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TRANSCRIPT OF ORAL HISTORY RECORDING

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BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE A.

Identification: This is Side 1, Tape 1 of the interview with Mr Carl Lennig. I'm Daniel Connell and this is 6th September 1989. End of identification.

Mr Lennig, if we could start the interview by talking a little bit about your family background before the war. Where were you born?

I was born in Berlin, Germany, in 1904 on 25th June and we migrated to Australia in, er - 1910 we arrived in Australia via Cape York, through the Torres Straits and I think we made landfall around, some - I think about 25th March in 1910.

Do you remember the first world war?

I remember the first world war. We were in, er - we were on the selection outside of Rockhampton at Milman. That's where all the migrants were in, um - which were the .... They were all put on the land there in 1910 on virgin blocks of land and, that's where we went.

Were any members of your family interned in the first world war?

Oh no, no. No, I don't think there was a German settlement down there. I don't remember anyone getting interned from there. Not a soul but ....

There were problems in places like the Barossa Valley in South Australia, in the first world war, in the second, too, but the first world war was - the feeling about the different nationalities .... Remember how they changed all the names and the - couldn't play Beethoven and all those sorts of things.

Oh, no, I, er - we were very isolated there. You know there was no - we were nowhere near a town. See Rockhampton was, what, twenty-thirty miles away, I suppose and, er, we were really in the bush we had, well we had no railway line actually, from the start, I don't think. No, we came up to, er .... When we first landed there at Milman. We'd really .... We came up by motor boat and were landed there. There were no train there at the time and we landed somewhere up in Alligator Creek there. That's just south of Yaamba, a little bit, and then, I think there was - more or less camped on the bank of the creek there for several months and we were under canvas, I think, more or less or a few sheets of iron here and there and that's all. And the women were the only one there that I can remember. The men were away working somewhere on a railway line. They, they - I think they're all as poor as bloomin' churchmice. I don't think any of them had any money and, and - all being tradesmen they knew nothing about the land at all when they went there. Now, let me see, there were ... and the women, they were the only ones that were on the farm. They, well - there were no farms, just virgin land and they put up a few sheets of iron here and there, and .... We lived under the few sheets of iron, more or less, with dirt floor and that for, uh, on that - we were there for about eight years before we finally walked off and came up here to Sarina.

(5.00) But we never had a school there. I never went to school till I was about nine. We had a provisional school there and I think it was about the end of - it was 1913, I think when they - when we had our first school. It had - we'd about - I think we started off with fourteen original pupils, and, - that's all there was to it, but, er - nobody, nobody on those selections

there did any good for themselves at all. They nearly all went broke or walked off and - because the menfolk nearly always worked somewhere and the women were left to .... When they cleared a bit of land and burnt it off - I think the only thing that we produced on our, on our selection there, was we planted a bit of corn picked in with a mattock and planted a few pumpkins and that. And then we had to er - what bit of corn we did have we used to put through a corn sheller by hand, you know, and that's all there was to it there, and the only schooling I had there would be, well I had to - well we went to school. We first had to learn English as well. See I was about nine, I think, when I started school and then we had to learn English and I think I was there ....

You spoke German at home, did you?

Ah, well, we were - Mum wasn't the one to - to speak, let us speak German if we could. She was all for wantin' to learn English, see. She really didn't want anyone to speak German if they could get away with it. No we were, we were supposed to speak English mostly if it was possible.

No, well I couldn't speak German now, you know. I haven't - I could understand German, I think, if it was, er, if it wasn't spoken too fast, you know. Mostly Germans speak fast, but if it was spoken slowly I think I could understand German but otherwise I wouldn't .... Possibly if I was in a German community - I don't think it would take very long for me to pick it up again, but I mean to say, you take it that I haven't spoken German for seventy years or more, eh. It would be fairly hard to pick up again, wouldn't it? Well, that's all I know then. Anyhow, then we came up to .... After 1918 cyclone we came up to Sarina. We came by springcart and sulky. There was, er, there was father, and mother and there was, there was four - there was .... I had two - I had four brothers no, two, two - three brothers and two sisters and we came up. One sister was born in Sarina but the rest were .... One brother was born at Rockhampton - there was four of us came over from Germany. There was Bill and I and Lena - that was a sister and Bruno - that was the four that came over from Germany. Bruno was one, I think, when we came over and - I'm the only one left now. So, anyhow we came to Sarina and we started working in the sugar mill here in 1918.

What was your father doing?

My father started - he was .... He was a carpenter by trade and he got a carpenter job in the Plain Creek mill when we came up here in June in 1918.

Right so, just to - jumping a few years - going to 1939. What were you doing in 1939?

In '39 I was cutting cane at, at, er, Kolijo - that's just north of Mackay near Calen. I cut on a - I cut on a farm. I cut there for .... I cut in the same place for about eight years.

Sorry - you didn't own a farm at all at that time?

Did I?

Did you own a farm?

I did not. No, I didn't own a farm. I didn't go on to a farm until 1940 - about the middle of 1940 - I went down to Koumala.

That was your own farm, or someone else's farm?

Yes, I, er, we - we paid a deposit, sort of. There was a 400 pound deposit on a small farm. I think it had a sugar peak of about, er, just under three hundred tons, so, of cane.

(10.00) Come 1939, you'd been in Australia a long time, but Australia was fighting once again, you know, the land where you were born - where your family had come from ....

Yes, Yes.

How did you feel when war was declared in 1939?

Oh well, I had no - no affiliation with Germany at all. We had no relatives as far as I knew. We - our family never communicated with Germany at all. There were no letters . I think - I don't think Mum had any relatives left on her side. I think her sisters and brothers - I think before she came over here, I think died from TB and father - he had two brothers, I think, over there. One of .... He had two brothers, I think one of them was in business, in a furniture business, I think. But I wouldn't know anything about the relatives over there at all. They didn't - they didn't correspond as far as I knew, anyway.

I mean, there would have been a lot of people who disagreed with Hitler and opposed his ideas but at the same time didn't like the idea of fighting ...

Oh, well, I was ...

... relatives.

I was talking about the first world war now, but I, mean to say, we haven't come to second one yet have we?

Oh, oh, I was thinking we had.

Ah, ah.

In 1939.

Ah, that's right. Yes, that's right you had come .... Oh, I don't know. Well, I wasn't amongst Germans any more at all then, see.

Right.

Because I was in, er - I didn't get amongst Germans at all - once I came to Sarina, here. I started in the mill, here, and I was working there as a boy - oh, I was about fourteen. I worked three, three - four, four seasons in the Plain Creek mill. I was there in 1919 when all the boys came back from world war one - all the men came back - I was only a lad then, of course, and

then I worked another three seasons in the Plain Creek mill before I finally went up further north, there, and went into the timber getting business. But ....

Right, so coming back to 1939, um, you felt Australia was home and all those sorts of things. What did - did you feel you wanted to do any particular thing? Did it affect you at all, the declaration of war?

Well, it gave ....

Were you married, for example, at this time?

I was married by the time, oh yes. We were married in '32 I think, I'm not sure. That's right because [inaudible]. But, er ....

Children?

Yes, we had two children by the time war was declared in 1939. Yeah, we had a boy and a girl. And - the boy has since died. He - we lost him in '61. He died, so we only have the daughter left now. No, it had - Germany meant nothing to me and, of course, I mean to say, I was never in favour of that sort of stuff - like Hitler's .... You could understand - we could view - see it in the light that a dictator brings up these boys from six/seven years old and teaches them a certain thing and that's all they know. When they're grown up, well, they become tools of the dictatorship, don't they? Well, that's the way I look at it. And then after that when I finished .....

Did you feel like wanting to enlist or anything like that in 1939?

Oh, well, I - I didn't enlist till the Japanese came into it. I was in the Victoria .... I went down to, down to Melbourne - that was Mum's home town - my wife's home town and I was .... One time while I was down there I thought I might get a job in a munitions work and then I thought no, I'd better come back.

What year is this, do you know? Can you remember what year you went down to Victoria?

In, er, yes the end of '39 and - in Victoria - it would have been, oh, early, the first week or so in the new year, in 1940. Yes, then we were down there a couple of months or so. One part I thought I might stop and go in the munition factory there, then I decided I'd better come back because - country is the only thing I knew. So I thought I'd better come back into the country and ....

Why had you gone down there?

Oh.

At that time.

Oh, we went down 'cause May's people, the wife's people, were in, in Mornington so we went down there. That was my second visit down to the, to the - no, that was my first visit to the

wife's people, that's right, yeah. We went down by - we had a Model A Ford and we went down by road. We were about eight days going down. So ....

(15.00) Right, so, you came back to Queensland and you said before that you bought a farm, a small farm. Did you buy it immediately on return?

No, I worked again at Mt Pelion on a - with a contractor that was repairing the lifts for the different mills along the railway line and I worked on - with him till about, oh, I think about June of 1940 then I decided I'd ... We had, we saved up about 400 pounds - we had in the bank - and we thought we'd better go onto the land and we went down to Koumala and we ....

Why did you want to go onto the land? What was the particular reason for the decision?

Oh, well, the land was really in my blood, I think. And, and I got a bit of - my neighbour there when I was cutting at Kolijoe - there was a chap by the name of McNicholson. He was on a farm just adjoining where I was staying and he always said, he said, 'Oh, you're wasting your time workin' for people'. He said, 'You're such a good worker, why don't you have a piece of land of your own'. Well, that sort of, eventually. grew on me and then I eventually thought I'd make it and .... Anyhow we went down to Koumala and got onto this, - onto this little farm and - it was full of trees and everything. Small house on it, horses, an old Fortune tractor. Anyhow - it was a very wet year, that year, too, and there was no - there hadn't been any ground broke up or anything like that in June so the fella that sold it - he had it turned over by the time we went down - about the end of June and then we had to go and plant. Well, we had - we had all this grass and stuff all under the ground and by the time I turned it over again all that came up again and we had a heck of a tussle and anyway to get our first crop in and we got it - we planted it. A brother-in-law of mine - he was married to my sister - he had a farm at Marian and he came down to help us plant. We'd a lot of plants cut ready so they came at the weekend. His brother came with him and we got eleven acres planted - in August - and down come fourteen inches of rain on it. And I was only reading in the paper, here, the other day when they gave the statistics for the August rainfall and I find that August of 1940 had a record rainfall of uh, I think they said in Mackay was 100 and - 180 millimetres. I think that would be about, oh, five, six or seven inches or something like that. Well, we had fourteen inches down Koumala fallin' on us at that time well, that sort of .... And - there was a - the farm hadn't even been passed - like - it had to pass through the board and one thing and another and I had 100 pound deposit on it and I said, 'Oh, I think we'll just finish [inaudible]' and we were gonna walk off it. The only one who stuck to it was Mum. She wouldn't leave so - it was only her good sense that kept us there anyway. That's about all you can say but we went on and on, of course. We battled along and we finally got on our feet and stayed there till 1961 ...

Just, just ...

... or 1964.

Just, just come back to the war. Did you think of enlisting at any stage?

I enlisted in - I wouldn't know the certain sure date but I enlisted - I think it must have been '42. I don't know, it might have been late in '41, I'm not sure, I don't know the date. I got no ....

This is for the army or the navy or ...?

No, this was the footsloggers. And I went to - I enlisted in Mackay and they ....

Was this for the VDC or something else?

No, this was for the AIF. I was thirty-six at the time, I think. And they sent me round to a Dr Barlow. He's the one - he lost a leg in the first world war and - he rejected me.

(20.00) He - I'd .... In, oh, way back in '24 I think it was, when I was timber getting. I got hit with a cane lift and it tore the sinew of my heel up at Elaroo, that was up near Bloomsbury and I got - Dr Hopkins was doctor at the base hospital at Mackay at the time and he sewed it up and Dr Barlow said that that was - this here, ankle, see how thick that sinew is there. Dr Barlow said that I wouldn't march. I wouldn't be able to stand marching for any - and so he rejected me, so then .... I did find out later when I was in the VDC that it used to play up with me, especially when you were on your toes a lot climbing up hills and that, you know, when you put a lot of strain on the heel - on the big sinew on the heel - it used to swell up a lot. So he was probably right.

Just going back - in 1942 the Japanese had come into the war. Had the Japanese coming into the war - had that given you a different feeling about the war, in some way?

Well, I'd even - I'd even had a bit of an idea before that while I still - before the 'Japs' came in - when I was up at Kolijo. I had a great friend of mine - he was gonna enlist in the air force and I thought I'd - I was going to try the air force, too, see. And he said to me, he said, 'You haven't got enough schooling to ever try the air force'. He - well, I mean to say - my three or four years of schooling was pretty meagre. So that knocked that on the head that time and then, of course, I never tried again till the Japs came in.

When had you first heard of the VDC? When did that name first ...?

Well, the first indication ....

... cross the ...

The first indication I had of the VDC starting up - I was on the farm down at Koumala and I was in the - I was doing a bit of grubbing - trees out with the mattock and shovel and that and a chap by the name of Reg Kemp, he had a farm at Koumala. He came along on a bicycle and he called in on me and he said, 'We're starting up this VDC'. He said, 'Would you be interested?' I said, 'My word'.

What did he tell you about it? What did he say it was?

Oh, he, that's all he said - well, he said the VDC was the type of civilian army, you know, just a part-time - sort of defence corps.

I notice ....

He was a first world war man, Reg Kemp. He had been in the first world war and he came along on his bike this morning and I said, 'Yes'. He said, 'I'm trying to see if I could get a section down here at Koumala'.

> I notice on your discharge paper that you joined in May. Before this - had there been preparations for evacuation or anything like that - earlier that year?

Oh, yes, that was on. That was on before that I think. I'm not sure, but I think it was because a lot of them evacuated and they came to us with evacuation papers and I know we - we reckoned we was stickin' and Mum said not for sure. She wasn't gonna bloomin' go and - we had ....

> Why weren't you going to go?

Well, definitely she was - she reckoned you might as well stop here as anywhere else and a funny part of it - our lad - John - he was, I don't know how old he would have been. He said, 'Mum, we're not going. I'm going to go up there, there's a cave up there on the hill', he said, 'and we're going to barricade ourselves in up there'. He was only about ten, I suppose, nine or ten or he might have been more, I wouldn't be sure now. But, anyhow, there were a lot of people evacuated - all around us, here, they were leaving. They got fairly scared, but May was never scared. No, she ... and then some of the other farmers around there .... One farmer in particular said, 'You're mad for this VDC business. It'll put us all in danger if the Japs do land then. We'll all be in danger because what the heck are you gonna do? You'll only cause strife by trying to resist or something like that and ....'

(25.00) But anyhow that wasn't our idea. Our idea wasn't really to stand up to an invading army. We were - we had just do a bit of pin prickin' here and there and demolition sort of stuff we were taught mostly, of course. That was our sole aim. We knew that we couldn't - couldn't defend against an invading army but we could still do the underground stuff - that was our idea.

> Just going back to joining the VDC. Can you remember the first meeting you had?

Well, I don't know whether we had any meeting or whether we all called up, you know, into the ....

> The first time you got together with a - a parade or a meeting or whatever it is you want to call it.

I don't ...

> ... the first parade ...

... remember that. I just remember that we were all called up to Sarina, were sworn in - sworn in then and examined by a doctor and then sworn in and that was that.

> What sort of equipment were you given?

Oh, well, our first equipment was - we were equipped with long .303s - them old infantry rifles. Those had - well it could have ... I know they called .... When I was on the farm, there, before - before we had the VDC they called in all the rifles and I'd a .303 because I used to belong to a rifle club at Kolijo and I'd a long rifle - a .303. Well, they were all called in and when we became the VDC we were issued with those long rifles that were probably impressed from all these different places. But anyhow, those were the rifles that we had for twelve months or so and our equipment - I ....

What about uniforms?

They gave us - well, they gave us uniform almost immediately because they reckoned if we didn't have a uniform we could be shot as spies, if we were taken, captured anywhere. If we had a uniform we had the rights to become a prisoner of war, but .... That's why we were given uniform. I don't think we trained at any time without the uniform. I think we had uniform before we started to become a unit.

What were you given in the way of uniform?

We were given khaki shirt, trousers, boots, socks, great coat and hat, of course, and gas mask - we all had gas masks. And equipment, I think, was fairly - was a rifle and we had ....

Bayonets?

Oh, yes, we'd a bayonet, yes and we had the dixies and all that sort of thing for our utensils and our water bottle and webbing, and I think as far as the bigger guns, we had, um .... At the start, I think we only had a Hotchkiss rifles. I think they were used by the Light Horse during the first world war. They were only short strips of - hold about twelve or so .303 cartridges. They were a metal strip that were just fed into a rifle and then we had .... We had a heavy machine gun - it was a Spandau captured by a - from the Germans in the first world war and it was modified to take .303 shells and we had a - one Boyes anti-tank gun - anti-tank rifle.

When you say 'Boyes', spelt how?

Boyes - Boyds [sic]. I think it might have been Boyds [sic].

B-O-Y-D?

I think so.

Uh, huh.

It was an anti-tank rifle. You were supposed to shoot into the tanks and knock a track off - off a tank. It - you had to lie down - it had a big - it had a fair bloomin' recoil because it fired a pretty - it fired a, oh, a fairly - you know, a small shell and you laid along the ground to fire it and you had a big rubber cushion on your shoulder. It fired - it was on a little - on a bipod - short bipod.

And how much training were you doing with all these weapons?

Oh, well, we were really only - only weekenders, weekenders mostly.

I mean, was there a shortage of live ammunition to get a feel of using it?

Well, we didn't get a lot of live ammunition training. We - I think we always had about five rounds each, I think. If I remember rightly.

What - that's each week - each weekend.

Oh, no, no. We never fired - we - I think - mostly we were using - anything we used at the weekends - mostly were the explosives for demolition. Otherwise we never used a ....

END TAPE 1, SIDE A

BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE B

Identification: This is Side 2, Tape 1,
Carl Lennig.
End of identification.

Sorry, you were saying about the rifles.

We never used the rifles much. The only time we really had, er, live training was when the mobile training unit came up and put us - we had a week in camp in - we were all called up to Plain Creek mill - to the barracks, there, and we had one week with the mobile training unit.

What was the mobile training unit?

Ah, well, they went - there was - I think there was only a sergeant major, I think, in charge and a couple of sergeants came up with them - came from Brisbane I take it. And, the sergeant - they were ex-AIF men that'd been in this - second world war and had been wounded or something and were just brought back to train again in Australia, and ....

What would they put you ...? What sort of training would they give you in a week in that sort of ... when you were poorly ...?

They had us with all the weapons. We were on the machine gun and ten pound mortar - that was one of our - equipment that we had and then we had the Owen and the Bren and the only heavy machine gun we had, as I told you was the - the Vickers converted Spandau and .... But then we had - I think we had a couple of Owen guns to our section. Our section was - I belonged to that section at Koumala, see. And Reg Kemp was a corporal who was in charge of our section. But we - that's the only time we came together - if we had a .... We all come together from - with the Sarina mob when we had a bigger turn out, see. Like the mobile training unit - we were all together then, and - otherwise we only had our, our own section.

Where did you stay during that week?

Er, at the Plain Creek mill. I'm not sure - I think we stayed in the barracks - I wouldn't be sure - were we under cover - under - out under the stars - I'm not sure. I think we were under the stars some part of it - we were camped out.

How many men were there - came together for that?

Oh, crikey - there must have been a lot there.

About a hundred?

Oh, I suppose there could have been. Yeah, I suppose there could have been - I wouldn't know. I know that - at that time, the - nearly all of them went down with diarrhoea while we were there in camp and there was only a few of us old blokes from down there that were bushmen that - who knew the herbal stuff - cider juicer, we used to call that weed which stop all that diarrhoea. We were the only ones around on deck that were eating cider juicer and the others that were on that brown medicine - that the army dished out to them - they were soon running to the toilet everyday.

What do you think caused the diarrhoea?

Oh, well, it must have went through - it must have came through the food. Must have come from the kitchen, somewhere, because where does that start in when there's a flock of men together - there always seem to start on the - start ....

The - so .... What was the atmosphere - among that group - I mean you were ...?

Oh, oh, very cordial - very ....

Was it a bit of a holiday? Bit of a break away from normal work?

Oh, I don't know about a holiday - they were a pretty serious mob I tell ya.

But I mean - sure, working hard but also a break away from the normal routine - break away from home.

(5.00) Oh, yeah, it was a break, yes - it was, I mean to say - but a break generally that we could ill afford really because we had to leave our farms and that - mostly - I think they would all be farmers, more or less, and - because anyone that wasn't on the farm or in a protected industry - they wouldn't have been there - they would have been either in the CCCs or in the army, wouldn't they? No, it was - yes, it was a break, you must say, but we took it pretty seriously, though - we - our .... When we had the final - we had the live show. We went down towards Sarina Beach, I think, where - had this 'do' - when .... Some salt pans down there and there was machine gun and this and that set up different places and they were supposed to be the enemy and that and .... But anyhow, we were under fire - we sort of advanced under fire and went down and another mob would go under fire again. But anyhow, when we came back to Sarina, then we all assembled in the hall, in there, and the boss from the mobile training unit - he gave us a lecture and he - which wasn't a very good lecture, I can tell ya. 'Well,' he said, 'Boys, with this 'do' here this afternoon you've got absolutely nothing to be proud of - in fact it was a debacle'. He reckoned we'd all get killed there [laughs], so we up and leave - wasn't very well trained anyway. But anyhow, we did our best - that's all we could have done.

Who were the men that were in charge, you know, the local men that were the people in charge of the various sections and patrols and ....

Oh, well, the ....

... company.

The CO, of course, was the manager of the Plain Creek mill - Tony Scougall and the 2IC - he was down - he was a Carmila man. He was lookin' after a farm - he was looking after Charlie Davidson's farm and Charlie Davidson - he later became 'Davidson for Dawson' in parliament. He later was the, er ....

Member of parliament.

Member, yes in - federal member and this chap - I can't recall his name, now - he was the 2IC, anyway. He was the one that was - he was the one that looked after our section, like, more or less and the Carmila one .... Carmila - they had - they had a section down there, too.

Had they been fairly well chosen - as the men in charge? Do you think they got the best men to put in charge?

Oh, I think they'd have to be. I think they probably all had first world war experience.

Didn't show up apparently in that - that show that you were just describing.

Oh, well, I suppose their - they were only privates anyway in the first world war. So I suppose they - they was probably still havin' the old tactics - tactics in the second world war changed a lot to what they were in the first world war, you know. And - I remember there - we were on a 'do' down at Sarina Beach there one time and there was a sergeant - an old 'Pommie' bloke by the name of Saunders - he had charge of our section - and we were coming in to Sarina to meet up with the rest - our section was out and we were coming in to Sarina and there was a salt pan between us - where we could have skirted, but no, he said, 'Full ....' - yeah - 'On the run', across the salt pan - up to our knees in mud. We could have easy went around it, you know. But no, he would have it - we go straight through this.

Why do you think he wanted to go straight through?

I dunno, I don't know, I suppose, he reckoned I suppose that when he was in the army in Flanders or some of those places, I suppose, they were up to their knees in mud. I suppose it was good enough for them it was good enough for us too.

You were fairly exposed out in the middle of a salt pan if there happened to be an enemy patrol on the other side.

I suppose we had to go flat down in that. No, - well, I don't know what sort of a job we could have done. I think we'd have niggled them anyway, here and there, if there had been an invasion - which was imminent at the time.

You mentioned before that most of the men involved were cane farmers. Any other types at all?

Not that I know. All our section - all our section was from Koumala, although a lot of the Sarina fellows, of course, would be metal workers and that sort of thing. But all our section from Koumala were all farmers.

(10.00) And what sort of encouragement did people get? I mean, you got a neighbour calling in to make a suggestion. How were the other people recruited, do you know?

Oh, well, that was about the only person that I know. And ....

Would it have been easy to refuse, or was there a bit of social pressure of the community? Was it pressuring people to get involved in these things?

Well, I don't know. I don't know. There was no pressure as far as I know. No, I think it was just voluntary absolutely. I think they were happy to be of some service. I don't think there was any - any of those that were in it were - they - there wasn't pressure in any way - that I know.

On - you met how often in a week?

Beg pardon?

How often would you meet each week?

Oh, we didn't - no, we didn't meet during the week at all. It was only weekenders with us. No. it was only weekenders, no - I think we practically had it every weekend.

And on a normal weekend, what sort of things would you do?

Oh, well, we would just do mostly - I think it was mostly lectures and - and demolition, mostly. Instruction on demolition of bridges and that sort of thing and blowing up strategic roads. You know, if there was roads that they'd re.... Blow them into holes and that which I don't suppose would have deterred an enemy very much. No, but, that was the idea.

Were you involved at all in special parades, you know, fund raising, loan campaigns, recruiting campaigns?

No, no, not at all - no, and .... Only once I remember us going onto a firing range. We went onto a firing range - I think there was only a few selected to go onto a firing range, and - I was one of them went to Mackay, there, on a firing range.

Was that the only time when you would get practice with your rifles?

That would be - yes, we never went on a firing range as far as I can remember, otherwise.

You didn't sort of practice in a paddock or anything like that?

Oh, no, no. We didn't have any ammunition anyway. No, no, we only - I think we were issued with five rounds, I think, that's all we had, I think.

That was for the war.

Oh, I don't know. I think if anything would have happened, the ammunition would have been forthcoming, oh yes. It'd have been forthcoming, all right. But, that was only ammunition we had personally with us, each individual. See, we took our rifles home and that's the only - the only ammunition we ever had on ....

Was it difficult to combine work in the VDC?

Oh, well, I mean to say ....

Labour was a bit short, wasn't it?

I think, if you were - if you couldn't attend parade - or if you - you just didn't. You had to stop at home to do your work - you probably didn't attend your parade at times. I don't think everybody attended the parade every time it was called.

What - were there some people who perhaps missed out on a few more than others? Some people weren't quite as regular.

Oh, well, that could be. That I wouldn't know. No, I think that the - there wouldn't be a full turn-out of a section at any time, I don't think.

Right. What sort of pressure would come on someone who didn't turn up for a number of meetings?

I don't remember them being overhauled - hauled over the coals in any way. I think there was excuses taken. I ....

You mentioned that some people were critical of the VDC because they thought it would attract Japanese animosity to the region.

Oh, yeah.

Any other memories of public attitudes? Anyone, sort of, call you 'Dads Army' or anything like that?

Oh, no, well - I don't think *Dads Army* was known then because *Dads Army* didn't really come under the public eye till television came in, ay.

But there were other names like 'The Old and the Bold' or 'The Retreads' - the ....

Oh no, no, no. No, I didn't know of any like that. It could have been around Sarina, I don't know because I wasn't in Sarina. See, all of our 'dos' were down in Koumala and Sarina, of course, having a population far greater than we had - we only had our few people down at Koumala - a one horse town - one pub town. I mean to say, there wasn't many there.

Fred Johnson described going to the coast on one occasion to investigate a story about a fisherman who'd been supposedly kidnapped by a Japanese submarine. This was publicised a little while ago in the Mackay *Mercury* .

Well, I could tell you the whole - I can get you this right from the horse's mouth. That's because I was living pretty close to where this happened. And this chap, the ....

(15.00) Do you know who it was, officially?

I forget his name now. But I can tell you the story of ....

Did you know him?

I didn't know him. No. But, Curtis - he was a well borer and he was living way down Rocky Dam way, there. And, I knew this Len Curtis well and he was boring a hole - he had a bit of a

land down there - and he was boring a hole for himself. And this was a percussion drill, you know, going 'thump, thump, thump' all the time - and he was living on the Rocky Dam creek - and his wife saw this man coming up the cutting. There's a road goes - a cutting goes down into the scrub, there. And just as he come to the top he collapsed, there. This - Len Curtis told me this story himself. That was directly after it happened. And, you know, during the war we had no trucks or no oil, we couldn't get no petrol. We had no - vehicle of any kind, hardly, but he had a 'Chev four' truck that he used to use for his boring business. Anyhow, his wife sang out, 'Len, there's a man collapsed up there on the top of the bank'. And he raced over, he said, 'Bring down the ....' - he had a little flask of brandy at home - he said, 'Bring down the brandy'. And, she came down with the brandy and he poured it down this fellow's throat. And, he revived a bit and he come round and - Len was a bit of a character - he'd tell a bit of a story - and he said, 'This fellow when he opened his eyes said, 'Ah, that was good,' he said, 'Have you got any more?" And he said, 'No. If you have anything else now it'll have to be water'. So, then he tells Len this story. He was looking after a trap for a fella by the name of Porter - down Glendower - down on Glendower Point.

What, a fish trap?

Yeah, fish trap, yeah. And, he said he was - he'd had his tea and he had his billy on to boil up some water to wash up and the Japs came up from behind him and they grabbed him and said, 'Now, we want to go - we want to get into Pioneer River into ....' - and said - 'You show us the way in there'. And he said they grabbed him and put him in this rubber dinghy, and ....

That's the creek into Mackay, isn't it?

Yeah.

The Pioneer Creek ...

The Pioneer River, yeah, the river into Mackay. Anyhow, they got him into this rubber dinghy and rowed him onto a submarine and they were forcing him to show - show them their way into Pioneer River - so the story goes. And he said they took him down below and he said, 'Oh, but - I said to these Japs ....' He said he was starting to vomit and 'I got sick and I was seasick' and they let him come up on deck and he said directly that he got up on deck he dived overboard and he went underwater and swam and then when he surfaced again they fired a few shots at him. Anyhow, he got away that was the story and that's how - he said he walked - oh, he'd only have to walk about, oh, seven or eight mile, I suppose. So he came up to Curtis' place and there he collapsed, see. But anyhow, Len then piled him onto the truck - took him to Sarina for a report of the incident to the authorities. They took him to Mackay and they quizzed him in there and they asked him what the dinghy was like and what was the - when they took him down the turret in the submarine - where was the ladder down there and what side was the ladder, and all that. And he reckoned it was there and they reckoned it sounded like it was a Japanese submarine, the ladder was on the right side like he - where it should have been with the Japs. But anyhow, the upshot of it was they took him to Brisbane for interrogation in there again by the marine authorities down there and then we never heard any more of it, later - and later I saw on the *Mercury* where he was fined five pounds for causing a public mischief. So that was the upshot of it. But when ...

You saw that, what, during the war you saw that announcement that he'd been fined five pounds?

Oh, yes, yes, that was in the *Mercury*. Oh, yeah, that he was fined five pounds for causing a public mischief.

(20.00) Right. What meaning that he'd made the whole story up?

Yes, that's what - as far as their interrogation went. But, of course, the VDC was sent down to patrol the beaches down - right down to Carmila along there to see if they could find any tracks or traces or anything, but ...

You weren't sent down.

No, I wasn't with them. I think there was - I think Fred Johnson was one. I think Cheryl Atherton might have been another one. I'm not sure - Roy Atherton might have been another one - I don't know, but I wasn't with them. I think there was about three or four of them that - in the VDC that was sent down there. But, they, of course - they never found anything.

Right, so that was down at Koumala. How far away - you weren't working with them. How far away were they from where you had your farm?

Where, this ...?

That lot of VDC.

Oh, they - where were their - where was their farms?

Yes.

They were at Koumala, too.

Right. But how many people ...? You were VDC Koumala, right?

Yeah.

And they were, too.

Yeah.

So, did you used to meet together with them - Fred Johnson ...?

No, I didn't even know they'd gone down there. They must have been sent from - through Sarina, I think. The Sarina, the Sarina VDC or something must have got in contact with them and sent them down there because I didn't know till later that they'd gone down there.

But normally, you would have worked with them on, you know, on each weekend they would have been part of your group, wouldn't they?

Oh, yes, they would have been, yes.

Mm, right. Were there any other major VDC activities that you remember - from that period?

No, no, no. Only that we used to have, maybe, every so often we might have had a camp out somewhere where .... I remember one camp we had about - for a weekend - down at Sarina Beach, where we'd have guards out at night, you know, and no lights and no cigarettes, and, you know, and do your several hours bloomin' guard duty and be relieved at midnight - another one come on at two o'clock or something like that. That's all.

As the war, sort of pushed on, you know, in 1944 early 1945 and it was seeming fairly clear that the Japanese weren't going to invade Australia. Did people begin to get a feeling of - well, there were better things you could do with your weekend than go down there and ...?

I don't think that's - it didn't seem to surface. No, those sentiments never, those sentiments never surfaced as far as I could - I never heard of any, anyway. They all seemed to be happy.

And keen, ready for the invasion of the Japanese in '45.

Oh, I think they were keen enough because I .... They wasn't lookin' forward to it by any means, I tell you. I mean to say, that was not the thing we were looking forward to, by any means. But, if it had happened - well, we'd have just had to see what we could do.

You also said that you were working as an air raid warden.

Oh, yes, yes ....

Could you tell me ...?

Not an air raid warden - a plane spotter.

Right, could you tell me - who recruited you to do that?

Ah.

Who asked you to do that?

Harry Williams - he had the butcher's shop at Koumala at the time and he was very keen. He was definitely keen. I mean to say, even any time that we were rostered for a certain shift, if somebody didn't turn up ....

Chasing a mosquito.

Any time he would sort of take over or get somebody to take that shift. It was always - always manned - twenty-four hours a day. I don't know ....

He asked you to join, did he?

Oh, yes, yes. He would be - he'd be the instigator down there at Koumala.

And what sort of training did they give you, so that you would be able to identify the right planes?

Oh, the only training we got was silhouettes of planes and what the Jap plane would look like in the air.

Who gave you the training?

Oh, I don't know. We had all the - we only had the paperwork to study ourselves.

I mean, you didn't go and do courses.

No, no, no courses, no. No, we got a few lectures, that's all. I think they were only local lectures and that was only from documents, I think.

How was it set up? How was the air raid place set up?

How was the ...

Not air raid place - the air raid - the aircraft spotting centre - how was it actually set up?

(25.00) It was set up in a little room, there, with a telephone and we had sole rights - as soon as we heard a plane we'd ring 'air flash' Mackay and all - anyone on the line would shut down - so we had priority on the line because they couldn't communicate by air at all - there was radio silence as far as aircraft was concerned during that time. It was - planes never transmitted anywhere because - and it was all left to the land lines to spot the planes. They had one at Carmila and one at Koumala and Sarina, I don't know where else they had them.

So, which one were you at?

At Koumala.

Koumala. And you also mentioned another place with a very similar name. What ...?

Carmila.

Where's Carmila?

Carmila was about another twenty or so miles south of us.

How do you spell Carmila?

Ah, C-A-R-M-I-L-L-A. [sic]

And Koumala?

K-O-U-M-A-L-A.

Right. And how would you - what sort of place would you go to spot the aircraft? Would you climb up a pole and be able to [inaudible] forward on ...?

No, no, no. No, we only had, we only had vision towards the coast and we had binoculars. They had - I think they were binoculars that probably - I think one pair might have been issued to us by the authorities and I think individuals might have had their own. But, we'd hear a plane and then we'd try and pick it up and we'd - they had a formula of - to describe the plane only in numbers, such as biplanes and monoplanes and that sort of thing. And two or single engine and they - we had - we only had numbers to - for that, so it shortened the message, see. We had a sort of a code, you could say.

Who - how many people manned the post?

Oh, well, that I couldn't say. But, ah ....

Or, how many shifts were there?

Well, the women used to do - the women used to do it - the shifts from six o'clock to ten o'clock at night. They probably did four hour shifts. And some of them - there was Harry Williams' daughter - I think her name was Edna. She'd man if there was - she'd man it all day if it came to that. If there was no other ....

Was it manned during the day normally?

Oh, yeah, yeah. There was .... Women manned it all day - all day-time and men at night. There was no women after ten o'clock till six o'clock next morning.

And how often would you go down to take a shift?

I think I used to do about two shifts a week, I think. I used to take the shifts from - either from ten till two or two till six.

And, how often would you report an aircraft?

Oh, sometimes, we used to - sometimes a whole flock of them, but oh, they'd be - there wouldn't be much aircraft at night. At night there was very seldom an aircraft. But they - I mean to say they wasn't as efficient as they are today. But in the day-time there was quite a lot. At one time when they were ferrying all the American craft north, there were quite a lot of planes then. Well, one time in my - not under my official duties - but I was down, down Rocky Dam Creek at the landing there one day and there was five planes, oh, circling around very low over the mangroves down there. And they were planes that I hadn't even - we ever had notifications of and they were the new Lockheed Hudsons that had come out - twin sort of a fuselage affair. The 'Yankees' later called them 'flying coffins' because they were - there was a bar between the tails, you know, and they couldn't, they couldn't parachute out of them because if they parachuted out then the parachute would have caught up in that tail bar between the - seeing there were fuselages, see with two tail fins. And, I saw them there that day and when I came home one of my neighbours, there - he was in the VDC, he said, 'I saw those planes', he said, 'They were Japanese planes that were there'. I said, 'No'. I said, 'They'd had a big br... an American star on them because' .... And I knew that they were coming out because I was talking to a Yank who was on leave in Mackay. One day I was coming out in

the [inaudible] a moment and he said, 'When we get these Lockheed Hudsons' he said, 'We'll give them Japs a bit of a doing then', because he said, 'We can go - we got a ceiling of about 40,000 feet with them'. So I knew that there was - that was the new Yank planes that came out.

I've got to change the tape.

END TAPE 1, SIDE B

BEGIN TAPE 2, SIDE A

Identification: This is Tape 2, Side 1,
Carl Lennig.

I was just gonna say how efficient our spotters were because I had .... A mate of mine was in the army and he was on leave and he was at our place - I was about two miles from Koumala, I suppose, and he brought back one of those tracer bullets. And, I'd never ever seen a tracer fired so he said, 'Put this in'. And I was on the back landing of our house and I put this tracer bullet in and fired it up into the air and it was picked up at Koumala and reported that there was a flare went up and as soon as I heard of it I told them what happened - how the flare went up. I shot this tracer bullet in the air and - Claud Latchet [?] was the man was on spotting that night and he reported what he thought was a flare and somebody said, 'It probably was a shooting star'. He said, 'I never ever saw a shooting star go upwards'. So, then as soon as I .... [Break in recording]

Just recommencing. The relationship with the army. Did the VDC have much to do with the army and the other armed forces round about?

No, none whatsoever as far as I know. No, the only time we came in contact with any of the army personnel was when they - when that mobile unit came up, I think. Gave us that week of training.

At the end of the war - what happened at the end of the war?

Oh, we had a big 'do' at the end of the war. We had a big dance at Koumala and everybody - well, we all got pretty full. [laughter] We had a pretty lively time, I mean to say - it was a relief to be - to have it all over, you know. Because, although we wasn't in it, we still - we didn't have a very easy time with all our rationing and all that going on, you know.

And the VDC, how was - how was the VDC wound up?

Oh, oh, we had a, we had a day out at the - we all assembled at the oh, the race course at Sarina - where the showgrounds are today. And we had a few grogs there. Oh, got fairly merry. I know I got pretty merry, anyway. And, that was where - disbanded there.

Looking back, was it - I mean the war for you - was it a time when you learnt new things and you had interesting experiences or was it a fairly flat time that was wasted?

No, I wouldn't say it was wasted. It wasn't wasted, but it was a job that had to be done anyway. And it did cut into our work a lot and - but I don't think it hurt anybody. You probably had to work a bit harder, that's all. You didn't have much time to yourself because you still had all your farming to do. In those days, of course, we - we had no harvesters - we cut all our own cane and that sort of thing had to go on. And, er, just any time you were too busy to attend the parade - you just didn't go, that's all. I mean to say, your work had to come.

Did you feel that the VDC should have got more recognition after the war?

Oh, well, I don't know whether we looked for any recognition. I didn't anyway. But I thought we did our bit, the best we knew how and that's how it was. We didn't look for any accolade in any way. No, I reckon we were happy the way we were. We were happy to do the job we did, and it mightn't have been very efficient but who knows it might have - if something would have happened perhaps we would have put a bit of a sting into them just the same, because I think as far as equipment went I think we had a fair bit of fire power. Whether we could have used it, I don't know. But, that's all I can say.

You were saying about camaraderie?

Yeah. Yes, we had - we were a well knit sort of a family affair really between us. We were all good friends. We used to .... When we used to go up to Sarina there was only one vehicle, I think, that was mobile down there and we all piled into one vehicle to go up to Sarina. Roy Atherton was the only one had a vehicle down there on the road and that was a Model A Ford. We'd all pile in there - there was only - I mean to say - there was only about seven/eight of us down there, I think, in Koumala that was in it - about eight or nine. I think there might have been nine there altogether, I don't know. Only had a section.

END INTERVIEW