



TRANSCRIPT OF ORAL HISTORY RECORDING

Accession number	S00712
Title	(NX13015) McKay, Robin Sydney (Lieutenant)
Interviewer	Connell, Daniel
Place made	Alstonville, NSW
Date made	29 July 1989
Description	Robin Sydney McKay,`M' Special Unit, interviewed by Daniel Connell for The Keith Murdoch Sound Archive of Australia in the War of 1939-45

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Tape identification: This is an interview with Mr Robin McKay, I'm Daniel Connell and the date is 29th July 1989. End of identification.

Right, well, if we could start the story before the war. If you could tell me where you were born and where you grew up.

I was born in Melbourne, Victoria, and went to school in Victoria, in various places. And in 1935 I decided to go up to New Guinea, even though I was young, so I put my age on several years and obtained a job with Burns Philp. I had a sister who was up in the Surprise Creek in the goldmines at that stage, hence my wish to get up there. So ...

A sister. I mean, by herself? Or she was married to someone? Or what.

Oh, she was married, yes, yes. She was married to a fellow up on the goldfields, where there were goldfields. However, I walked into Burns Philp and got this job with them by putting my age on, and went to Kokopo in New Britain onto a plantation there for several months as an overseer, then I was down the south coast of New Britain as manager of a plantation in Wide Bay called Kiep. I think I was about seventeen or eighteen then. And so on, until the war came. And when war came, I was relieved and came down and joined up as a reinforcement to 6th Division.

Just before.... What sort of work did your father do?

My father was a boat builder, but he had died many years before.

Right. And when you went to school, you went to a private school? a public school?

Yes, I went to a private school in Melbourne for some period.

Which one?

I went to Wesley for a brief period. Apart from that it was mainly ordinary public schools, yes.

Okay, so war came, you were relieved. At your request? Or that was ...?

At my request. They relieved me eventually. It took some months to do it. So I couldn't enlist in New Guinea. There was a draft called up at that stage in New Guinea, NGX one to sixty were their numbers. However, I couldn't get a relief, so I followed them down and enlisted in Australia and joined as a reinforcement to a unit called 6th Division Reconnaissance Regiment, which later became 6th Division Cavalry Regiment and at a later stage, much later in the war, became the 6th Division Cav (Commando) squadrons. So I went overseas in ... er, June or July I think it was, July 1940, and I was held up in hospital for a while so I didn't join my regiment until January '4l. I was in the desert with them for some time. We came back, and then went ... when most of the division went to Greece we were sent back up again as a reconnaissance regiment for the British 7th Armoured Division, the idea being to try and break through and relieve Tobruk because Rommel at this particular stage was just trying to

... just containing them, and had ... the 'Benghazi Handicap' so-called was over and they were ... the troops were caught in Tobruk. We had several weeks of running around with the British and then we were withdrawn and ...

What was it like being an Australian unit in close combination with the British?

Oh, very good indeed, very good indeed. We had no troubles whatsoever, no troubles. In fact I do recall at one particular stage when we were moving up and there were a mob of British moving back - I think they were ancillary units of some sort - and they pulled up and said, 'Who are you?' and we said, 'Australians', and we were very proud to hear them say 'Well, thank God for that!' (laughing). However, how much they meant it I don't know. However, we fooled around, up backwards and forwards, moving all day and rendezvousing with our B echelon for supplies and so forth at night.

(5.00) In fact, one night we missed them - wrong map reference or something - and we were there all next day without any petrol, couldn't move a thing, in laager formation, and just hoping and praying that a German column wouldn't come our way. And that particular night - it was just before dawn - we were standing completely still and a German armoured column clanked past at about two hundred yards difference. However, we kept very very quiet and, thank God, they went on their way. However, we were then withdrawn from that area, and more British troops came in and we were sent back and formed up to go into Syria. We went into Syria as a ... in three sections; one of our squadrons went along the coast, and another squadron went in at the central Merdjayoun sector, and the third squadron - which was mine - was held in reserve. Well, the squadron that went into Merdjayoun they were complet... very soon lost all their vehicles, they were all knocked out completely, and we were sent in to relieve them. So we were there at Merdjayoun, the central sector, until that was consolidated and we moved over to the coast. And then we were in at the last, Damour, and up to Beirut. Incidentally, the squadron who were completely knocked out, they captured a lot of French horses and we got saddlery and equipment from the Yeomanry in Palestine, British Yeomanry, and they were sent on horse around looking for artillery positions. And it was the only time Australians were ever used mounted in this last war. They called them ... they were known officially as 'the Kelly Gang'. And they did quite a good job, you know, spotting artillery positions and so forth - and they enjoyed themselves immensely, I will say. However, after ...

Were you in that group?

No, I wasn't in that, no. The squadron that was knocked out were horsed in that.

What was it like fighting the French? I mean people ... it's a bit of a unknown war, that one.

Well, yes, it was quite a mixed up thing. The fort at Merdjayoun, it was held by the French Foreign Legion. There were native troops who would desert at the drop of a hat. They were only too happy to - the Senegalese and various people like that - they'd come over at the drop of a hat and love it all. But the Foreign Legion they fought to the end, fought right to the end.

And there was nothing wrong with them as far as fighters are concerned. And then when the ...

What sort of warfare was it? Was it ...

Well, they were in entrenched positions. It's very rough country where it was fought, valleys, and ravines and what have you, and prepared fortifications and things like that. And it was just a matter of ... well, their artillery ... we had the range on them for artillery, they had 77s I think it was, and our 25s could just outrange them by a few hundred yards. So the artillery boys would sit out of range and do what damage they could. Their air force gave us a lot of trouble for the first week or so, a lot of trouble. The trouble ... the main trouble was that they had Hurricanes on Lend-Lease from Britain and had Glenn Martin Maryland bombers. Now the French cockade is red, white and blue, same as ours but with a reverse one - I forget which it was now, blue in the centre or red in the centre - but when you saw the planes, recognised the planes, you didn't know which they were, and they were quite a damn nuisance. So they had command of the skies, really, for the first fortnight or so of the campaign and played merry hell with us. And then No. 4[1] Squadron I think it was, Bobby Gibbes, his squadron, No. 4 Squadron, they came in with a plane called the Tomahawk. That's right, it was the forerunner of the Kittyhawk, Tomahawk. And they shot the French air force out of existence within a few days. What they didn't strafe and destroy on the ground, they shot out of the sky, and from then on that was the finish of the French air force. So things weren't so bad after that. Then at the cessation of hostilities we'd had a victory march through Beirut, and then we were stationed overlooking Vichy French camps and various places, and my unit were on the heights above a place called ... aah, er, ... it's just up the coast from Beirut and it's the site now of one of the biggest casinos in the world ... er, what the devil is its name, I forget now. However, there were a lot of Vichy French camped down at the bottom; we were supposed to watch them and contain them while they made up their mind whether they'd join de Gaulle or go back to France.

(10.00)Well, most of them went back to France, they preferred to go back to France than join de Gaulle because they reckoned he'd split France and so forth. And the only other thing about that area was the ... they had Vietnamese - or Indo-Chinese I'm sorry - Indo-Chinese troops there running their transport, their ASC transports. And the coast road from Beirut up to Tripoli at times goes along very precipitous cliffsides and so forth. And they tried to bluff our drivers, they tried to run them off the road. Well, after a few of their trucks went off the road, they called it quits. But there was a bit of an unofficial war there and quite a few trucks went over too, but I will say our drivers won out on it.

Did you see any of that?

I saw the remains of two, just at the end of a convoy, and when we went past there were two of these French trucks down the bottom. And then of course we just did the usual army style of hang around and hang around, and then Japan came into the war and so we were ... eventually came back in the beginning of '42. That's right, yes, early '42.

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[1] Squadron Leader R.H. Gibbes was in No. 3 Squadron.

The return to Australia was something that caused ... behind the scenes as most of us know now, there was quite a lot of argument going on between Curtin and Churchill about what should happen to the 6th and 7th Divisions. Did you know any of that at the time?

Yes, we knew it, we knew it. And I would say that the general feeling amongst our people was that we did not want to come back to Australia. We would have preferred to have kept on and had a stake in the European war, and we all thought - oh, not all of us - but, talking these things over amongst ourselves, we thought that probably a division of Indian troops would have been a damn sight more use in the jungles of New Guinea than we, who knew nothing at all about jungle warfare. Just, you know, this sort of thing. We weren't happy with leaving there, we thought that the ... and we didn't know how serious the Japanese were going to b anyway, really.

Was that a view you'd changed in a few months? Or not? Or do you still hold that view, or what happened to it?

I think that, as I say, a regiment or two of Gurkhas or somebody like that would have been absolutely invaluable and a damn sight more efficient than we were for a long while. See, we had to learn in New Guinea, we had to learn right from the word go. And that is why, you know, anything about jungle training or jungle warfare sort of stopped in Malaya, with the troops, with the exception of people like Gordon Bennett who has been much, much criticised, but all our training and all our information came ... Gordon Bennett was the man who co-ordinated it all and impressed it on all our early training before we went to New Guinea was based on Gordon Bennett. And that was sort of a mix ... I don't know whether I should be talking about this anyway, that's bloody politics.

No, no, that's fine. Politics is an important part of it.

Mmm. But then ...

Particularly political feelings you had at that time, I think are very important.

Well, I suppose some troops thought that Gordon Bennett deserted. Others of us thought that he'd done the right thing and brought the information out that was required, definitely required for us. I never ever knew until right almost the end of the war - I was in Sydney for a short time and I met some of the fellows who were rescued from that ship that was torpedoed with the prisoners-of-war on, they may have been being taken from the Dutch East to Singapore in the last year of the war - remember that? - and they were torpedoed and sunk and there were some survivors picked up. Well, I met a bunch of these fellows once and I said 'Righto, what did you fellows think of Gordon Bennett's actions?' And they said 'We're behind him a hundred percent. He didn't go until it was a case of every man for himself, and we knew he took the information out.' So I said 'Well, that's fair enough. If his own men support it.' In fact, we always thought that the *Australian Women's Weekly* was the crucifier of Gordon Bennett, stirring up hatred, and 'our boys back there, and he gets out!'. But there's reasons for it, sound reasons.

Right. So, just coming back to your own experiences. Can you remember - well, I'm sure you can remember - can you describe the trip back? I mean the ...

Yes, we came back on the USS *West Point*, a huge American ... which was the SS *America* and this was its first trip as a troop ship. And I think there were about, oh, five or six thousand of us on it. And it was ten days from Port Tewfik to Fremantle.

Port where?

Port Tewfik. On the coa... on the end of the canal, Suez.

Remember how to spell it?

Yes, T-e-w-f-i-k, Port Tewfik.

(15.00) The spelling's for the transcriber ...

(Laughs) Nothing much about that trip except that I lost a lot of money at blackjack. Oh, we came to a place ... we were offloaded at Adelaide - that's right, we called at Fremantle, we didn't get off - we were offloaded in Adelaide and taken up to Tanunda, and billeted in private homes which was absolute heaven, so much so that, although people wanted to get back to see their families and so forth, I don't know that anybody went AWL at all, it was so wonderful.

I've interviewed some of the German people in Tanunda, and they remember that as a favourable experience and they don't have anything negative to say about the soldiers. But some of them felt that they were being punished as a German town, because ... you know, that the selection of Tanunda was in a sense a test for them.

And this is quite so, too. Because there was a ... a lot of Lutheran missionaries from New Guinea were sent there during the war, and the Lutherans were not a very in... the German Lutherans and the American Lutherans were two different mobs up there, and the German Lutherans were definitely a little pro-Hitler. They'd have Nazi symbols and things like that in their church, and they weren't very popular. Also, they were behind the eight-ball a bit because Von [sic] Luckner had, just prior to the war, been hosted and feted by Tanunda people. And when we arrived there, they were dead scared, they didn't know what was going to happen. But within a week we were quite civilised, we got on perfectly well and we had a wonderful time with them all, and they were all good, and they relaxed. But I can understand them saying ... you getting the impression from them that they were being tested - I think they were.

Right. So, how long were you there?

Oh, only about a month, five weeks, something like that. As I say, nobody ever raced off to go home, they enjoyed themselves there. I remember the local bank manager loaned me his car, a Hillman, he couldn't get petrol tickets anyway but I got plenty of army petrol. And somebody

else loaned me their golf clubs. And we had a glorious time. We'd go out and pick grapes - it was harvest time, that's right - we'd go out and pick grapes just for a bit of exercise, and tour round the vineyards. It was a lovely thing. And then, that was okay, we then went on leave. And then we went to - after the great 19th February in Darwin, when everything panicked up there - we were sent up there when they were reinforc... or started to, decided they would stabilise that area. And we went up and, as I say, I spent ten months on the Daly River which was very very nice and very pleasant but you were in a backwater as far as the war was concerned.

What did you do on a daily basis?

Up on the Da... ? Oh well, we used to, we were ... took our turns out on the outposts on the Daly River. I was mapping, doing mapping most of my time, mapping the area, because there was only very very primitive Lands Department maps of certain areas at that stage. So I spent most of my time mapping it.

A question I should have asked you earlier. When you joined the army, what were you trained to do?

I was a plantation overseer or manager in New Guinea, that's all I can do.

What did the army train you to do?

Ah well, I was a driver-operator, and I was a gunner, and I went through various things. And then I became an intelligence ... an intelligence corporal, for a long while. Just army field intelligence, nothing very high up at all. And then, as I say, I got a transfer because of my local knowledge. I'd applied to get out and do something in New Guinea, because we were all fed up with the Northern Territory, you know, we were just fed up and stagnated. So I was transferred, and claimed actually by a mob called ANGAU, to go to New Guinea; and when I got there I was seized by a fellow I knew very well who was organising this Mosstroop thing, so I was transferred into Mosstroops.

Where did the name come from?

Oh, well, the moss troopers of Scotland, you know, the brigands and irregulars in the forests, the moss troopers. There was a fellow called Trappes-Lomax out from England, from MI5, who was doing most of the organising of it. Hell of a good bloke, and I became his personal assistant for a while, while we were organising the thing.

Could you describe the aims of it? What were the aims?

Oh the aims were to establish ourselves inland behind the ... well, up the Sepik River and up the Ramu River. Now, the Japanese held all the coast; so instead of attacking them on the coast the idea was to get in behind and attack them from inland. So there were several columns to be established and work from inland to the coast instead of landing on the coast. That was mainly what it was. And that was ... and to foster guerrilla warfare and partisan warfare, that was the whole idea. And to arm and train and lead natives.

(20.00) So the idea was that it was basically going to be an operation that involved Papua New Guineans providing the bulk of the troops, and Australians the officers and the NCOs?

I think it was ... yes, to organise bands. It wasn't the main ... the main thing was we were ... we had a large European establishment, it was quite big. It wasn't ... it was a different thing to what we're going to get onto later, the 'M' Special and the coast-watchers. It was a more active thing than the coast-watchers, it was ... apart from arming bands, it was also to go in and attack, yourselves, you know, Europeans.

And what ... I mean, when you say ... how large? If you could just give me an idea of the numbers.

Ah, ... well, of course they weren't fully organised before everything was sort of knocked out. We were jumped, other parties were jumped, a fellow who was in command of the main section headquarters up in the Yellow River proved to be incompetent, and, you know, used to get himself full at night and then make his signals for the day. So they wiped the whole thing.

But there would have been, what, a hundred Europeans involved?

Oh, there would have been at least a hundred Europeans involved. Well, in our party there were - our little party which just landed and walked out - there was about ... there was ... one, two, three, four, five, eight, nine ... ten of us, yes. Yes, that's right.

So, okay, so that's the aim of it, that's the size of it. Could you - you know, just coming back to your own career within it - could you describe what happened to you, in a bit more detail?

Uhuh. Well the party I was with were landed by Catalina in a place called Lake Yimas, on the lake.

How do you spell Yimas?

Y-m-a-s. [sic] Four ... one, two, three - I'm just counting the Europeans - I think it was about seven or eight Europeans were landed one day. Then I went in the next morning, with the next plane, with the natives ... one, two, three, four, five ... six natives, and all our cargo and equipment. And that was on the second day of landing. So we're trying to organise ... we had been equipped with these folding canoes, folding boats, you know, that you pull out, and we had ... trying to organise all this gear which we were the ... the base, going to be the base camp for further parties to follow us. So there was an awful lot of stuff there, food and ammunition and arms and the whole lot. And we were working getting this stuff up the hill from the shore of the lake, when we saw several canoes coming across the lake. Well, we had a fellow with us who was an old miner who had just come in for a couple of days, just to show us around the lake and get us going with the first native villagers, he knew them very well and he swore they were a hundred percent loyal.

What, he'd been hiding in the jungle? Or did he fly in with you?

He flew in with us. He had been in, until just beforehand, he'd just walked out. A fellow called Bill MacGregor. And then he sort of flew in for a couple of days just to see us on our way. Well (laugh), so when these natives appeared in the canoes, he said 'Ah, this is good. They're coming over, we don't even have to go to them.' So he jumped into one of these canoes with a native paddler, and they paddled across, and he was yelling out 'Me master Mackee come back, me master Mackee come back!' And up behind every paddler popped a Nip with a rifle - they'd been hiding down in the canoe. So old Bill, he came back at the rate of knots, very much so, and we waited till they were close and then we opened fire on them, and eventually finished up killing them all and moving the rest of the stuff up the hill. And then there were more canoes ...

> Could you ... a bit more detail there, if you don't mind. So he stood up, and the Japanese stood up. But did the Japanese fire? Or what happened?

Oh yes, yes. As I say, they were paddling across the lake, a canoe was coming, paddling across the lake, so ... and behind these paddlers, crouched down hidden, was a Jap. So they up and started firing at him, you see. So he came back ... and, oh, I don't know how many Japs there would have been in those first two canoes - probably eight or ten, something like that, and the same amount of paddlers. Anyway, as I say, they were all done over.

> Was that a fairly easy battle, or a hard battle?

Oh, one-sided. They couldn't shoot very well standing up in a canoe, but they were soon in the water anyway. The idea was to just fire ... get rid of them all, that's all, from then on. And, you know, they were hiding behind the bloody canoes and so forth, you were more or less shooting the canoes to pieces to get them.

(25.00) Anyhow, one of the more unsavoury things of them was, after the firing had died down about half an hour or so, the crocs came up - and did they play merry hell with those bodies! The lake was just like a boiling maelstrom with these bloody crocs fighting over the bodies. However, some more canoes appeared on the other end of the lake, it was getting quite dark - or not dark, but getting towards evening at that stage - and we had Bren guns and they're very efficient at a reasonably long range. These people would have been about 800 or 900 yards away I suppose. So I was in charge down on the beach, and I sent word up to the officer in charge of the party to open fire. And he said 'No, don't fire, they might retaliate!' - which I thought was the most queer thing I'd ever heard in my life in the army. However, I can see his point because we were there stuck in the middle of nowhere, and anybody who got wounded of course you had to carry him out and so forth, and we couldn't accomplish anything very much anyway. So we just decided ... they couldn't contact Moresby, so we just loaded up at the night and moved off.

> Why couldn't you contact Moresby?

Oh well, radio conditions, you know, weren't suitable, it didn't come off. So we packed up, and we were supposed to pack and carry as much food as possible. And the two signallers we had, they were carrying a wireless set. And another lad was carrying a Bren gun - which he insisted on carrying all the way out, anyway. And so we moved off. Well, it turned out that in

the dark people had picked up the wrong packs and there wasn't much food anyway when we found ourselves next morning. So we just went up and down ridges and so forth, trying to break our way through to a path, or a track, which went up to the highlands, to Wabag.

> Well, I mean, you were already ... what, you'd already made a decision to retreat rather than stay in the area?

Oh yes, yes. This was the instruction, was to retreat, get out. You could do nothing, we'd lost our stuff, we were all by ourself - it's not much good showing you on the map here ...

> When you say you'd lost your stuff ... so, in other words, the Japanese had inflicted quite a few ... quite a bit of damage in that battle?

No, no, no. But the point was the place was crawling with Japs. You see, I should say that when these later Japs appeared and were seen on the other side of the lake, they were there in large quantities. Now, we had nothing or anybody within days ... several weeks walk, and they knew we were there. So the whole thing was to get out before they cut our retreat to the mountains. We could accomplish nothing more, all the surprise had gone - you see, we were to get ourselves established, and then move down and do our operations when we had our lines of communication and our base and that all worked out. That was all ruined because we'd been jumped as soon as we landed. So that it was a case of it being quite useless to stop there, we couldn't have accomplished anything, and we'd have inevitably been rounded up. So the idea was to get through before they could cut us off from getting back up into the mountains. Which we did. And walked and walked and walked, and starved and starved and starved, and eventually got up ... oh, you don't want to know about ... it's just a tale of bloody walking, and rivers and things.

> No, actually ... No, well, not perhaps the specific ... you know, what you did day by day, but to describe the type of terrain you were going through.

Oh well, I can soon do that. We were ... in these rivers, the tributaries of the Sepik where we were at the start ... we were following them up to get up into the mountains. And of course the higher you went, the more raging the torrents, and the harder to cross and all the rest of it. And we came to a thing called the Maramuni River, which ran at an angle of about thirty degrees, it was a terrifying thing, you could hear it from miles away. And that was ... the Japanese had got there before us, where this track crossed the river, and they'd been waiting for us, but we were so long finding the confounded thing that they'd given up and they'd gone back. And they had cut ...

> How did you know that?

By their tracks and marks and their camping area and so forth. They'd just gone back within hours of us getting there. And they had cut the rope - when I say rope, vine - the vines, the vine bridge which went over this river. So the only way we could get across, one of us was a very, very strong swimmer, we tied vines around his waist and he jumped into the stream as high up as he could, and managed to get across to the other side before it went into waterfalls and things, with this rope around him, and then we pulled bigger ropes over we all got over on it. And from then on, ... well, we'd managed to get into communication - that's right, we'd

managed to get into communication - we had an air drop, they dropped us food. And then a fellow had come down from Mount Hagen, was sent down from Mount Hagen with a large line of natives to find us, and we eventually ... he found us, and so we had carriers, we had the lot, all we had to do was to walk to Mount Hagen then. And we went over ...

END TAPE 1 SIDE A

BEGIN TAPE 1 SIDE B

Tape identification: This is the second side of the first tape of the interview with Mr Robin McKay. End of identification.

Sorry, if you could just give me that last little bit again, the ... you were describing ... going back a little bit ... you had carriers ...

Ah yes, well, carriers were brought down to us by an officer, he brought a lot of carriers down, and from then on we didn't have to carry anything and we had food, so it was quite a simple operation. The only other thing I can think of there is that the American air force had dropped parachutes with cargo and equipment, ostensibly for us, and they finished up.... No, no, no, sorry, that was one lot. One lot finished up at Merauke, they lost their way, and dropped it somewhere near Merauke. The other ones had dropped it in our area, and the natives in this area had grabbed everything of course, and when we got to the area where this drop had occurred, with these carriers that had been brought down to us, we - with two interpreters - yelled out across this gorge to these people to bring in the stuff that had been dropped from the air and we'd pay them well. And they sent back 'Come and get it, if you're game!' Well, what we wanted mainly were boots because, you know, we were barefooted by this time, we badly needed boots. So we spent a day or two trying to get across there, and these people had all just disappeared into the bush when we got across to the place, and we eventually found our boots in a vegetable ... you know, in a native gardens area, and then we were right for boots. So we - salutary lesson - we burnt down their houses, said 'Blow them! Let 'em build them again!' And from then on, apart from that, it was just a nice holiday's walk into Mount Hagen.

You mentioned earlier that it was a time ... you were very short of food in the early days. How long did that go on for, on that walk?

Oh, it was about ... we were weeks getting out of the thing. And this is of quite good interest, too ...

How many weeks?

Uh! I'd have to look up my notes.

Just approximately.

Oh, it would be three weeks, a month, before we got carriers. It would have been a good month. But we found that all we could find to eat was sago, native sago. And we'd stop, we'd

cut down a sago palm, and we'd wash the thing through a singlet, straining the thing, and as much of that as you ate, you could eat and eat and eat it, but it gave you no strength whatsoever, gave you no strength at all - because we had no salt. And the salt deficiency, we tried ... there were certain leaves we knew of, we boiled those and made a sort of a soup out of them. We had a snake, one time, we got a python, that was a red letter day. And then we had a ... oh, a large bird, I can't think of the name of it now, between about ten of us, another day.

A muruk?

No, it wasn't a muruk, oh, no, no, no, no. It wasn't even a hornbill, it was a ... a goura pigeon, that's right, a goura pigeon. Uhm, ... and things, you know, things were mighty tough. Well then we got a drop. As I say, the planes found us and we got a drop and we had salt. And you could eat salt ... I remember getting a handful of it and just eating and eating and eating it until I was sick. You'd get one grain too much and you were sick. But from then on you could feel the strength coming back, and as long as you had salt you got strength. But without salt of any nature ... we tried ash, we tried all sorts of things, nothing ... we were still weak, and you could eat sago until the cows came home but without salt it was no good to you. However, as I say, this was ... we were going backtracking, and going backwards and forwards, but eventually this fellow came down with the carriers and we were all in communication. And from then on everybody was fine.

(5.00) And so, what happened? You got to Mount Hagen.

We got to Mount Hagen. We were flown out by an American DC3, or C47, or whatever they called them in those days, flown out, to Lae. And we came into Lae just when they had the first ... they'd just taken the Lae area, the Nadzab area, and I think there was one strip operating at Nadzab that we came in on. It was right at the start of it. And ... now what did we do then?

Well, just before you go further than that. I mean, Mosstroops, the whole plan, what did you find out about the business of cancelling it? Did you find out anything about the discussions that had gone on?

Ah, not ...

At a debriefing, or whatever?

Well, I remember ... we were all debriefed on ... you know, our ideas on things. But, no, I think they just realised it was one of those things that had gone awry, it hadn't been properly planned, the right personnel were not in command, and the whole thing was ... this fellow from MI5 in London, he'd gone back to England, and it was just wiped. See, a lot of those personnel were 'Z' Special, they went back to 'Z' Special. The others were some ANGAU people, they went back to ANGAU, others were picked up all round the place and most of those fellows went to ANGAU. In my case, I got seconded to ... or by 'M', 'M' Special, because of my New Britain knowledge, and then I joined 'M' and I was with 'M' for the rest of the war.

Right. So, you arrived in Nadzab. What's the process of getting into 'M' Special? I mean, first of all, did you know about 'M' Special? Did you ... what happened? How did you come together?

Oh well, the point is ... actually we weren't at Nadzab, we went back to Port Moresby. And at Port Moresby we were debriefed and so forth. And then I knew vaguely these things were going on, hat 'M' Special did exist. My prewar boss was in it and so forth. And I just found out where they were and went and saw them, and they said 'Oh yes, we want you straight away.'

So what was Port Moresby like? I mean, you've got all the regular troops; but I get the picture of these rather shadowy groups that no one quite understands also being around the place.

Oh yes, yes, they're all there, yes. They're all ... you know, FELO and ...

What's FELO?

Far Eastern Liaison Office. Somewhere here I've got this list of those things. See, Allied Intelligence Bureau consisted of 'Z' Special, or Services Reconnaissance Department, and they were body-snatchers and people like that, you know, who take things and blow things up and what have you. 'M' Special, which was a development from the coast-watchers, which was purely observation and intelligence and then later guerrilla warfare. Then there was FELO, Far Eastern Liaison Office, they were involved - I've got a pamphlet of theirs here, I'll show you later - they were involved in dropping leaflets, rec... I don't know what they had in those days, but recorders, you know, and they'd arrange radio broadcasts or drop in with whatever they had in the way of equipment and tapes, in those days - purely propaganda. Then there was SIA, Services in Asia, that was undercover work on the China coast and around there. There was NEIFAS[2], that was the Dutch one, Netherlands East Intelligence Service, that was Indonesia, working. Then there was the Philippines Section, American Philippines Section. They all came under Allied Intelligence Bureau, in the broad section. 'Z', I know, was directly linked with MI5 in ... ah no, no, SOE, Serv..., no, Special Services in Europe, which ... it actually all came under MI5. But they were the British thing. Ours, N, was navy controlled being a direct inheritance from the old coast-watchers. I don't know sort of how the others helped, because the Americans had the Philippines thing, and the Dutch had the NEIFAS. SIA, ... I don't know, they would have been British I think, British or navy, I'm not too sure which, control and derivation. But they're all loosely grouped under Allied Intelligence Bureau.

Did they mix together very much?

Ah yes, yes. We used to have the propaganda people drop in occasionally with us. And then we have done things in combination with 'Z' and 'M'.

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[2] Means NEFIS - Netherlands East Indies Forces Intelligence Service.

(10.00) What sort of things would you do in combination with 'Z'?

Er, well, in Wewak, for instance, when they ... 'Z' did a job over in an island off Wewak, which most of them were killed in, but they had some of our people with them there, showing them in and introducing them to the, you know, local knowledge things. We had some Americans attached to us, a couple of Americans in the Solomons. We had navy personnel, air forc personnel and army personnel, all mixed up.

> What significance was your old unit in all of this? I mean, I've interviewed a number of people and, you know, they've all come from different sorts of places. Uhm, the original units that they were seconded from or connected with, they no longer had any day-to-day significance? What was effectively happening?

Ah well, you were transferred from that unit, so that ... it might have been your mother unit. See, my discharge is in the name of 6th Div Cav, 6th Division Cavalry, because I spent most time with it, probably, over the years. But you were just transferred and that was it. Actually my original unit, they became 6th Division Cavalry Commando Unit, and they were in the Wewak and in that campaigns, but I'd had nothing to with them from the time I left them until after the end of the war.

> Okay so, you're in Moresby, and you went and saw your old boss and he said 'Yes, fine, okay, you're going to join 'M' Special', and ... well, what did you know about 'M' Special when you joined?

Oh, I knew what they were doing, they were poking round the bush, you know, and on intelligence and what have you. I realised what the idea was. We had a training camp at a place called Beaudesert - you know Beaudesert with the pool, do you? - at a place called Tabragalba, a property just outside Beaudesert, and we sort of formed up there and had our bit of training and also formed up parties to do various things. And from there we used to go off to the islands and come back when the job was over.

> How well publicised during the war was the coast-watcher role?

Not publicised at all, really. The idea was not to talk about it at all, you know. It was not that hidden, you couldn't hide it completely, but you kept it very quiet.

> What, so the Japanese wouldn't intensify their interest?

Well, anything which is working, you know, under a subterfuge, and they have people behind enemy lines, well, you know, you keep quiet about it.

> Okay, so you've just joined them. What sort of training did they give you? What sort of preparation? What's your first assignment?

Well, most of us were trained soldiers anyway. I think most of my training in that place was done on beer, really. But, oh, your codes ... I suppose new things for all of us would be the

codes that we used, various new weapons that we hadn't used elsewhere and which I'm not going to tell you about either.

What, they're still confidential?

Well, not confidential, but they weren't supposed to be used then.

How do you mean, they were ...?

No, I think I'd better keep quiet about that one. In other words, we used to use weapons which weren't quite sanctioned by the Geneva Convention. But there were odd things that we ... and training in ... some of the fellows who didn't know New Guinea of course had a bit of training in pidgin. Most of us were ex-New Guinea or knew a fair bit about it. Uhm, did a route march. And of course we had natives down there and we were training them, so when we ... we go in as a mixed party, you know. And just fill in your time and have a good time until your job came up.

When did your job come up? How was it.... Was it a fairly clublike informal atmosphere, or ...?

Very. Very, very clublike, very informal, nothing like the army at all. But you would join a group and the group would have a job, and you had the right to pull out if you didn't like it without any detriment to yourself at all. You were given the whole thing of what was to happen, or what you would attempt to do, and you'd like it or not like it, you were given plenty of time. 'If you don't want it, pull out, and wait for another one!' Or 'If you don't like the unit, get out without any come-back!' And when you had your job, whichever it might have been, then you were trained for that specific job with the things that you were going to do, you planned it, and studied the terrain, the maps and the whole lot of it, and knew exactly what would happen if such and such a thing happened, or ... and so on, you know, the logistics of everything, and everything that was known about it.

So what was your job? What was your first assignment?

The first one I had was establishing guerrilla warfare on the north coast of New Britain. And we actually took over from a party which had been ... had just started it off. And we went in by PT boat that night. At that stage the whole coast was full of Japs going backwards and forwards. And we went in by PT boat right late at night, there were two PT boats, and there was an Australian officer on board, a naval officer, he had been a trawler master in New Guinea before the war and he knew the place very very well.

(15.00) And the entrance to this bay, the approach from the sea, was very very narrow between reefs, you know, the reefs covered the whole lot and there was just one passage through from way out to sea. And we steamed up the coast, and then there was a torch on the shore, just at the right place and a long long way away, and he just turned and went straight in. And he would not have had more than 150 yards between the reefs, and this is in the black of night, so I think it was an excellent bit of navigation, that. However, we went in and the other parties came out and one was left to show us around. And I remember that night we slept on the beach before moving off, and there was a crowd of Nips making their way by

canoes around the shore. We had a fight that night and did them over. And the next morning we moved ...

Could you describe that in a bit more detail, what happened there?

Oh, well, they were just coming along in canoes, identified, so we opened fire on them. They opened fire on us, but we got them. And then the next morning we went in and crossed the road, the coastal road, which is about an hour inland, and ran into a party there, which we did over. They were evacuating and they had no morale, they had nothing, no organisation at all at that stage. They were evacuating from Cape Gloucester and from Arawe, getting themselves back to Rabaul as best they could. That was a ... so our job then was to knock off as many as we could on their way back, which in their condition was a comparatively easy job. And we killed quite a few hundred in there in a couple of weeks, ambushing them on the road.

Could you talk in a bit more detail about that, because the War Memorial is interested in tactics as well as ... you know, ...

Oh well, I mean to say, at that stage, with a bedraggled ragtag of an army making their way back, it was just a matter of ... it really wasn't terribly sporting. It was just having ambush points, and a little radio, you know they would radio up when there was somebody coming along the track, just make sure they weren't a forerunning party of a larger one behind, and do them over when they got into the area. It wasn't terribly sporting. However, that went on for quite some weeks until the ... it trickled out, they all finished, all through. We then moved up the coast ...

Just before you move on from there. The people involved that you were working with, you brought them all ashore or did you recruit people ashore?

Oh, the natives ... no, we recruited the locals. Now, this is ... the principle at that stage was just to recruit the people in the area in which you were operating. And then move on, and leave them behind in their own ... didn't move them out of their village area. That was the idea of that. So actually you're just helping to defend their own ... they were helping to defend their own neck of the woods. So we, at this stage when we'd cleaned up the remnant of the Japs getting through, we paid off - I don't know whether I should tell you this, either - we used to pay so much a head for anything the natives did; and so we demanded as proof, we demanded a thumb from each body, so they got so much a thumb. I think it was ... they were quite well paid. And I know the other party on the other side, they used an ear as a thing. I probably shouldn't be telling you all this, anyway.

Well, I should say that the War Memorial does have ... If you want to say that a section is confidential, ...

Well, I'd like that to be confidential.

Okay.

You know, things like that if they get out, it doesn't help very much. It doesn't accomplish very much and probably doesn't help very much people. People who don't understand get hold of it and put the wrong constructions on them and ...

Okay. So we'll make that confidential.

Yes, mmm. Anyhow, we paid the locals off, and then we moved up with our nucleus - of permanent people of course, we had our own troops, permanent ones. We moved up the coast, up into the Open Bay-Wide Bay area, and then we sort of penetrated and poked in, found out where the Japanese outposts ... located them and reported on them. We brought out some people, some Chinese, brought out a Swede and his German wife ... uhm, ... oh, you know, generally mucking around, annoying them. Oh, that's right, and then their own coast-watching ... see, they had coast-watching parties too, and you get on the trail of them.

(20.00) And we had one particularly big pitched battle with a Jap coast-watching party making their way back to Rabaul and had a day-long battle with them. We lost a few. And there were only two of them escaped; they went down to the coast, and when we went a different way and down and found where they'd hit the beach - this was, well, quite some ... a good day's walking - and sent a couple of boys along to see if they could chase them, because we wanted to catch them. They caught them all right. So none of that party got away.

Well, a couple of things about the way in which you organised yourself. How were the ... in terms of the organisation, how did the Australian troops, who were what you might call the regular troops, how did they combine together with say the local troops? Not so much the Papua New Guineans ...

Oh, I see. Well, what you'd have, you'd have a patrol. In it you'd have a patrol leader and a radio operator, that was a basic; but generally we had a patrol leader, his 2IC and a radio operator, and then ten or a dozen local troops. You'd very rarely have more than three Europeans. And they'd be your patrols. Well then, you'd have the fellow in charge of the party, plus his 2IC and anybody who was resting up or so forth would be the headquarters.

And where did you ... what sort of place were you living in? The headquarters, what sort of place was that? How would you describe that?

Oh, just a bush shack in the middle of the timber, in the middle of the bush. Just a, you know, just a leaf ... you know, you put up leaf shacks in the middle of the bush, well and truly hidden so they couldn't be seen from the air and that sort of thing, you know.

What about food?

Food? We had two packs, we had ... and they were packed in four-gallon tins, four-gallon keroseners, square tins ... would you have ever remembered seeing those? ...

Yes.

Yes, well, four-gallon square tins, one was the European rations, the other one was natives. The natives was ... consisted mainly of rice, tinned meat and stick tobacco. And the European

stuff had ... oh, it had all sorts of ... some good, some rubbish - wheat germ was particularly good, little tins of butter, biscuits of course, rice and ... oh, a dozen different things, and a tin of Champion Ruby ready-rubbed tobacco, and it always had a novel in it. And I remember these blasted novels, they were *The Art of Making Plastics*, *The Red Badge of Courage*, and *The Moon Is Down* (laughing). Three of the damned things, they were bloody awful! However, they were supposed to keep you entertained. And they were four by fours, four men for four days or any derivative of that, or ... three by fours ... no, three by fours, that's right.

Could you describe a drop? These were dropped to you, were they?

Yes. Well, they dropped them in things called 'storepedoes'. And a storepedo had a sort of a ... oh, it was before the days of plastics, a sort of papier-mache cone with four struts connecting them to the main body of the thing which was a compressed cardboard cylinder, and everything was in those. And they started off, they used to drop them with silk parachutes, and we always slept in silk and carried the silk around with us. Then they made them in hessian, and the hessian would slow them up enough so they wouldn't damag... they'd come down and you'd recover the stuff. And they fit on this nose cone, these four struts would sort of break off, absorb a lot of the shock, and your storepedo, as they called it, would fall over and you'd get it there. I've seen radio sets dropped quite okay with them, and things like that. But then with rice, they used to free drop it, and the most terrifying thing is to be on the receiving end of a free drop of rice. They just put them all at the door of the DC3 and then kick them all out, and they come at you and they expand over a large area and you don't know where the hell they're coming, whether they're coming right at you every one of them. It's quite terrifying. So that was the way we did it. And what we'd do ...

Anyone get hit?

Oh, in some cases they had ... I haven't experienced it myself but I have heard of somebody being killed with a biscuit barrel, a biscuit tin. Then, when we were up in Japanese territory, Japanese-held territory, or behind Japanese territory, we used to have pre-dawn drops. And we'd light three fires at the tops of trees, in a triangle, or have them all built - you know, get some dead wood and natives up the top to build these fires up in the tops - and then, at the signal, you'd light them, and the plane would come over to drop as near as they could to these three fires and then everything was out. And at the first break of dawn you'd be there grabbing the whole ... grabbing them all and off at the lick of your life before the Japs got there - because they'd hear it and know what was going on. Those pre-dawn drops were ... of course that was only if you were behind Japanese lines or in an area where there were a lot of Japanese.

(25.00) Did they ever look ... did the Japanese ever look like finding you?

Oh yes, yes, yes, quite often, you know. We had to jump and run a few times.

Well, could you talk about one or two of those?

Well, I remember on one occasion when we were in this area and I had a boy I always kept with me, he was one of my ... sort of my bodyguard. And he wandered into camp one evening just before dusk, and he said 'Hey!' - he wasn't a very polite bloke - and I said 'What do you

want?' He said 'Jap-man he stop.' I said 'Where?' He said 'Down the bottom there.' So we immediately broke camp, and moved down to try to intercept them. And they had picked up our tracks and they'd moved in. So we exchanged shots and went on our ways, just broke bush and got out of it. There's one. Uhm, I remember one of our parties were on a small hill, there was a fellow and his operator, a bloke called Captain Seton, Cardon Seton, who was a well-known ... he was an ex-Solomon Islander, well-known bloke, and he had his radio operator with him, a fellow called McAuley[?][3], and they were on this pimple, a pimple of land in the middle of a swamp. And the Japs' party, a large party, had arrived and moved into the area. So these blokes sent a signal 'So-many Japs - giving the map reference - at such-and-such foot of hill, in confined area, may we open fire?' And the reply came back 'No, repeat no, just observe.' So these two blokes, they were very upset about that, and Cardon Seton had a medicine chest he'd pinched from the Americans somewhere in the line down the Solomons, and he had a lot of medical alcohol in this thing, so he and his operator decided that they'd drown their sorrows in medical alcohol. And they sent a message about eleven o'clock at night to headquarters in clear three words, 'Yah, Chocos, hic.' And they got into real strife. But anyhow, the Japs didn't search this hill and they moved off the following morning.

> So you're ... I mean, you're obviously busy quite a bit of the time. But did you have quiet periods as well?

Ah yes, yes. I remember once we ... it was at Christmas time. And things had quietened down. The Japs moved past and they decided that all the parties ... we had about three - one, two, three, yes, four of us - four parties we were, like patrols, patrols I should say, out. And we moved into the inland, into the hinterland, and rendezvoused at one spot. It was right in the middle of the island. And we sent a team back down to one coast, and a team to the other coast to the Australian headquarters - which were further down the island - and demanded our rations of grog which we hadn't had, we'd never had. And we enlarged the number of people we had and so forth, and there was a bloke went down to one side one day and one to the other, and they got double issue of grog from either side and up they came. We had a glorious couple of days at Christmas time, a very glorious time. And then we moved out, I remember we went back to Wide Bay and to Open Bay then, and moved in. That's right, we had to clear the bays for the Australian troops, they were coming up. We had to clear them, make sure that they were not strongly defended or they were defended or they weren't defended. I remember we went down and cleared the whole area, proved that it was all okay, and then the Australian troops came in. And that was right up the narrow neck then between Wide Bay and Open Bay, and they just had Rabaul and the Gazelle Peninsula cut off. And shortly after that we came out from that trip, that show.

> Right. So, in the quiet periods - I mean, you mentioned some novels that people were reading - what else did you do?

Oh well, I mean there was nothing much else much to do, you used to.... Oh, I used to ...

END TAPE 1 SIDE B

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[3] Lt C.W. Seton worked with A. Waddell during this period.

BEGIN TAPE 2 SIDE A

Tape identification: This is the second tape, side one, of the interview with Robin McKay. End of identification.

I used to carry a *Times* book of crossword puzzles, and when you were sitting down with nothing to do, or resting or what have you, just pull this crossword book out and do crosswords. I found that the best way of relaxing. But you don't have much time to relax if you're moving all day. You were never ... you never camped in the afternoon. You'd always move until there was just a half an hour, an hour, before dark and then wherever you stopped, decided to stop, you'd send out people all around as far as they could, just to clear the area and make sure everything ... that they would get in by dark, by full dark. So you knew that was fairly clear and we'd light fires in the dark, because we knew we were hidden, couldn't be seen. And if it was smelt, well, it was too hard to move in the thick bush - and we always camped in the middle of thick bush - too hard to move in the bush for anybody, anyway. So you'd know that you could hear them if they did try and move in the bush. And then in mornings we'd always be up, packed, and move with the first glimmer of light. And you'd move fast for an hour. Then you'd ... I'm sorry, you would be up well before daylight, you would cook or heat up a cup of tea, make a cup of tea or whatever it might be, before daylight, and put your fire out, and then you'd be moving, move with the first glimmer of daylight, and go for an hour before you stopped. And then you stopped, and have what you'd normally have, or have a bit of cold sweet potato or something, whatever it might be, and then move on. But the whole idea was not to camp, make camp in daylight, and to get away from that bloody camp before dawn.

And does that mean that every day you changed places?

Oh yes, on patrol, yes, sure.

Right, but you'd have bases where you'd stay for longer periods of time, just stay in one place?

Off patrol, you'd be back where you ... in the mountains or somewhere, wherever your base camp was. But if you were away from base camp you moved every day.

And base camp, how many people would be in base camp?

Ah well, it depends. You might be ... as I said earlier, there might be ... there'd be the OC and perhaps one other, and whatever patrols weren't out on patrol. It was a very loose organisation, you know, it wasn't anything ... it wasn't set down, it wasn't like regular army, it was just as conditions required and as the job was called for. You were there, and according to the information you'd receive you'd do something. You'd get information in from the natives, you'd go and check it out. Or you'd decide to do a certain thing in light of the information that had been given you. Or you'd bring people in and interrogate them. And ... you know.

What would you bring people in for?

Well, anybody from enemy territory, natives, or if you got hold of some of the refugees. We picked up an Indonesian, a Balinese soldier once. He'd been a prisoner in Rabaul and he just decided one day he'd had enough of being a prisoner. He picked up a bag of rice and he walked out with it, walked into the bush, and went down the island, down New Britain until he met up with some natives there who looked after him. And he wanted to walk right to the end of the island, you know, he didn't know where ... you know, he was going to walk home to Bali I think. And they took him to the top of a mountain and showed him the never-ending line of mountains that lied ahead of him, so he hid up there. And they looked after him well, and made sure the Japs didn't get anywhere near him. And we moved up into the area, one of our patrols went up the coast and locating all the Jap camps in the area, and right up behind their lines. And we contacted one of these local natives, and they told us this fellow was there, and they didn't know exactly what he was but 'his king was a queen'. So we said 'Oh well, obviously Dutch or ...' but he was a ... and he had long hair like a girl, and by his colour we realised he must have been an Indonesian or a Dutch East Indies soldier.

(5.00) So, instead of going up to where he was camped, we sent a couple of boys up to bring him down to where we were. And unfortunately one of the boys we sent up was armed with a Jap rifle, he didn't happen to have one of our own; so this fellow, the Balinese, decided this was a trap - Japs - so he wouldn't have a bar of them. So then one of our boys went up there and contacted him. He came out. I think his name was Kurundi[?], and all he wanted was a rifle to join us. But at that particular stage we picked up him, then there was a plantation had a German and his ... no, a Swede and his German wife, and the Japs kept them there and they were running - making a garden, vegetable gardens, for them. And they had a big coast-watching party on the shore. So we went up and we got them out, at night. And then there was a Chinese. By this time word had got around that somebody was moving round the place, so we had to sort of move fast, because you know too many people were disappearing and the Japs knew we were around and ... Ah, this is quite an interesting, quite an amusing story. I finished up with this German and his wife - I'm sorry; the Swede and his German wife - and we had taken a lot of goats from there, their place, a grandfather clock and a gramophone, and all sorts of bloody rubbish and so forth. I don't know why we did it. And we were camped, or headquartered, in a creek mouth between two Japanese posts. And ...

How far away were they?

Well, Pondo would have been about six, seven, or eight miles; and the other one would have been about eight or nine miles the other way. So the fellow in charge of this party, he went back up the coast to go to another plantation to get some half-castes out. And I was to take these people out at night as soon as it got dark, and we had to go out and down the coast, and we had to get past a Japanese post on the point, at Pondo Point, which we knew there was permanently manned. And I remember us starting off, and these blasted goats - we were taking them back to eat, actually, when we got to base camp - they started to blat. So we bound their mouths up, their muzzles up, with cord and we had them and then we had this fellow and his wife, and all, and we set off. And the tide was against us. There was no way we could have got to that point before daylight, so we went back. We spent the next day there, and I let the goats go - there was no way in the world I was going to go past that point again with a lot of bleating goats around the place. So next night we got off with dusk, and went through. But the following day - we heard later from the local natives - a party of Japs came investigating what all this business was about, from *both* of these camps. They met at this

place - or didn't meet; they each thought the other were us, and they had a nice little war to themselves, which lasted for some hours before they realised what was going on. So in the meantime we'd got out. In fact ...

> Did you get involved very much in local affairs? You know, arbitrating any quarrels, or doing the sort of things that patrol officers used to do in civilian times?

Yes, we did a lot of that without any sort of ... any official blessing on it. But, as I say, we were mostly New Guinea people, we knew the whole score so ... Oh, and they ... as a matter of fact, it must have been all right because I remember they gave us a lot of those *luluais* hats and things, hats to give to people. Yes, oh, we had ... I did a bit of first aid and so forth, and I did a lot of ... of ... you know, what we called NAB shots, intravenous injections for framboesia which is a very very rampant thing, we did hundreds of those things wherever we went through. Also one very sad little episode. There was a ... we'd ... a couple of lads from a very primitive area wanted to join us, wanted to go with us, so we said 'All right, it won't do any harm', we gave them each a rifle and we used them as trackers. And they came down to the coast with us. And we proceeded along the coast, then up inland again, we got into country which is controlled by people called Mokolkols - have you heard of the Mokolkols? Yes, well you know what I'm talking about.

(10.00) But people hearing the tape might not have heard of them.

Ah no, that's right. Well, the Mokolkols were a sort of a renegade clan or group of clans from the Bainings, who many many years ago became adrift from the main body of natives and they lived as complete outlaws, had always lived as outlaws, and had lived in the bush without ... a nomadic, completely nomadic life, and they'd come down on the coast and they'd murder women and children in the gardens and collect axes and things and food, and they were really outlaws. Anyhow, they lived and moved and they lived ... their main, one of their main foods were the hearts of certain palms which grow there. And they were their 'coconuts', in other words. Anyhow, we were in this area and we were waiting for one of these night drops that I'm speaking about, and we were clearing the ... getting some firewood ready to go up in the trees. And these two little fellows who came from this village were sitting down eating the cabbage, or the heart, of this palm. And they were attacked by a mob of Mokolkols, who suddenly appeared and just hacked them to pieces, hacked them completely to pieces and off, before anybody else could move. You know, they were that quick.

> What, you saw this?

Mmm?

> You were there?

No, no, I wasn't at the spot. I was a hundred yards or so away but I wasn't there. I didn't actually see them, I just saw them a couple of minutes later. Hacked them to pieces and off, with their long-handled axes. And one chap was completely dead. The other poor blighter, oh, he was in a hell of a way, you know, his kidneys and he was throwing [inaudible] and his back was broken, his arm was severed and his head was bashed, how he lived I don't know.

But I remember this Cardon Seton, he kept trying to sew him up, and I got morphia syrettes and as fast as he was sewing him up I was putting morphia syrettes into him just to relieve the poor bastard. Poor little fellow. Oh, I eventually got enough morphia into him to put him out, but he wouldn't have lasted more than half an hour anyway. But, yes, I remember being very cross with that. As a matter of fact, we had cyanide tablets we carried, after a certain episode that happened, and I remember getting a couple of mine and breaking them into some salt and leaving them around hoping the Mokolkols would come back again. I don't know whether they ever did or not.

What was the incident that caused them to hand out cyanide tablets?

Ah, no comment.

Right. So ... but some of the ... you mentioned that you did get involved in arbitrating in sort of disputes. Could you just comment on some of those disputes? Any of those stick in your mind in particular?

Ah, well, it wasn't so much in disputes; but here were people who were completely disorganised and knocked over with a war in their midst and all the rest of it, so you just did what any normal patrol officer would have done, give advice, or something, or if some bloke had been playing up you'd do something about it. I think we sent a few people back to ANGAU, back at ... down Talasea way there were ANGAU officials. But we more or less just, not taking over ANGAU's work at all, but assisting them, and actually ... as we had the knowledge to do it. We weren't like normal troops who wouldn't know one end of a native from the other. At least we knew them.

Let's see. So you were there, you were moving around, you were conducting sort of fairly active sort of raids. At this stage of the war were you having problems with Papuan New Guineans, local Papua New Guineans, giving information to the Japanese?

Ah, well, there you had your black kapitan, you had your loyal natives, and your disloyal natives; and the poor blighters, the bulk of them, who were just forced by circumstance to go along with whoever was in power. Therefore you found that the people in the mountains who were furthest away from ... or who had the least Japanese contacts, were more liable to be loyal. The people who were well under the influence of the Japanese were more liable to be dis... loyal to the Japanese - with very very notable exceptions. There's many a native who was absolutely heroic in their steadfastness and loyalty, really surprisingly so. It's also, without being in any way sectarian, we found that the Seventh Day Adventists were by far outstanding in loyalty. I know of not one Seventh Day Adventist adherent who was any way disloyal. I don't know what it is, but it just worked out that way.

(15.00)The other religions could be one way or the other, but the Seventh Day Adventists for some reason were particularly loyal and ... well, they always were a cleaner people, they taught them cleanliness and respect and loyalty and cheerfulness. And, you know, I've got no brief for the Seventh Day Adventists - I don't particularly like the Europeans - but the natives were really very good and reliable. And if you had to rely on a native without knowing him,

or knowing the circumstances, you know, the fact that he was a Seventh Day Adventist would swing you.

> Can you remember any incidents where you had problems with particular individuals who were giving information against you and mixing with you?

Oh yes, yes, yes, yes. Oh, we ... yes, they ... there were quite a number. There was a fellow down near Talasea, I forget his name now, he'd started a bit of a cargo cult just before the war, this fellow. And he'd picked up a couple of Japanese ... er, a couple of American airmen, crashed airmen and handed them over to the Japs after beating them almost to death before he got them there. A few things like that. I remember getting hold of him; he wasn't very happy for a while. But ...

> What did they do to him in the end?

Oh, they did nothing about him. You know, after the war everything was gone and forgotten. Not forgotten, but it was a policy then not to blame anybody for anything. I remember one fellow who was a very very loyal worker for us. He used to work ... be a complete and absolute spy job, go into Japanese camps and work for them and come back and all the rest of it. Worked all the time, he was on the job all the time. Older bloke. And I remember reading after the war, he said 'What the hell did I work for?' He said 'So-and-so, who was helping the Japs all the time, he's just as big a ... he's just as good as I am. He's got his war damage, I'm still trying to get my war damages. Where's the ... what's the strength of it all?' And I quite agreed with him, too.

> There's a lot of feeling about pensions and decorations and things like that, among Papua New Guineans. What was your feelings about them?

Er, ... no. It actually was ... it was just about really ... You'd find that anybody, if he'd been a carrier for ANGAU, would consider after the war that he was deserving of a pension. Now, I remember Paul Mason had a good outlook on this - it might have gone a bit too far - he said 'The war's in their country, they're helping to keep the Japanese out of their own country, they're defending their own.' And I think this is the way you should look at it, too. It's like ... as far as, you know, pensions and all the rest of it are concerned, okay, they were not attested, they were not sworn on, they were in or out, they were volunteers, they were in or out - apart from the Royal Papuan ... you know, the NGIB battalions - but the people we're speaking about they were just with you as long as they wanted to be, or they went away. And if they're defending their own country, you know ...

> What about some of the ... Sergeant Ouiga [sic], for example, is a name of ...

Yaliga.[4] Mmm.

> Yaliga [sic]. He was a ... well, he was given the rank of sergeant. Was he a member of the Australian army? Or what's the scene, there?

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[4] Probably means Yauwika.

They were called the 'Black Watch' and eventually they did get round to making lists of them. There was Yaliga [sic], there was Simogun, there was .... oh, some ... Simogun was a ... he was a sergeant-major, a decorated man, so was Yauwika. In actual fact, they were not attested soldiers really. They made up roll calls and, you know, called them the Black Watch, but they weren't. They were quite irregulars. Yes, fine men, both of those.

So, you're working ... you're through late '44, and you were there about ten months. What's happening towards the end of that ten-month period?

Ah well, the Americans had gone, the Australian army had come in, the transition over, and really everybody could see the writing on the wall. And this was of course a war of attrition. You know, I think the Australian army thought they'd like to get a little bit of honour and glory at the last while there was still a little bit of time left, and moved up when they .... there was really no need to. But you know, really the whole war in New Guinea was a farce really, because we were accomplishing nothing on the overall plan. Once they'd nullified them and anchored them down and they couldn't move out, what harm could they do there? But ...

Did you feel that at the time?

We used to wonder, we used to wonder. But the Japanese were the people that wondered. They couldn't make out what the hell we were all about, what it was all on about, especially in Bougainville. See, once the Americans moved on and there was no necessity, no necessity for the Torokina airstrip anyway, what did it matter? It was just really to - I'm damned if I know - to, oh, show up big in front of the natives or something, keep faith with the natives, but a lot of people lost their lives doing that.

(20.00) I just read your letter of commendation that showed that you were very actively involved yourself. I mean, you didn't have any doubts, any worries - you know, 'Why am I taking these risks?'

Oh well, I mean to say, I was just there and that was to be done, this is all. And information is concerned ... the actual reason for being there, well, that was far too high for me to consider, in the light of my actions, whether I liked it or not. You could say that about the war as a whole, couldn't you?

Right. But it's the sort of thing that could affect morale quite a bit. *Could*, I'm not saying *did*.

Oh, I don't know. Could be, depend on the type of people. But I think morale comes from an *esprit de corps*. And if you're happy with your friends and the people you are with, and it's not a completely obvious lost cause, well, there's no reason why morale should go down.

Could you describe the group you were with? I mean, you just mentioned that *esprit de corps* as an important, a very important, factor. So could you just talk a bit about the group you were with?

Oh well, they were all good fellows or they wouldn't have been there, you know, they wouldn't last long. In a small situation like that you had to get on together, or had to like or respect each other, or, ... you know, it'd be no good. So I think practically all cases where ... especially where you were forming up parties to start with, you sort of made sure in the initial stages you could get on with everybody else.

What about rank? How important was rank?

Oh well, rank was important, as it always is in an army. But we didn't have such things as discrimination, so we ate together and we called each other by our first names and all the rest of it, and there was no discrimination whatsoever - but you knew exactly where you were in the chain of command.

I mean, frequently within a group of people, you'll find that there are strong individuals, there are smart people who ... it emerges over a period of time that someone has a particularly good sense of judgement, and that doesn't always match the formal sort of ranking that goes in a system. Was this ever a noticeable factor?

Oh yes, you would find people who were nominally in charge who really weren't up to it as much as others. Well, they'd be sort of ... uhm, other people would take a few more decisions on their own hands in a case like that. It would all work its way out. The stronger would influence more, and the weaker would influence less. When ... you can always, you know ... an old soldier can always sort of hide this sort of business and butter up an inefficient, or hide an inefficient, officer and cover up for him. Or a weak soldier can be put in a position where he's not going to be any danger to anybody else, if the others know him and are prepared to do it for him. It levels out. Amongst old soldiers, I'm talking about, I'm not talking about recruits, or young people who ... it's a game you get to know. You assess people.

Any major disputes within the group at that time?

Ah, ... no, I can't think of any.

I'm interested from the point of view of how the disputes were solved. That's the main purpose of the question.

Mmm. I had a large dispute with one gentleman once, a large dispute; but I just told him that I would go into Blamey if necessary and told him what I thought of him, and that was it. And he and I disliked each other, but we had nothing to do with each other, we were in different parties and we just happened to be in one part of the bush at one stage.

May I ask what it was?

Just personal, just a personal thing. Uhm ... no, I don't think it's worth going into details on the thing. But he was just a man that I didn't like, he didn't like me, and we had a large argument and left it at that. But apart from that I've never had any trouble with anybody.

So, towards the end, you came out, you pulled out before the end of the war, didn't you? You left.

Ah ... no, I came out of that party, and went back in again, and when the war finished I was up on the top of Mount Sinewit.

(25.00) Right. Well, could you describe how you got out when ... you know, the main time you were there? How did you leave that area and go back?

How did I leave the island? Oh, by this time the Australian army had three parts of the island contained. It was just a matter of going back by barge to the nearest airstrip and coming out by plane. Ah no, it was quite civilised, by the time I got out.

Right. But you'd been away there ten months. Did you go back to Australia? Or did you have leave?

Yes, I came back to Australia. As a matter of fact, I spent a bit of extra time in Australia because I wanted to get my appendix out, because this fellow I referred to earlier with the medical kit, Seton, he was (a chuckle) ... he had a complete surgeon's kit - and he was mad as a snake too, this fellow - but I was having trouble in my ... pains in my side, and it was appendicitis. And he used to delight in telling me how he'd read in the *Readers Digest* once about somebody having their appendix taken out on a kitchen table on a ship somewhere along the line, and he was sure he could do it and he knew exactly where to go and what to do and so forth. (laughter) So I had to abuse him; and when I got out I made sure I had my appendix out, I was not going back into the bush in case I was back with him.

What about mail? The business of ... had you been getting any mail when you were in the bush?

We used to get them dropped in with the stores, get mail dropped in with the stores.

And what about messages to relatives or, you know, fiancees or girl friends?

Ah well, down in Brisbane where our headquarters was, old Commander McManus would regularly write to all relations and say 'Your husband or son is well and he is sorry he can't communicate at the moment. I can assure you he is in the best of health ...' and all the rest of it, you know. They had ... yes.

(laughing) Not all that reassuring in some ways, but at least you're alive.

(laughing) That's right, yes, mmm.

So what about newspapers? What sort of news would you be getting of life in Australia?

Oh, mostly we were not. I don't think we were very interested, actually. Uhm, no ...

On the course of the war, the course of the war.

Oh, well, you'd get a certain amount of radio, you'd get your radio news on the radio, that's right. And if you were near any army bases or anything like that, you had army papers and what have you. But of course we had none out in the bush. But you'd get your news on the radio, yes.

> And, what, was there a systematic policy of passing this on to the Papua New Guineans round about? Or it just happened effectively ...

Oh, yes anything of interest, yes, anything of interest we definitely did. I remember when the first atom bomb was dropped, and telling them all about it, you know, the war would be over now, and everybody was happy. And I remember one fellow ... did you ever strike a native called Raymond Martin? - he was another of these senior native ... er, ... he spoke English, he'd been to school in Australia, and I remember him saying after we'd told him about this atom bomb thing and what it did and so forth, he said 'I don't know, sir. You fellows are going to blow this world up one day.' (laughing) He didn't like it even then.

> Well, yes, it was a fairly spectacular impact. So at the end of the war, you were up on ... what mountain?

Mount Sinewit, which is ...

> Right, how do you spell that.

S-i-n-e-w-i-t. On one of the flanks of Mount Sinewit.

> Right. And you were overlooking Rabaul?

Yes.

> What did it look like? - for someone who ... I mean, I've seen Rabaul since, but someone who hasn't seen Rabaul at all and ...

When I say I was overlooking Rabaul, we were overlooking the Gazelle Peninsula, yes. And overlooking the top end, Kokopo and all that, you could see the plantations from the sea up to the top end, yes, sure. But actually we were ... we had moved up into position to run our patrols from that base down into the Rabaul area, when of course they started to hot things up in Japan so we were then made to sit where we were, we weren't allowed to move, we just sat on the top of this ridge, we weren't allowed to move. In such a case, I remember when one of our scouts came back and reported a small Japanese party down in the garden, and we asked permission to go down and knock them and we were refused. What we should have done of course was to go down and knock them off and then tell them what we'd done. Well, if we had, somebody might have got killed anyway and it would have been a waste at that time. But we just remained there until the thing was over and then we were just declared out, declared redundant, and moved out of it.

> And what did you do ... I'll just turn [the tape] over.

END TAPE 2 SIDE A

BEGIN TAPE 2 SIDE B

Tape identification: This is the second side of the second tape with Mr Robin McKay. End of identification.

At the end of the war, can you remember actually getting the news of the ... you know, August 15th?

Oh yes, yes. Yes, yes, I remember listening to it on the radio, yes, listening to it on the radio. It was fine, it was wonderful. Er, and a bit of a disappointment - see, Rabaul was my home town and I'd badly wanted to go in with the surrender party, you know, go in there when they took it over. And they wouldn't let us go in, we were declared redundant and straight back to Australia. So I then got my discharge, and I was up in the ... I was in the first party of civilians to go back to Rabaul, after that. But I would have liked to have been there at the ... after looking down at the damn thing and having to go the other way and not being able to go in. Yes.

So at the end of the war, had you had time to form any personal relationships, marriage, fiancees, anything like that?

Oh yes, yes, I was married when I came back from the Middle East before I went up to the islands. I was married in '42.

So when had you met your fiancee?

Oh, before the war when I was on holidays from New Guinea. I'd met her some years before.

So you married her before you went up to Darwin?

Yes, yes.

What was it like, being separated for years and years? I mean, it was a rather strange beginning to a marriage. A lot of other people were doing the same thing, I know, but ...

Oh well, you know, it was just everybody had to put up with it, that's all. Yes, I remember we were married ... uhm, we were to be married on the Friday, Friday night, that's right, had everything arranged, and orders came through on Tuesday that we were to go to Darwin on Thursday, that's right, yes, to go to Darwin on Thursday. So I went into town and got my fiancee and told her it was all off, wait until I came back next time. And I remember we were in Ushers drinking away there, and a bloke called Jeff Bates [sic] - who later married Zara, you know? - old Jeff was in our show, and he was with his first wife then at the next door table, and we told him the story. And he said 'Why don't you get married tonight?' I said 'Tonight! How the hell can we do that?' He said 'Well, you've got the papers in, haven't you?' So I rang up ... Anyway, to cut a long story short, I rang up the bloke who was going to do the job. He had to ring his bishop and get permission, and he rang back about ... oh, twenty to

twelve or something, to say 'It's on. Get around there.' So we raced out, and the bride wore black, and we got married at midn... er, at midnight ... oh, that's right, he'd got permission from the bishop and it had to be done that day, on that date, so we were married about a minute to midnight.

Right. And the bride hadn't had time to go home?

No (laughing), no time to go home. We rounded up a few people who all had to see us do a hurry-scurry job. And then I went to Darwin on the Friday - that's right - and came back ten months later.

Right. Well, at the end of the war - you'd had a long war, you'd been in the Middle East, you'd had a very heavy difficult war in New Guinea and in the islands - how did you feel about that six years and what it had meant, its impact on you?

I'll tell you what, I'd just about had it, by that time. You know, you can go on for so long and not mind at all. People did get themselves out on ... you know, so-much years overseas service and so on, you could get yourself out. But you could never front up to doing that, get quite to the point. But I'd had enough.

(5.00) You'd had enough? Did it also ... did it have more ... were there other things in terms of its impact on you that was significant? I mean, do you feel that you'd ...

Not really ...

... lost years?

... I didn't have a very great regard for human life at that stage, I'd say. Took me some years to get that back again. I don't know. And yet, again, when I was discharged I felt like a motherless foal, and I walked out of that thing, you know, I was a civilian and I felt I had no momma, no poppa, nobody to look after me, because the army had been my home for so long, and no matter what happens the army looked after you. And you'd be out on your own ... oh, I was quite lost, really. It probably took me a day or two to get over it, over the strangeness of it. It becomes a part of you, quite hard to get over it.

You didn't feel that you would have preferred to do something else with those years?

Well, ... no, if this had been a war. I don't quite follow you there, because.... If there'd been a war on, I should have done something else?

No, no. Some people say, 'Well, it took away six years of my twenties when I could have been playing sport and having a pleasant time with my friends. I had a horrible time for six years and I came back a psychologically ...'

I don't think so, no, no. I think my life has been fuller and probably better for those years of experience, better inasmuch as you learnt how to put up with things, you found out what real

friendship was - and anybody who has not been through a war doesn't know what real friendship is, they'll never know. What is the saying: 'If you were there, you'll never forget; if you weren't there you'll never bloody know.' And that's so. You live more intensely. And, you know, it's a ... in ordinary life you never ever get down to the raw things of life, do you? And whether you're any better for it or not, I don't know. I think so. I certainly am in terms of lifelong friendships and in appreciating people, yes. It also I think builds up - unfortunately builds up - lasting hatreds, too. Very few of us are the type that forgive and forget completely. Not people who've been in real action.

You're talking about the Japanese?

Japanese, Germans, anybody that was aggressive ... anybody who forced it on the world. It's wrong probably, but .... I used to think at the end of the war that it would be a very good thing if everybody as they grew up was forced to look at realistic movies of what had happened, what had really happened, and people should be forced to read and know exactly what happened. I don't agree with that now. It doesn't matter to young people. But I certainly felt strongly - most of us did - felt strongly that the ... er, what's this thing? ... 'Let the rage go on ... ' - er, what did Whitlam say? - 'Maintain the rage.' Yeah.

END TAPE 2 SIDE B

END INTERVIEW