EDWARD HENRY 'TED' RANSLEY

A LIFE

Based on an interview by John Ransley
At Illawong Retirement Village, Nambucca Heads 4 July 1996

Woodburn

When we were growing up in Woodburn, we were always fishing and swimming and we used to go shooting too. Parrots mostly, Big Blue Mountain parrots to make parrot pie. There were thousands of them, millions. You could hardly hear yourself talk for the noise they used to make. They were only there during the winter time, all around the house.

We mostly used .22 short with parrots, the short bullets, not the .22 long. I used to sit up in a tree. You didn't walk underneath, you could nearly touch them most of the time. Not far away. To make a bag for them you'd get an old sugar bag, fold the top and put a belt around it. Corn bags you could fold and use as a hat.

There were a lot of tea tree swamps there and the tea tree is out in flower in the winter and they were at them and plenty of trees around, there was all bush. There were gum flowers and iron bark and all on them too.

[Lynne: Myrna said when there wasn't a blade of grass at their place they would take their animals to "Aunty May's" (Mabel's) place which was swampy. Troy: by cutting the tea tree saplings, laying them into a trench and covering them up you could drain swampy areas.]

As kids we used to walk 3-4 miles to New Italy to play with the Antonelli kids. The Italians had been put off their ship at Ballina, and nobody knew what to do with them. So they ended up in this "New Italy" settlement (their name for it). They mostly kept to themselves. The Antonelli's had a big mud 2-storey house.

The picket fence around the old house was made of tea-tree logs. When the house was extended and the kitchen built the rafters were tea-tree, they grew straight in the swamp. The house had trellises with grapes and passion fruit on two sides. When we kids come home we would climb on the trellis and eat the grapes and get a tummy ache and have to take castor oil. There was also a "fern house" with tree ferns and pot plants and staghorn and other orchids that grew on ironbark trees.

When the river was at half tide, you would tie a bit of barbed wire onto a stick and poke the crabs in their holes to make them cranky, so they'd come out and you could catch them in a net. Get forty crabs in a day. We had two boats. The river was salty so we'd only get catfish in the floods.

During the floods they would take 5-6 milking cows out of each herd, take the milk into the school, kids loved it. You could row into town and nose the boat into the pub to get a shot of rum. There were two 2-storey pubs in town until the 1945 cyclone took their tops off. Only one pub now.

Our shortcut to the school meant getting through a ten-strand high barbed wire fence which surrounded a paddock full of Shetland ponies—the stallions were wild, they used to fight each other. They were owned by Mr Shalad, he had a big place on the corner coming into Woodburn.

We used to catch those Shetland Ponies sometimes. They are hard to catch and hard to keep but we used to ride them. Mabs and Charlotte always had a horse to ride. Ride into town and that. Mabs used to ride to school when she went to High School at Woodburn. I rode horses too.

Bob and Jane Moss had a dairy farm at Mummulgum Creek before they retired to Evans Head. When I was 6-7 years old Locke, a friend of my brother George, took Mabs and I there in the Ford T.

There was a crippled bloke who could only move by sliding himself along the ground on a blanket. But he was happy as Larry once he got in his boat with all his fishing lines and stuff. Because of his condition he had to row backwards, pushing not pulling. Uncle Bob Moss would see him coming and say "that's Jesus Christ coming".

The bullock teams loaded logs onto the trucks via a ramp outside the school, to go to the Woodburn sawmill. Myrna's husband's sisters built a house where the school was, after it was moved into Woodburn.

The Little River house had one big water tank. If it was too dry we'd get water from the well. We never put rubbish in the well, took it into the bush and sometimes buried it, like we buried the dunny.

[Lynne: Valerie—Myrna's daughter—said they showed the people who bought the place where the well was, but when they dug it out it was full of bottles.]

I still prefer corrugated iron roofs because the sound of the rain puts you to sleep.

When I left school at 14 I went and cut cordwood for 6 bob (6 shillings) a ton. Just to get a bit of money. Moe and I would cut five cords of wood a week for the steamboat ferry that came to Woodburn. Each cord was four feet long, four feet high and eight feet wide. One time we nearly cut one cord a day each.

Paddy Trustum came out one day and wanted me to work for him so I went and worked on his dairy farm at Woodburn for a year. Paddy was related to the Ransleys. His dairy farm was opposite Eastow's farm across Bungawalbin Creek. There were five dairy farms along that creek, Trustum, Eastow, Boyter [Alice Smith married Thomas Boyter], Wagner and Antonelli (Italian).

At Trustum's farm I used to milk forty cows by hand, while he worked the quarry at the back of our Little River place, using horses and dray to cart rock to the Woodburn crusher for the Woodburn-Macleay road through Tabbimobile [south of Woodburn and south of New Italy] [blue metal overlaid by bitumen]. Moe worked in the quarry too, cracking rocks. They would drill all Sunday and let them off [with dynamite].

Then my brother George Ransley came up from Sydney one day and said you've got a job down in Sydney if you want it. I stayed at a boarding house in Bridge Street Hornsby. At first I worked down at Hornsby railway station in the yard down there as a call boy (at 16 years), my job was to bicycle around and call the train drivers like Uncle Hilton Ransley to work. I didn't like it much. I'd never seen a telephone before and I had to answer it.

I'd ride my bike from Hornsby to Manly and then return via Redfern and Strathfield to Hornsby, all in one day. My brother George was mad about fishing. He and I would ride our pushbikes along the Pacific Highway north to the top of a big ridge with a view of the Hawkesbury river waters far below. We'd walk down and up again, leaving our bikes at the top. Out in the boat if you moved around he would go crook about frightening the fish—who never got frightened. Later, when he had a car, he would drive and never stop.

Then the boss called and offered me a job as an offsider to a boilermaker in the Eveleigh Railway Workshops. You had to heat the rivets and throw them to the boilermaker to catch and fit. I shifted back to Hornsby. After nine months the railway foreman offered me Christmas leave to see my mum. He gave me a railway pass to get to Grafton, and then I got the Newland bus home. I packed up everything at the boarding house. The woman in charge said "are you coming back?" and I said no way. She said I don't blame you. Of course I didn't like Sydney and I went home and stayed home and wouldn't go back.

Wardell farm

That's when Steve "Jimmy" Butler picked me up. He was at Swan Bay and he took this farm on down at Ballina and he came out and got me to go with him. I was 16 at the time. I knew him for years. I used to work for Steve's Uncle Patsy Eastow over at Woodburn.

It was hard work, Oh yes. You had to clean up after they cut the cane and clean all the paddock up and scarify it, plough away from the stool and plough back on top of it and run a diamond harrow through it now and again until it got high enough to leave. Beside that we were milking eighty cows. Down there we had milking machines. The other farm I worked on was milking by hand, eighty by hand, but down there it was up to eighty in the winter time and in the summer time we got up to one hundred and twenty with milking machines and it was a lot easier. 'Course you started work at half past four in the morning and finished at eight o'clock at night. Used to have one hour off for dinner, that was all. That was seven days a week of course. The wage was only twenty seven and six (27/6) a week, with keep.

There were no other workers. The family, six kids, they used to do, to help a bit but it was mainly just him and me, we used to do the milking because we could handle the four bales. There were 2 cows in each bale. There was eight milking at a time, four bales milking at a time, you'd turn over other one, switch over to the other one, and let one go and soon as you let one go another one come in, and you have that one ready to switch over, backwards and forwards all the time. Towards the end of the milking you switch on the separator, start the engine on the separator, by the time the last cow went through, the separating is finished and all finished at once and then you had to go down and feed the pigs and the calves and then you come back and wash up and it was eight o'clock at night before you were finished. You're out again at four o'clock the next morning. That's how it was.

So when I got the call-up to go into the Army at 18½ I said I would go into the Army and have a spell. I could have got exception for working on a dairy and cane farm but I decided

to go in the army. Should have a pretty easy time. And it was. The Army was easy after that, really easy. I was working like that for four years, seven days a week.

We had no recreation. Sometimes Jimmy would give me a couple of hours off on a Sunday to go home and see Mum and come back again. I used to ride a horse home and ride a horse back and it used to take an hour to get home and an hour to get back. Jimmy's horses.

There was a wireless. But you'd never have time to hear anything. Sometimes we'd go fishing over the back, the beach was only about a mile and a half away from the farmhouse and we used to go over there of a night time, ride the horses over and fish until it was time to come home to milk. That's the only recreation we had. When we were fishing, that was all.

Never went out, never saw town. Never bothered. You never see those things.

I started smoking at 16. He smoked, he used to roll his own. I would get a packet, ten in a packet then, it only cost thruppence a packet for 10 cigarettes, tailor-mades. I forget now the brand, Ardath, something like that, or Lucky Strike. Used to buy them. Only smoked about one a day. Used to have a puff now and again that was all. Didn't have much time to do anything else you are working all the time.

The pigs were sold into the abattoirs. They come out and pick them up.

The farm had up around sixty pigs. One big old boar and a couple of sows. They would have a litter of ten, eight or nine piglets each, then they, as they grew up they'd get to the right size and send them to the Abattoirs and get paid for them. They was getting five quid a pig and that was a lot of money, that was, when, 1938 and 1940. That was good money. Good side money for the farmer.

They didn't sell the calves. They kept most of the calves for the herd, so they would have them for milkers later on. They'd weed the old ones out and put the new heifers in once they had a calf.

The old ones went to the Abattoirs. They never killed anything. They bought everything from a butcher. Of course if they sent a pig in they'd get some of it back for to eat, a side or something like that. They'd send four or five in they would end up with a side of pig back for the family to eat.

There was a vegetable garden and we did all that work too, besides ploughing for corn and rye grass and red clover and sweet potatoes. There was always a vegetable garden, always was.

The corn and the potatoes were for the horses and the fowls. Of course they had fowls too, sixty or seventy chooks, the eggs and the spare eggs they used to sell to the shops in town, and things like that. All the vegetables left over they would sell them in town. Never send them to the market or anything like that, you had the old corner shops then. They used to sell them to them. They would get a bit on the side like that.

The pigs were fed on milk, separated milk, and any old vegetables. Throw in they'd eat anything and anything left over from the table used to go in. Corn as well, grown for the pigs and the horses, draught horses, they had six draught horses. They worked nearly every day.

They was corn fed. Had to feed them one at morning, one at dinner time and one in the afternoon – a big bag. Put a nose bag over the head and they used to stand there and chew on it.

Clydesdale draught horses, big ones. They had three light draughts; they were for the diamond harrow to go in between the car. They were only a light draught, they was faster, you'd get around faster with them. The big heavy draught was for the double disc plough and things like that and the dray of course, when you had to go and get wood for the house.

The dray just had two wheels, like a cart. For carting things around like corn and getting firewood and taking ploughs from one paddock to another. That was what they were for. The dray was pretty high, oh yes. To lift the ploughs up we used to back them up against the bank. Put them in that way. Just the one draft horse in the dray.

I was lifting one section of the diamond plough when I dropped it onto the top of my left foot. I immediately knocked off and brought the horses in. Steve Butler said "what are you doing?" It was all cleaned up with Condies Crystals, the cut wasn't that deep but I had to hobble about for a while. Steve sat me between two cows and when it came time to change one, I'd take the cups off, and hopping on one foot let her out and let the next one in. Turn on the separator to separate the cream from the milk. I'd also do all the washing up.

Mrs Butler had the sulky, used to drive into town. But they had the car too, an old Dodge car. They had the sulky to do their shopping in town. Only once a week, on Saturdays. The town just had the normal shops, country town, normal shopping. There was no big supermarket or anything like that it was only a corner stores.

The nearest town was Wardell. And then Ballina was a bigger place of course, bigger shops there. They'd go down and do their shopping. Of course they'd go to Church. They were Catholics, they went to church on Sundays. Mass and things like that. They'd go on Sunday once. Sometimes they'd go on Saturday. There was one day in the year that was Saturday at dinner time, it was a Mass of some sort, I don't know what it was, they'd go to that. That was in Ballina.

World War II

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Conscription
The Second World War was the first time Australians were conscripted to fight overseas. In November 1939 Prime Minister Robert Menzies announced that the existing reserve force, the Citizen Military Forces (CMF) or militia, would be bolstered by conscription. However, the CMF would not be required to fight beyond Australia and its territories, which did include Papua and New Guinea. That changed on 19 February 1943 when Menzies' successor, John Curtin, passed legislation requiring the CMF to fight further afield.
https://www.nma.gov.au/defining-moments/resources/second-world-war-conscription

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After the war started my brother Alf joined up fairly soon, in July 1940.

I got a call-up in the mail. They just sent a notice to anyone turned 18, as soon as you turned 18 you were sent a notice to call into the nearest Medical Officer, have a check up to see if you were fit for the army and if you were working on a dairy farm or things like that you

could get an exemption, you didn't have to go of course. I suppose it was more or less conscription, wouldn't it be, but you could have a say whether you wanted to go or not though. That was a different deal to the Vietnam War. When you got your number you went and that was it. You had no say in it.

[According to his service documents Ted his first medical examination in Lismore when he was 18 years and one month old, 11 January 1943. He was described as unemployed and classed as A1 fit.]

Well I left the job so of course I was unemployed. Because I had to give a week's notice. I gave a week's notice and as soon as I finished I went up to Lismore and got checked over. Oh yes, I was pleased to go. Because there was 4 of us all went at the same time. Oh yes, all keen to go. We were all mates from Woodburn that we knew at school, Neddy Williams and Alec Gibson and Peter Robson and me.

Mum didn't want me to go because Alf was already overseas, in the Middle East. She wouldn't let me go in AIF. I went in as a militia and she wouldn't sign the papers for me to go in to the RAAF because she reckoned I'd be sent overseas. So I never got around to joining the RAAF. I went in to the militia and came out of the militia because she wouldn't sign.

From Lismore we went straight down to Paddington in the Sydney Showgrounds on the troop train [arriving 5 February 1943]. They had a whole train load of recruits going down there. Then I got posted to an Entry Training Brigade in Dubbo [12 February]

Dubbo and Canungra training

We trained in small groups, in a Platoon of about 30 men. They would have you round the bull ring. That's a lecture on all sorts of army weapons. You had to pass all the tests and learn all about them and go through a test. You had to learn map reading, you had to learn compass reading, night time, they would send you with a compass 4 different legs of a night time and you had to go out to find all these spots they sent you and you had to find them all and come back again. I liked map reading the best. It was really good. You could pinpoint it and you'd land right on the spot where you were supposed to me. Amazing it was. Well it was amazing to us. Because we used run in the bush without any compass we knew where we were going though. But to go out in a pitch black night and end up in the spot where they tell you where you should be at the right time and all this business. That was all the basic training of course.

And of course you'd do long route marches 30-mile route marches and things like that with only a bottle of water. Wasn't allowed to drink anything else. They had you all in different huts. And if you were a good boy in the tidiest hut they'd give you a day off in town in Dubbo. At the end of the training you had to pass an exam to see if you'd learnt enough to go through into jungle training school at Canungra up near Ipswich there. When I passed that they put me in jungle greens, sent us up to Canungra and you had to do 28 days there, non-stop, 24 hours a day on duty. They would give you a bit of sleep now and again. You'd just get to sleep and they'd call you out and you had to run up Tamborine Mountain. You had to run to the top of that and put a lantern out and come back and get to bed and no sooner were you in bed you were hauled out again. You weren't allowed to sit down to eat breakfast you had to stand up. Then you were off again running all day and they would pull you out of bed

first thing in the morning they would run you a mile down to a creek, that's when you had a shave and a wash and back up and stand around eating breakfast and off again on another training day. Pack drill and all that.

And going across obstacle courses on the flying foxes and across creeks and climbing mountains and it went on for 24 hours a day. You didn't get much rest or anything. But once you passed there you were right. Once you got 28 days full training, hard training. This was training for going up to New Guinea.

For jungle training we had .303 rifles, Bren Guns and the Vickers light machine gun. The Vickers had a belt and was water cooled. Of course the Bren gun you would fire a few magazines through that and you could pull the barrel off and put another barrel on. Every time the Bren gun fired it had to have two men on it. One to fire and one to change the magazine and change the barrels when they got a bit hot. Mostly on a tripod, it weighed 23 pounds altogether. The Bren magazines held 30 rounds .303 calibre. The Bren was reliable and it had a long barrel, very accurate. Actually you couldn't miss with it. It was that good.

The Vickers was a lot bigger bullet than the .303. I think it was a .5 or something like that. The Vickers was twice as heavy as the Bren. They used to break it apart, one bloke used to carry the barrel, one to carry the ammo because it was belt ammo, and the stock went to the other fellow. The Vickers was accurate too.

Later we got our own gun of course, the Austen machine gun. It shot a little 9mm bullet but it was a good gun too. Once we got over in New Guinea we gave the rifle away and we had these little Owen guns and Austen machine guns ['Australian Sten']. The Austen was much the same design as the Owen only it wasn't as reliable. The Owen gun you could throw it in the mud and pick it up and it would still fire. The Austen jams sometimes. It wasn't as good as the Owen nowhere near it.

You could fire the Owen single shot or automatic. You could put a full magazine of about 30 rounds through it straight away with it without cocking it. It was gas operated. Made in Australia. The Austen had the same sort of magazine actually, but I think it was made overseas. Same calibre as Owen as far as I remember.

We got the Owen in New Guinea when we went into action. There were also a few sniper fellows there, they used to have .303 sniper rifles.

Cane cutting

Before going overseas I went cane cutting up at Innisfail on Leave Without Pay. [LWP 22 June43 to 19Oct43] Just for one cane season. It's awkward, that was it. There was a lot of people did it because there was no labour on the land. That was before the women land labour [women's army] were able to come into it. There was a few blokes went rice picking and fruit picking but I went cane cutting up at Innisfail. A whole trainload of us. We were all army. We still had our ration coupons for meat and that and we got extra ration of meat while we were scrubbing cane. We were paid by the farmer, not the army.

[Service docs record you sick with chickenpox 29Dec43 to 9Jan44]. Chickenpox? I didn't know about that.

AWL 10Feb44 to 6Mar44

I was sentenced to 90 days detention. Up in Brisbane, I just can't think of the name of the place. I got some taken off for good behaviour of course. I was sentenced to 90 days but I think I got out in about 80 or something like that. I went home when I was AWL. Mabs and Mum and Betty and Charlotte was all that were there. No, didn't do any work no.

[First Army Forward Punishment Centre, Churchill Qld. Total forfeiture 113 days, remission of 20 days granted by commandant 2/1 Aust Detn, net forfeiture 91 days pay. Followed by in service docs record: 'Award: 28 days Field punishment with forfeiture of 28 days pay by Com. 1Aust Reinforcements Training Battalion, 14Mar44, total forfeiture 54 days pay. Then 'apprehended and located at 3Aust Gd Camp' by Aust Training Centre 26April44.]

We went from Brisbane up to the Atherton Table Lands, up the top there. It was a big staging camp. That's where the 7th, 9th and 6th divisions was up there, at one part of it. That's where they brought them back, the first ones that went overseas, they brought them back and they put them up there to have a spell. That's where they send them to the home on leave and they report back there and when they had to go back overseas again they took them down to Cairns wharf and put them on a boat and took them over.

When the ship *Duntroon* came in they brought us down to Cairns and put us on the boat [29 August 1944] and we went straight to Madang, PNG [arriving 2Sep44]. All the fighting there was finished then. We were only just waiting for the Yanks to come over and pick us up. We didn't do much there. Didn't even do any training, we just lazed around the beach that was all. I didn't think I was there that long. Because I can't remember much about it.

[Two months. Service docs record him embarking on the 'Santa Monica' 12Nov44 and disembarking Bougainville 15Nov44. Next entry is an admission for hepatitis on 2May45, discharged 29June45.]

We were in the 9th Australian Infantry Battalion. The Yanks took us to Bougainville on the *Santa Monica*. The Yanks were fed like kings, big cartoons of cigarettes, icecream, they even had fridges, even had sheets on their camp beds. They were preparing to move to the Philippines and we stopped in a camp and helped them load their boats. They wanted a garrison of Australian troops in their place. We followed the Yanks through. Native expression: "Yank comes, hill goes." Their big warships pounded the hills, chopped trees into little pieces. When we took over, we went up the Numa Numa Trail, that's in the middle of Bougainville and straight across the middle of the Island.

[The Numa Numa Trail is a trail on Bougainville in Papua New Guinea that runs from Numa Numa on the east coast over the central mountains of Bougainville to Torokina on the western coast. Wikipedia.]

We were to relieve the Yanks from the front line. The Yanks took us part of the way in big trucks. The native carriers took our heavy stuff the rest of the way, they had big splayed feet. The officer in charge of the carriers was called Angowa, he would hit them with a whip, for example when a native cut a bamboo to get a drink of water. The country before the mountain was flat with a stream that we crossed twenty times. We walked around half wet all the time.

As we climbed the mountain we would send out a few scouts. We were up there for about six weeks. It wasn't hard fighting it was just sniping one another. We were dug into the side, it is a big ridge. We were sitting on the ridge and up there was Artillery Hill. There was a bit of a gully between it and they were up on top and they would snipe at us and we would snipe at them.

The hill was the site of an old volcano, there were sulphur fumes and the stream water was warm. Funny thing, when we bathed in the stream, although it was warm and slightly sulphuric, it made us fresh and clean. Our boats bombed the volcano trying to get it to erupt.

The Japanese had been there a long time but the Yanks reckoned they were going to the Philippines so they didn't bother going any further. That was all it was.

One day, all of a sudden, the Australian HQ decided to take Artillery Hill. We pounded the Jap positions with our 25-pounders and 3 inch mortars. A New Zealand Kitty Hawk plane strafed the top of the hill right across in front of us. We also had 3-4 Vickers heavy machine guns overlooking the hill where the Japanese were dug in. After our firing broke off we stormed up that hill at daylight in the morning. The hill was so steep it was two steps forward one back. You had to crawl up it from cover to cover. We were mostly using Owens, we couldn't use the heavier machine guns, no. It was straight up like that. It wasn't real good. Scared of course. But we came out of it alright, well some of us did and a lot got killed.

We used grenades on Artillery Hill and we only used them once down on the flat country because you couldn't see anywhere to throw. Up in the mountain was alright and we had those EK rifles. They had a grenade launcher on the top of them. They fire a blank cartridge, stand them up. Used to trip the trigger and send the grenade right up over the trees and about 200 – 500 yards. We used them a couple of times. They were smoke grenades. When we come in contact we would send the smoke over and the New Zealand Air Force would see the smoke come out of the tree and they'd bomb it and strafe. They didn't hit very much, they hit us a few times, that was all. That was the only time we used grenades, the smoke grenade. We never used bayonets. They get tangled up in the scrub. We took them with us but we never put them on the gun.

The Japanese had a 'Long Tom' artillery piece, a massive big thing that could fire shells as long as a VW five miles. We advanced too fast for them, keeping underneath it up steep slopes. They couldn't drop it down low enough, only our HQ copped it. Even their machine guns were firing too high. They had their [heavy machine gun] woodpeckers and they had their carbine rifle like the Yanks, a long single shot one [Type 38 Arisaka bolt action rifle, 7.7mm (equiv .303)].

When we got to their positions of course they were running around, only a few left, half shell shocked most of them. Easy enough to kill. There was no hand to hand fighting. Most of them had run away but I think we killed about 500. Most were killed by the mortars or the artillery or the strafing and bombing by the Kitty Hawks. None were captured.

We had three platoons of about 30 men each. In my platoon we lost 6 dead, 9 wounded. It wasn't worth taking. We should have just sat there and waited that was what we should have done. Wouldn't have lost anybody of course. No it wasn't really worth it when you think about it.

We sat there for a while until we were relieved by the 25th battalion. They took the next mountain, Pearl Ridge, in the centre of the island (the ridges ran across us). From Pearl Ridge they could look over the other side of the island and see the sea on the other side, we could only see the sea this side. It was too steep. They were pushing back over the other side of the Ridge.

[**Battle of Pearl Ridge**: **On 23 November, in what was the first Australian operation of the campaign following the relief of the Americans, the Australian 9th Infantry Battalion captured a Japanese outpost on a feature known to the Australians as "Little George", supported by machine guns, mortars and artillery. Two Australians were killed or died of wounds, while six others were wounded. This attack was followed up by a second in mid-December, when the 9th captured a Japanese outpost on "Artillery Hill**". *https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Pearl_Ridge]*

Senior officers

I think our general was Thomas Blamey.

[From 1942 Blamey was Commander-in-Chief, Australian Military Forces and Commander Allied Land Forces in the South West Pacific, under US General MacArthur. The general in charge of the Bougainville campaign was Lieutenant General Stanley Savige. For Southern Bougainville, Major General William Bridgeford.]

We never saw our senior officers. They never came up to the front. Oh yes, we had Brigadiers and Colonels and things like that. They were in Headquarters of course, we were always miles in front of them. They were miles behind us. The most senior officer we saw were captain and major. Major was the highest. We had a major in our company. Most officers were captains and lieutenants, that was all. And then sergeants and corporals and lance corporals of course. Section Leaders and things like that.

Rations

For food, just the rations, compact. It is all pressed into a hard slab and that's all we had. Bully beef of course. Plenty of that. There were biscuits and you could boil them and they would swell up twice the size and you could get stuck into them. They'd fill you up. I suppose they had plenty of nutrition in them too I think. They were made that way. Biscuits, bully beef and this hard packed stuff – looked like a chocolate but it was real hard to chew and that. Some sort of a beef or something and of course we had the vitamin pills. You had to take them and malaria pills, they were adamant you had to take them every day.

Plenty of tobacco rations. Beer. When you went into action you were in for six weeks and you came back and there were two bottles a week saved for you and they had a big warehouse and when you came back out of action they'd bring you a dozen bottles. Sit down and have a drink. But actually it didn't agree with us our guts was all out of kilter with all this hard rations and everything. Didn't enjoy it all that much. There was nowhere to cool it or anything, it was drinking hot beer, it wasn't much. Didn't bother about it in the finish.

Torokina to Tokyo Bay

We came back down to the coast again, Torokina, after six weeks.

We had a bit of barge training there, and then they sent us down to land at Tokyo Bay. We had to go through to the Hongorai River. That was back in the front line again fighting the Japs again. From Tokyo Bay there was no action until we got to Hatai Junction, a crossroads. Its right inland, it's flat, dead flat country. No mountains, no hills, nothing, just flat. Terrible, you couldn't see anywhere, real thick jungle. All you could see were Japs now and again and he'd take a few pot shots at us and that was all. The rest of them the 61st and the 25th and the 34th they came on another road and we all met at the junction and then they went back and we kept going until we got to the Hongorai River.

When we got across the Puriata River we set up an ambush there – the whole company did, 30 of us on both sides of the trail and about 300 Japs came down off the other bank and they started to come across the river we had them get right across and we got stuck into them. We don't know how many we killed, they were washed away by the water most of them. That's the biggest we ever had, that one. The rest was only small clashes that's all, it wasn't anything really big.

[The Battle of Slater's Knoll (28 March – 6 April 1945). the battle occurred as a force of about 3,300 Japanese from the Japanese 6th Division, including artillery and other supporting elements, launched a counterattack against the main Australian offensive which had been pushing south towards Buin, concentrating their attacks on Slater's Knoll near the Puriata River. The Australian troops belonged to the 7th Brigade, with the 25th Infantry Battalion being the most heavily engaged, although the 9th Infantry Battalion and the 61st Infantry Battalion also took part in the fighting. *https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Slater%27s_Knoll*]

There was only a battalion of us. A, B and C Company. Three companies that's all that done the fighting, only 90 men and all the rest were headquarters and things like that, I was in C company. We had to clear the road. It was an old mission road, grown over with jungle. When we got up there we crossed the river which was above over our waist but the Indonesians come and put a bridge across. They would be going to do the same at the Hongorai but they didn't have to do it because that was as far as we got.

A company would go forward a thousand yards then B company would go around them and go a thousand yards and then we'd go just leap frogging one another all the way. You wouldn't walk straight up the road you'd go round the side and go in at a thousand yards and then send a section back to clear the road, see if there were any gaps there and the other company would come up and they'd do the same.

We'd also ambush each other along the walking paths. A section, 8-9 men, would go out and patrol them, set up an ambush and they'd come along talking and chatting to one another and we'd let them have it. All with Owens. Didn't use machine guns. It was all close. You couldn't fire a .303 rifle because you can only see from here to that wall there about 10 or 12 feet. The little Owen gun because you were always close. Sometimes you'd kill 8 or 9 sometimes only a couple of them got wounded or something like that. Not every time would you kill anybody.

And they did the same to us. We'd run into an ambush and that's all we done. We would shoot one another when we came in contact. It didn't happen very often. But now and again

we would run into them and that was it, both pull back and go back next morning and have a look around and find they'd gone and go after them again until you contact them again and that was all it was. They were retreating all the time.

We never spent much time in trenches. You would go forward and dig in only for the night. Advance the next morning. Dig your hole and sit there the whole night. Sometimes the Japanese would attack at nighttimes, bullets flying everywhere but no one seemed to get hit. There were lots of fireflies, you'd catch one and get it to flap its wings to light up so you could check the time on your watch.

We took turns in scouting. That was risky. Because you had to go ahead until you drew their fire. There were 3 sections, 10 men in each section. The middle one would go forward to scout and draw their fire and the other two would run around the back when the first moved and get behind them and when they pulled back well they would run straight into our blokes. We used to go every day, sometimes twice a day and they used to fall for it every time. They never seemed to wake up, funny isn't it?

The Japanese were just walking around in sections, 3 or 4 men together sometimes 8, sometimes 15, sometimes you'd only see 2 together. That's all you'd see but might be half a day and next thing you'd come across about 15 or 20 of them all in a heap. They were all scattered around. I think they knew they were cut off from home and they couldn't do anything. Army blokes, most of them were in a shocking condition. Thin as anything.

Their navy blokes were in tip top condition. I think they hadn't been there long. I think they were landed in submarines. They were still landing them there right up till the end of the war. Landed them on the coast I think because some of them had a port sort of a suitcase and you'd open them up and it was all clean white clothes, you know what the sailors wear, white clothes and you could smell the camphor in the clothes all fresh clean everything. But all the Army fellows they were all dressed in rags and just a pair of thongs on their feet and very seldom would you see soldier with all his gear. He only had bits and scraps and bits and pieces. They were in a hell of a mess. They'd been there for years probably.

We'd lose a couple of mates in clashes, now and again. There were a few killed. We had 30 in the platoon and sometimes we'd get down to 16 and sometimes 10 and they'd send reinforcements and that's how it went on all the way through. It was all for nothing when you worked it out. Wished we had just sat there and done nothing because the Yanks had them all cut off, they couldn't do anything.

We used to get prisoners. The only way we got prisoners was by sending the native police. They were told to get a prisoner and away they'd go and they had to take a couple of us with them otherwise they'd kill them when they caught them. You'd go along and they'd put their fingers to their lips and they'd point and they'd be back in about 10 or 15 minutes with a Jap prisoner. It was no trouble to them at all. But you had to be there otherwise they'd kill them, slit their throats with their machetes, they wouldn't bring them back. That's why you had to go out with them. They'd send them back to headquarters to be questioned because they'd had Japanese interpreters and everything there.

For six weeks we done that and fought right through there to the Hongorai River. It was swift flowing and we crossed it up to our chest. We stopped then and they were bringing us back to make a barge landing down the south, right down the south of Bougainville at Buin.

But the war ended before that. And that was the finish of the War. We stopped at the Hongorai River and that was the finish.

I was up on duty one morning and the little bloke from the telephone exchange running wire came out with the telephone, he came over and said the biggest bomb in the World has dropped. I said what's the matter with you and he said the biggest bomb in the World has dropped. It was the Atom Bomb of course and over a week later we got word the War was officially over. We were still out patrolling and having a shot at one another. Of course some of the Japs, it was a couple of months before they knew it was over. Before they started to come in.

It was over two weeks before they brought us back. Where I was they used a jeep with about 14 trailers on behind it. They called it a jeep train and that's how I got back. I got the last patrol. I got dengue fever and they put me on a stretcher and put me on this jeep train and that's how I came back from the front. They put me in 'hospital' right on the beach and I remember they bought a drink of lemonade, orange drink around and I never tasted anything so good after drinking muddy water, water with tablets in it and they sent me back to Torokina on a big launch. It was the hospital launch, that was a good trip too. I was on the beach for about a fortnight and then went back to the unit.

Then we had to go and guard these Japs. All these Japs had come in. We guarded them until the boat came to take us home.

[According to your service documents you transferred to 7th Australian Infantry Battalion on 10th October 1945. You embarked at Torokina on 21st October 1945, disembarked at Fauro Island in the British Solomon Islands on the next day on 22 October.]

That was where they held the Jap prisoners**.** We had to guard them there. They were alright, they used to work pretty hard. We had our guns with us, we had a stick and just walked around with them and they would stop work and talk amongst themselves and we didn't know what they were talking about. None of them tried to do anything because they were just waiting to go home too I suppose. Some of them weren't happy about the war ending. They reckoned they should have suicided, killed themselves instead of getting caught.

The army was looking for soldiers to occupy Japan but they only wanted men six feet tall, I was too short. At Torokina we boarded the last of three ships, but the Dutch captain put on steam and we got to Brisbane first. He was very keen to go home.

[According to your service documents you returned from Fauro Island to Torokina in December 1945 and embarked per [Dutch liner] Amatima at Torokina on the 16 January 1946, disembarking in Brisbane on 21 January 1946. You were admitted into Hospital for malaria 2-15April46, 11-28June46, 24Aug-23Sep46 including admissions to Lady Gowrie Convalescent Home, Gordon. You were discharged from the Citizens Military Forces (CMF), 9 Australian Infantry Battalion 'on account of demobilization' 11 October 1946. Quite a long time between the end of the War and discharge].

In Brisbane we went straight to camp until we got a troop train to Sydney and landed in Sydney on Thursday afternoon. Got there on Thursday and back on Friday up to Woodburn on leave. I had 48 days leave because I was 2 years over in the Island. I finished up at the

end of the war with an Owen gun, the old .303 was too cumbersome. The Owen was a 9mm automatic gun, sub-machine gun, fired from the hip. I had to take it with me on leave, it was a nuisance. I handed it in when I was discharged in Sydney.

While I was waiting for discharge I was in the *War Graves Commission*. Used to go out and do all the diggers graves around Sydney. Just go out and mow them and pluck the weeds off and things like that. They wanted me to go overseas with the War Graves Commission and I wouldn't go. I should have gone and had a look around shouldn't I? It wasn't much good over there. Yes, right through Europe. They go over there and find the Australian graves where Australia fought over there. Should have gone over for a trip.

But I repeatedly suffered malaria attacks, in and out of the Showground and also Lady Davidson home in Turramurra, eight times. They kept me in the army until I got rid of the malaria.

They took me back down and I got discharged. They discharged you on points. I only had 100 points, I was single too. All the married people and the ones that served in the Middle East all got discharged first. We had to wait until the last actually. Me and Leyton came out late put it that way.

All I wanted to do was get out of the Army and go home, all I wanted was to go home. I hadn't been home for 2 years. Never seen anybody for 2 years and I never saw my brother for nearly 4 years. Alfie was over in the Middle East. I don't remember but he must have been home when I got there. Because he came from the Middle East and went to Borneo. He'd be home before me because he had more points than me.

Charlotte, Betty and Mabs were all home. The rest were in the Services. Mabs was in the Land Army then at that time. She was with Patterson Land Army of course, that's where she met Bill, working on his farm.

After discharge

I went around doing casual work on farms and doing a bit of ploughing and cutting a bit of broom and cutting a bit of cord woods around Woodburn and then Mabs sent word from Patterson that they wanted me on the railway down there so I went down there and that's where I started on the NSW Railway, in 1947.

There was a shortcut from Mabs and Bill's farm, Glenlossie, into Paterson via the railway bridge over the Paterson river. If you were caught on the bridge when one of the trains were coming you had to hang underneath by your hands. There were Goods and Mail trains from Murwillumbah and the Brisbane Express that went over that bridge.

"Pretty Paterson". People would come out to Paterson to drink at the Paterson Hotel, because of a law that allowed you to drink after driving. Betty, Ivy and Mabs all worked at the Paterson Hotel, Ivy as cook, the others as maids.

Worked the main railway line from Paterson to the Queensland border, and the branch line to Murwillumbah, as far as Billinudgel. Working in the mud gang. They were digging out where the springs were in swampy areas and filling them up with gravel and cement and everything. No culverts, just filled them in. I started there and went right through to the

border loop right through to Casino and Lismore and back down to Murwillumbah and back to the other side of Grafton. Both Moe and I worked with the adze on the Railway, it was one of the key fettler's tools. I acted as leading hand on the other gang when the leader went to Sydney for training.

When mum was still in Woodburn I would get home Friday dinnertime (after knocking off Thursday from working ten days straight), and all the doors and windows would be open and mum would be up in the paddock sawing firewood with a one-handle saw (not a crosscut saw), even big logs. The wisteria was beautiful, grew from the deck (veranda) to the front gate. Mum walked into Woodburn once a fortnight to do her shopping. Uncle Alf Grissell would drive her order back to the house.

My sister Lena's husband Col Graham wrote to say a job was coming up at the Nambucca Heads RSL. So I took it after working on the Railway for ten years. Left the Railway and got a job as a cleaner at the RSL Club. The job was alright, a bit boring but I was there for a few years and then I went down to Sydney again working factories for a while.

Mum had shifted to Nambucca Heads from Woodburn where she had been living by herself. Col went up with the truck to bring her down. Charlotte was in charge of an orphanage in Newcastle. I drove up from Sydney, picked her up to take her to Nambucca to look after mum. Lena and the others wouldn't do it. There were hundreds of kids crying when we left the orphanage.

I stayed with Mum in the Raleigh Street house when we first built it there. I was working at the RSL Club and working on the railway. Only come home for weekends every fortnight when I was on the railways, that was my home. But when I was working for the Club I stopped there all the time. With Charlotte and mum and Moe. I worked at the Club for 10 years.

Mum was not too bad when I was living there. It was only the last few years. I went to Sydney in 1966 and it was about another 8 or 9 years before she started to lose her memory and that. It was a long time after that, after I went down because I used to come up every Christmas and see her. We used to drive up and go up and see her at the Christmas holidays. She was alright then. I don't remember anything about my father. I was only 3 years old when he died.

Along the way I had a daughter and now I am a grandfather of a boy and a girl. A grandfather now. Beauty, I saw them the other day. They came here for a couple of days. I was working in the RSL Club and their mother was working in the Motel next door, Joyce Falconer. That was around 1960, 62, 63 I think it was. We lived together, 13 years in Sydney with her. Shifting different places all the time.

She had been married and had 2 sons, one is about 45 now and the other one about 42 I think. Something like that. They were married and gone. She was a Catholic but she never wanted to get married again. We lived in Cronulla most of the time. We rented houses in Cronulla and Sutherland and Oyster Bay out in Sylvania Waters, out near there. About 6 or 7 different places we went. My daughter's name is Lynne Robson, not Falconer, because Joyce married a Robson.

I was working in a [Brownbuilt] factory as a storeman and packer. I used to work mostly overtime sometimes I'd work all day Saturday and all day Sunday and from 7 o'clock in the morning till 5 o'clock or 7 o'clock at night all through the week. Doing assembly and working in different places. Mostly I was on the paint line. It was an endless train running around it would run through a place and get spray painted and then go round through an oven and come out and we'd take it off and stack it. Baked enamel.

These lockers that they have in schools you know, these lockers and things. Make all sorts of things they did. It was all steel, steel cabinets. Making everything there. I used to be on spot weld and I was on the guillotine and machining sometimes on the machine in the workshops and it was an interesting place. You had a different job nearly every day. I liked the spot weld the best it was so easy.

Joyce also worked in different factories. When we were down there you could leave a job here this side of the street and go across the other side and start straight away another one. Doesn't happen any more does it?

We had a car all the time. Made it a lot better with a car. I didn't do much holidays down there. Didn't run around. I used to go down at Cronulla beach and have a fish. Not very often though. Up Georges river there, get a boat and go up there. Not very much. Didn't like the place. Hated it. Loved Nambucca, there were no jobs up there though.

When mum died in 1977 I was still working in Sydney. The house was split between the three of us, Beryl, Moe and I. Beryl and Jack Henson had a house on the other side of Nambucca. They just walked in and took over, told me to get out. [John: I think Alf said Beryl got half and you each got a quarter]. That's right, her and Jack moved in and that was it. It wasn't our home any more. They paid us out and took it right over. Alf got 4,000 and I got 6,000. Jack coughed up, gave me a cheque for $6,000 "that's for the house", a very cheap deal for him. Gave Moe $3,000. [John: Alf told me he got 2,000]. No I think I got 4 and he got 2 that's right, something like that. It's that long ago. Because I put the most in.

We'd put money in and I put in an extra 200 quid to put the veranda around it. I paid for all of that. The other two didn't pay anything. So I put the most money in and I got enough out of it anyhow. No good having a house for me. Joyce wouldn't come there to live, she lives in Bundaberg.

I didn't break up with Joyce, no. I said I am going to Nambucca are you coming, and she said no, she said I'll stop here. You go, you'll be right. We'll be right. I still sent her the money of course for Lynne. Our daughter Lynne is at Childers. It is 50 km in from Bundaberg. She has three kids, Coen Lang and Clare Evelyn. Joyce is coming down to Nambucca this weekend. She wants me to go up there. I suppose I better go up. She only comes down for a holiday. Well her son's there, he's got a caravan there. She wants me to go up and see her this weekend.

[In late 1979] I lived with Jack and Beryl for about 3 months then I went over to a flat behind Bobby Lears' place. That's the time I put in for this retirement village [Illawong] and after Bobby went there were a few different people in here and then a woman came around one morning and said there is a place over at Illawong for you if you want it and I said yes so that's how I got here. And that was in 1984 December. I have been here ever since.

[DVA file records have him retiring from Brownbuilt Ltd of Bath Rd, Sutherland on 17 August 1979, after working there for five years. He applied for a Service Pension on 14 September 1979 (his eligibility for that based on his overseas war service) when he was living at 6 Raleigh Street, Nambucca Heads. On the recommendation of Department of Veterans' Affairs 'Local Medical Officer' Dr TJ Fennell of Mann Street Nambucca Heads, he was granted a 'Service Pension Permanently Unemployable' for arthritis in his elbows and knees with effect from 14 September 1979. After a couple of reviews this pension was made permanent on 16 November 1981, when he was living in a 'batchelor flat' at 38 Liston St Nambucca Heads.]

My hands are alright now. But that's why I knocked off work. I used to do a lot of mowing lawns and that and when I'd mow for a day the next day I couldn't even use my fingers so the Doctor told me to knock it off so I finished. I put in for a service pension and got it. When I hadn't done any work my hands got a lot better. The doctor used to give me pills and that, and I'd give them away. Didn't seem to do any good. If I got shopping in those bags and carried them in my hands from here up town I would have pain all night. If I even dig out there in the garden for a little while they'll pain all night. I don't bother doing much with it. Same with the hip and the knees and the ankles. All there.

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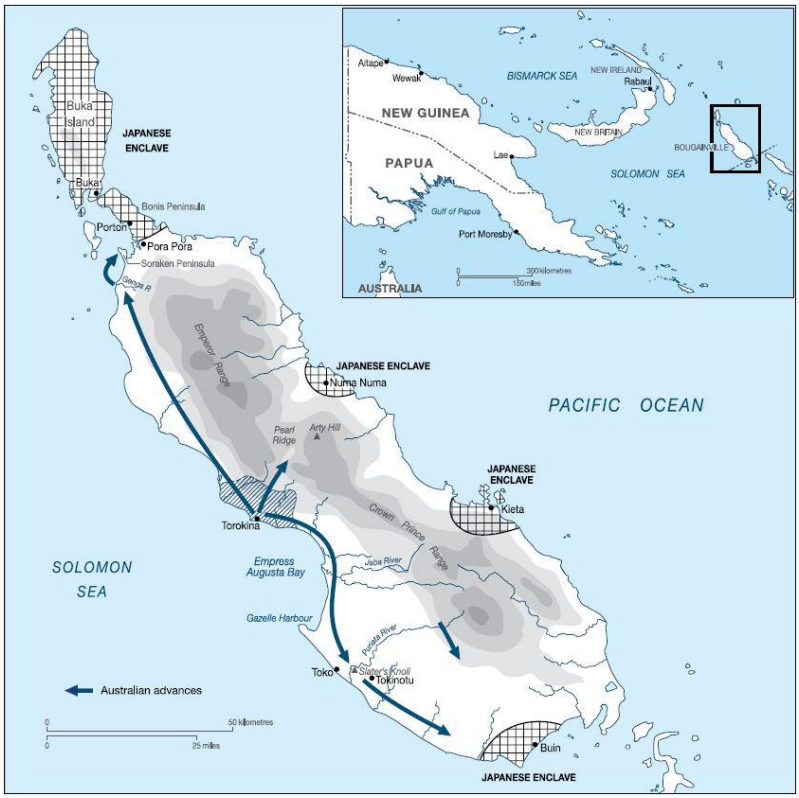

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Austen submachine gun
The Austen (from "Australian Sten") is a 9×19mm Australian submachine gun derived from the British Sten gun developed during WWII.
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Austen_submachine_gun

Owen Machine Carbine
The Australian Owen Gun, designed by Evelyn Owen in 1939, was the main service submachine gun of WWII and was used by the Australian Army from 1943.
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Owen_gun

Australian soldiers armed with Owen guns in New Britain, April 1945

Bren light machine gun
The Bren gun was made by Britain from the 1930s and was a licensed version of the Czechoslovak ZGB 33 light machine gun. The later Bren gun featured a distinctive top-mounted curved box magazine, conical flash hider, and quick change barrel.
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bren_light_machine_gun

Private John Davies, with a Bren light machine-gun, during an attack by the 24th Battalion against the Japanese at the Hatai Junction on Buin Road, Southern Bougainville, 14 April 1945. AWM 091023. https://s3-ap-southeast-2.amazonaws.com/awm-media/collection/091023/screen/7143080.JPG

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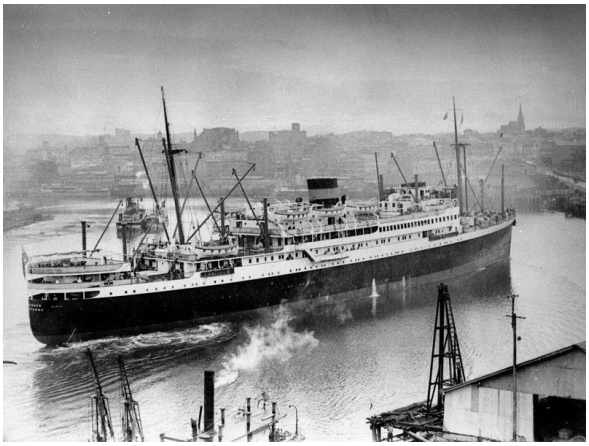

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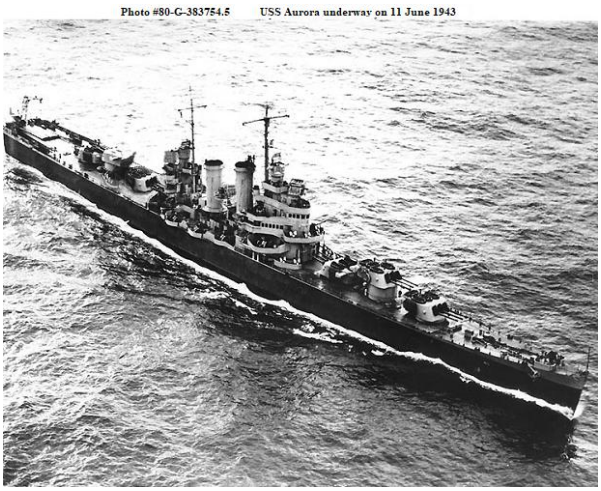

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