TRANSCRIPT OF ORAL HISTORY RECORDING

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Description	Norman Charles Henry Coady, Lance Corporal 55th/53rd Battalion, interviewed by Daniel Connell for the Keith Murdoch Sound Archive of Australia in the War of 1939–45. Discussing pre-war employment; army training at Dubbo, NSW; army training at Sellheim, Queensland; contact with American service personnel; leisure; censorship; status of militia units by 1942; reputation of 53rd Battalion; New Guinea campaigns; Japanese surrender; demobilisation; post-war employment.

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Identification: This is tape one, side one. The interview is with Mr Norm Coady. And the date is, I think, 16th March 1989. End of identification.

Right. Mr Coady, if we could just start off by talking about your background. Where did you grow up?

I grew up in Trangie in western New South Wales.

Could you describe your family for me please?

Yes. I came from a family of four children: three girls and myself; three girls and a boy. My father passed on when we were very young, mother reared the four of us.

Was she working?

Ah, she was working with her parents, so they had a little mixed business in a little country town.

What sort of business?

Ah, restaurant cum catering business and we grew up in that environment; in that atmosphere.

Where did you go to school?

I went to school in Trangie until I was about thirteen and then I had to leave school during the early depression years and try and get a job to help support the family. I worked around the Trangie district and western New South Wales for four or five years doing anything – ringbarking trees, fencing, shear working in shearing sheds, travelling around the country in a horse and sulky for about four years. I think it was four or five years before I came back home again at the end of ... the depression looked like coming to an end. I came back home and just did odd jobs for a while until a vacancy came in the local grocery store and I worked there until '42 when I went into the army.

What was your religion?

Catholic.

Right. Did you go to a Catholic school?

Yes. I went to a Catholic school and for the last twelve ... oh, two years, I guess, eighteen months or so of education, I went to a public school.

Any particular reason?

Yes. I was trying to do my intermediate certificate but circumstances didn't permit it. I had to leave school and to go out and get a job and consequently I didn't sit for the intermediate. I only went to ... well, they called it in those days, the qualifying certificate, I think it was, the QC examination.

What about politics?

Oh ... Neither one side or the other.

Was the depression a hard time? I mean, most people would say it was a hard time in general but ...

It was a hard time. Yes, generally it was a very hard time; a very tough time ... tough time, particularly for those who are a bit older than me. Young married people with families trying to get by and, you know, no work, no money, just battling for a job here and there, pick up a few pence; pick up a meal. You know, it was a tough time because ... you saw many professional men. I can remember seeing quite a few professional men, men of substance with family in pre-depression days who had to take to the road just with their swag just to look for work to try and subsist.

You were twenty-two in 1939.

Yeh.

(5.00) What was your ... And like most people you would have been reading the newspapers and seeing things were getting bad in Europe. What was your feeling about things ... subjects like the war and ... oh, war generally, the First World War, what you'd heard about it and being part of the armed forces?

Looking back now I suppose it was a feeling of expectancy. To think, 'Oh gee, there's going to be a war. Let's get away. We're going to have a good time. We're going to go overseas. We'll probably finish up in Europe or somewhere'. I don't think anyone visualised what was going to happen in Europe; what eventually happened in the Pacific area and I believe the first thought was something of an adventurous nature, but – 'Oh, let's get away. We'd get into the army and get overseas and see the world' sort of thing. I think that was the first thoughts.

So you thought of the army; you didn't think of the air force or the navy?

No, no, no. I never ... didn't ... never ever visualised going into the navy or the air force. Ah, actually I did volunteer for the army a couple of days after war broke out and because of a defect, because I was wearing glasses, I wasn't accepted and some few months later I had a communication from the RAAF to join the RAAF police because I wasn't quite fit enough to join the army. But I didn't go on with that. I had no idea of ever going into the air force. Army was what I thought of.

Well, what about the police, did that idea attract or repel you?

It didn't repel me because two years prior to that I'd been here ... down to Sydney to join the New South Wales police and I was knocked back because of the same condition, because I had a defect in my eye. I believe, they told me in those days that I had two-fifths of the sight in one eye, the abnormal side. But I was very disappointed I suppose when I couldn't get into the New South Wales police in those days. But I went back and got on with my life as well as I could until the war started and I had to wait then until '42 before I got into the army.

Just talking a little bit about life before you got in. You were working ... where did you say you were working?

I worked in a grocery store; a general grocery store in Trangie. Yeh.

Can you describe what Trangie was like '39, 1940, '41?

Yeh, a little country town, one main street. Population of about 600 people. What, three hotels, I suppose. Is this the sort of thing you want to know?

Mmm.

Three hotels, there was two general stores and a Wright Heaton which was a supply store for most of the outlying stations and properties around the district.

Obviously a quiet place?

Quiet, yeh. A quiet little place. The only entertainment would be films once a week – Saturday night picture show sort of thing – in the summer, open air pictures.

You were twenty-three, twenty-four. You didn't feel tempted to leave home?

No, I had a job. I didn't want to get away, you know, when I was working, and as I said earlier, I was trying ... still trying to help support my mother. She had no income of her own. So I was helping to support Mum in those days until I went into the army. Even then, right through my army career I had an allocation from my pay made home to Mum right through and that stayed right through until I was discharged and was married.

Right. Could you ... What actually happened? You know, the series of events that resulted in you joining in the army in '42? I mean, what, you got a letter in the mail? How did it start?

Yes, just a letter in the mail saying that my name had come up for selection for military service and I had to report to, oh, whatever military district, it was at the Sydney Showground in those days, on such and such a date, bringing, you know, ... I've forgotten now. What was it now – toothpaste, and brush – toothbrush – and a cut lunch sort of thing and report to Sydney Showground on such and such a date where we were inducted into the army.

(10.00) Could you describe what that actually meant? You know, you turned up on the day and what happened?

Oh God, it's too far back to remember that sort of thing, what happened then.

There was no particular event that stands out in your mind on that first day?

No, no, no. Just that we were ushered into the showground along with a lot of ... like a mob of sheep, I suppose, and lined up, given our name. We were issued with part of our uniform, I guess. Over the next two or three days we were issued with all our uniform and what we referred to as 'dog tags' – your identification disks – given an army pay book, an army number. But, you know, the ... normally you don't remember those. It's just being inducted into the army.

What sort of place did you find it to be?

What the showground or the army?

The army.

Uh, great ... great.

Why?

Oh, I don't know, I enjoyed all my army service. There might have been bad days and good days, but generally I enjoyed it.

What was it that you found good about it, that you liked about it?

The camaraderie, the comradeship ... uh, the devil-may-care attitude sort of thing. You didn't give a bugger what happened today or tomorrow. What happened yesterday was history; what's going to happen tomorrow we don't know, no-one knows, we live for today. And, oh, I enjoyed it. I tell you what, if I had the opportunity I'd be back in it again now.

What about officers, sergeants, how did you get on with them ... in these first few days?

Oh, I got on very well. I never had any problem with any of them. I mean ...

I'm not suggesting that you did. I'm just ...

No, no ... Oh, you had to learn early that you had to respect your senior officers or NCOs and as long as you did that – no problems – you know, do as you're told. Don't do as I do, do as I say type of attitude; you go along with it.

I mean, it was a fairly well organised scene?

Oh yes, yeh ...

Not like earlier in the war when it was a bit disorganised?

Oh, I don't know how it was early in the war but by the time I went in everything was well organised. We had ... as I say, I've got no complaints about anything that I had to do or anything that I did or was told to do. Sometimes you might get your hackles up at being told to do this, that and the other and you say, 'Go to buggery' or something. But, generally, no, it was a great life. I enjoyed every minute of it.

What did you do in the first few weeks?

Bludged as much as possible, I suppose. No, we ... we were only here – at Sydney Showground – for about, oh, ten days or a fortnight. Just getting used to being in army uniform; getting used to heavy boots and marching around the showground. We were transferred back to Dubbo and we had to do our initial training, you know, get used to carrying our rifles around, I guess ...

What sort of training were they giving you?

... army rules and regulations: getting up at such-and-such a time; be on parade at such-and-such a time; and have your bunk made. You know, everything. Army regulations and you get used to that, that's the first few weeks and then you get into

the solid training – physical training – and marching and that sort of thing, handling of equipment and rifles and ammunition and, generally, I loved it – I loved the army. It was a great life.

So, did you have leave?

Yes, and fortunately my people had moved to Dubbo after I went into the army so I had leave at home. We used to get weekend leave. We got plenty of leave through the week. You could get out, you know, after training once or twice a week you'd get leave at night, you know, and be back in camp, I don't know, by ... curfew would be around about nine-thirty, ten o'clock. But, then every ... oh, I think pretty well every second weekend or weekend that you'd get weekend leave and you could go into town. I was fortunate, after some two or three months of training I was selected to – because possibly my clerical background that I'd been doing ... I was elected to go into a quartermaster's store and I was assistant to the quartermaster there and that gave me plenty of leave. I used to get leave of a Saturday afternoon and come back Monday morning. It was great; I had a leave pass every weekend for a long time until ... oh, I think I was ... I seemed to be left behind at Dubbo – it was personally me I'm speaking – drafts were going away all the time and I was stuck in this quartermaster's store until early '42. Uh ...

(15.00) When did you go in? What was the date of actually joining up?

I'd say early '42 ... it must have been later ... it was early '43 and I didn't go in until May, I think it was, of '42 ... no, it was early '43. Most of the fellows that I had gone into Dubbo with my training with had gone on different drafts and a lot of us had trained as transport drivers. And ... there was a lot of call for transport drafts to ... particularly through Queensland from, say, Brisbane, Toowoomba, right through up to Darwin in those days. The big transport sections were operating right through into Queensland there and a lot of fellahs had trained for that. And a draft was called to go away and I thought, 'Oh well, here's an opportunity to get away somewhere' and I put myself on, I volunteered to go on the draft because the last of the fellahs that I had gone into the army with, about my own age, were on it. The rest of the young fellahs that had come in since then were only eighteen year old, nineteen year old, and I was, what, possibly four r five years older than them. I don't want to be an old dad among these young kids, you know.
So I volunteered to go on the transport draft but as it turned out it was a draft that went to Toowoomba and apparently the numbers required had been satisfied by the time we got there and we went on to do training up at ... to do jungle training up in a place called Sellheim out of Charters Towers and from there across to Townsville where I joined the 55th/53rd Battalion at Alligator Creek.

So, the training that you were doing, was it related to transport under these new conditions?

Not really, no. It was just general warfare training. I mean, transport training was only driving really and we'd done a fair bit of that driving ...

Not maintenance or anything like that?

A little bit of maintenance, but, no, no. Maintenance ... as long as you had your general knowledge of, you know, how to get a vehicle started and get it going again.

But mechanical maintenance, no, that was left to the mechanics. The driver only had to get in the truck and be able to get it started and get it going. You know, you'd do your general ... your, oh, general maintenance; your petrol, oil and water's all being ... and make sure that everything is, you know, your vehicle's right to move. And apart from that we didn't have to do any other heavy mechanical work; that was left to your motor mechanics.

Right. So you got sent to Townsville. Had you heard of the 55th/53rd ...

Hadn't heard of the 55th/53rd [Battalion] before we joined them. The unit was pretty well depleted when we got there and sometime towards the latter end of '43 – I think it was around about August/September – they'd come back from New Guinea early '43 and were posted to Townsville for R and R. The unit was very depleted because of sickness because of malaria and because of casualties in the Sanananda campaign and were being reinforced generally – or gradually being reinforced up to battalion strength again.
A lot of the fellahs that were missing from the ... the members of the battalion who were missing when we got there eventually came back. They'd been on sick leave, on army leave and that sort of thing until the battalion was brought up to full strength again with the ... towards the end of '43.
(20.00) And in '44 – '43, '44 – we did general toughening up exercises around that area. A lot of wharf duties came into it. We were called on to unload boats and that sort of thing in Townsville Harbour. The battalion, as a battalion, moved out of Alligator Creek into a place just outside ... outside of Townsville opposite the racecourse, a place where we camped there and we did wharf duties for three or four months.

Right. Did that bring you into conflict at all with any of the wharf labourers – civilian wharf labourers?

Not personally. Because at this time I was attached to the transport section of our battalion and, as such, I didn't come in contact with them. But I believe some of the boys did come into a little bit of physical contact with the wharf labourers – a few Donney Brooks and that sort of thing occurred. But, generally, you know, it's give 'em a bit of a punch up and you shake hands afterwards and 'Righto mate, let's go and have a beer', that was the sort of attitude. But ...

What was causing the problems?

Strikes ... strikes, you know, waterfront strikes ... the cause of them were the problems. They called the army in to unload the boats. But we didn't know much about it at the time, we didn't ... we weren't interested. All we were interested was living from day to day and having a bloody good time.

Townsville was a place with – I think at this stage – a lot of Americans. Did you see them much?

We saw a lot of Americans; got on pretty well with them generally and, you know, I can't speak for other fellahs. I got on generally with everyone whether they were black, white or brindle. A man's a man for all that, that's my attitude in life. And, no, I had no problem with anyone.

What sort of things would you do in common or where would you meet them?

Oh you'd meet them in the street. You might meet them at a ... we used to be invited to go onto their canteen – their PX as they called it. You'd meet a couple of fellahs, they'd strike up a conversation, 'Come and have a beer' and 'Let's go down the PX, boy'. And we'd go down there and they'd take you along. No; you might meet them anywhere, just strolling around. I never went into Townsville much except when I had to go in or on weekend leave visits. It was always a mad rush to get a beer sort of thing in those days – the pubs would open for an hour or two at midday and an hour or two at night and it was a mad rush. I preferred to do without rather than join the rush.

Did you get to know any ... particular Americans at all?

No, no, no. Not normally. You'd get to know a fellow, 'G'day Charlie, how are you?'. You might see him next week, you mightn't see him again sort of thing. No, I didn't get to know any; none of those ones.

What about social life outside of working on the wharves? What were you doing on your leave in Townsville?

Oh, generally having a day out in town with the boys sort of thing. Your social life didn't ... I was engaged to be married and I just wasn't interested in anyone – any other sort of social life – it just didn't worry me. I'd go and have a few beers and come back to camp again and sleep it off that was the way life went up there.

Sport?

Sport, oh yes, we played a lot of football in Townsville, our battalion particularly. I don't thing the old ... our old colonel was the type that wanted to see everyone play sport. We built a dam across the Alligator Creek, there were two or three crocodiles in it, we had to get them out. We had to wait until they come up on the bank and shoot them ... we got 'em out. And we used to have competitive swimming carnival there among different companies of the battalion. Plenty of swimming, plenty of football; not much other sport was played.

What about cards, reading, things like that?

Oh, read any jolly thing you got your hands on. Play cards, yeh.

What games?

Oh we played a lot of bridge, played a lot of solo, um, the old euchre of course, black jack. On pay day we'd play a bit of black jack if we had a few bob to spare. But, generally bridge and solo, they were two among my mob – little group, you know, the games we played a lot.

(25.00) Did you write home much?

Oh, yes, yes. Every week, yes, letters home. Once ... at least once a week, sometimes twice.

And your fiancee, where did she live?

She lived in Sydney.

You'd met her where?

Went to school together when we were in the country. She came down to the city later after she left school and ... I met up with her again when she was out visiting her sister in Dubbo when I was in camp there and we got back ... we got together and corresponded for a while. And I came home on leave one time and my sister's, my younger sister's wedding, and invited her out and from there on we got engaged – we become engaged – and we didn't marry until after I was discharged.

Right. Was there a feeling that you shouldn't get married while you're a member of the fighting forces?

Yeh, that was my feeling that we shouldn't. My attitude was that I didn't want to leave a widow behind and possibly a widow with children and something like that. I thought, 'Let's see what happens'. If I come home well – safe and sound – then we'll get married. We became engaged, yeh, but we waited until I came home before we married.

Censorship, did that worry you? If you were writing home ...

No, no ... We knew someone was going to read the letters. They probably wouldn't read anything different in my letters to what they'd read in someone else's. It had to be done. No, that didn't worry us at all. That didn't restrain us from writing what we felt and what we ... how you felt towards one another or what you wanted to say. I don't think censorship put any restraint on what a person had to say.

Right. And letters coming to you, were they censored at all?

Oh yes, they were all censored. And occasionally get one and a word or two had been cut out or blacked out sort of thing. But ... not to the extent that apparently that ours were censored coming home because you couldn't ... particularly up the islands you couldn't say where you were or where you were located, it was verboten.

You joined as part of the Militia and there were ... there'd been, going on for quite a long time, disagreements between the Militia and the AIF and there were different conditions that applied to the two different streams that were within the army. How do you remember ... when you joined in 1942, what do you remember the feeling as being between those two groups?

Oh, possibly ... I think by the time I joined the army in '42 all that strain was gone. You were accepted as a member of the forces and that was it.

But the AIF had conditions that you didn't have, didn't it?

Yeh, but that might have been prior to '42 – '39, '40, '41 that might have happened. I didn't find that it was happening when I joined the army because when I went in to do training we had AIF personnel alongside Militia personnel. We were all doing our training together whether you'd enlisted or you were called up sort of thing for army duty or military duties. There was no strain then. I think, you know, there had been a

couple of punch-ups and that sort of thing between the two branches of the services and I think most of that had died, had gone out.

Didn't they have different canteen rights than you did?

No, not that I remember, no.

And they also ... But I think they did have different demobilisation rights and that was one of the reasons why, you know, people did switch sides a bit later in the war?

Well if there was, that's news to me. I'm just trying to think. I ...

I'm not trying to get you into a conflict, I'm just trying to get you to remember as it was at that time. If you say it was fine, well, that's the way it is.

Well as far as I'm concerned it was fine. I can't remember any conflict between the ... you know, personally, as I say, it may have been in '39, '40, '41, '42 or something. From the time ...

END OF TAPE 1 – SIDE A

START OF TAPE 1 – SIDE B

Identification: This is tape 1, side 2. The interview is with Mr Norm Coady. End of identification.

Right. So you didn't remember any particular conflict there. What did you hear as a young soldier about to go into battle potentially in the future; what did you hear about the previous experience that the 53rd and 55th had had in Papua particularly?

I'm just trying to think what I did hear what was told. It wasn't until I'd been in the battalion for sometime – some little time – that stories became, you know, were kicked around or were told around that, oh, they were only chocolate soldiers, they were `chockos'. They ... there was a story told that the part of the battalion had turned away in the face of the enemy. That they were deserters, that ... the men that they were deserted by their officers. But as history proved itself later on, all these stories were so much c–r–a–p. Ah ...

How did people feel about them at the time? I mean, people within the battalion how did they feel?

Proud to be members of the battalion and I was proud to be a reinforcement to the battalion.

The ... what, these stories were coming from people outside the battalion?

These stories were coming from people outside the battalion; from people who had ostensibly not been up on the trail itself. A lot of it was, what would you call it, journalistic licence I suppose. But a lot of it – most of it I'd say, ninety-five, ninety-eight per cent of it – was ill founded. The 53rd Battalion proved themselves as young

men that were thrown into battle ill-equipped, ill trained, against a well trained army. The training that the 53rd Battalion had was unloading bloody barges and that sort of thing for the army, for the navy, for the air force at Port Moresby. They had no equipment, they had no rifles, they had no training with grenades; they were young kids that went up there and they proved themselves on the trail that they were as good as the next man.

Their commanding officer was actually killed on the trail, wasn't he? Colonel Ward?

Colonel Ward, yes, yeh.

Did they talk about ... were there any people who talked about, say, the events that surrounded that as ... or was it something that was a bit suppressed?

No, ...

Not suppressed but it was something that people didn't talk about.

Not suppressed, not suppressed. It was something that they didn't talk about. It was, I suppose you could say, it was, for a lot of the younger kids, it was a bloody baptism of fire. It was something that happened that, all right, that's back in the back of your memory. Let's push that back there and get on with today. Um ... they didn't want to talk about it. Even today, fellahs that I'm closely associated with who were up there and particularly those ... a couple of fellahs – and I was associated with after the event ... after Sanananda, the Sanananda campaign – one of my ... he was one of my best pals in the army, he was wounded up in Sanananda but I never ever knew he was wounded until well after the war was over. Never spoke about it. You don't speak about those sort of things. A couple ... you know, were, you know, ambushed and hid all day away from the snipers and that sort of thing, but they don't talk about these things today. They want to talk about sport: about the races yesterday; or, who won the tennis last week; how did Greg Norman go in golf? – forget the war. You know, the attitude is, forget it, it's over and it's history.

(5.00) And they didn't talk about it then either?

No, no ... I don't want to talk about it. As I said, earlier in the piece, 'What happened yesterday is history; what's going to happen tomorrow nobody knows. Let's live for today' and that seems to be the general ... You know, generally the Australian's attitude towards life.

In '43 was there talk of what's going to happen now? Where's the battalion going to be sent to next?

Oh, there was a lot of conjecture – a lot of conjecture – ah, where are we going? Are we going to Darwin; are we going back to New Guinea? No, we're not going to Darwin, you know, we're not going back to New Guinea; we could be following the Yanks. You know, this was the general conjecture. We might finish up ... actually we thought we might finish up in Borneo. And, ah, we went to Bougainville – that was in '44, wasn't it – December '44. Time gets away. But units of the Australian army were going all round the islands then in those days. I think a lot of the 7 Div[ision] went to

Borneo. We went up to Bougainville and we were there for about, oh, twelve, thirteen months.

So where did you first hear that you were going to go to Bougainville?

When we got on the Liberty boat at Brisbane.

Did you have warning that, you know, this was your last leave?

Ah yes, yes. We'd had leave from Townsville and we were ...

Did you go back to Dubbo?

Yeh, that was when I came home and, oh, I forget, eighteen days or twenty days leave or some jolly thing. Came back home to Dubbo and we were reported back to Townsville again and from Townsville we went to a place called Jacky Jacky up in the Gulf country – just down from Thursday Island. We were guarding an airstrip up in the top of the Gulf. We were only there for about nine weeks I believe and we were given leave again. Told to pack up our gear, pack up everything, and I was still attached to the transport section then although I was trained as a mortar operator – trained in a mortar crew, and the only training that we did in the mortar crew was when we were out on field training I was detached to – as acting transport corporal for our transport platoon – and we were given instructions to pack up everything and drive it into the bush and leave it. Get on a barge and go over to Thursday Island and come home on leave.

Did you think that was rather odd to just abandon all that stuff?

Yes. I still think it was bloody odd, but this is what happened. Although, I don't remember too well know how whether a detachment ... well, I'm sure it was all just driven into the jungle and left, all our equipment. We came ...

What sort of equipment was abandoned?

Oh, only three ton trucks, jeeps, a couple of utes, you know, spares. Oh God, struth. We got in a barge and went over to Thursday Island, got in a boat and came home. Came down to Brisbane and we were given leave again from Brisbane. Oh, this was great; this is a good life. You know, and only nine weeks previously, this was pre-embarkation leave. So we came home and ...

They called it that?

Yes, I think they called it pre-embarkation leave then. But we didn't know where we were going, what was happening. We came home and had our holiday – had our leave – and reported back and we did a couple of months' training out of Brisbane at Strathpine – two or three months' training there – and a lot of marching; a lot of toughening up exercises. And down and shoved on board one of those Liberty boats and it wasn't until we got on the Liberty boat, I think got away from the wharf, that we were told we were going to Bougainville.

(10.00) What did you know about Bougainville?

Nothing, nothing. I knew it was an island in the Pacific somewhere ... ah.

Well, even if, I suppose, even if people don't know anything about a place, they have lots of ideas about a place. What sort of ideas did you have?

Oh well there's many a South Pacific paradises, you know, with girls in grass skirts dancing around on the wharf waiting for you. I guess that might have ... I don't know. But, oh, we just accepted it was somewhere we were going, you know, to Bougainville and three or four days later, I think it was – I just forget now – four days, we landed at Torokina and then into camp there.

Can you describe Torokina? What was it like?

Just a wharf. We unloaded from the boat on this long wharf onto barges – the boat was stood out from the wharf because there wasn't apparently enough draft there and we were unloading onto barges and across to the wharf there and taken down to a camp site which was being vacated by the Americans. We counted probably half a dozen Americans still in camp there. We were there and we were allocated an area were we had to pitch our tents. We stayed there for some time then until ... well, that became our headquarters, more or less, that area until, I suppose, until we came home as I remember. That was our base. We went from ... we did ... The Americans had held the perimeter around Torokina around about four or five mile deep and about nine mile long and that was the perimeter that they'd held there. They didn't venture outside that perimeter until after the Australian army got there and it was a sign that we'd better go and see what's happening outside that perimeter.

Right. So you decided that you should go outside the perimeter?

Oh well, I didn't decide anything. The army decided that we should cut the island in two. Torokina was about the centre of the island – it was like a long sausage – and Torokina was a bay and was about the centre of the island on the west coast of the island. The island ran something like north–south and we followed another battalion, the 36th Battalion I think it was, had gone up over the hills, up to what is known as Pearl Ridge and we followed them and relieved them and went across, straight across the island to the village on the far side, on the eastern side, nearly to Kieta. Our battalion ...

That's Kieta, is it?

Kieta, yes. Kieta or Kieta. Our battalion carried out a lot of deep penetrating patrols through there, throughout the area, and they stood on the ridges overlooking Kieta before we were recalled and relieved then and came back. We'd been up there, I don't know, I guess about the best side of a couple of months.

So, what, you spent a couple of months patrolling that central section?

That central section, yeh.

You had, what, posts or just patrols?

Patrols. Oh, we were up there as companies, different companies, along the ridges of Pearl Ridge.

So I mean, what was the daily pattern when you were doing that? How did you live?

Too far back to remember. Oh, looking ...

What would you do?

... cleaning up your area, looking after your area. Making sure that, you know, even though we were deep penetrating patrols, we had to patrol our own area within a given radius.

(15.00) How did you go on patrol? What was the actual formation? How many men for a start?

Sometimes an officer; usually a sergeant or a senior NCO. A deep patrol would be an officer and sergeant and probably a platoon of ten or twelve fellahs. But then, if you were patrolling around your own area, there might be only three or four of you. You know, close patrol to your own area. I wasn't associated with any of those because we were on the ... behind the headquarters ... behind the rifle company with mortars. We were firing mortars over the heads, sort of thing, onto the enemy on the other side. Um ...

Did you have much reason to fire those mortars?

Not a lot, not a lot. Um, on three or four occasions, I suppose, up on Pearl Ridge we were engaged and we were given, you know, map references and ranges to fire on the enemy. You couldn't see whether you were hitting him or not because you were firing four or five, six hundred yards. But ... we ... the forward scout who was directing the f re would tell you whether you were on target or not.

And you didn't do any scouting yourself?

No. No, I didn't go out on any patrols at all.

So, when you were up there on Pearl Ridge what was the ... oh ... what was the food like? You'd brought it with you, hadn't you?

Yeh, oh, you had to bring ... no, your food was coming up daily. The cookhouses were in operation. You were getting good, solid army tucker, you know, the old meat and vegetables and that type of thing. You weren't getting fresh meat and fresh vegies sort of think but you were getting good, solid tinned tucker. Oh, it was all right.

What were you doing at night when you weren't standing to ready to fire your mortar?

Oh, sitting around smoking, having a ... you know, you couldn't get out into the open with a lighted cigarette sort of thing. You had to get into ... we were dug in up there. We were dug in in bunkers and fox holes ... not fox holes but a real bunker. We were sleeping four to a bunker and ... up on the ridge.

Okay, so you're not winning ... You're not losing the war, so there's not that demoralising experience but it's a fairly boring time in some ways?

Yes, it was a bit boring for ... I suppose. There was nothing to do but stand to and man your mortar and fire when told sort of thing. That's all it bloody was up there. I came down ...

No morale problems?

No, no. I came down, about a fortnight I think it was, before the rest of the battalion. We were firing one day and I got a bomb blast in the ear and I was partly deaf for a few weeks and I was on leave from up there – brought down from up there – back to base headquarters. Then the battalion came down later. They were relieved and we did more training, swimming, toughening up exercises, I suppose is what they're called, back at base before we went up to the northerly island, up to Pora Pora. That ...

Back at base; what was the base like?

Just a tent city, a tent town sort of thing. We were all under canvas.

The Japanese never tried to make any ...

No, no ... Oh, they tried to get through once or twice earlier in the piece through the perimeter but they were repulsed there. But they didn't try to get through at all after a while. And then the patrols up the north, they used to patrol, what, some five or six mile I guess north of where we were, until it was decided that the division would go up to the north end of the island to Buka Passage to Pora Pora and we went through up there.
It was pretty rough at times trying to carry mortars and ammunition and God knows what through with the mud up to your knees and being fired on from afar.

(20.00) What – you used to get intermittent Japanese fire, did you?

Yeh, yeh. Oh yes. We ... I can't think ... some river we had to cross, we crossed it and we'd only just got across and they fired on us with – we were just digging in, we'd been instructed to dig into deep fox holes – we had the fox hole half dug and they opened up on us with their mountain guns, their pom-pom-pom guns, and scared the hell out of us for a while.

What was the procedure when that happened?

Hit the deck. Hit the deck as fast as you can get down and as far as you can. But they fired on us for a couple of days up there with their mountain guns until – we had the Kiwi navy ... the Kiwi air force up there – I think they must have spotted their mountain guns and got rid of them. And we went on. Part of the battalion went round ... stuck to the coast and the other half went up round the ranges and then a pincer movement came in on a place called Pora Pora which was a more of a market area for the Japanese. They grew a lot of their staple and foods there and that was cleaned up. We held them at a spot there overlooking Buka Passage for a while until we were relieved again. Came back and prepared to go down south.

There were a number of casualties during this time, weren't there?

Yeh, yeh, quite a lot. Twenty-seven I think, up there.

How did that happen?

I don't want to know what did it. They were all ... there were twenty-one there that were killed in action or died of wounds, plus a lot of other wounded casualties besides that.

You can see some clusters in the dates: 13th April, 9th May, 12th May, 13th May.

13th May, that was a food supply train going up to Don Company who were forward at Pora Pora. We were up in the Buka Passage area and they were coming back. We were encamped about four or five hundred yards from the river when the supply train were coming back and they were ambushed as they came up the bank of the river. And these three fellahs, Billy Plaza and Jacky Holmes[1] and Freddie Barrett[2], they were meeting the supply train as they came up over the bank of the river and they were the first ones to cop the brunt of the ambush.

It was 13th May, was it?

Yeh, that was – when was Bill killed – 13th May.

There was also some action on the 12th I can see.

Yes, there was action previously on the 12th. There was action early in May – April and May – right through there. As you can see. There has been some action in May there up in that forward area apparently.

You weren't present when that happened?

No, I went up ... whether I'd been up before this or after this. I think I'd been up there ... I think ... in May ... No, I went up the day after that, about the 14th, I think it was, 14th May. We were up there, from memory now, about three or four days before the battalion pulled out and was just after Plaza and Barrett were killed. That's right.

(25.00) Right. And what about that earlier action in April, were you nearby there? ... 13th?

Yeh, I know. They were killed on the ... we were further back. These were fellahs that were going round the coast on [inaudible] like us. I can't think of the name of the ... Soraken plantation, that's right. There was an action up in the Soraken plantation where those fellahs got theirs and we were further back with Headquarter Company when that was happening.

What was the reaction when that happened? I mean, in a sense, you expect casualties but in another sense you don't.

Ah yes, in a sense you expect casualties I suppose. I don't think you feel any reaction until it was someone that you were close to; someone that you knew pretty well. And those fellahs that were ambushed there, Billy Plaza, he was a really good mate sort of

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[1] Should be Holmes, F.J.

[2] Should be Barrett, J S

thing because he was ... we'd trained together earlier in the piece and we'd come pretty close together when we were encamped at Alligator Creek and he came from that area. He came from over at Ayr which was not far from Alligator ... from Townsville and as mates you'd say, 'You'd better come over home for the weekend' if you got a weekend leave. And I'd been over and met his family sort of thing. That was a bit of a wrench, you know, when you hear that sort of thing. But someone else that you're not closely associated with, you think, 'Oh gee, that's bad luck', that seems to be the attitude. But when it hits with someone that you knew and someone that you're close to, you feel more of a wrench than you do with someone that you're not closely associated with.

What was the procedure for burials on the battlefield?

Oh bodies were sewn up in their blankets and brought back to headquarters, taken down to Torokina. They weren't buried on the spot there.

No, but I mean, did you get a chance to go to your friend's funeral?

No, no ... There's no such thing as going to a funeral sort of thing.

So what happened when the bodies went to Torokina?

I don't know.

You don't know where they're buried?

I don't know ... although, probably buried up there. I've got an idea ... I don't know whether they were all exhumed later on and taken back to Bomara – there's a big war cemetery at Bomana – whether they were taken back there or whether they were buried at Torokina, whether there's a war cemetery there or not, I don't know. I wouldn't have a clue.

Right. So you were in the north of Bougainville for quite a few days, weeks?

Yeh, we came back from there in about ... in May, the end of May, going back and we were preparing to go down south then. June, July. Getting over any tropical sores and that sort of thing – wounds ...

How were you preparing, training?

Oh yes, continuous training.

What sort of training?

Route marches, you know, and physical training, PT and that sort of thing.

Route marches are not that useful for jungle fighting, are they?

Oh, they're useful for toughening the muscles up – toughen you up, my word. And we were getting ready and being issued with new equipment where necessary, new gear. Getting ready to go down south when they dropped the big bomb.

Before we come to some of those subjects. At some periods in the war there were some questions about new equipment being issued just

before people went into combat. Did you get ... were you subjected to that? Given strange equipment?

Well, that happened in New Guinea I believe early in the war when we mentioned the Kokoda Trail. Troops were given the equipment there. I believe they were given, say, a Bren gun and they were given half an hour's instruction on it sort of thing. But, you know, the time I'm speaking of, no, we were just issued with new equipment, new gear that we were used to. New clothing, new boots. Not so much new rifles because you had your rifle right through. But, I suppose, the machine gunners were given new equipment but it was only equipment that they were used to or had had some training in.

END OF TAPE 1 – SIDE B

START OF TAPE 2 – SIDE A

Identification: This is tape 2, side 12 of the interview with Mr Norm Coady and the date is 16th March 1989. End of identification.

Right. What about things like Red Cross parcels and things like that, did you get them?

Ah yes, yes. We got Red Cross parcels and parcels from home pretty regularly. Very regularly in my case. I used to get a ... My old mum was a bit of a scrounger for me. She used to scrounge a bottle of whisky or a bottle of rum or a bottle of gin occasionally and shove it in a loaf of bread and send it up to me once a month sort of thing. That was a regular parcel from home and it was a regular treat that we had. Something to look forward to.

Mmm. What about the ... Were there chaplains and padres round about?

Yes, yes. We had chaplains and padres and the ... what was he ... well, actually a padre I suppose. The Red Cross ... the fellah that operated the Red Cross tent, Red Cross worker. Anyhow, they were always around the place. The Red Cross tent was always a good meeting place at night for a bit of a chat and a yarn and a sing-song around the piano sort of thing, a game of cards, a cup of tea.

This is at Torokina, or ...

This is at Torokina, yeh.

What about elsewhere?

Elsewhere the Salvation Army, they were always there, wherever we went. I remember going forward when we were going up north, going forward to – and we'd been through some mountain gun fire from the Japs and went through a patch of jungle and come round the bloody corner and here's the Salvation Army set up with a cup of tea and the billy going ahead of the army. What ... they didn't give a hang, they were there ...

This is where?

This is up in Bougainville.

Whereabouts, more particularly?

Oh, up the other side ... the top end of the Soraken plantation. And they were in advance of us sort of thing. And, you know, come round the corner and there's the Sallies there, 'Want a cup of tea, boys? Packet of cigarettes?'. They were out of this world the Sallies; they were beauties. And we had a Salvation Army chappie looking, you know, when we were back at Torokina, the Salvation Army tent and the old cup of tea or cup of coffee was always on there and a few tables and chairs where we could go and sit down in comfort and write – write our letters home, sort of thing. They were great.

What about personal problems, even if you didn't have many yourself, there must have been some people around, sometimes, who did. Who would they go to for help? I mean it might be a problem with someone back at home or something back at home or it might be something like that?

Usually go to their officers. Usually go maybe to their sergeant, their NCOs or to the officer in charge of the section that they were in. Explain the position to them. We always had access to go and see any of our officers. Any one that we wanted to speak to, you could go and speak to them, no problems whatsoever in that respect.

Relationships were good?

Oh yes, yes. From the old man down, you know, from the colonel down to the relationships between officers and men of our battalion was great; wonderful.

What sort of things, apart from the obvious organisational things involved in running an army and fighting a war, what sort of things would men and officers do together?

I don't follow you there.

(5.00 Well, I'm just saying ... I'm just actually asking about how the officers and the NCOs and the men would actually mix. For example, in a football match, would you ... who would be on the team? Would it just be NCOs and ordinary men or officers too or ...

Oh God no. There'd be a couple of officers. Yes, there were officers and men, NCOs mixed together just the same as any sporting side would mix together. No, in sporting events like that they were all in together. You know, we had one or two officers taking part in sport, you know, along with the men, they were all in together and it was Charlie, Dick, Bill, Harry – not 'Sir', or, 'Hey, you'. You know, it was just Christian names right through and great camaraderie there.

So Christian names on the sport's field. What about in the mess?

Oh no, no ... Away from the sport's field it was 'Sir', you know. You respect the title given to the officer whether he be a lieutenant, captain, whatever it might be. With NCOs and men it was generally Christian names sort of thing. You know, with a sergeant, you might sort of say, 'Sergeant' or you might call him Dick, Bill. It would depend on whether you were attached to him, whether you are in the same group,

same company, same platoon. But it was usually Christian names of the NCOs and men and the title were given to the officers or whatever it might be.

> What sort of things would occasionally cause trouble – actually, that could probably be recorded if you don't mind – what sort of things would occasionally cause trouble? I mean, by the sound of it, it wasn't very often that there were charges or discipline or anything like that but there must have been occasionally some things?

No, I can't recall any.

> What, never occurred? Never a case ...

I never had any problems.

> No, I'm not saying you but, generally, the people ...

Oh, anything that happened to someone else wasn't my affair. That wasn't my affair; I wasn't interested. You know, if somebody got into trouble, well, that was his own affair. He got out of it the best way he could. But I ... it didn't bother ... you didn't poke your nose into someone else's affairs. You mind your own business.

> Right. I mean, there weren't ... was there the occasional fight or anything like that?

Oh, it's the same as there is in the local pub if you have too many beers, you might get into a bit of a punch-up sort of thing. Bit hot tempered and you take it out on one another, have a few blows then you shake hands and say, 'Come on, have another beer mate'. Yeh, that seemed to be the attitude.

> What sort of things might cause an argument? Religion, politics ...?

I don't think so. I don't religion or politics came into it as far as the army was concerned. And ... most of the arguments, I would imagine, would come when you're on leave and you've had too much of that giggle water into you. Ah, it might come over someone borrowed money and hadn't paid it back or refused to pay it back sort of thing. ... I suppose, you know, in a lot of instances some bloke might doubt someone's ... whether their parents were married and that could develop into an argument. That's the sort of thing and politics and religion didn't come into it.

> What about theft?

Very, very ... I don't think I heard of any thefts in our battalion anyhow or among our group, our mob. You might have heard of someone knocking off a pair of socks or someone dudding someone in a game of two-up, you know, you'd done someone for a few bob but, no, no ... I don't know, I didn't come across any of it anyhow.

> Well this probably wasn't regarded as a offence but what about gambling – two-up? Well, beginning the business of offences ... was there much two-up and if there was could you describe the sort of situation that would develop?

Oh, there was a fair bit of two-up played, yeh. The same as in any battalion right through the army I think. Two-up was played everywhere. Ah ... what do you mean, what situation developed?

(10.00) I'm just trying to get an idea of ...

Usually the old sly game would be on on pay day. Ah, there was only actually one winner I suppose, it would be the bloke running the game. He's the only one that consistently was a winner. But, some blokes would do their money, others would win a few bob. There wouldn't be any arguments; 'It's just bad luck mate'. 'I'll have to borrow a quid till next pay day', sort of thing.

People allowed to run up credit with the person running the two-up game?

Oh, he'll lend the money, yes. He would lend them ... I think, if not, generally you'd ... What did you need money for anyhow except when you got leave ...

What, he might lend them ...

... except when you got leave you didn't need money.

He wouldn't lend money to gamble 'cause, I mean, that's the way of ...

That's right, he wouldn't lend money to gamble. But if you wanted any ... the only need for money that you had was if you were going and you got some leave and were able to get to a town or something and, you know, this was when we were back on the mainland, the only need would be if you got weekend leave and you wanted to go and have a few beers. Uh, in the islands you didn't need money. So if you've drawn your wages and was lost at a two-up game, the only need you'd have for anything would be for some toothpaste or shoe polish or a packet of biscuits or something from the canteen. So you'd go down to the canteen and the canteen sergeant and say, 'Look, I'll fix you up on pay day' boom, boom, boom, and come pay day you'd go and get your pay. You'd go and pay the canteen sergeant whatever you owed him – a few bob – and the rest was in your pocket again. And they lived like that in the army.

The areas that you were in, they weren't very densely populated with Papuan New Guineans were they?

No, no, no.

But you must have seen some?

Yeh. Mainly as porters in Bougainville. Majority of the natives we saw over there were used as porters. It wasn't until we got to Rabaul, after the war, that we saw more natives there and they used to come down with their produce once a week from there, down from the hills to a market place and try and sell some of their produce sort of thing, that you saw more of the villagers – the natives and their women and their children sort of thing.

You speak of Rabaul ... that's where you went after the bomb was dropped?

After the bomb was dropped, yeh. After the war was ... after the armistice had been signed.

Can you remember hearing about the bomb being dropped?

Oh yes, my word. On that fateful day in August, wasn't it?

Fifteenth.

Fifteenth of August.

Well, actually the bombs were dropped before that; 15th was when the war finished. I think the bombs were dropped a couple ...

The six of them ... sixth I think was the first bomb, wasn't it or ninth ...?

Mmm, something like that.

I think one was dropped on the 6th and one was dropped on the 9th.

Can you remember hearing the news?

Oh my bloody oath.

Can you describe it?

Yeh. The first one, when the first bomb was dropped, we got news that a bomb had been dropped on Japan – we didn't know where – and it was something that no-one had ever heard of before, it was an atom bomb and ...

Did you talk about what an atom bomb was? Did people sort of speculate?

Yeh, well, what the hell is a bloody atom bomb, you know. Because no-one had heard of an atom bomb and, you know, the news we got was that it could shorten the days of the war and, I don't know what the speculation was, it was ... whether it was ... We laughed at the idea that one bomb could, you know, could shorten the days of the war until a few days later the second one was dropped on Hiroshima ...

Nagasaki.

Nagasaki the second. Hiroshima was the first, wasn't it, Hiroshima and then Nagasaki. We got news that the second bomb had been dropped and Japan was suing for peace. It was a great jubilation and then a few days later, it was the 15th I suppose, we got news of the armistice of Japan and decided to call it a day. That was the day of great jubilation I suppose.

(15.00) What happened on that day?

I suppose everyone went bloody silly; we were dancing in the mud and the rain, most of us, and whatnot. And we were issued with ... we were issued with our fortnight's issue of beer. We got two bottle of beer a man. Some of the boys didn't drink and some of us finished up with three or four bottles of beer. But, we got the news in the afternoon that it was all over and we wouldn't be going down south, that the war was finished.

Did you see any Japanese surrendering?

No, I didn't go down. ... I forget who it was now.

... I've been at Mascot, it's very difficult.

No, the guard of the troops went down I think. I'm not sure whether it was under General Savige – Brigadier Savige at the time – that accepted the ...

Surrender.

The surrender from the Japanese commander on the island. He took down a guard with him. One of the boys was selected ... I don't know ... from line companies, not so much from the mortar company, but from the forward line company, I think it was, represented the guard that went down.

So how was the guard selected that went down with the brigadier?

I don't how it was selected, possibly from size, height and that sort of thing.

No, I thought you might have ... you're suggesting that they are elected as if there was some sort of ...

Oh no, no, no. I think on physique and build and height and that sort of thing. I wouldn't be sure how they were selected now. But they went down there, accepted the surrender from the Japanese commander and we sat around for a while and then we were told we were going over to Rabaul. We went over to Rabaul in, what, early September, October ... oh, September, early October I think we went to Rabaul and set up camp there and we were given the job of – along with others – of making sure that the compounds were built to hold the prisoners – prisoners-of-war – or Japanese surrender ... Japanese ... members of the Japanese army that had surrendered ...

Just before we go to Rabaul ...

... were brought across there and put into compound there and held there. Before we go to Rabaul, yes ...

When did you first see Japanese after the war? I mean, you'd been fighting them for four years, it must have been interesting to just see them.

Yeh, we didn't come into contact with them until we got over to Rabaul. Oh ... they were just ordinary Japanese soldiers, you know. What can you say about them?

Well, did you actually have any contact with them or were you doing something separate?

Oh, we had contact with them to the extent that we were putting ... clearing areas at Rabaul, we built a big parade ground – we built a big amphitheatre and a stage sort of thing – and we used Japanese labour to do it. And we would be given a team of workmen – maybe half a dozen – one Japanese that could speak a bit of English as an interpreter, usually an NCO and half a dozen – six or seven – workmen to do work and, you know, you'd have them building roads and doing odd ... cutting timbers and building seats for this big amphitheatre that we built up there. It was built with

Japanese labour. That was the only contact we had with them and didn't want any other contact. They were used as ... used around the kitchens and around the camp as labourer, you know, cleaning pots and pans and that type of thing.

What was their manner: surly, friendly?

Surly, very surly ... very surly. Well most of them and I don't think we wanted to be friendly towards them anyhow. We didn't have any friendly attitude towards them and their manner was very surly.

(20.00) There was something like 80,000 in Rabaul.

Yeh, we ... When we went to Rabaul ... and at the end of the war we w re told that our intelligence reported that it was something like twenty-three, twenty-four thousand Japanese on the island at Bougainville. And during the campaign there the Australian army and New Zealand air force was supposed to have accounted for some two to three thousand killed and wounded Japanese on the island ... which meant that, you know, there was possibly about twenty or twenty-two thousand left there. When the final count come I think there was somewhere in the vicinity of about 80,000. They were a hell of a long way out with their intelligence report. I think, if the war had gone one and we'd gone down south, if the bomb hadn't been dropped at that time, I think we could have been quite easily crushed down there, you know, by weight of numbers – by sheer weight of numbers would have crushed us. Thank goodness it didn't. Thank goodness the bomb dropped.

So, it was peace, you were living in Rabaul – obviously Rabaul's a mess, I've been there quite a few times, it's a very beautiful place ...

A very beautiful place, yeh. Glorious spot. Pity that harbour hadn't been dredged of all those boats and planes that went down in the harbour hadn't been cleared out of there and, you know, brought back to what it must have been like pre-war; a bea tiful harbour. I can't think of the name of it now. Not Empress Augusta [sic], was it?

The harbour?

Empress Augusta Bay?

I'm not sure.

I'm not sure myself now. But we were round on the other side, on the western side of the island, the nor-western side at a place called Talili Bay where we were encamped, just below what is known as Tunnel Hill where they ... the Japanese had driven into the tunnel, into the hillside there, driven their tunnels in there. We were down below there at a place called Talili Bay. It was one of the prettiest spots I think I've ever seen. Beautiful spot.

Tell me about the tunnels?

I only went into one or two. They were tunnels that you could drive five-ton trucks, ten-ton trucks into. They were so immense, so huge. They were full of equipment and supplies – God knows what. They went for hundreds of metres, driven into the side of the hill – the hillside. Tunnels everywhere. So when the Allied bombing took place, well, they'd just drive, go straight into the tunnels and wait there until it was all over

and go out again sort of thing. Like ants going into a nest apparently. But they were fully set up as workshops and God knows whatnot into those areas, into those tunnels.

And you saw a bit more of the Papuan New Guineans there?

Saw more of the natives in Bougainville ... in Rabaul than we saw over in Bougainville, yeh. Once we'd settled in there the natives got, you know, they would come down with their produce, with their bananas and their mangoes and their paw paws and their fruit, their yams and set up a market place sort of thing and ... they would barter among themselves – there'd be the coastal natives among the hillside natives – you know, for their produce. We'd occasionally get some fruit from them but you had to be a little bit careful I suppose with what you were eating.

Why, what was the danger?

Oh, you didn't know what danger might have been associated with produce that's grown there. There could have been any – what's the word – any agricultural problems, you know, with produce that's grown. Possibly ... they grew corn. You wouldn't eat corn unless ... naturally it had to be cooked. It would have to be cooked and boiled first. But, bananas were all right, you'd peel them. But, oh, we ate the fruit all right – paw paws, mangoes, there was no problem there – but we were told to be pretty careful of what we were handling, what we were doing with the produce that was coming down from the mountains.

(25.00) What were you doing ... I mean, it was now peacetime. How were conditions easing up in the army at this time?

Oh, there were no parades, no early morning parades. We did a bit of PT drill and that sort of thing just to keep us reasonably fit. There was no marches, no forced marches, no route marches and that sort of thing were out. We were just relaxing generally ... more or less and making sure that the prisoners-of-war, as they were then – the Japanese were doing all the work that had to be done – kick their backsides and make them do it.

What about Allied prisoners-of-war, people held by the Japanese? There were quite a number held in Rabaul, did you have any contact with them?

No contact with them at all, no.

No. So what were you told fairly early on – when were you told – about what was going to happen now the war had finished – you'd joined up to be part of the war, the war had finished – what were you told?

What were we told? We weren't told anything. We asked the question: 'When the bloody hell are we getting home?', 'How soon can we get home?'. That was the big question on everyone's lips: 'When are we getting home?', 'When can we get home?' and the Prime Minister then of the day came up to ... and visited different battalions, visited areas in the ... I forget where he came to Bougainville, yes, to Bougainville, and apologised – old Ben, Ben Chifley – apologised for not being able to get us home as soon as ... as early as we would like to get home but he said, 'Understand, our problem is shipping. We just haven't got the transport to get you home as soon as ...

but rest assured, as soon as we get the transport to get you home, we'll get you back' and we just had to sit and wait then. I came home in the ... January of '46. Was discharged on, I think, 16th January 1946.

How did you get home? Describe the way you got home?

Oh, God, I can't even think of the name of the boat now. ... No, it's got me. I came home by boat.

Well, describe the boat.

We had to come home on a ... we came home on a point system. You know, you build up so many points depending on your length of service, on whether you had dependants or not, and we came home on a point system. I just forget how many points I had but a lot of the battalion had gone home long before me. The boat – I forget now – it was the old *Kanimbla*, I think. Oh, it was a lovely trip. We left Rabaul and came down ... steamed down the north-east coast of Papua New Guinea and we pulled into Milne Bay area. I don't know whether it was to pick up some troops or what it was for – probably to pick up some troops from there – and we steamed down through, I think it was referred to as the China Straits, coming down onto the coast of Australia and through New Guinea and it was a beautiful sight coming down through all those little islands dotted on either side of the passage as we came down. ... It was most memorable because, as we came down the coast of Australia, we ran into the greatest number of dolphins I've ever seen in my life. The water was practically black with them and they seemed to be following the boat on either side and ahead of us for miles and miles and miles; followed us for hours. We steamed down and called into ... no, we came down inside the reef. By-passed Townsville and down to Brisbane. We were off-loaded at Brisbane.

END OF TAPE 2 – SIDE A

START OF TAPE 2 – SIDE B

Identification: This is tape 2, side 2 of the interview with Mr Norm Coady. End of identification.

Did you go into Brisbane?

No. We weren't ... We ... Some of the troops were off-loaded at Brisbane and we just steamed on and came down into Sydney Harbour. The greatest sight in the world coming into that harbour. That was it; it was beautiful.

So, demobilisation. Was there anything memorable about that experience?

No, the only thing I can remember is the fellow that asked me did I want to be discharged immediately or did I want to be boarded out. So I said, 'Let's get out of this bloody mad army. I'm sick of it'. And he signed my discharge and away I went - ta-ta, that was it.

Right. Where did you go?

Where did I go? I went out to Dubbo, went home to Dubbo.

On your first night there out of the army?

Oh, I stayed at my fiancee's place a couple of days, that's right. Oh, maybe for a week. Made arrangements to get married. Went back home to Dubbo, came back and got married. That was it.

What were you doing in those first few days? I mean, it was a new experience being out of the army.

Yeh, just walking around, just getting the feel of Sydney. I didn't know Sydney too well. I just, oh, I walked. I was at Bondi, Bondi Junction, I just walked around getting the feel of being free without being told what to do sort of thing, you know. Looking for some civilian clothing. That was a problem in those days; trying to get some civilian clothing. Although we were given ration tickets – ration cards – for clothing, it was ... clothing was hard to come by.

What about work?

Yeh, I ... I didn't want to go back to the country. I thought I'd stay here in Sydney and see if I can get work. I looked around. The only job I could get was over in North Sydney. I was travelling from Bondi Junction to North Sydney by tram ... tram and bus I think it was in those days. Put up with that for a couple of weeks and then I got sick and tired of the travel. I stashed that job and I got another one. I'd worked for a week ...

What sort of job was that first one?

Oh, it was just a general – a little grocery store, a little chain store. Ah, I got a job in the delicatessen down on Wynyard ramp and worked there for two or three weeks and then I heard of another one close to home up at Bellevue Hill and I took that. About three weeks and I was, you know, generally unsettled. I didn't know what I wanted to do and at the same time I was suffering from malaria and I was fighting malaria back. Anyhow, I got ... I bumped into a commercial traveller whom I'd known previously pre-war in the country and he suggested I go and have a look at Grace Bros, that there was a vacancy at Grace Bros. And I said, 'God, in Broadway?', he said, 'No, at Bondi Junction'. Well, I was living at Bondi Junction. I went and applied for the job there and got that job and finished up staying thirty-six years with them. End of story.

(5.00) Right. So you didn't take advantage of any – obviously – any of those training schemes that were available to veterans?

No, no, no. It was ... it was kept, as far as I was concerned, it was kept fairly quiet in those days. I don't know whether it was, later on, whether it was made, you know, more easily available but by then I was too busy trying to work myself into a good position and thinking about having a family sort of thing, you know, and I wasn't interested in these training schemes.

The war was a major experience. How did it affect your life subsequently? What did it mean for you?

Not a great deal to me because it got me away from ... living as a, you know, a country ... a fellow brought up in the country with country ideas, it broadened my ... image on life, generally, I think. I think the ...

Attitudes to people?

The army life to me was four of the greatest years of my life. I enjoyed every minute of it. If they'd accept me now at seventy-two I'd be back in tomorrow.

What about the Japanese, the people you'd been fighting for four years? How do you feel about them ... well, how did you feel about them at the end of the war and how do you feel now?

I suppose I've mellowed a bit towards them over the years in so far as this generation is concerned. But generally towards the Japanese I don't feel any different today than what I did in 1946. There is only one good Jap and that's a dead bastard. ... But this generation, they're like our own generation – our own children – I suppose. They can't be blamed for what their parents did.

You never felt that they were conscripts who just had to do what they were told by the government?

No, no, no, I didn't. We never ever thought that. They were the enemy and we were going to fight them sort of thing, you know. I don't know whether they were conscripted or not. But subsequent history showed they were bloody fanatics. No, but, you know, you mellow towards them but I think, you know, they couldn't beat us with guns and force in '46 but they're beating us with money today.

END OF TAPE 2 – SIDE B

END OF INTERVIEW