer and an actor.

Beautiful. If I could just turn, because we're getting near to the end of our afternoon, I'd like to go to Sanananda and Gona if we could because there is a lot written about Kokoda. From what we understand

05:30 **Is what you told our researchers, Sanananda was much much worse.**

Yes, I believe so. Mainly because the country itself, I did say Sanananda was a huge area, a complete swamp so you were living in water all the time. A dreadful place. You dug a slit trench to share with a mate and you only went down about 12 inches or a little bit more and all the water seeped up straight away so consequently you were laying in water

06:00 all the time, particularly at night. It was a very very difficult place. If somebody got wounded and you tried to get back to the - behind the lines is what they always called a casualty clearing station where you tried to get casualties back to there where sometimes minor and sometimes major operations are done with doctors standing in water up to their knees operating on somebody on the stretchers there. Getting stretchers back

06:30 with a wounded person on to these casualty clearing stations. Anyone who was available got onto the stretcher. It didn't matter whether you were a Corporal, Sergeant or a Private. You usually carried a stretcher on your shoulders with water right up to your waist, up higher at times. You might have to go

a long distance just to keep the stretcher above water and not let the poor fella on the stretcher get wet and you to try and get him back to the casualty clearing station. So the area was a dreadful area

07:00 and as I said before not only was it a swamp area it was a dreadful area for malaria. All sorts of fevers in that area. If you go through the casualty lists in most Units their biggest casualties were through sickness. Same thing happened in our Battalion. The major casualties were evacuated through sickness. In most cases a lot of those fellas were sent back to Australia and we had groupings. If you were an A1 you were

07:30 an A1 in health so they could be sent back and become a B1 and that meant they weren't permitted to go back their Unit again. They were sent to a base job, somewhere in Australia. It was really a shocking place. The Kokoda Track was bad mainly because of the climbing and the track and the valleys and the climbs we had to do and of course it was very wet at night. You could set your watch by the time the showers and rain came down.

08:00 We had torrential rain at Sanananda and when I say torrential rain you're looking 8 or 9 inches in a night. So you can imagine how wet you were. So it was really a dreadful job there. It was bad enough just living there without trying to fight an enemy.

So you living and fighting in water a lot of the time?

Most of the time at Sanananda yes. Gona was a little bit better because it was right on the coast but when we moved from Sanananda to Gona

08:30 we relieved another Battalion. They were brought back again. So we took up our position on the beach at Gona and the first night we were there, there was torrential rain. Some of the heaviest rain I've ever seen in my life. You wouldn't believe it. It had washed all the sand away and there was something like 800 Japanese had been buried. Dead Japanese and it washed them all out of these graves and when we

09:00 woke up in the morning we were in the middle of all these dead bodies. We had to turn around and dig deeper and put them back again because we couldn't have stayed there for the smell that was coming up. The rain was so heavy it washed all the sand off them. The previous Battalion was involved in an action and they were all killed as a result of that action but they hadn't been buried too good. Well they thought they'd buried them pretty good but the rain was so heavy it brought it all out in the open. It was one of the weirdest things you'd ever seen in your life.

09:30 Wake up in the morning and suddenly sit up and look around and there's all these arms and legs and heads sticking out of the sand. It was dreadful it was.

And the smell must have been awful.

Yes, it wasn't too good. It's a remarkable thing - it's a dreadful smell but you get used to it. Although I still have nightmares, I have a lot of nightmares and I can wake up sometimes with that smell in my nose. Even now after all these years.

10:00 **Is it anything that you could describe?**

Well rotten is a good word. Nothing more rotten than - well I don't know whether for example, you've ever had a dead dog lying around somewhere and a similar smell would come from that as it would from a human being. But multiplied many times over when you're looking at 700 or 800 Japs that have all been killed. At Sanananda

10:30 there was so many Australian soldiers killed and so many Japanese soldiers killed that smell was permanent. It was there all the time and you do reach a stage where you're used to it. It doesn't worry you as much as it should do. Well you've got to, you know, you're there, you can't get out, you can't leave everybody and just walk out of the place as much as you'd like to.

Did you get a - at what stage did you get a sense that you were getting on top of things

11:00 **Or not?**

Yes, when we moved to Gona. Just after we moved to Gona the 18th Brigade had come up by boat round from Milne Bay and there was 3 Battalions, the 2/10th, the 2/12th and the 2/25th [2/9th] I think it was. They made a landing at Buna and they were the ones really who broke the battle at Sanananda because they put in huge attacks

11:30 and also there was a squadron of Australian tanks didn't do real good because the country was too bad for tanks. As a matter of fact if my memory serves me correct, they lost 2 or 3 tanks plus the crews because the Japs could hide in the jungle, come out, jump on these tanks and throw a grenade or something through the nearest slit and they killed the crew and put the tank out of action. The tanks didn't do really good there. But it was the 18th Brigade that really broke the

12:00 battle at Sanananda. One of the reasons we were sent to Gona was that they knew that the Japs were going to break any minute and we were there. The first thing the Japs would do was break out and head west to try and pick up with other Japs further along the coast and our job was if any broke out to stop them. That was our job which we did do there. That was the beginning of the end, I mean there was

- 12:30 more battles took place later on further along the coast at Salamaua, Lae, Madang, Wewak. By the time they got to Wewak that was almost the end of the War anyhow but those areas became clear. They eventually reached the stage where Lae became clear altogether and I think I might have mentioned they re-opened the soft drink factory there and we did have a
- 13:00 Bath Unit come down which allowed us to have a hot shower and that sort of thing which you couldn't have done before when the Japanese were in occupation. I would just like to mention one fact too. In the middle of Lae there is a mountain, a small mountain and inside that mountain was a Japanese hospital and it was filled with Japanese patients and Japanese Nurses and when the Australian soldiers surrounded Lae they sent in messages through the entrance to this mountain asking the Japs
- 13:30 to surrender and they refused to surrender. They were asked many many times and each time they refused to surrender so the entrance to that mountain was blown up and they're entombed in there to this day and not so dreadfully long ago the Japanese made an application to open it up. They like to get the remains of their dead like everybody else but it was refused. Right on top of that mountain today is the Lae RSL and I think there's a big hotel on top there also.
- 14:00 But inside that still entombed are all those skeletons of the Nurses and the hospital people, the Japanese, yes. A lot of people don't know about that but it's there.

In the overview you mentioned because of the desperation and isolation of the Japanese there were acts of cannibalism. Had you heard any stories about that before you experienced it?

Yes we had heard it. Word had seeped through from

- 14:30 a couple of Units who had apparently been over the Owen Stanleys and the 3rd Battalion, a Militia Battalion was one of them. I think they had acts of cannibalism committed on some of their fellows. Of course when we were in Gona we had it on our own fella too. Later on they had an enquiry. Justice Webb was sent up from Sydney to do an enquiry into the atrocities caused by the Japs and we did have to provide witnesses
- 15:00 to that enquiry about what happened to our fella. Most of those other Units. They did have the same thing happen to them. That was a dreadful thing to get used to that because I think Australian soldiers the last thing to enter your mind is to start eating other people, human beings and we just couldn't get used to the fact that the Japs would do this. But they were so desperate for food, if you look at it that way. I suppose if you're that desperate
- 15:30 but I can't think of an Australian soldier starving to death would stoop to do that. I remember many years ago in South America there was a soccer team. Their plane had crashed into the mountains, the Andes and they were there so long they finished up doing the same thing to those who died on that team and they're supposed to be white people so I suppose it does happen. I have heard cases of course ships that have been sunk and the
- 16:00 lifeboat at sea with the people on board and they reached the stage where everyone's looking at the fattest fella sitting in the boat and he knows he's the first one to go. So obviously it does happen but I tell you what when it's happening to people you know, it's very very hard. You never get used to it.

Was it a shock to morale at the time?

Well it made it - it confirmed stronger than ever our fear, don't get captured by the Japs or don't get killed close to them

- 16:30 because if you're killed you don't know anyhow and don't worry about it but it did confirm the fact that whatever you do, don't become a prisoner of the Japs because they did take prisoners and kill them for that purpose. Horrible it is, absolutely horrible. That's why we never spoke about it a great deal when we came back after the War because people didn't believe you. In a lot of cases you'll find that most Infantry men never ever talked a great deal about the War
- 17:00 in the early days. It's only these last few years that people are interested now and want to know these things. They want to know answers to questions and incidents that have taken place. They want to know in detail what happened. That's why I'm sitting here talking to you now like a lot of other people.

Has that been a bit of a surprise or a good experience that people want to know?

Well the thing I'm very happy about is the number of young people nowadays

- 17:30 that are interested in the War. I regularly get phone calls from young people who are perhaps at University doing thesis on World War II and my name was given to them somewhere. Usually they'll ring the RSL headquarters in the City and they'll say "Get on to Keith Irwin and ring him". Not just me, others too and give them my telephone number and I would get a call and I'm happy to help them. I usually send them a fair
- 18:00 bit of information. I'll type them out stories and things and send them and just help with their studies and this sort of thing. I think it's great to think that they've got an interest in it. The other thing is the Australia Remembers Year. I think that was the turning point. Right up to then, people didn't seem to care much. But there was a lot of publicity given on that Australia Remembers Year and it's from that

time on there's been a great interest on what went on during the War. Particularly the soldiers in New Guinea. There was probably

18:30 less written about New Guinea than any other action. We got a lot of news about soldiers in the Middle East and Greece and those places but there wasn't a great deal surprisingly enough about New Guinea but now I think most young people today have got a real good insight into what really went on up there.

After the War was over and you came back was it a tough place to come back to?

Yes it was. The first 12 months were dreadful for me. Absolutely dreadful.

19:00 Bearing in mind I'd spent 6 years in an Infantry Battalion and the first thing I did when I come back - 2 other fellows, not from my Unit. A friend of mine I went to school with and another chap. We were so fed up it was incredible so we went away and had a holiday. We went on the train out to Parkes, I think it was. We changed over to the old Silver City train

19:30 that went to Broken Hill so we went out to Broken Hill and we spent about 4 or 5 days there. We stayed at hotels and hotels opened all night out in those days in the mining town of Broken Hill. Then we got the other train down to Adelaide and we spent a week there. We came across to Melbourne and had a week there and then we finally come back to Sydney then. That's when I started to look for a job again. I didn't know what to do. Just didn't know what to do. It was an incredible

20:00 experience to get out of a uniform. You've lived in a uniform for 6 years, get into a civvy suit and not know what to do.

What was the toughest thing about it?

I don't know, I really don't know. The transition from Army to civilian life was really hard it was. I did settle down after a while and in fact the very very first job I had

20:30 when I couldn't go back to The Sun I thought, "Well what can I do?" I didn't care what I did to be truthful. Anyhow I saw an ad in the paper for a Storeman for Selfridges. Now I don't know whether you've ever heard of Selfridges. Selfridges was a chain store. Their logo was "No connection with Selfridges of London" and I started there as a Storeman and I think I was a storeman for about 4 weeks then they made me a Floor Walker.

21:00 I never even got a chance to serve on the counter which is the job in between and as a Floor Walker you're in charge of a floor. I started off at the Selfridges store at Pitt and King Street. It used to be an L-shaped store. It went from King Street into Pitt Street - an L. It was 2 storeys and I was in charge of one floor. They had 9 branches. One in Western Australia and one in Wollongong and I did time at

21:30 7 of the stores. I did 12 months in Lithgow. They had one store up there and I boarded in a house up there. I liked it. It was a good job. I liked the work but then I felt I wanted to do something better. Then I joined the AMP Insurance and I went there for a while. In those days you knocked on doors and people used to pay sixpence

22:00 for their children's policies. At the end of the day you probably came out with about a pound in sixpences and this sort of thing. You covered miles on foot during the day. I always had a habit. I used to wear a felt hat in those days and of course as I was writing out the policy I'd always forget and it was a pen and I'd put my pen up like that (indicates behind ear) and I'd finish up with all these ink spots under the rim of my hat because of that pen sticking into it. Anyhow I left there

22:30 and I went to - I had an opportunity to join Vesty's. Vesty's was the big meat company and I was in the Imperial Small Goods Branch and I used to drive a big van selling small goods and I did a lot of country work for them too. That was very good. This was in the days when the Snowy Mountain Scheme was going on. I used to drive the van right up into the works up there and supply them with lots and lots of meat and things like this. I was

23:00 away an awful lot. I got married in 1950 of course and we had 2 sons born and for many many years I'd only come home on the weekend and of course I did miss out on the growing up of the boys in those early days. My wife was left to look after them herself. I always made a point of ringing her every night no matter where I was. I worked for them for about 9 years, did a lot of country work and then I

23:30 had the opportunity to become a commercial traveller with a leather firm of all places and we used to supply goods to department stores, shoe stores, boot repairers and people like that. All country work again. They went into liquidation after 9 years so I then joined the Standard Telephones and Cables which was probably the best job I ever had. I finished up - I used to

24:00 sell telephone systems PABX switchboards. I don't know if you're familiar with the expression. I used to sell whole systems. It's probably the top selling job there is. All the selling was done to Boardroom Directors so you had to be very careful what you spoke about because the Board of Directors and most times they might bring an engineer in. You had to really know what you were talking about but I used to get over that. I was able to

24:30 ring back to STC. If the engineer asked me a curly question, I'd ring back to STC and I'd get one of my engineers and I'd put them both together on the phone and they were as happy as Larry, they really

were. But they got the right answers they wanted. I always learnt right from the word go that if you're selling anything at all what you've got to do is sell yourself first. If you sell yourself first your home and dried. I used to do a lot of interstate work with STC and we had a public relations team which

- 25:00 they put me in charge of and we used to do a lot of lectures. Anyone who wanted to talk about communications I'd take a team out. We'd put another acting performance on for them. We introduced new - we kept with the times and introduced new equipment. We'd put a big demonstration conference on in all the capital cities and we'd have staff who'd ring all the business houses to get a selection of people to turn up.
- 25:30 No expense was spared. Some of the places we'd sent a hire car to pick them up at their office and bring them back to wherever it was going to be held. I held conferences in the Hilton here in Sydney. The Hilton in Melbourne. The Town and Country up there in Brisbane. All over the place we went. We gave them good food and plenty to drink and we wrote a lot of business that way. We had people with orders forms when it was all over.
- 26:00 It was a great job it really was. I was very well paid. I had a company car. Unrestricted use of a company car and an expense account. An unlimited expense account. The only thing was of course no matter what you spent it was okay as long as you had a receipt to hand over. If you didn't have a receipt you wouldn't get paid. It was a real good job and I stayed there until 1983. I was 60
- 26:30 in 1983 and it was the time an edict came out that people turning 60 had to give up their job. and nowadays you can work into your late 70's and still work. But I had a good send off. I've been a cartoonist all my life. All the time I worked at STC I used to do cartoons about the staff. Some of them weren't very nice because cartoonists can be cruel
- 27:00 and they gave me a big farewell down at the Mandarin Club. Even the Chiefs of STC turned up and we were just going through the meals and the speeches started as usual and one of the Sales Manager got up and next thing I know he's wheeling in a big screen and I thought "this is funny". They set up a camera sort of thing there and this fellow unbeknownst
- 27:30 to me had kept every cartoon that I'd done in the time I was at STC and had them all made into slides. They ran all these slides through up on the big screen and I had to stand up and give a commentary on what I did about all these cartoons and why. Talk about embarrassing because half the people I did sketches about were sitting in the audience. It was great. It was a good send-off and I'm happy to say they tell me and I saw on Anzac
- 28:00 Day when I went down to my Unit I saw one of the top bosses for the first time since 1983. He came up to me and the first thing he said to me was "Do you remember that send off we gave you back in 1983?" That's how good it was. I thought that spoke volumes. I gave up in 1983 I did.

Reflecting back on all of that do you think your experiences during the War had a positive or negative experience on you?

Positive certainly. Later

- 28:30 on it got more positive. It was those early years which I can't say I had a positive reaction for those days. I was sort of lost in the wilderness for those first couple of years. I settled down. You've got to. When I got married and we've got 2 boys. Nowadays of course the boys are grown up and both my boys turned out to be bankers.
- 29:00 One with the Commonwealth Bank. He was a Bank Manager with the Commonwealth Bank and my other son was the Human Resources Manager for the St George Bank. Paul, the eldest boy, 2 years ago was retrenched with all the Bank Managers. Hasn't been able to get a job since. He's 52. Every time he applies for a job and they ask how old you are and he say's 52, they don't want to know you. Steve, my youngest fella has just turned 50 and he was retrenched just before Christmas in a big shake-up.
- 29:30 Apparently they brought a lady manager over from the Commonwealth Bank, the previous CEO of St George died and what does she do? Brings in a whole swag of people from the Commonwealth Bank and puts off the St George people. He's having the devil's own job trying to find a job. He's written all over the place. As soon as they know he's 50 they don't want to know him. That's been a concern to both Beryl and myself about the 2 boys. One boy's got 2 girls and the other one's got a boy and a girl.
- 30:00 The 4 grandchildren are either at University or been at University so I believe they're fairly clever kids - don't take after me. Probably take after Beryl because she's got an accountancy background. She runs rings round me when it comes to figures. But I probably run rings round her when it comes to talking.

You mentioned after a few years, once you settled down, you felt it was a positive experience

- 30:30 **so in what way?**

One thing I did learn for sure was leadership. I was promoted to Corporal then I was promoted to Sergeant. I got one blot on my copy book. We were at Buna and I took a work party down to the wharf to unload a ship. Very rough road and being the Sergeant I was able to sit up in the front seat of this big truck and there's no

- 31:00 doors on them. We used to be lairs in those days. I had a .38 Smith & Weston pistol which I used to - I would turn the holster round the other way and stuck it like a cowboy you know. There was a lanyard on the bottom of the pistol which was supposed to be around your neck and tied to the pistol. What we used to do was wind it up into a neat little tassel and let it hang down. We're going down there and when I get
- 31:30 down to the wharf of all things I looked down and my pistol was gone. It has bounced out of my holster. The holster had come undone and it bounced out and I lost it. And of course at that time a lot of pistols were disappearing and being sold to the Yanks. The Yanks loved to get hold of one of our pistols and they'd pay astronomical amounts of money just to get them. I go back to the Unit and report it and I'm put on a charge sheet straight away. Not only was I put on a charge sheet
- 32:00 I was court marshalled so I've got a DCM which means District Court Marshal not Distinguished Conduct Medal and I was court marshalled and I had to front the court marshal body of men who in this case was a Major and 2 Captains. When you go into this - there's the big table laid out in front of you and there's the sword laying in front. It's a real ceremony this and I've got to be marched in with 2 Sergeants as an escort because
- 32:30 of my rank and I line up there and to cut a long story short, my Company Commander Major McGlynn in civvy life was a solicitor. He went to bat for me and he's told them such a good story about me and what a good fella I was and how I performed in action. I couldn't even believe it myself. I learnt things about myself which I never ever knew. Anyhow I was guilty. There were 2 things that could have happened. I could have lost my stripes and revert to a Private
- 33:00 or fined 5 pounds and I was fined 5 pounds and kept my stripes but what happened was I could never apply to go to Officer's school because I got that court marshal on my record. So that stopped there but that's life. When I get back to the Unit and I go up to the Quartermaster, the Warrant Officer Eric
- 33:30 Huxtable and he said "Why didn't you come to me first". I said "Why" He said "I'd give you another pistol". I reported it to the wrong people and got put on a court marshal. Incredible. That stopped me going to Officer's school.

Do you think you would have gone?

Oh yes. Without a doubt, yes. They reckoned I was the type of fellow they needed to go to Officer's school mainly because of what I'd been doing and everything. I'd had a reasonably

- 34:00 good education which some of the fellas didn't have but that really stopped me. No way in the world could I have been sent after that.

We're getting close to the end and there's one question I haven't had a chance to ask you. Down at the War Memorial one of the great paintings about Papua and New Guinea is actually the natives helping you guys out on the Kokoda Track.

- 34:30 **What are your impressions of the natives and you got a lot of help from them when you were there?**

Oh my word, yes. You've heard of the poem the Fuzzy Wuzzy Angels and that's exactly what they were. A lot of fellows alive today would not be alive if it hadn't been for the natives. They were incredible people. The trouble they went to, to carry

- 35:00 a wounded soldier over some of the most dreadful country you've ever seen in your life. Up and down mountains and they treated that patient like a baby. At night time, if you got a big heavy shower of rain, they'd put him on the ground and cover him up with big banana tree leaves to keep the rain off him and others there - they used to have a rest every now and then. You couldn't keep going all the time and they'd wave leaves back and forth
- 35:30 to keep flies off him and all this sort of thing. At night time if they had to spend the night on the side of the track, somebody stayed awake all night just keeping an eye to see if their wounded person was okay. Absolutely incredible people and probably one of the saddest things that ever happened even to this day they've never been recognised properly. They've never been recognised by the Australian Government properly. They should have been. As I say
- 36:00 they absolutely - you could not have done without them. Not only for looking after the wounded because they carried all the supplies in and for a very very minimal wage, virtually nothing that they got for doing this and most of those natives come from the mountains themselves and of course the Japs had destroyed most of their villages. A lot of their own families had been killed by the Japs
- 36:30 in atrocious ways but without a doubt we couldn't have done without them. We couldn't have handled it ourselves. You couldn't have got our people to carry a stretcher in this sort of country with somebody who needed attention.

The term, Fuzzy Wuzzy Angels was that used at the time?

No, I don't think it was because what was the fellow's name? Beros. He was an engineer, Sapper Beros

- 37:00 and he was responsible for writing that poem. I think it must have been him who created the expression

Fuzzy Wuzzy Angels because that was the title of his poem and it's a beautiful poem. Have you read it?

I don't think I have.

Oh, it's a beautiful poem. It's sort of giving a message to the mothers back home that if it wasn't for the Fuzzy Wuzzy Angels their sons wouldn't be there tonight. It's a lovely poem. Really, if you get hold of it it's worthwhile reading it.

37:30 **Do you feel every word of it's true?**

Yes, I do. Absolutely. Just a final thing, as you know I did get awarded the Order of Australia Medal and I've got that for services to the 36th Battalion. That was my citation. Not only did the citation say for services to the 36th Battalion but for the writing of "Marching On" my journal. I'm very very happy about that.

38:00 My Battalion we've had 7 fellows receive Order of Australian Medals and I'm the only one who has received it for the Battalion so I feel really chuffed about that.

Congratulations.

I got it a couple of years ago now. Beryl was responsible for a lot of it. She rallied some people around and they made applications, unbeknownst to myself. The day came and I get a letter from the Medal Authorities saying that

38:30 you're being considered for an award in the Honours List and would I be happy to accept it. Before the ink was dry I had a letter back to Canberra saying yes. When the time came, Beryl was very very sick at the time when I had to go to Government House and we were able to get her there. I was only allowed 3 visitors and it was a magnificent ceremony and it made me feel really good. Not for just getting the medal but the reason why I got it.

39:00 After all, you don't go looking for rewards for the things you do but it is nice when it happens.

We've just got a couple more minutes. Keith, is there any final words looking back over it all and everything we've talked about that you want to tell?

Just to say it was a wonderful experience. I'm glad I did it. I really am. I wouldn't have missed it for the world. We had a lot of very awful

39:30 times, sad times but we had a lot of good times. I think the main message that comes out of it, life in an Infantry Battalion is a wonderful thing with the fellas you meet and to think that 60 years after we were in the same Battalion with these fellas, you're still together today. I send out a journal to roughly 260 people at the moment. Many of them are 36th fellas all round Australia and they're in constant

40:00 contact with me no matter where they live. I get phone calls from Western Australia, South Australia, you name it, I get phone calls. In any other organisation I can't see that sort of thing happening. We're a band of brothers, that's exactly what we are. If someone's family is sick or dies - I've had 2 people in the past few weeks. One chap and his wife their daughter, 47

40:30 died suddenly with a Cerebral Haemorrhage. I had one last week, their son, 46 died from Leukaemia and everyone in the Association treats that as somebody out of their family and they feel very deeply for the parents that are left behind. Dreadful thing. It's bad enough with people my age dying but it's much worse when you're children die before you. I learnt a lot out of my experience during the war.

41:00 I've only got the one grandson and I'd hate to see him have to go through the same things that I went through. But as I said I wouldn't have missed it for the world and I'm very proud of the fellows in the Battalion, I really am from the Colonel down.

What sort of advice would you give to your grandson?

Well, if he was called up for example. First of all I'd say never volunteer to go into the services but if he was called up

41:30 I'd say make sure you don't go to an infantry unit. Go to a unit, perhaps a transport unit where you're not walking all the time. Something where you don't experience the dangers that you experience in an infantry battalion. That's the best advice I could give him.

Thank you Keith.