



TRANSCRIPT OF ORAL HISTORY RECORDING

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Title	(Q215294) Johnson, Christopher Robert ‘Bob’ (Private)
Interviewer	Connell, Daniel
Place made	Mackay, QLD
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Description	Christopher Robert (Bob) Johnson as a private, Volunteer Defence Corps, interviewed by Daniel Connell for The Keith Murdoch Sound Archive of Australia in The War of 1939–45.

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TAPE 1. SIDE A.

Identification: This is Side 1, Tape 1, of the interview with Mr Bob Johnson. I'm Daniel Connell and this is 5th September 1989, End of identification.

Right, Mr Johnson, at the beginning of the war, how old were you?

That's to say 1940. T would have been thirty–two in 1940.

And what were you doing, what sort of work?

Um?

What sort of work?

I was a farmer.

What sort of… ?

Cane farmer.

And whereabouts?

At Mia–Mia via Mackay. That's approximately thirty miles from Mackay. [inaudible],

And when war came, how did you react to the news, what did the news mean to you?

Well, of course, it was a bit of a shock I suppose to everybody but ... maybe it was a surprise. Its pretty hard to remember just what my reactions were at that time, um

…something personal – I'd better not say on this.

Did you have any children?

At that time – that's what I was about to say. In 1940 I had a family of five and my wife was very ill at that particular time and she died in 1942. That's why I wasn't going to say anything.

Right, sorry. So, the work that you continued to do after the war started – how did the war affect your business as a sugarcane farmer?

As what?

Sugarcane farmer, how did the war affect it?

Well, it made a difference–wise of course. It was difficult to get employees to carry on the work, particularly in the cane harvest and it was customary in those days to have a number of cane cutters to hand cut your cane and it was difficult to get employees and you couldn't get experienced employees, put it that way, so that was about the main thing.

When did you first hear about the VDC?

0h, that's, oh, I don't know, when did I join?

It will probably be on your discharge.

No, I think it will be on this one here, probably is on it?.

Yes, it is, 1942.

24th April, 1942 when I enlisted in the VDC and...

When did you first hear about the VDC?

Well, I'm not sure, I can't answer that truthfully. It might have been some time previous to that. I think it would have been some time in '41 or maybe before that, I don't know. I can't answer it truthfully.

Um

Can't remember.

Why did you join the VDC?

Well:, I think everybody had to do his bit, that was the idea and, cane farmers and – were exempt, actually – and we had to do our bit, you know, and it was weekend, it was all weekend work this, in the VDC. It wasn't full–time but each weekend you turned out on – with the group.

What about evenings as well?

(5.00) Sometimes, in the evenings – local sections. it was this particular B Company of the VDC – 15th Battalion. It was spread throughout the district or throughout the northern – the western part of the district.

Which district is this?

Well, that was Mackay district but I mean it was, er, from – B Company extended from Marian, we'll say, to Netherdale – that part, the western part of the Mackay district. A Company was the Mackay company and the Mackay company were from Bakers Creek to Mackay, you know. That's as far as I can say, at the time. There were times at nights that the local sections from around about Mirani did turn out for night patrols and that sort of thing – out from Mirani. But the main meeting place for B Company was the Gargett School and that would be approximately, oh, about thirty–five miles from Mackay and that was our meeting place for the assembly there at weekends, Saturday and Sunday.

When you first joined, what sort of training did you get at the very beginning?

Well, it was – ordinary teaching, I suppose. How to march and ail that sort of thing, but – the usual army training of, um – pretty hard to say – you had your each sections and your sections and platoons and so on, but it was just a matter of training and we had to learn to use explosives – had to learn to use rifles, Tommy guns and so on.

How were you organised, how was the company divided up?

Well, the company was divided up – as I say, it was the 15th Battalion, which comprised companies from – I think from about St. Lawrence in the south to approximately Proserpine in the north – that was in the Mackay district – that was 15th Battalion. And it was split up into several companies and each company had their own, er, er, company commander and your company sergeant major, your, your platoon sergeants and so on, the usual army idea and we were particularly happy with our officers up here but today, of course, they're all gone and it makes it difficult, I can't recall a lot of things.

The officers that you had, perhaps you could tell me a bit about them because we're also interested in finding out who were the people who organised the VDC.

Well, our um – the battalion commander was a Mr Ben Hogan. Incidentally he was a neighbour of mine, a cane farmer. He had served in the First World War and I think he had reached the – he only was a sergeant in the First World War but he was a man who had taken positions in the sugar industry – Chairman of Directors of the local sugar mill, North Eden and a man competent to carry out his duties. I think at that time the next under him was a Mr Campbell. He was a captain in the First World War and he had at that time was manager of North Eden Mill. Our company commander was Lieutenant Tom Lynch, a school teacher who had also served in the world war and had served in an intelligence group, I understand. And the company sergeant major was Sergeant Major Wright. He was also a cane farmer. Our platoon sergeant was Jim Nimmo, another cane farmer. I'd say all the officers were somebody connected with the sugar industry in B Company because that was a country company.

Was that, in a sense, a fair representation? Was sugar the only industry going, or were there other big industries like cattle that weren't so well represented?

Well, the cattle industry was mainly in the western – west of Mackay over the range sort of thing and Upper Eungella were dairy farmers but some of the Eungella dairy farmers did come down and join with the group up on the far end of the company. 1 can't say offhand who they were now – I can't remember the names but there were very few of the cattle people – well, they were too far away from this particular area anyway to have taken part in it.

(10.00) What about the town people, were they represented in a different...?

The town people were in A Company. All the townspeople were in A Company and, as I said earlier, our company extended from, I think, from Walkerston out to Netherdale but all round Mackay itself and out as far as Bakers Creek were all in A Company so they did their training separately from us. Each company did their own training in their own particular area, so. They did have a trial mobilisation when all the companies came together and mobilised to – in case of a – Japs coming in or something like that, you know, and they met outside of Mackay and .... Its pretty hard to describe what happened but everybody was – every company was the other company's enemy sort of thing and you had to go to certain places at certain times and make sure that you didn't make contact with the enemy and all this sort of

thing. On that particular occasion the rendezvous was the school at Mirani and a big storm blew up that afternoon and it made it pretty difficult – everybody got wet and when the section I was in…

Did you have things like grenades as part of your equipment?

Well, we did not have grenades. We couldn't get a lot of equipment in the early stages but Captain Campbell who was the manager of North Eden Mill and I think he was our 2IC at the time – he had a type of grenade fabricated at North Eden Mill which was made in sections similarly to a hand grenade that it was made about six or seven inches long so it would take one stick of gelignite and that what we were using – I suppose you could say we were using it – as a hand grenade, But of course it had to have…

…a wick or detonator?

Detonator. It had to have a detonator inserted in it and a bit of fuse before it could be let off and it was a bit unfortunate. But we were instructed in a particular method of cutting the fuse which was to be used when – for instance, blowing up a bridge and havin' to make a quick getaway and the fuses cut at an angle and with the wooden match you hold the head of the match on the fuse and strike the match with the box. And it immediately flares off – there's no second attempt – it goes straight away and you can move quick and I showed army blokes that and they'd never seen it. It was very good, I don't know who had brought it out but it was very good. You know, you just cut your fuse up at an angle like that way and you loaded the head of your match against the angle held with your finger and lit the match and away she went. Lot of them cut a bit of the gelignite out and stick it in the fuse and light it to start the fuse off but there was no need for this – this method was quite good. I don't know who brought it out but it was very good.

[Break in recording]

For instance there were Seaforth, Habana Bay – deep water right up near the shore and the island out from Seaforth, Newry Island. Those were two particular spots where there would have been no difficulty in any ships coming in and unloading troops and those were areas we had to keep a watch on. we also had to keep an eye on the harbour of course, Mackay harbour. And at times we had patrols on outposts up there at Slade Point and all that sort of thing, so. It was all under the control of the army, of course, our commanders had to take their instructions from army headquarters and were told where to go and what to do and that sort of thing.

When you joined up do you remember the reasons why you joined up? Do you remember why you joined up?

Well, as I said earlier, I think we joined up because we felt that it was doing something to protect our country. We couldn't – all the farmers were more or less exempt from joining the AIF and we had some railway workers as well. They weren't allowed to join up either and, this sort of thing, so it's – I think some of us, some of the farmers and farmers' sons did join

the army, but... I know in my case I could only get a B class pass anyway, so that's all I could get for varicose veins and fiat feet [short laugh) no that's...

(15.00) Was there any social pressure? Did the people around the area say that –say, if someone was a bit slow, would they pressure them – put a bit of pressure on?

Oh, no, I don't think there was any pressure on the VDC, actually. There could have been on the AIF but I doubt it because there was a fairly good representation joined the army from this area and I can't recall any instance of 'white feathers' or anything like that – I can't recall that at all, but you did get the odd one, that would snicker at us, sort of thing and 'don't be so bloody silly' and so on. I know one bloke said to me one day. He said, you know, something of that effect to me and that particular joker himself had his cars loaded up and everything ready to go bush if anything did happen. That's how he was gonna help the army. So you did get a few like that but not very many. They laughed at us – a bit of them but not too many.

In that early '42 period, can you remember the preparations that were made in case of invasion?

What as far as the VDC was concerned?

And the area? This immediate Mackay area.

No, I can't recall any immediate preparation of any description.

The beaches didn't have barbed wire put on them?

No, there was no barbed wire at the beaches. I can't recall – unless it was further south but nothing here that I can recall. No, it’s just that we had to patrol, you know, and make sure the different companies patrolled the beaches and had a good lookout, that's about all. But at that time, of course, it didn't look as though there was any chance they'd came this way. The Coral Sea Battle had kept them, the Japs, back and further north, of course, when they had bomb attacks on Townsville and up in Darwin and those areas – we didn't get any of that here. Not that I can recall but we did have to have blackouts and that sort of thing in the town…

The training, you gave sort of ideas of that before, but how much training would you do? You were mentioning the weekends, did you meet often at night?

Well, we trained the weekends and that was mostly army training we had..

[Break in recording]

The training that you had – you told me a bit about that before?

Well, we were all issued, of course, with old rifles. We were luckier than some areas that didn't even have rifles and we were trained to use Tommy guns. We used our rifles on the range. We had practice shoots on the range – 300 yards and more. Later in the war we were issued with new .303 rifles that's when we really did do a bit of training on the range. The Tommy guns were issued – but first we were issued with the Thompson that was the

American Tommy gun. Later on we were trained to use the – um, well, we used the Owen gun on these twenty–five yard range and we were trained on how to dismantle and re... put these rifles together and that sort of thing– and there was another rifle, the English Tommy gun, can't remember the name of it that we used before the Owen Tommy gun came in.

Not the Bren?

The Bren? We did use a Bren but of course that wasn't the Tommy gun, that was a anti–aircraft or range rifle but this was a smaller one. It was previous to the, to the er, one I was just speaking about. I can't think of the name of it now. It was the English rifle I think, an English Tommy gun. We didn't use that very much. In the early stages we also used the Vickers. We were trained to use the Vickers machine gun and the Bren light machine gun. We were trained with them and we… there were mobile training units went throughout the district to give them intensive training and I can recall one was held in the showgrounds, here in Mackay and the commander was a Lieutenant Bligh and that was an NCO school or potential NCO school which I attended and most of the members at that school were B Company, very few from A Company attended – Probably because they were too busy. And there was another 040 out at Finch Hatton a mobile training unit camp held out there for, I think, it was only a weekend. I wasn't at that. Think I was in hospital at the time and – after the NCO in the showgrounds there were certain members selected

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You said – and well, if you could tell me about that training course in detail because I think that's…

Wagga Wagga?

(20.00) The Wagga Wagga

Well, there were several from B Company. Two or three members from B Company went along with me and that was the 5th Battalion, Royal Australian Engineers at Wagga Wagga and we were camped down there in – four men to a tent and we did an intensive training course. A three weeks course – we did – the same training as the engineers with the exception that we didn't do what they call 'the mad mile'.

[inaudible interruption by interviewer]

What was the mad mile?

The mad mile was done by the engineers and AIF that sometimes went to that – did that course and there were dummies set up at certain distances and – they charge with fixed bayonets and that sort of thing and there were snipers coming up – dummies, which they had to fire at and so on, but, it was all done at as a race, at a run, you know. Well, we didn't do that, we weren't asked to do that because many of us older fellas wouldn't have been in good enough training to have done it in any case. But we did do a lot of training at night–time. Besides, it was mainly demolition work that we were engaged on, for instance, blowing up bridges we did, and that sort of thing because that would have been part of our work in the – if there had been a landing here for – what do they call it? – scorched earth policy, blowing up bridges to prevent the enemy getting further inland. So we did a lot of that and we were trained how to explode bombs and hand grenades and what have you. And also on top of that training we did a lot of temporary bridging at Wagga Wagga. That was various types of temporary bridging over streams which might be useful perhaps in New Guinea and those sort of places – pretty hard to explain them without, you know, havin' any detail but we did quite a bit of that and that was done mainly at night and – that was outside of Wagga of course in the training ground. We went over the Murrumbidgee River. I remember going over the Murrimbidgee River over a bridge one night and when we came back, we came back over a bridge which had been built by the engineers while we were away. It was a Bailey bridge and that was a big surprise to us and oh it's, you know, it was – oh, I can't think of all the things we did during that school but as said we were down there for three weeks and did everything that – did a bit of training. Each corporal had to take his own platoon up to the dining and that sort of thing, you know. It was a typical camouflage camp amongst small timber – the tents, pretty difficult to see from overhead. They had their own farm where they grew vegetables and they had pigs. They run pigs and they had the magazine of course where you went in and were trained how to use the various explosives and fuses – to differentiate between the safety fuses and the fuse instantaneous detonating and that sort of thing.. A very comprehensive school. That's about all I could say about it and barbed wiring – we had to learn how to lay barbed wire and a bit of camouflage. All those sort of things. That's about all I think I could say about it.

What date was that course?

That was in February 1944. I think it was late January, early February that we went down to Wagga Wagga, 1944. It had been going for some time. Another – other companies had sent their representatives down but that was when I went down and the chaps from B Company went down with me at that particular occasion.

You've described a number of different types of activities – beach patrols, demolition work. Did you actually work out a practical plan of demolition for your area? Was that done by someone else, or not done at all?

(25.00) No, no, it was just a matter of – we were shown what to do, how to lay the charges to bring down a bridge or something like that. There was no comprehensive course that I knew of, that I'd nothing about. Some of the officers might have known something but I don't recall anything. But... Certainly, we got our training in local places, for instance…the company I was with – I was with the I Section – was supposed to be the I Section. I did everything I think and I finished up with the engineers but this particular occasion – of course the I Section had to do decoding of signals that came in and also map reading so that you could pinpoint somewhere where you had to turn out, for instance, eastings and northings on your map reading. You had to know how to do that and how, for instance, how carelessness can cause you trouble. On one particular occasion our signal came through that we were to blow up a bridge and of course the company set their guards out to defend this bridge and the chap that took the message – he didn't get his compass bearing right and instead of blowing up the railway bridge they blew up the footbridge – the traffic bridge. [a little laughter] How easily things can happen!

So the trains were left... [laughs] ...to keep on going.

Yes, the railway bridge was well guarded and our platoon sergeant was sitting on the traffic bridge that we blew 'im up. (laughs) So that's one of those things that shows how easily things can happen and, you know, if you get a message sent along the lines and how it can get garbled and get the wrong message by the time it gets to the end of the line. There was a bit of that done. You get a message through to the head of your section. He passes on to the other man and by the time it gets back to the other end there can be some mistake. That's one thing that we had to be careful about, you had to be sure of.

How old were the oldest people in the VDC7

Oh, well – they were quite a few of the old World War One diggers and I suppose, say, that from 1918 to 1940 that's – they might have only been eighteen when they joined in 1918 but, what would that make – they'd be in their fifties suppose, thereabouts some of them in their fifties.

And, I mean, was there sort of talk about – I mean was there a hard core of the VDC that was actually going to do the work if it came to the crunch. or were all those old blokes going to be expected to do just as much as the younger members?

Well it seemed they were expected to do their duty because most of the – in our particular company there was all the old diggers that were officers of the – there were some section leaders – fellas that hadn't done any army training before might have been in cadets or something but not very many, most of the officers were old diggers and, you know, you also had training in gas protection from gas, you were issued with gas masks and all this.sort of thing and you were trained what to do if there was a gas attack.

Any particular gas mentioned?

No, there wasn't any particular gas mentioned at that time it was just, just the gas masks and you were instructed how to fit them and when to fit them and this sort of thing.

Were you involved in any special events like the annual show day or war loans, war bonds, or anything like that?

No, I can't..

Recruitment campaigns?

I can't recall anything like that. The only, one ANZAC Day the old VDC marched with fixed bayonets, I forget which year was. We marched from the cenotaph here in Mackay up to the drill shed and ... where the present, er, er, city council building is now. That was one particular ANZAC Day during the war, but that's the only time that we ever really turned out in anything like that that I can recall.

How long did it take before you got decent uniforms?

To the what?

Before you got decent uniforms – how long did it take?

Well, we got our uniforms right from the inception but I wouldn't say they were decent uniforms. All we were issued with was the khaki trousers and a tunic and you wore your own shirts and so on. It was just the khaki trousers and tunics and .... We first started off wearing the old type of leggings but later on we were issued with putties, the old style of putty where you wound around the leg sort of thing but later on we were issued with the putties you just put on over your boots.

What were they for?

Well, to protect your legs, I suppose, your lower legs. I remember when we were down amongst the spear grass they were woolly lookin' things and they were a bit of a mess after goin' through the spear grass, I suppose they were actually issued to protect you lower leg – might be snakes or anything like…

END TAPE1 SIDE A

SECOND TAPE 1 SIDE B

Identification: This is Side 2, Tape 1 Bob Johnson.

The army, how did they interact with the VDC? Did they treat you with respect? Did they have much to do with you, or were you fairly independent ...?

No, we had very little to do with the army, but I think they gave us proper consideration. We perhaps were a little better thought of than the CMF, wouldn't know for sure but, you know, they called the CMF 'choco soldiers' and that sort of thing but I can't recall – not during the war years anyway. After the war they may have had something to say, you know, laughed at and that sort of thing but I think that was because of the old TV serial *Dads' Army* and it was a bit of a laughing stock to a lot of people but I think a lot of people realise that we were doing our duty as best we could, you know, in case of a – not that we would have had a chance to do anything because we weren't well enough equipped to stop anybody at all. All we could have done was blown up a few bridges and roads and one thing and another to stop the advance but there's no other way we could have stopped them – delaying tactics – we would have been knocked over first, first assault. That's the way we all felt about it, I'm sure.

Was there any talk of guerilla activity in the mountains behind Mackay [inaudible) Japanese camp?

There was talk about – if there had been an invasion – of guerilla tactics. There was some of that taught, you know, – getting around at night–time and blowing up this and blowing up and that sort of thing. That's about all – there was not a great deal done, but it was a little that was done just in case but not a lot.

Was there a serious plan of evacuation worked out, in '42?

No, I can't recall if there was. It was as I said earlier, there was a mobilisation of the whole companies throughout but that was in case of an invasion but I can't recall anything on a large scale as regards the evacuation or anything like that. Anything that happened as far as evacuation would be personal, you know. Anybody wanted to move away at the time but nobody that I can recall did leave Mackay at that time.

Was it ever discussed if you came in contact with the enemy, your status as – if you became prisoners – what would your status be, do you think?

We signed up the same form as a AIF, the same enlistment form so I would think that we would have bean considered in a similar manner to an army personnel

Was that sort of thing discussed much?

No, no, it was never discussed, never discussed. As far as I can recall. it as never discussed...

In the VDC, were you given more information perhaps than other people in the area about the state of the war? Did you hear more about what was happening through your official channels, confidential channels?

No, I can't recall getting anything more than what appeared in the local newspapers. Some of the heads of the company might have got more information. if they did, they didn't hand it on. I might have got a bit more information down at Wagga Wagga. There was a bit handed around down there but not up

Was it difficult to combine VDC work with your ordinary work as a cane farmer?

Well, it was. It was pretty difficult because, you know, you got away early, particularly on a Sunday morning, you got away early. In my particular case to go to Cargett, the rendezvous, we had about seventeen miles to travel. My brother and I went together, younger brother – and when the war – when they first started with the VDC there was a couple of employees on our farm also went with us. There was four of us but one of them joined the army later and the other chap: dropped out – he was an older man – he dropped out.

(5.00) But there was only the two of us and you'd get away early in the morning and in those days you had stock to look after weekends – to feed and all that sort of thing. I know in our particular case we'd get home at dark and we'd be out getting our horses in and – Sunday night – and feedin' them, you know, and this sort of thing. It was pretty tiring sort of a job, you know, you were going all the time, there were no breaks. You worked all the week and weekends you were out on the VDC but when you're young you didn't worry so much about it, you were young and fit. You're fit enough when you're workin' on a farm, so it did help in that regard but the biggest difficulty, of course, was getting labour. There were so many people joined up from Mackay district that it was pretty difficult to get efficient labour and what we did find – this applied throughout the district – the shortage of ,tour and in the middle areas it was necessary for the cane inspectors in particular mill areas to regulate the supply of labour for harvesting the crop, sort of thing, you know, and – so that they can make the most efficient use of the labour available. I know in our particular case we had several fellas that had never seen the sugarcane before and a couple of 'darkies' – Aboriginals. They weren't that bad. They were they could be, you know, they wouldn't stay – they wouldn't stay any length of time – stay a couple of weeks and go, you know – that sort of thing. But apart from that there was nothing else 1 could say, just the shortage of labour and you had to work a bit harder, that's all.

What about in your case, looking after your family and your children, was that difficult?

Children? Well, in my particular case it was somewhat different because I lost my wife in 1942 and I employed – had a lot of difficulty in getting anyone to look after my children. My mother and sister did the best they could but eventually got a housekeeper and I did have a housekeeper at the time that was elected to go to Wagga Wagga and I know 1 had a little bit of trouble convincing the – Lieutenant Bligh that I had to go home first to make arrangements with my housekeeper and the family, you know, for payin' her while I was away and you know, that sort of thing, but eventually did give me permission to go home for a day before I

went to Wagga Wagga so that I could make arrangements for her to look after the kids while I was away, sort of thing.

> What so, when you were selected, what were you doing when you were selected? You were obviously away from home. But…

Oh, well, I was at the NCO school when I was selected when word came through but I don't know who really made the selections.I think it would be your company commander that made your Selections,

> Where was that NCO school?

Here in the showgrounds at Mackay, the NCO school. Lieutenant Bligh was in charge.

> That's a good name for someone who refuses to let you go home (inaudible]....

Yes, and I recall, I can recall the name of another chap. There was about three of them givin' instructions in weapons and that sort of thing – was a Finucane and he had a relation at that time was noted for being a particularly good ace – fighter ace. Finucane, I think he was killed later on in the war but his name was bandied around as one of the champion fighter aces at that particular time – Englishman, Englishman– I think he was. But the name stuck in my memory because the name being the same. He was some relation, but I don't know what.

> The Americans, the Americans were round about in Mackay in fairly large numbers, weren't they?

Yes they were. Mackay was a relief centre for them where they came on leave – a leave centre and they were stationed – a lot of them were stationed at what they called the Grand Hotel here in Mackay at that time. It's since been burnt down. But there was quite a lot of them around Mackay just ticked on leave and you know they had quite a good time. They enjoyed themselves. There was horse riding and bicycle riding and all sorts of things end the locals put on dances and all that sort of thing for them – they really made them at home and…

> Did they have anything to do with the VDC at a11?

(10.00)No they didn't. They had nothing to do with the VDC that I can recall. They nearly got me drunk with a – the night, the day I got married, but – I got married again. I didn't say that earlier. After I come back from Wagga, the next March, in March – I had made arrangements before I went as a matter of fact. I married my present wife. She was then my housekeeper. I married her after I came back from Wagga in March and went over to the hotel where some of the Yanks were and my father–in–law had to split of course and they nearly got me drunk. (laughter). But no, I think they behaved themselves pretty well around Mackay – there was no objection to the at all. I found them very decent blokes, most of them. I think they were mostly air force personnel, I think that had here in Mackay, I think, I'm not sure about that. We didn't have any of the dark races from America, you know, they were the workin' group. But we didn't have any of them here in Mackay.

The activities around Mackay for the VDC, after say about 1943 onwards, north Queensland became a very large best for all sorts of different miltary units. This didn't make people feel that there was no longer a function for the VDC, because there were so many other army people around?

Well, I suppose there might have been a thought but I can't recall anything like that because as I say– it wasn't until 1944 that I went down to Waggn Wagga and they were still – we were still working hard as ever. It was shortly after that of course that the war effort – well, you know, Hiroshima and those sort of things – it didn't last long after that, after I came back. I can recall when I came back from Wagga the 2IC called me out in front and, and er – trying to get me to show the company or the platoon the various manners of wiring and so on, at cetera, et cetera, but I didn't have a great lot of it to do because it was very nearly the end of the war anyway, thank goodness! But I did do well at the course. I suppose – he did get me out in front and – I shouldn't say this, I'm not blowing me own horn but this is right – the 2IC, he got me out in front and I got pretty high marks for the examination that I went through and that was probably because that I'd had a little bit of training in writing and a bit of high school education. At the school I attended in Wagga Wagga there were a couple of engineers – mill engineers – very good practical men but perhaps not as able to put. out on paper the way I could put it out sort of thing and that's probably why that I got a bit better marks than they did for that sort of thing, but, that's about all happened about that,

So – but there hadn't been any slackening in morale before that?

No.

There hadn't been any sort of doubting within the VDC about the ...?

No, I don't think so. I think we were pretty sincere about what we were doing. There were one or two, of course, that did drop out that was – it got a bit tough for them and this sort of thing. This particular mobilisation – we traversed a lot of country. We started off ..

Which mobilisation was this?

This was the trial mobilisation of the VDC, the whole of the company, the whole of the battalion that I mentioned earlier in the piece of mobilisation. And when we – each company was traversed through the district and, you know, each one treated the others as an enemy, sort of thing. And when we met at the Mirani school and Mirani railway station. Well, our particular company – we did all right but we – while this storm was on we managed to get shelter in the Marian school that was about 6 miles from Mirani and – it was raining so heavily that the – our company commander said, 'Oh well', he said, 'I think we'll have to get the trucks to come – transport to come and get us.' And he sort of asked for volunteers and nobody volunteered and then he said, 'Oh, well', he said, 'I'll go myself'. So everybody volunteered. That's how much we thought of our company commander. He was the type of man that – er, also our company sergeant, all the same on one occasion, the 2IC told his company sergeant there wasn't much – there wasn't enough discipline amongst the men. He told our company commander at least, there wasn't enough discipline amongst the men. He

said, 'There's your sergeant out there. I bet he's tellin smutty yarns'. And he was. But they were men that we would have followed anywhere – they were that type of men. We were most fortunate, I think, in our company to have such good officers.

(15.00) Why do you think they were respected to such an extent? What was there about their selection that made them so effective in that sense?

What as officers, do you mean?

Yes.

Oh, I don't know. I don't really know how they were selected. They probably were selected from the army because of their previous experience, perhaps, in World War One. As I said our company commander had – he'd been in the intelligence section in the World War One and that was probably why he got the job. He was a school teacher and a very fine fellow and the other chaps had had experience too. I don't know whether they'd had rank or not but I don't really know how they come to be appointed. Whether they were appointed by the battalion commander or who, I just don't know, don't know. I couldn't answer that.

But they did, they were men who were well respected in the district, that's what you're saying?

Oh yes, in their own particular district. Yes, very much so. It's only recently that this, the – Tom Lynch, the company commander – he – they had a 'Back to Gargett School', sort of thing, you know, and he's one of the earlier teachers and he was given a good write up in the teachers' – in the journal after the 'Back to Gargett' week. How well he was thought of in that particular district – of course, he's died since. But he was a well thought of man and a man that always – besides teaching the pupils the '3 Rs' you might say. He taught them a lot of sport. Always had them out in sport, in cricket or tennis or football or something like that whenever he had an opportunity to get his kids away for sport and so in that regard he was well thought of by most people and sort of looked up to and that's how the ordinary fellas in the VDC – we looked up to him.

What happened at the end of the war?

I don't know. Just don't know. It – everybody went home and forgot all about it, I think. That's about what happened I think. I don't know .

You don't remember any particular ceremony, sort of a party or ...?

No, just…

A passing-out parade or...?

I can't recall any passing out parade at the end of the war.

Oh, that's what you have perhaps when you graduate, but you know, some sort of completion activity?

Ah – I can't even…

A final parade?

I can't even recall anything, then happening just that we ....

Where did you get your discharge papers?

They came from the army. That's discharge came from the army.

What, you got that in the mail, or ...?

In the mail, yes. And we were allowed to – we had to send al: our gear back except our clothing, but like the gas masks and all sorts of stuff had to be sent back. Our helmets and all that sort of thing. But they did allow us to keep our .303s if we paid two pound for them. So I sent a cheque to the army for two pound and they sent the cheque back and said they wanted cash, So I kept the cash and kept the rifle. Don't tell the army [laughter). So that's – I haven't got tne rifle at the moment because I've had it all these years and looked after it but not so long ago I gave it to one of my grandsons end he's putting it up as a showpiece, sort of thing. Otherwise I would have still had it.

It’s almost got the status of a musket, isn't it?

Me, yeah, well they were good rifles but they were ruined really. They were new rifles when they came out and of course with a rifle after you've had firing practice on the range or anything like that you're supposed to put hot water through then – all that sort of thing. Well, in our case we had a seventeen mile ride and then to go and look for our farm horses and one thing and another they were neglected. They were ruined really, and I know my barrel was not very good but I did, I did do a bit of kangaroo shootin' on me brother's place at one stage down there. But I did intend joining the rifle club but by that time, I think, .303s were on the way out and I didn't go ahead with it.

No, I think when the war finished we just were very pleased that it was all over and we just went back to our usual vocations and were very pleased about it and as I said earlier. I – we didn't want to know anymore about it. When the war finished that was it and we'd heard enough about atrocities and one thing and another and we didn't want to have anymore to do with it, I think we'd had enough. I think that was the feeling almost right throughout. But I think there has been a little bit of feeling since that we – what we have done has never been recognised by the army or by anybody for that matter and I think a little, you know, – you feel a ittle bit of resentment at times that you put in quite a lot of your life you might say to do your bit as well as you were able and no recognition has been given to you for it. That's my feelings at least. So that's about all I can say about it.

END INTERVIEW