

Transcription

Tape 01

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Can you tell me about where you grew up?

I was born in Balgowlah, an outer suburb of Sydney, but I understand when I was born on 8th September, 1918. Balgowlah was right out in the scrub. The family background, I've never really got it quite clear

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but my uncle and aunty came out to Perth before the First [World] War, and they in turn got my father to come out, here, and he was a tradesman bootmaker and repairer. He met my mother here. And my uncle and my father enlisted in the 28th Battalion in the 1st AIF [Australian Imperial Force], and went off together.

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Dad was caught in a gas attack and he was only 19 months in the army, back home, discharged as physically unfit, Mum and Dad then moved across to the eastern states and we went up to inland to Moree. I always thought he was running away from the horrors he had been through, but an aunty of mine informed me that he was chasing hot, dry air, We moved way out to a town called Bingara, actually,

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and as my sister and I got to the school age, then we moved to Moree. I would think Mum's influence come in there, so we would have a better school and a better education, because Bingara has three streets if I remember rightly.

Can I just ask why was he chasing dry air?

He'd got caught in a gas attack and his lungs were bad, and someone had advised him to go to dry country for the good of his health.

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Did he ever tell you about his experiences in the First World War?

No, I found quite a lot of this ? I thought he was running away, but an aunt of mine informed me sixty years later that the reason was that he was chasing dry air for his health's sake. We lived at Moree until I was 10, but the conditions there were very crude and very rugged,

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it was only a very small town in those days. We moved back down to Manly where Mum opened up a boarding house,

and we lived there for about five years or so at Manly. And at the age of fourteen we came across to Perth, because my father had sisters over here and he obviously wanted to be with his sisters because his health was getting worse all the time.

How was the Depression affecting your family?

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Well, during the Depression everyone makes do with what they have got, therefore shoe repairs were in demand. In Moree, during the bad years, Dad had a bootmaker's shop there and he employed five men, so theoretically we were doing all right. But then again, I've said this several times already, the adverse affects of that First War, not only on my Dad, but when I look back all his mates were sick, too, everyone was crook in those days, the younger generation.

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And consequently Dad moved down to Manly, and Mum opened up a boarding house and Dad opened up a little boot repair shop, but in due course we moved across here to Perth when I was fourteen.

It must have been a pretty colourful kind of childhood having been part of a boarding house?

In a sense, but mind you I was only a kid. I was only ten when we came back to Manly.

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Everyone then, of course, was years older than me, so you were still a child and treated as a child, how adults do, but our upbringing was pretty strict, and we were fairly well behaved. I had two sisters and an elder brother and we got on quite well with the people who stayed at our boarding house, because in those days boarding houses were pretty common. Young ladies who were typists or working around the town, they had no where to live, so they stayed at a boarding house,

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Many people never had a place to live and this sort of thing was quite common. In due course, we came to Perth. I was fourteen, I had to do something about getting a job to support the family income. Although Dad opened up a little shop in William Street near James Street, it wasn't very effective there. I got a job as a messenger boy and I didn't know

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where one street was from another in Perth. I hung onto that job for a while, and they found out I had put my age back six months in order to get the job, if they paid me what I was entitled to it would have been an extra two shillings sixpence a week, so they dispensed with my services.

That is a bit of a bad thing, isn't it?

Things were tough in those days.

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You basically finished school when you were fourteen. Before you finished school, could you tell me some of the subjects that you enjoyed when you were in school?

My favourite subject has always been the English language, as well as poetry, I enjoy all that, in particular Australian bush poetry which has always intrigued me ?

Why is that?

Because it described the country that I lived in. Again, quoting poets,

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Banjo Patterson and Henry Lawson wrote a type of poetry that I could relate to at the time because we were living way out back in New South Wales and I could sense what they were trying to say, and apparently I did enjoy reading,

learning and reciting poetry. And this has stayed with me all my life because, at the moment, I am a member of the WA Bush Poets and Yarn Spinners Association, and when at

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the end of this month, there is a Folk Festival at Boyup Brook. I have to go down there and take part in the activities down there and this goes on all the time, it is one of those things that I enjoy. I enjoy writing, I write poems. I have had a book of poems published and I write little articles now and then. The English language has been my main topic, and I think to history, English history, believe it or not,

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because that is all we were damn well taught when we were kids, God, King and Country, but the country was England. There again my folks, being English, we always had pictures of St Paul's Cathedral and Westminster Abbey and Houses of Parliament on the wall. There was nothing about Australia, of course, because we were British, by Jove, and that's what it added up to, all my life.

It certainly makes your interest in poetry

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quite specific, because you were just trying to reflect on the life that you were leading rather than the life that you have never known.

This is true. In those days kids could move around. I know we were only under ten, but a bunch of us, eight or nine, we would go out into the scrub and camp for a few days, out in the scrub, under a scruffy old tent we made up like the Aborigines did. You could do that, folks would feel their kids were safe, they not going to be molested or pushed around any way, and

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life at that stage was pretty free and enjoyable.

How about sport? Did you play any sport?

Not a team sport, I was never a team person. I have done quite a bit of sport, but in the main it has been hiking or things of this nature, individual efforts. This has been my attitude towards sport all along. I have been a long distance runner, I've been in kayaking events,

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I've been in cycling events, but as far as team work goes, no, I haven't really been a real team type person, although the activities I have mentioned have been with groups.

How long did you last as a messenger boy?

I think about ten months, twelve months. They wanted my birth certificate and of course I stalled them off as long as I could, saying I had to get it from the eastern states. I knew

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there would be trouble, because putting your age back, things were a bit hard, everyone was looking for work, and if you weren't suitable you were just kicked out and they got someone else. They also felt when I did produce my birth certificate that I wasn't an honest type of person, the fact that I had taken hundreds of dollars in cash on delivery around the town when I'd been doing my work didn't come into it. Anyway they dispensed with my services and

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I had bought a push bike and I had worn out the back tyre in that so they gave me an extra 2/6d. to get a new back tyre, which I thought they were a pretty good mob.

They sacked you but they gave you a new tyre?

Yes. I had worn it out riding my bike delivering their merchandise.

Was it part of the job that you had to provide your own bike?

No, it was not, but I could see that a push bike would be a great asset because you can only carry so much

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around in your hands, whereas if you put a carriage on your bike you could carry quite a few parcels and do quite a bit at once.

How did you get the money together to buy a bike?

I went to my Uncle and borrowed two pounds, ten shillings off him and paid him back at the rate of five shillings a week. That was the first time I ever went into debt.

It was for a good cause though.

Yes, yes.

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So what happened after being a messenger boy?

Well, I was out of work for a while, and what you did in those days, you just looked up the positions vacant in the West Australian, and there was always boys wanted. Well, there was one wanted on a farm ? but to get back to that, where you would have boys wanted, you would get up early, go through it and work out the possibility of where a job was. You would race down there

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and you would stand in a queue on the footpath waiting to get in to be interviewed, and nine times out of ten, before you got to the door, someone would have opened the door said the job's finished, the job's filled, so you would race around then to the next place but of course by then it would be around nine o'clock and the job would be gone. After a few months of this you get very depressed, so I got a job as a farmer's boy, I think I was sixteen at the time.

So how long were you looking for a job?

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I would say about six months.

That is awhile.

It was. We were pretty tight, we were family people. I don't know that Dad was bringing in much money. My sister was working, she had got a job, and my other young sister she was still going to school. All in all, we survived ? it depressed me to think that I was not contributing in any way, and I was a bit of a drain on the family when things were really tough.

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Why had business disappeared? Because of your father's health with the shoe business?

No, not really. I think that he picked the shop in the wrong spot. That sort of shoe repair work, you've got to have it where people are going past all the time, you can't advertise it, you can't go around canvassing, and I think he just picked the wrong spot.

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But there wasn't a big income there, at all, so eventually that closed down, but that comes later. I was on this farm, I had never done any farming, although I was always interested in my country, sort of thing. I was on the farm for about ten months, they were paying me about ten shillings a week and keep.

Where was the farm?

The farm was at a siding called Mandiga up, up near Bencubbin.

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In those days, of course, it was all horses, and that was interesting inasmuch they were big horses and I wasn't a big fellow, and that took a lot of getting used to, especially in the stable when they were feeding and you walk down the centre and there were all these massive big creatures on either side of you munching away ? it was a very funny sort of feeling, I got used to them and I still enjoy horse riding and being with horses.

Can you describe to me an average day on the farm?

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I would get up before daylight. The farmer had a son who was 21 years of age, I was sixteen at the time. We would both get up at daylight, I would go over to the milking shed, we had a couple of cows that we milked, I would milk the cows, and the farmer's son would be feeding up the horses by then. We would return to the house for breakfast, and after that

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we go over and harness up the horses. That was quite an experience in as much as those horse collars were quite heavy, and those horses were big, but I managed to get those collars on horses eventually. We lined them up, they were about eight abreast, we were ploughing at the time, and they would be taken up to the paddock and hooked onto the plough and away would go the farmer's son, with his plough and horses. I would return back down to the house.

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The farmer was a blacksmith by trade, and we would go up to the forge and we would cut our plough shares ? or from plough shares we would cut out combine disks ? start again, we would cut out combine points, and he did all this sort of work which saved him from buying these things from manufacturers, which in those days the things were still very rugged. It wasn't a very big farm, I understand it was only about seventeen hundred acres. We had a bad season, it was a very bad drought,

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and after about ten months they had to put me off, they couldn't afford to keep me going.

Where were you staying when working on the farm?

Oh, well, I was very fortunate. I was treated very well. I had shared a room with the farmer's son, it was in the house itself, I had all my meals with the family. He also had a daughter who was several years older than me. Between the lot of them they treated me very well.

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They treated me as one of the family. I was very fortunate, because I do know there were other people, in similar circumstances to me, who had it pretty rough around the various farms, mainly because there was nothing there, they couldn't afford to put up a house and things of that nature, so things were pretty solid in those days. So I returned to Perth ?

It must have been pretty disappointing to lose your job there?

It was, it was very disappointing,

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but I could see the problem. All the crop just didn't come up, that was all there was about it, and I could see the man had no future for the next twelve months, and in those days, well, every penny counted. His vehicle was a four cylinder Dodge with a canvas top and wooden spokes, and you would go to town on the Saturday afternoon, you'd combine your shopping and your sporting activities,

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then you would be back on the farm. You couldn't get out very much, there wasn't a great deal of activity around.

When you could get out on a Saturday, what would you do?

We would go into Bencubbin. His son played cricket, he was a good cricket player and I would hang around and watch the game. There was also an annual dance, I went along to that with them, but of course I played no part there, I just sat like a kid on the side watching everybody dance around.

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I wasn't part of that community, that's all.

Are we talking lack of dancing skill here?

Lack of dancing skill, plus I was just another bloke that come into the district and I wasn't part of the scene. I was an intruder, in a sense. But the other activities? No, I can't recollect any other except cricket and ? that dance stands out because I had never been

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to a dance like that before. We used to cut chaff, of course, there would be chaff cutting, that was a horrendous experience, because you would have a mountain of sheaves of hay that had to be put through a chaff cutter. It is dust, dirt, itch, you get lumps all through your body with the whole thing. All you could do at the end of the day would be to take your clothes off, get under the shower and

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get all the dust off you and put other clothes on you. That was all you could do ?

It sounds unpleasant?

It was an unpleasant experience for a boy, anyway. But I look back on the farming experience and it was a very formative part of my life. There was no radios, the people, the farmer and his wife, they used to sit around reading a book at night under an Aladdin lantern.

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I learnt then the value of books and reading. This stays with you all your life, because you're in those formative years where you're putting down your foundations for yourself. I also learnt how to respect seniors, because everyone there was senior to me, and therefore you showed respect to them and you got consideration back, there is no doubt about that. Generation gap or something, I have never come up against.

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I regard the whole of that farming experience as a very important part of my life. I came back to Perth, I hung around for a while, my Dad meanwhile had gone up to Laverton, of all places. He had got a job as a yardman on a gold mine.

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At that stage, I began to scratch my head and think, ?Now, what is my Dad doing up there as a yardman on a gold mine?? Well, the fact is that the trade that he had just got too much for his physical health, plus the fact that out there, on the gold fields, he probably thought he would be in better health. There was a dairy out from Laverton, it sounds funny these when I mention it to people from the gold fields, and they say, ?A dairy??

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These days, all the milk comes in cartons in freezer trucks, but in those days ? This dairy was out from Laverton, and the fellow there wanted a roustabout, someone to help him. Well, I could milk the cows, I could ride a horse and my

Dad suggested that I go up there and take on the job. I got there by applying at some office in Perth. I don't know what it was, but they paid my rail fare and I had to pay them back

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at five shillings a week, to get up there. The chappie that ran the dairy was an old soldier ? when I say an old soldier, gosh, I was only sixteen, so he was not exactly old, but he had been in the First War. He was out on this dairy with his wife and two young children, pre-school age, and this was another thing that intrigued me, the dairy,

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the gold mine and everything else was on a cattle station owned by someone else, and I could never work out how you could have all these things on someone else's property, because in Perth, you had a quarter acre block and that was yours. But up there everyone else was swarming over this cattle station. We used to get up in the morning at three o'clock and milk these cows, we had about thirty cows I suppose, and then we would harness up the horse and put it

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in the milk cart and we would go around delivering milk amongst the workers from this Lancefield Gold Mine. There were no streets anywhere near it, the fellows, mainly Yugoslavs and Italian, put up timber-framed hessian shacks, white-washed them, that was their place. You had to go from one to the other and wind your way down through the scrub to get to these places to deliver the milk.

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And this was rather intriguing because I thought, ?Now this is going to be a real problem. They've all got foreign names and it's going to be a bit awkward for me to remember all this,? so I started to recite it off the way I learnt poetry. I got a fellow's name and between him and the next one I would repeat it, and I got the next one's name. At the end of the week, I said to the boss, ?I think I can handle this on my own now.?

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He said, ?Get out.? He said, ?It's going to take you weeks to learn all these names.? I said, ?Well, listen to this,? and I recited all the names and the quantities off to him, and he said, ?Cripes, you'll do me.? He said, ?Righto, on your way.? So here I was at sixteen on a milk cart and a horse delivering milk around to all these places. And when I got back the boss said, ?Ah ha, but how did you know where they were?? I said, ?That was easy.? Smack the horse on the rump and tell him to get up and he would stop outside their place and I would just go in and get a billy can,

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I only hoped that was the right place. From there, we used to go into Laverton and deliver around Laverton itself, where there were streets. Then you would make your way back to the dairy. When I pulled up there the boss said, ?Did you have any trouble?? ?No, no trouble ? Oh, just one spot.? I said, ?As we were coming out of town, we came to the pub and the horse swung up against the hotel wall and I couldn't move him. He just wouldn't move.? And the boss said,

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?Well, keep that quiet.? He said, ?Next time just get off the cart and walk around the building and get back in and he'll be right.? Apparently the boss used to pull in there and have half a dozen beers before he came back from the dairy, and he didn't want his wife to know about it. This I did and we had no trouble from there onwards.

That horse has a memory like an elephant.

Yes ? I put it down to the fact that I liked learning poetry and you could do these things.

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The little hut I had was a bush one, that's all, it was just a piece of hessian wrapped around some ginwood gum post stuck in the ground and white-washed over, it had a galvanised iron roof and a little bit of a bow lean-to out the back and a washbasin and a stand, the old kerosene tin wooden case there ? and I felt on top of the world. I was on my own, I was doing well. Meanwhile ?

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The boss's wife was putting on a bit of a show, because her kids are growing up and she didn't want them growing up in the bush country around the outskirts of Laverton and beyond, she wanted to move down to Kalgoorlie. She goes down to Kalgoorlie on a holiday with the two children, and when I came in from the milk run, one of the boss's mates had come in. Now he was one of these lean, muscled, sinewed characters that roams

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around out the gold fields. His job was as a tank builder. And between the two of them, during the course of the next week, they cut down the boss's overland tourer which is the standard thing, like that Dodge with the canvas top and wooden wheels, and made a utility out of it. This intrigued me a bit, why they had to do that, but they did this. The boss's wife came back from Kalgoorlie and about a week after that

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I came back from the milk run and all the family furniture, such as they had, was stacked on this utility, and I said, ?What's going on?? The boss said, ?We're going to do a moonlight flit to Kalgoorlie. When it gets dark tonight we're going off to Kalgoorlie. I could get a job in the mines or something there.? The owner of the dairy lived in Laverton, so he said ?When you get to his place tell him

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that we've gone and work it out from there.? I thought, ?All right, I can't do much about this.? So anyway, off he goes about eight o'clock that night. The next morning I do the milk round, and I pull into the station owner's house, and he comes out and says, ?I suppose you're going to tell me your boss has done a moonlight flit?? I thought, ?How the hell did he know that? They only went last night.? I had to run this dairy for a fortnight all on my own.

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I was sixteen and had about thirty cows to milk and two horses. I had to do all the milking, load it in the cart, and do all the deliveries around the area, and then clean the place up when I got back, until one of his sons came in from an out-station and took over the dairy. Well then, I was out of work again. Fortunately, I got a job as a dishwasher and a spud peeler at the mines boarding house.

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I was there for six months, and that again was quite an intriguing job.

Why intriguing?

I was still only a kid, surrounded by boisterous mature-aged miners who drank and swore and fought and did all those sort of wonderful things that men do when they're out on the gold fields on their own. Again, I had a nice little room, again timber framed, hessian covered and white-washed, but it had a comfortable bed.

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The boarding house staff was women folk, well, I got on all right with them because what my mother had taught me, always be polite to ladies. I would get up at five o'clock in the morning and light the fires in the kitchen, so that when the cook got up the fire was hot, and then my job, mainly, was washing up after the meals, as well as peeling a bag of spuds every day. There was a whole bag of spuds a day.

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This was a good job. Meanwhile my Dad had taken sick, he was back in hospital in Laverton. I went in to see him and he said he was going down to Perth, but would I be all right where I was? ?Yeah, I'll be right, Dad.? Well, Dad comes back down to Perth and he finishes up in a sanatorium, which was out in Victoria Park, at the far end of Victoria Park, called the Edward Miller Home.

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It was full of blokes like him, with crook lungs, and all slowly dying. I must have felt a bit lonely because after several months up there, my Mum suggested that I come home and be with the family, and this I did.

Were you home sick at all?

In a sense, when Dad went, yes. When Dad went down to Perth I used to feel a bit on my own, but again I was active,

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and I felt independent ? I possibly was home sick which is why my mother probably said to come home. She again had boarders in the house. One of these was a boilermaker, and at this time they were putting extensions on the East Perth Power House, which in those days was the only powerhouse in Perth. They were putting extension on it, he was working for the firm.

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This boilermaker said, ?Oh, I'll see if I can get you a job down where we are.? So I got a job as a rivet heater in this powerhouse extension building that was going on. When that job cut out, I was then transferred to the firm's fabrication shop out at Welshpool. The name of the firm was ? the Structural Engineering Company of WA,

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they are no longer in existence. I was a junior worker (BREAK) I was employed as a junior worker. In those days they didn't have apprentices, because apprentices were committed for five years, whereas if they had junior workers they could put them off and put them on just as they wanted, according to the amount of work that they had. But I managed to stay there, on and off ?

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I became a timekeeper, and I was down at North Fremantle for quite awhile there. They built these COR [petroleum company] oil tanks down there. From there I was sent up to Pearce Aerodrome, we built the first hangars on Pearce Aerodrome, we did the original construction work there, and I was a timekeeper and storeman on that job there.

What does a timekeeper do?

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Well, you've got a squad of men, maybe thirty men, and some men might not be there that day, and not only that, they'd be on different jobs, and that particular job, the head office wanted to know how much it cost to do that job, which was a section of the overall picture, so you had to keep control of your job numbers, where men were working, who was there, who wasn't there, and generally just keep the figures right for that particular area.

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This you passed onto the accountants in the head office and they worked on it from there, the accountants and the architectural draftsmen. Things went up and down, this gets now back to 1939. It is interesting to note that during the construction of Pearce Aerodrome, they had to shut the job down because it was all under water. We had a very wet winter.

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We couldn't do any work. There was no planes could land ? Mind you, they never had anything. They had three or four Avro Ansons, a Hawker Demon and some Avro trainers. Other than that, there was nothing on the aerodrome at all, which was our frontline, of course. When the war broke out, in September, 1939, there was a Vickers Walrus climbing down out

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of the sky and landed there, and we thought that was an appropriate sort of a thing. It was a sea plane. ?The way this aerodrome is at the moment, that's about all you can put on it.? The job shut down, I was out of work. During all this period, I had joined the Cameron Highlanders of Western Australia. I was one of the original members of the Cameron Highlanders of Western Australia.

Why did you join them in the first place?

British, by Jove. Tradition and all that stuff that was rammed into us

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from the day we could go to school. Not only that, it was a good mob to be in. They had tradition, granted, but it also meant discipline, it meant mixing with other chaps around my age and active industries, or activities. The transport section, which I joined, which was a horse transport section,

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which meant that you had horse riding, you had horse drill once a month as well as your regular camps. And it was a period of growth that all young people go through, which is a wonderful period if you control that well. I joined the Cameron Highlanders, and I spent three years in there in the horse transport section.

What sort of things did you learn how to do?

Well, military discipline, you learnt squad drill of course, which is normal infantry work. We also learnt how to look after a horse

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from a military sense of view, looking after harness, how to be associated with Rifle companies ? You weren't exclusive because you were horse transport section, you were part of the regiment, you had your job to do as far as support of rifle companies went. Such as carrying Vickers guns and things of this nature. In those days, the theory was of course that you would have your Vickers guns loaded

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in boxes in a limber, with your two horsemen, and you would take up your position, they would unload the Vickers gun and you would back way out of sight until the action was over sort of thing, based on the tactics employed in the desert during the 10th Light Horse sort of thing, which of course was hopelessly obsolete, but that was the best we had at the time.

What sort of equipment did you have to train on?

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The Militia itself had Vickers guns, Lewis guns, there was also trench mortars ? Anything that was used in the 1914?18 War which was left over in the ordnance when the war finished. I never had a great deal to do with the actual platoon work, we were again transport, an entirely different thing. So we learnt how to put up horse lines, how to look after horses,

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how to feed them correctly, groom them. Someone had to be there twenty four hours a day, so you'd divide yourself up into shifts, two on, four off, sort of thing. This went on twenty four hours a day when you were in camp. In other words, you learnt to be disciplined, controlled, take orders, obey orders and give orders, where necessary. So it was all part of a development between the ages of eighteen to twenty one.

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So when you were in camp, what sort of activities would you do?

Well, we used to camp over at Rottnest. The whole battalion would go over there for ten days. We would go over on the old boat they had called the Zephyr, which was a horrendous thing. We'd have a pipe band. We would get into Rottnest, we used to camp where the aerodrome is now, there would be rows and rows of tents,

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that was our quarters. Each company had its particular tent line, and it got down to platoons within the company. Our horse lines were well away from the main body of the men, for several reasons. One is they reckoned that transport drivers and horses breed flies and they didn't want us too close to the rest of the troop. When they went on activities, which sometimes meant they had to go from one

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spot to the other on the island, they might camp out for a couple of days, we had to transport their gear, see that it was there, plus the fact that if they went on patrol we would have to be with them with our horses, with our limbers and the guns. This part, you all took part in the military activities, generally. Meal times? We all had our cook house, we had the usual tent-like mess huts.

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We were fed fairly well, there was no problems there. Generally, it was just like a great big wonderful time with men and horses and activity. There is no other way, really to describe it. It did have its influence in as much that the officer commanding the Cameron Highlanders was a Lieutenant Colonel Louch. And his 2IC [Second in Command] was a Major Sandover.

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Well, when the war broke out, the lieutenant colonel was made the commanding officer of the 2/11th Battalion, promoted to the rank of colonel. Major Sandover also enlisted with him. There was a big mob came out of the Cameron Highlanders that went with them. So yes, I went with them, for several reasons. I felt it was the right thing to do. My Dad and all his mates had been soldiers

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for the Empire, and the Empire was threatened, and worse than that, the Motherland was in trouble and you just had to be there to do the right thing. This is how we had been educated and taught in those days, that Australia was subordinate to England in all our thinking. It took me a long while to wake up to all of this, but I'm a very staunch Australian character now.

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We joined the AIF and we were sent to ? we were in northern for a few days, we were sent across to the eastern states to be with the rest of the AIF over there for training purposes. Came back to the west for a brief period of a few weeks, plus a bit of leave, and then we were all crowded aboard a troop ship called the Vasser.

When you went off to do some training, exactly where was that?

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At Rottnest Island.

You went on a different training program?

All our training program in the Cameron Highlanders was at Rottnest. There was for horse training, once a month, they had a remount depot out at Guildford. We used to go there once a month.

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The other training ? we were sent across to the eastern states when the AIF was formed to be part of the activities over there, so we could get used to being with a big number of men, whereas over here, we were just a small show compared to what they had over there.

How did you actually join up with the AIF?

They had an AIF call, that is what the paper called it,

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they forming up the 6th Division, 2nd Australian Imperial Forces ? You just had to join, that was my attitude at the time. You just went down the drill hall and said, ?Well, here I am.? They measured you up, you went through the usual routine, a medical checkup and your height, chest expansion and all that. That was a funny thing ? well, not funny ?

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I was half an inch short of the required height of 5' 4?. I was 5' 3? and I was trying to stand on my toes, but the old soldier that was measuring us was awake up to this and he said, ?I don't know. You're half an inch short.? And just then, this Major Sandover and another chappie called Archie Jackson was strolling past and they pulled up and said, ?Oh, Leggett? You're enlisting, are you?? ?Yes sir.?

Interviewee: Arthur Leggett Archive ID 1413 Tape 02

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Yes, well, I was being measured up and the old soldier said, ?You're half an inch short.? And I'm trying to stay on my heels, but he is awake up to this, and just then Major Sandover and a fellow called Archie Jackson, awfully British in their accents, and they are passing and said, ?Oh, Leggett? You're joining up, are you?? I said, ?Yes, sir.? The old soldier said, ?I don't know sir, he is half an inch short.? and Sandover says,

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?Oh, we can't fight a war without Leggett, let him in.? The next six years were sheer bloody hell. I wish he hadn't have gone through with it.

Where had you developed your rapport with him?

Major Sandover was in the Cameron Highlanders, and Archie Jackson, he was in the 11/16th Militia, and everyone knew everyone in Perth, in those days. If you wanted to meet anyone, you just stood on the corner of William and Hay Street

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and they would go past. Yes, so, all right, we're in the army and we were taken up to Northam for a few days, where we fiddled around and mucked about because there was no equipment, there was no uniforms ? we had fatigue outfits which consisted of a white cloth hat and what we called a giggle suit, which is just ordinary khaki cloth, and boots ?

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I don't think we even had a rifle each, at that stage. And when we did eventually get rifles, they were all branded '1918.' We were then transferred across to the eastern states. This was quite an enjoyable experience. The interstate shipping was built for passengers, as well as cargo. It had three classes first, second and third on every ship in those days.

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The company commanders had to toss to see who would go in which class and our commander happened to win the toss and we travelled across to Sydney first class, which was most enjoyable. We had waiters and people to make our beds and generally spoil us, which was a most enjoyable little trip across. We arrived in Sydney, highly secret of course, and we were shovelled inland, I think it was to a place called Rutherford,

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where we stayed for a while. But our main camp was Ingleburn, which is out of Sydney at the time, although I understand it's an inner suburb now. We trained there for about three months. We were then transported back to WA where, again, we were fortunate, our company was fortunate, we travelled first class ?

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Can you describe the training that you had at Ingleburn?

Oh yes. The part I neglected to mention was that all the experience that I had had with horse transport was of no avail, there was no horses. I didn't know very much about vehicles, and I didn't fancy driving a truck, so I joined the signal platoon. We had to learn Morse code, we had to learn how to handle the Lucas lamp,

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we also had telescopes and stands, we had flags to signal with, and we had field telephones. We used to go out on exercises where you would lay out cable and learn the telephone routine, according to the military manual. We also had to learn how to use the Lucas lamps, send Morse code with the Lucas lamps, how to send Morse code with flags. We spent all our time learning the Morse code

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and would you believe, all the action I ever went into we never used Morse code once, but that's beside the point.

That is a lot of instruction you must have received during your training?

Yes, we did, we had to start all over again ? The formation of a platoon was now in three ranks instead of four, there was none of this, 'Form fours! Right turn!' business. We were already in three ranks. We were eventually equipped with Bren guns,

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although our initial equipment was the old Lewis gun, branded '1918'. The responsibility of the signal platoon within a regiment is communication between the companies and the headquarters where the colonel is, etc. Therefore you have two men attached to each company, this is on a

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manoeuvre, and they in turn are responsible for communication back to battalion headquarters, and again you could have a phone line back to the rear to where your rear echelon is. This meant that you were spread around quite a bit and you got to know quite a bit about a battalion's structure, how it worked, and what would be required. There were certain parts about it which now

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are rather humorous. For example, cable was in very short supply. You would go into a manoeuvre, you would lay out miles of cable, but you had to roll it all up again, too, before you came back because it just wasn't available to be thrown around. The manual said the cable had to be tied up to hedge-rows, and so on, off the sides of the road, so as it won't be run over by traffic going along the road. But of course, there's no hedge-rows or anything like that in Australia or in the Western Deserts,

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so it was rather humorous endeavouring to train as a signaller with manuals written in 1914. But, nevertheless, that was our commitment. We got on very well, there was thirty in our platoon, and we still get together now and then for a bit of a smoko and have a bit of a yarn over things.

Whereabouts do you meet?

Anzac House, I always drop in there, there's always someone in there. We'll say, 'Oh, we'll meet there.'

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For example, the 2/11th Battalion Association is no longer functioning due to natural attrition, but we still get a little handful meet there regularly, once a month, just to get there. With the platoon, we had a sergeant who was a remarkable bloke, he had been in the First War so he knew what it was all about, whereas we were a bunch of kids having a great time.

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There was the difference. He used to bully, shout and abuse and he used to do everything, but push us along all the way and it had results, we all eventually learnt Morse code, we learnt how to handle all of these things - all these different instruments, and we did become a fairly efficient sort of a unit within the battalion.

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Can you describe in a little bit more detail some of the equipment? Like the telephones? And what's a helioscope?

A heliograph. A heliograph is an instrument which is set up on a tripod and it's a mirror which you can send messages by the sun's beams flashing off it. It takes a little bit of lining up, you have got to align your heliograph flash

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where the receiver is, so that in effect when you send Morse code, it lifts the sun beam onto that spot, and this way you can send Morse code by using a mirror. You may see it on movies, some Roman fellow standing there with a mirror in his hand going like this - well, that's a lot of junk because you have got to be very precise. Because if you're there, you've only got to be a fraction out and that fellow won't be able to read it, so you've got to be very precise with the heliograph.

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Also, if you get the sun up there it will hit your mirror and you can send, but if the sun is there and you are trying to send there, you've got to have two mirrors and this, in turn, requires quite a bit of adjustment. But, in clear country they are a very effective method of sending Morse code. And I understand in India, where the British Army was, they used to send a message anything up to sixty kilometres or more, using the heliograph.

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What do they look like?

There is one down at the army museum in Fremantle. It's on a tripod, it's got a means of - a Morse code key, and it has simply got a mirror with a hole in the middle, and you have an arm come out here with an upright here and you line up,

you press your lever down, your Morse code key down, that will tilt the mirror and you send the beam onto that spot.

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You look through the hole in the mirror at your spot at your receiver. Now, as you send, if you're going to be there for some time the sun is going to move ? as our sergeant used to say, ?I can adjust the heliograph while you're sending, but I can't keep the bloody sun still. Now adjust the heliograph.? You have to adjust it and make sure you have got the spots dead right when you're sending, over a period of time.

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It is equally awkward when the sun is behind you, because you have got to hit a mirror there which has to hit a mirror here, which has to hit that spot on your little upright so you're in line with your receiver. The Lucas lamp was a lot different, it's like a pistol grip, it's like a big lamp, it's got a sight on top and if you're looking through that you are pretty right, as long as you've got your sights on your target, you're pretty right there with that.

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Is that for evening Morse code?

Yes, evening Morse code. They used to use them in the trenches, but they would have a long tube in front of them, too, and this would keep it secret. So you had to be accurate with it, so that no one from the left or the right could read it, for example, the enemy. If you were sending to the rear from a forward place the enemy might see it, well, this would shut it out. A tube over ? You will see it sometimes on the cameras that you see at the footy fields and things of this nature. The field telephone? Well, the one we had, originally,

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was the ones they had in the 1914/18 trenches. They had a Morse code key on there, they also had a telephone with a pressel switch on, and they were operated by batteries. The theory was, when you were listening you let go of the pressel switch because ? then when you wished to speak, you pressed that switch which brought in another circuit that conveyed your voice. And invariably to find out

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if that's working, you picked it up, you blew in the mouth piece and you could hear it there. Whenever anyone picked those things up that was the first thing you would hear would be, ?wffft wffft.? And it got a bit of a joke amongst the signal platoon, I know in the Western Desert there, a signal corps, one of the front companies, a signaller picked it up and went, ?Wffft wffft,? and he wants to speak to captain so and so, and the captain would pick it up, and he would blow into it. The bloke on the exchange said, ?If some of you funny bastards would say something instead of blowing into it, we'd get on with this war.?

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The flags, well, they were back in the pre-Boer War days, but that is how we thought in those days, you see. You were sent to the rear with a flag, and it is possible to send Morse code with a flag, once you've learnt it all. But there again, it makes you very vulnerable if you're in the Western Desert with nothing to hide behind.

Waving flags around in the air ?

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Yes, it's true. What other gear? That was mainly it, The telephone exchange was a whole series of things, you just pulled in plugs and bits and pieces. Later on, we got a more up to date telephone exchange where you just pressed buttons. But unfortunately, if they got wet, the whole lot came on at once. It got a little bit embarrassing.

How was the field telephone powered? Did it need powering?

Yes, they all had batteries, all battery operated. The exchange had so many batteries,

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each telephone had a battery, which means that batteries were quite important thing. You had your signal platoon storeman whose job it was to keep check on batteries and make sure he had the necessary quantity to keep the things functioning.

It sounds like quite an art to operating each of those pieces?

Yes, you were classified as a specialist,

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and for all your extra learning, you got an extra one shilling a day, which mounted up by the end of the war in the circumstances that I was in. You were a specialist, that's all, we worked harder and longer and we had different sort of training. For example, I had no training in the Bren gun or forward position or firing of any sort because I was a specialist in the signal platoon, it wasn't my job. We had the knowledge of how to use these things,

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because you never know when you're going to get in a jam and it's necessary, we were all taught squad drill, we were all taught the usual position that soldiers have within a battalion and what your duties are, and what your other equipment is, but we also had this extra work as well.

So you must have had some firearms training?

Yes, we were all trained in firearms, taken down to the rifle range and learn how to fire a Bren gun and how to handle your .303 rifle.

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Were you armed later?

Oh, yes. By the time we got back to Perth, I think we all had a rifle each. Digressing a bit, I know but later when we got to the Middle East, the regimental armament was brought up to modern standards, in as much as the Bren gun replaced the Lewis gun, and we also had submachine guns, some people had submachine guns, not all of us, but those that were necessary,

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and the weaponry was brought up to date as far as people knew it in those days.

How did you get back to Fremantle?

We came back again on the Duntroon, which was one of the interstate boats. As I think I may have mentioned, our Captain managed to win the toss again and we travelled first class back in the ship.

You have travelled in style so far?

So far, yes.

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A lot of the other vets that I have spoken to have travelled in cattle trucks across the country ?

This is so. Mind you, this is the very early stage, this is 1939. We still haven't got out of 1939 at this stage. We camped at Claremont Showground, we had a few exercises in the bush country between Perth and Rockingham before going overseas. We also got leave, leave was quite generous while we were there.

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Where we didn't get leave, well, there was a hole in the fence anyway, but they weren't over-strict on that sort of thing, as long as you were there for your early morning check parade. While even though they knew you might have been out

unofficially, there was no great fuss because after all, they couldn't do much about it.

Did you take any unofficial leave?

We all did. We all got out. Well, I had my Mum, my family, everything else. I used to get out as much as I could.

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Plus the fact that you had your teenage group, not necessarily all in the army, but you had a teenage group that you grew up with here, and there you were with your uniform there, you were going to win the bloody war. You would get out as much as you could with the gang that you'd knocked around with ? all your growing years. This, of course, was good enough reason to get out of camp at night.

For sure.

Eventually, we had a big parade through Perth.

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We got off the train in the central station and marched down to Barrack Street and then down Hay Street, and the whole town turned out. It was done during the lunch hour, it was a big send off, a great military send-off. We finished up getting on to a boat called the Nevasser, which had been a troop ship since a way back, it was a real troop ship. The sort of thing they poked the English army

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in go to India and bring them back home, the others back home, it was a hell of a bloody thing.

Can you describe it?

There was no cabins, nothing in it for the troops, put it that way. It was so old that during the course of the voyage to the Middle East we couldn't have concerted physical activity because there was the danger that some of the decks might collapse. It had been booked for the scrap yard, but because the war broke out

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it had been refurbished as a troop ship. You could see from one end of it to the other. There were tables coming out from the walls, they were the mess tables, there was about eighteen men, if I remember rightly, to a mess, and also there were hooks from the side of the boat, that's where you hung your hammock of a night. Your whole existence was around this mess table. And theoretically you hung your hammock up over the mess table at night to sleep.

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There was about three or four decks of that. There was wooden stairways going down to the various decks, they had been well worn and greasy and polished. The cookhouse was up on the top deck you, would have two mess orderlies go up to get the food, and every meal someone would come a gutser on those stairs and all that food would go pouring down one flight of stairs down to the blokes on the next flight of stairs, you can just imagine the chaos that went on there.

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Then you go back to the cookhouse, which was manned by a couple of Pommy cooks who hated everybody, ?You've got your rations. You're not getting any more from us.? Well, that meant eighteen men were scrounging around looking for food. Most of us slept up on deck at night, we took our hammocks up, just laid them down on the deck, we laid there at night.

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We were washed out of there in the morning by the Indian crew hosing down the decks, they took great delight in that. Time was spent in concerts now and then, impromptu concerts, two-up games, Crown and Anchor, all the usual things,

boxing matches ?

Was two-up popular?

Oh, yes, it's always popular amongst the troops, it always got a good following. I was never a gambler, but most of the boys ? you're on a troop ship, you've e got nothing else to do.

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You would win today, lose tomorrow, but it just passed the time away.

What were the concerts like?

Impromptu, some of them were a bit rough. There was quite a number of men who came from the goldfields. I should have mentioned this earlier, coming from the Cameron Highlanders, they were awfully nice chaps, and when we joined the AIF we were still awfully nice chaps.

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But then they recruited from the goldfields, now these men were rugged, they drank beer, they swore, they'd fight, if they couldn't fight someone else, they would fight each other. When I look back now, of course, I realise what a snob I was, but they were magnificent men when the stink was really on, but they horrified me at this particular time. Getting back to your question, ?What were some of the concerts like?? Some of them were very crude and rude, and I used to feel so embarrassed.

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I look back now and I laugh because they were magnificent men, but we didn't see it at the time because of the way you'd been brought up. I had two sisters and had to look after them, and all that sort of thing. It was rather an awakening for me, yes. I matured rapidly.

You lost your innocence?

Well, I must have been the most naïve character to have ever joined the AIF, honestly.

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I mean, here we are in this country, we all speak a common language, we have got water all around us, you can go anywhere in Australia you don't meet up with another language, and suddenly you're overseas, and I had no idea where Egypt was. And the Suez Canal? I heard about at school. And this is the sort of way I went overseas, anyway. And eventually when we finished up in Greece and Crete, I had no idea where we were. But there it was, so that's just how we were educated.

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Was there plenty of beer available on board?

No, because of the effect the beer has. Some men just drink beer and they get horribly drunk, aggressively drunk, and they can become a real problem, especially on a crowded troop ship, they can disappear overboard and all sorts of things. But no, it was a dry ship if I remember rightly.

Have you heard of men going missing going overboard on those trips?

No, I haven't, as a matter of fact, not on our boat anyway,

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and I doubt if there was any of that incident. A humorous point, yes, now we got crammed onto this boat, taken out to Gauge Road just out of Fremantle and they dropped anchor, and the rest of the convoy came around from the other states, and they went all ashore, and it took two days before they all had leave and we were all sat out there, after the wonderful farewell that we'd had, going overseas to win the war,

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there we were, stuck outside there for two days while all the rest of the troops went ashore and had leave. One day, one mob of several ships would go ashore, the next day, while the second lot were going ashore they would lower their boats and rowing around and they decided to come over and tell us what wonderful women we had in Perth, how kind they are ? well, we had been fishing with anything, bits of string,

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anything, cotton and bent hooks, and we had a boat covered in mullet, and these blokes come around telling us these wonderful stories of what they were doing with our women folk, well, we loaded their boats up with mullet I can tell you. It was quite a vigorous little assault there for a while. The chaps who were in charge of the boats were Pommy officers, ?You can't do that, you chaps! ? You can imagine what we said.

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Flying fish. Who else was in the convoy?

This I can't tell you. It was sixty five years ago. I know the Ramillies was one of the boats that escorted us, there was a French cruiser too, I think.

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I can't tell you the name of the ship or how many were in it. I would be kidding myself. I think there were about seven troop ships escorted by naval escort, put it that way.

Was it a comfortable voyage?

No, it wasn't. We settled in, you had to. As I say, I've described the decks and the scenes that went on there, and theoretically we should have all been below deck, but we moved up on deck to sleep at night.

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There was very little facilities, there was no real library, to read, there was no games, except the usual gambling games that go with a group of men.

Was there any training exercises?

Oh yeah, we learnt the Morse code. We had a few telephones that sent out the Morse code, so our little platoon would be sitting around the corner of the deck sending Morse code messages to each other to get the hang of the Morse code.

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We did this for four weeks, I think, and flags, you practiced the flag drill, but there wasn't much you could do because the boat was crammed. And I think, if I remember rightly, most of our gear was in another ship anyway. That's how we went away in those days, you would land somewhere and your gear would be somewhere else.

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What kind of exercises were the ordinary infantrymen doing?

Oh, well, ordinary physical exercises that soldiers or military or anyone wants to keep fit, you do your arms out and your arms in and you touch your toes and all that sort of thing, which must have grown on me because I still do it. You could keep yourself physically fit, and the food was sufficient, put it that way, it was not excessive but it was sufficient.

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We went out all right. And of course, it was all novel to us, you must remember that. The enthusiasm for being in the army, the traditions of the Australians were established in the First War and we were all part of this, and it helped you get through your day with a sense of pride that you were going to achieve something.

What kind of grub were you being served?

Mainly stew, of course, with boiled potatoes.

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There would be tinned fruit, but there was none of the luxuries that the Americans had, like ice cream and lollies and all that sort of thing. It was basic food, put it that way, very basic food, but our whole army existence was on basic food. Well, we did get out a pretty good sort of a meal at some stage, but we'll come to that later.

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What route did you take?

From here we went to Colombo, we got a day's leave in Colombo, which ruined our reputation. As you know in Colombo, they used to have a man pulling a two wheel carriage. Well, our blokes finished up with the chappie pulling the carriage sitting in the seat and they'd have races

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down the main street. You get about fifty Australians in the shaft of one of those tearing down the street, all full of grog of course, and the bloke that owns it sitting up in the seat looking very worried because he had never been there before in all his life, because we still had that attitude of everyone is equal, which is not common in that country. Drank a lot of grog. I wasn't one of them. I had a mate, a couple of mates,

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who were similar in their outlook to me and we went looking for museums and things like this, but the majority of the fellows had one heck of a good time.

Did you find some interesting places to visit?

This I can't remember. These couple of mates, who were the same as me, we looked for somewhere like that to go whenever we got ashore or whenever we went anywhere,

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but I can't clearly recollect at this stage how successful we were on that particular day. We got back to the ship, the ship had been bunkering with coal. That was rather unique. There was barges come up beside the boat and there was a gangway going down and there was a whole string of natives up this thing, across the deck, down the hole where they are dumping this coal.

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And the whole of the boat was covered in about half an inch of coal dust, it was just filthy. When the boat was finished they hosed it all down and cleaned it all up. The bit that intrigued us, of course, was all these black fellows carrying these bags of coal, no conveyor belt, nothing. It was the first time we had seen things like this.

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The majority of us were just so damned ignorant about the rest of the world at that stage of our lives, because we had never been anywhere, you could never travel anywhere, no-one had the money to do that, at our level, the working class level. It was really an eye opener what we saw when we went overseas.

Completely different cultures?

Absolutely, different culture, class levels, different attitudes, different religions and all

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mounted up. It was something we knew slightly about, but here it was, we were actually seeing it. An intriguing part of

the whole time I was overseas was, 'There it is, I've seen it. It's only been in picture books up until now, but there it actually is.' It was quite an eye opener.

Makes your war time experience quite valuable?

I strongly suspect that this is one of the reasons why we joined up,

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because it was going to be a new life, a new existence. I know from my point of view, I had uncles and aunts in England who we had been writing to ever since we were kids, but we had never seen them, never knew anything about them. And here was a chance, 'My Dad went to England in the First War, they're bound to send us to England in this war and I'll meet my uncles and aunts as well.' The idea that you might get killed in a war, that doesn't come into it.

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The fighting never really entered your mind?

No, that was just a sideline.

You were still in Colombo of the chaps bringing on all the coal?

From there we went up into the Red Sea, we pulled up outside of Aden but nobody went ashore because, I understand, there was a bit of political problems there and no one went ashore. We moved up into

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the Bitter Lakes where we anchored for a day. I think we all went overboard there and had a good swim. We finished up at El Kantara which was a base in the First War, a big base, and there we were fed well, we had a good meal there, and then, to use the army phraseology, we entrained and we went up into Palestine. Our particular battalion was camped at a spot called

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Kilo 89, which is about seven or eight out from Gaza, north of Gaza. The tents were all set up, there were buildings there, cookhouse, mess hut, store room, quartermasters stores, headquarters building and so on, they were already there. Apparently those little set ups were right along Palestine and we occupied the lot. When I say we, the 6th Division.

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We occupied the whole lot, and our particular camp was down at Kilo 89. Occasionally, when we got leave, we would go into Gaza, which was a little town, quite a peaceful place. It was quite a comfortable little place. It sounds silly now in 2004 when you read about it, but it was a comfortable little place. There was a bit of humour there, too, because the Arabs apparently objected to the British occupation

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of their country, and there was fear that if we took ' we couldn't go in unarmed because we might be attacked. Now, if we took a rifle with us and we were attacked, they would be armed with our rifle, therefore you would have to leave the bolt in camp, which meant that you were walking around with a rifle slung over your shoulder, on leave this is, by the way, with no bolt in it. Of course, you were a great joke amongst the Arabs, they could see that.

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That was one of the bits of red tape that went on, which was quite humorous. Another one, again the Arabs were very clever burglars. The rifles were all chained up either to the tent posts or in the tents, in the night, or during the day I think they were up the quartermaster's store. We were on guard duty around the camp,

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we were armed with pick handles, because there was a danger that if you were an individual guard you could be overpowered and they could take your weapon and therefore you were armed with a pick handle. This is the way things were at that particular time. We treated the Arabs as levels, well shook the Arabs a bit, too, because they'd never had this sort of treatment, and when we used to sit down and have a yarn with them they could hardly appreciate a lot of this, because they had always been belted, bashed and pushed aside

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by British occupying forces. We got on quite well with them, in the towns, wherever we went, we never had any trouble with the Arabs. Of course, you get into the big cities like Cairo, Alexandria, the blokes would get drunk, they'd flake out and the street marauders would go through their pockets and all that sort of thing. This would happen, yes, but the average desert character, we got on well with them.

How did you manage to communicate with them?

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A lot of them spoke English, of course. That was another thing, we were surprised how many different nationalities speak English. We got on with them and we learnt to speak their language, which was another thing that surprised them ? Not surprised them, but intrigued them. We made an effort to learn their language so as we could communicate with them, which was always handy.

It must have been a novelty, speaking a foreign tongue?

That was another thing, too, of course, it was a novelty,

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something else we are doing, ?This is beaut, learning another language.?

Do you recall any of the phrases?

Yes, some of them were applicable to a house of ill fame so we won't go into that. There were silly things like soa soa, which is brother, kaif halak, how are you today? I have forgotten how much it is, but little things like that, we learnt their common greetings.

I find houses of ill fame quite fascinating ?

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That is a long story. I had a couple of mates, we got leave to Haifa, so we had heard about all these places and we decided we would go and have a look at one of these. So we go up into a hole in the wall, it's a door and a big wall,

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high wall, this is the way in, you go up these stairs ? we go up these stairs, there's water flowing down the stairs, someone had left the tap on up at the top, and when we get around the last bend in the stairs there's blokes up the top there urinating down the stairs, that's what you're ploughing up through. We get into a big lounge room, there's fellows around with different girls, trying to strike a bargain.

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A door flies open, there is a sheila, half Arab, half Lebanese or something, in a slip, she lets out a horrible scream and flakes out in the middle of this tiled floor, out of this other door comes a big black mammy and chucks a bucket of water over her and this girl rallies around and stands up, and mammy says, ?Well, whose the next lucky fellow?? Well, me and my mate we went down to the pictures

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and saw Diana Durban that afternoon, and I have never been in a place since like that. That's not quite true, we'll come

to another episode later, which is humorous.

It doesn't sound very inviting ?

It was horrendous to me, anyway, and to my mate. We said, "Out of here, mate."

Can we just go back to Kilo 89 and get an overall description of that camp?

We're in tents, each company of course was separate,

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the whole battalion was there as a group, but there were company lines, and water was freely available, it wasn't as though it was a parched desert country. They had shower rooms, they had healthy toilets, showers, ablution facilities generally, they had a canteen and they had a Red Shield writing room. There were buildings that

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already been set up, wooden structures, where you could write home at night on Salvation Army notepaper. They already had their headings, they had a nice red shield and a quotation from the Bible, "My strength is as the strength of ten because my heart is pure," and I used to put a circle around this and say, "That's your little boy, Mum," when I wrote home.

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There was a cookhouse, they were well set up, and we did daily drill, you did your squad drill, this is where we were taught squad drill, and how to handle arms more efficiently, things of this nature, plus the fact that we went on exercises out into the desert. You would be out one week, and in the background there would be desert between Gaza and Beersheba, as you know

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there is a lot of desert there, we used to go out on manoeuvres there, and we would be out for a week and then back in camp for a week. We really toughened up and we got where we could live in the desert quite comfortably.

Interviewee: Arthur Leggett Archive ID 1413 Tape 03

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We were just talking about desert warfare and the training that went along with that. What sort of supplies did you have when you were doing the training?

They had the cookhouse in the base camp, but the cookhouse is like a battalion in the desert, also mobile. While we were training, to the best of my knowledge, the cooks would prepare the meal,

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put it all in dixies, which in turn would be put in hot boxes, which are like an elaborate sort of Esky we have these days, they would be taken out by the trucks to wherever we were at the end of the day, with the result that we had a pretty good meal at the end of the day. Also, the cooks had great delight, they would have a cut lunch, and this a remarkable feat of cookhouse capabilities.

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There would be two slices of bread heavily laden with butter, and in between that would be jammed a McConnachie's Herring and Tomato Sauce, that would be a sandwich. This in turn would be put in your aluminium dixie, which would be put in your pack, and you would go all morning out there in the desert with the sun beating down on this.

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When it come to midday, you would open up this sandwich and you just could not eat it, you would have to be a really

tough man ? the remarkable thing was you would never see an Arab all morning, while you were carrying out your manoeuvres, but as soon as you sat down at lunch and opened up this sandwich and said, 'Oh, I'm not going to eat that,' and you're going to throw it away, there's an Arab there with a camel with watermelons on it. I don't know where the hell they come from, but they were always there.

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So we would have a watermelon lunch, something along those lines, and he would get a McConnachie's Herring and Tomato Sauce.

What sort of manoeuvres were you doing out there?

Mainly training for desert warfare, which of course was entirely different to the 1914/18 trench warfare. You have space, you have to be manoeuvrable and you have to be capable of moving fairly rapidly. Mainly our exercises took the form of retreat.

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Now our colonel used to maintain, probably speaking from experience, that anyone can go forward but you have to be well trained to stage a withdrawal, or a retreat, not that we were interested in retreating, but that was his philosophy and it proved eventually to be quite justified.

What is so difficult about retreating?

Well, let me put that in reverse. You go forward, a company goes forward

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and then they're backed up and so on, but in reverse theoretically you've got the enemy coming at you, they must be overpowering you and or you wouldn't be retreating. You have someone make a stand and someone comes back through their lines, that front line then does whatever damage it can and retreats, and that leaves the line behind them. It's complicated because everything is going back, your transport, everything, all your supply lines, it's all retreating. Whereas when you're

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going forward, you're going forward, 'She's right, mate,' one is leap-frogging the other going forwards. There is a difference. A much more complicated thing is withdrawing, especially if you're in the face of the enemy. Of course, when we got up into Greece it all paid off. The other exercises would be night exercises 'I'll just go back a little. Meals would be brought up in the vehicles.

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When you're training in desert warfare, okay, twenty miles is a good sort of a hike if you're training, but it's not very far in a vehicle, so when I say we got a hot meal at the end of the day, at twenty miles the vehicles might have to come up and bring up your meal, which is not a great thing for a vehicle to do, but quite a lot to do when you're practicing desert warfare. Also night manoeuvres were another thing, because you would have to go on your compass bearing. When I say, 'you,'

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mainly the officers in charge of the companies would be on compass bearings to take up different positions, and you had to keep your men together, it's pitch black, there's no street lights, you're out in the desert, it's dark, and you have to be in control and it's good training in that aspect that it teaches you how to control men and it teaches men how to keep in contact with each other and carry out the tasks, whatever they were,

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which has been allocated to him. Desert warfare is entirely different. It's just like ships on the ocean, you've got space to manoeuvre, you've got areas to cover, it's not as though you were dug in, so it is an entirely different type of warfare, I think.

What sort of equipment did you have by this stage? Was any of it updated?

Oh yes, all our signalling gear ? well, our telephonic gear was updated, it was a more modern type of telephone

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and telephone exchange. We never had radios, they were something that we had heard of, but we never come across them. The Rifle companies, they were equipped with their Bren guns and support equipment. We did have a Vickers gun platoon within the battalion, and not every company had Vickers guns, but there was a platoon within the battalion

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which had Vickers guns. I think the theory is, then, if a company needed the services of a Vickers gun, okay, there it was. You would have several Vickers guns, they would be spread around the battalion, because the Vickers gun is a hell of a deadly machine when it gets moving, and it gets firing. so you wouldn't have three or four of them to a company, regularly, but you might need them spasmodically, which is a good thing.

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We were still short of signalling equipment, rather cable, that had to be rolled up every time when we went on an exercise, which was a problem, it meant extra effort. We might have used a Lucas lamp at night now and then, but it was all too slow. You see, again, desert warfare you are moving, you don't have time to sit down and read Morse code from a lamp, theoretically anyway.

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So you have got to have your telephone, the company commander can pick up the phone and talk to the colonel and there it is. Well, in the old days you'd write out a message, give it to the signaller, he would send it on the Lucas lamp, he would write it down and give it to someone, the runner ? in the desert you have got to move quick. It took the whole British Army two years damn near to wake up to all this and get it functioning that way.

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How much cable were you taking with you at any given time?

You would have a reel about that diameter ? could be a mile of cable in there, so you would have to run that out and roll that up again, because we never had any cable. If we used it all up, that was it.

Was there a shortage of cable?

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Yes, I would say there was, there was a shortage of every damn thing. You have got to remember that ever since the 1914/18 War we had been disarming, and everything was cut down, there was no need for any defence work, and suddenly it all happens, and we have got to organise a division of men. This is my theory, they got everything they could out of the ordnance stores and handed it around,

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and cable was not in abundance, there was a quantity for every battalion, but it was not a big deal, mind you. I may have made it sound as though it was a big deal, but it is just one of those things we had to go through. Sometimes some of our manoeuvres were quite ? well, they had their funny points. I can recollect clearly getting back to Australia, we were learning how to use a party line, and on a party line there could be

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about five of you on the one length of cable. For example, your battalion's dug in the frontline as per the 1914-18 War. We got out at night and this sergeant of ours would say, 'Now, you put down a pin here, you run the cable out and you put a T in there, two men put a T in there. And then you go further on, they take the cable on, and two men put a T in there.' This was going on and he was standing back at the first one.

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Well, the first telephone would be teed in and back would come a very crude message as to what you can do, you see. 'Who said that?' The next one would go down and they would get the same message, 'Get stuffed!' And after about four times the sergeant said, 'I will have you all put on a charge!' And he would go racing up this cable. Well, the last fellow had sent down the Morse code message GB, which was 'reel down and close in,' which he had no authority to do, and the sergeant's going out roaring, and it's all coming back in again,

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well, you can imagine that sort of thing happening amongst a bunch of recruits and beginners. But we got over that attitude, we realised that war could be serious at some stage.

How did you get on together?

Very well, yes, very well, because esprit de corps is a very important thing. You have a company, put it this way, if I remember rightly

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there's three platoons in a company with about thirty men in each platoon. Now the thirty men within that platoon would have a strong esprit de corps, and the three platoons again would have a strong company esprit de corps, and it was built up, that was quite strong. And always there was this Australian attitude of mateship, which is not necessarily peculiar to Australians, but it was very strong, You were all mates.

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Did you have some really good mates at this stage?

Yes, I had a couple of good mates there, and the three of us used to knock around together. We bivouacked and we'd somehow finish up together, or if you went on leave you would be together, this sort of thing. But you were part of a platoon, and you were all good mates in that.

Any of the weather conditions out there that made things difficult in the desert?

Back at Kilo 89, no ? it didn't happen,

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not until after we left. Okay, so progressing on from there, you may recollect in the history of the war the Italians were in Libya and they came down over the Egyptian border and propped around about Sollum. There was an Indian division up there who were booked to go to Addis Ababa, but they decided to have a bit of a go at these Italians before they left,

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and it was such a resounding success that they decided to send us, the 6th Australian Division, up there to carry on with it, which we did do. We were in Egypt for a while. Getting back to the weather now at Kilo 89, all our tents were sunk into the ground about eighteen inches or so, the theory was it would help us if there was an air attack, and it would shelter us from bomb blast and so on.

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Our camp was on a slight slope and the copious rain that fell, after we left, filled up all the tents there with water, so they were absolutely useless, but we got out of that one pretty right. We were in Egypt by the time all this happened. The weather was always ? well, it was fine there for three months, anyway.

How were you transported up to Egypt?

By train.

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We went by train, and then we camped at ? Burg-el-Arab, we were camped there for a few weeks, just at the end of the year of 1940. We had a big Christmas dinner there, celebration, before, and from there we were taken by truck to the outside of Bardia there for the first battle of Bardia.

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By this stage were you actually looking forward to having some sort of action?

Well, yes, we were willing to try ourselves out, we were very intrigued as to how we were going to shape ourselves up to this sort of thing, because up until now it was something like a dumper in the surf, you know it's coming, but you're not quite sure how you are going to handle it until it arrives. We were eager to go, of course, yes.

How much were you told about what you were expected to do?

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All the time you're told that you are expected to do the maximum, no matter where you are or what you're doing. I wasn't a very educated sort of a character, and I had no real knowledge of the outline of Egypt, Libya and so on. So to me, I was just part of a regiment and the regiment was going up to Bardia, as part of the 6th Australian Division.

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That's from my point of view. It's quite feasible that the upper crust knew exactly what was going on, of course, and it's quite likely everyone else did, except me. I was just an ignorant character, in those days.

What was the first thing that happened when you arrived in Bardia?

We took up our position ? when I say ?we' the battalion took up it's position ? This is rather humorous, really.

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We moved up at night, and we had a corporal who had also been in the First War, how much of it, I don't know, it must have been the latter end. Anyway, we had to dig in, we were told to dig in, so we dug slit trenches and we dug in, we laid out cables to the forward companies, and the corporal came crawling over to my slit trench, this is after we had dug in,

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?Now in the morning there is going to be the biggest artillery barrage in history.? He said, ?I've seen some in my day, and I want to see this one. You wake me up at five to four, will you?? ?OK, Lou. So at five to four I crawl across and wake him up, ?Lou, it's five to four, mate.? ?Righto.? So we both crawled back to my slit trench where the telephone exchange was, this was at battalion headquarters. At four o'clock this barrage opens up.

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Well, we're sitting there, looking to the front, or rather sitting there and looking to the rear, I should say, because that's where the artillery is, always behind the infantry. But we can't see a thing, we can hear it, we can feel the ground shaking, can't see anything. We turned around and looked the other way and there was the artillery about fifteen mile

ahead of us, and we were the reserve battalion and the reserve brigade, and we were about fifteen mile behind the artillery lines, and we had been crawling around and whispering to each other all night.

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And Lou said, "Bloody hell, here we are crawling around in the dark, whispering." We were told to move forward, and I picked up all my gear, and I will never forget the advance at the Battle of Bardia. I had a telephone, telephone exchange, I had two few flags, I had tripod with a Lucas lamp, I had another tripod with a heliograph.

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I was just a mass of signalling gear with two feet underneath and a tin hat on top, and they could have hit me with a anti-tank gun and it wouldn't have hurt me, it would have bounced off. So we go forward and get through the barbed wire and the battle is just about all over by then, because our other battalions within the division had penetrated the wire and spread out and overtaken the place. We did get into a bit of action the next day, but it was nothing really serious.

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What happened?

Oh, well, I don't really know. Again, you're going right back, a long way, and it's not easy to always remember things in details. But our battalion did move forward through the break, which had been made in the barbed wire, and I think we went down to the left, once in there. We had to cross over a bit of open ground, but there was no real problem there.

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I'm not quite sure what our forward companies did. I think there was a bit of scrapping but nothing really bad, this was our battalion, I'm not talking about the whole division, I'm talking about our battalion which again, I repeat, was a reserve battalion, of the reserve brigade. I can't really recollect any serious thing happening. We occupied Bardia and that was it, as far as I can remember.

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How difficult was it getting water out to you all you folk?

We got half a bottle of water a day to drink, and the other half went to the cook house for cooking facilities. So we learnt to live on very little water. It was very cold weather, mind you, at this stage of the campaign. At night, you would go and lay down under your groundsheet, we had two blankets per man, and it was common for two men to sleep together

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and have two blankets under them and four on top of them. And your water bottle would freeze solid overnight, so it was pretty cold, but during the day it would warm up and the cold was not so noticeable. But there was always a cold wind blowing. We got half a bottle of water a day, and we allowed one water bottle full a day while the other half went to the cook house.

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That makes washing a bit difficult ?

We went three months without a wash, that was nothing, we finished up going three months without out a wash. You weren't worried much about washing, you were in a situation where you were in the desert, you were in a campaign. Washing was nothing. We managed to have a shave now and again, but that was about all.

So what happened after Bardia?

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From there we went up to Tobruk, we were all loaded in trucks and taken up to Tobruk. I am not going to elaborate on the history of the campaign because that is all written out by experts, and I'm not the full bottle on it by any means.

How much did you know about it at the time?

We got more used to it as we went, and we understood after a while. For example, I did know that the 7th Armoured Division was out on our flank guarding us from

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any attack from the desert country. They in turn were doing a good job as far as protecting our left flank ? But again, similar to Bardia, we moved up and took up our positions outside the defences of Tobruk. There was the usual heavy artillery barrage and we got through the tank trap, and through the wire, and eventually Tobruk fell, too.

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We did get mixed up with a bit of scrapping, but again ?

Could you go into that in detail from your point of view of what you could see?

Well, yes, owing to circumstances beyond my control, I was attached to a forward company there. No ? at Tobruk I wasn't, sorry. Well, again we moved out ?

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Tobruk had a big tank trap around it and barbed wired, and the artillery blasted a hole in the barbed wire. The spot where I crossed into Tobruk, the tank trap was quite shallow because it was solid rock and the Italians never had time to dig all that out, so we just walked straight into there. They had areas of barbed wire about this high, spread over quite big areas,

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you couldn't walk across them, and in between they had machine guns aimed down in the passageways between these areas of barbed wire. I never came up against any of this, I was back again at battalion headquarters, not that that means you're out of danger by any means. The forward companies were doing whatever they had to do down there, and I don't think there was a great deal of fighting

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from our battalion at that particular time. I think we lost a few men, but again, it's not very clear to me. And again, history is available in the correct books if you want to follow it up.

What sort of information were you getting back as far as the progress of the battle was concerned with Tobruk?

We knew we were progressing favourably, put it that way. We knew the Italians were throwing it in, hand over fist.

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It got very embarrassing at times. I know on one occasion there ? I was attached to this forward company, we were down on the edge of the harbour, after Tobruk capitulated, and the word came back that there was a few Italian prisoners down the front that had to be escorted back to us, so the captain sent a couple of chaps down with a Bren gun.

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I think he sent about four fellows down with a Bren gun and bits and pieces. They go right around the harbour to pick up these prisoners, and after a while I said to the captain, ?Sir? You had better come and have a look at this.? He said, ?What's wrong?? I said, ?You better have a look.? Well coming around the edge of the harbour was a whole line of blue uniforms of these Italians coming out, and these were the couple of the POWs [prisoners of war] that these men

went down to get.

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And in front of these there's these four Aussies strolling along, and there is one Italian carrying the Bren gun and another one has got the ammunition case. So the captain rushes up and pulls them up and says, 'What's going on? Where did these men come from?' He said, 'I don't know, sir. They came out of holes in the ground, they come out of buildings, they came out of everywhere.' He said, 'Well, what are they doing carrying your Bren gun?' 'Well, they're friendly characters,' he said, 'they wanted to carry the gun so I let them.'

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Of course, there was quite a reprimand then and he was given back the Bren gun, but anyway that's what happened. They took the prisoners back to the rear somewhere, where there was a compound for them. Another intriguing thing, I understand we rounded up about fifty ladies of a thousand delights and they were transported to the rear somewhere. They probably finished up at Alexandria and had a good time for the rest of the war.

Where did they come from?

From Tobruk, the Italian families had their brothels down there

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and things of that nature, like any army, I suppose.

So not only were there POWs ?

They were civilians, they were rounded up and sent back as well.

Was there anything else about Tobruk that comes to mind?

Only the wreckage of the place, it had been badly bombed, and it had been the subject of artillery fire, but no,

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I can't clearly recollect anything of it. I understand there was a few boats there in the harbour which had been bombed and sunk. But no, I'm afraid I can't ? I spent the last sixty five years trying to forget all this, because that's in the past. Dealing with myself, I know the war was a terrible thing and I was in the services about six years, but I'm over eighty now, and I've always looked at that six years

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as just a bad part of eighty years, and I'm afraid I don't recollect as clearly as some fellows.

Your recollection is actually very, very good. So out of Tobruk, where did you move off to?

The 7th Armoured Division had gone around behind Derna,

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and we were to attack Derna. Well, we were really mixed up in it. One of our companies, I think it was B Company, had to take the advance over an aerodrome, which was pretty well fortified, and they got into a bit of scrapping there. On top of the escarpment, from the desert, there's a big escarpment that goes down and then there is a flat area right along the coast there.

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They eventually took the aerodrome. I was attached to a forward company there and we moved around to a fort, I think it was Fort Rodrigo, we got past. And during the course of the day we went down the escarpment. I was a signaller attached to this company headquarters. I had no contact with our battalion headquarters because we hadn't run a cable out or any other thing.

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We moved down the escarpment and onto the flat, we spread across this flat area and advanced towards Derna, which we could see in the distance, and suddenly all hell breaks loose. They've got a line of artillery and machine guns across this flat. The artillery barrages crept towards us and caught up with us and then went back, and then it came forward again. But our first warning was a burst of machine gun fire ? It was like funny little lights dancing off the rocks around you,

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we didn't know what it was, well, I didn't. The skipper knew, he said, ?Get down.? So we all got down and then this barrage crept right past us and shook the ground to hell and didn't play much real damage to the fellows. And then it came back again, from the rear. We realised then that we couldn't take the town from where we were. Our sergeant major, he got hit in the head, he had to be carried out.

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Four of the boys there made a stretcher out of groundsheets and rifles and carried him back up the escarpment, got him back to the regimental aid post.

How effective was the regimental aid post?

They were good, things were mobile and the regimental aid post is at the rear of the battalion, and they got communication back. The theory is you have a regimental aid post,

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and then further back you have your advanced dressing station, and they usually rush you back to wherever, there's usually a hospital from there, that's when things are going well. We laid where we were until it got dark, and then we moved back and climbed back up the escarpment, and then it started to rain. We were parked up against a brick wall, back up near where the fort was now.

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One of the characters from the signal platoon comes wondering out there laying cable. He said, ?I thought you'd be out this way somewhere.? Well, this joker had been a bushman up on the cattle stations, and he had that uncanny instinct that those type of blokes had, he just wandered out with a bit of cable, ?I'll find them.? He came right to us. So we got back to battalion headquarters and I got my company commander then, having a yarn with the colonel.

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Then we had to move up a bit further, which meant disconnecting the cable and get moving up to near the road, where this wall joined the road. I thought this character had come along the road and come down the wall, but he hadn't. He just walked straight across this way. Well, when I got up there, of course, there's no telephone cable. Well, my mate and I spent the next hour and a half looking around out there for this cable. And in the meanwhile the Italians are tossing

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a shell over, occasionally, just to keep us quiet. That was a very miserable night, it was raining like hell, all the time. The area where we were searching for this cable was mud, and of course, an artillery would come over now and again, and you would dive into the mud. It became quite a nasty night.

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We eventually found this cable and got connected up.

How do you know where to look for the cable?

I think instinct is the only thing. Well, if the man had come up the road and joined it at the wall where we were, it would have been in there, but he came across this way, therefore you get back to where you were, or you circle around here, scratching around, feeling it with your foot. When you lay out a bit of cable in the desert at night, it just sits on bits of salt bushes, so you are bound to hit it with your knee or your leg.

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But it was a matter of hit and miss, that's all. It was just one of those silly damn things you do.

How does being under fire make that whole process more difficult?

It's frightening, really, but nothing is going to happen to you, it's always going to happen to the other bloke. And you're certainly committed to do something, you have got to get the damn thing, you've got to do the job, and therefore you plod on.

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But it's an horrendous ? there's no doubt about that. You think all the time, ?Well, this one could be it.? Especially with these shells I'm telling you about, they were a type of tracer shell and you would see them come and right up from nowhere, right up over your head, and you think they're going to go past, and almost as if they had a magic eye that saw you, and then they would suddenly start to come down. It was just the way they were ranged, which made it rather embarrassing.

So you could actually see where they were going to come down and then run?

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You had a rough idea ? you couldn't run much because when a shell's coming down, you're not going to get very far, so you just dropped. The Italians had nice shells, they only broke up into about four pieces, which didn't make them very dangerous, unless of course you got hit by one of these pieces. They didn't have a shrapnel explosion about them.

So fairly tidy as far as ordinance is concerned?

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Yes, that would be about it. Fairly tidy.

How long were you on the outskirts of Derna before you had to change plans?

I think we were about three or four days manoeuvring around there before the town capitulated. We had bad weather all the time, so when we did get into town

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our particular company was left on guard duty there, mainly to prevent looting by the Arab population of the town. We stayed in the best hotel in town, which was quite nice.

What did it look like?

Just a two storied seaside type town on the Mediterranean Coast would be about the best way to describe.

That must have been an extraordinary relief after the desert?

Oh, I'll say it was.

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It was a most enjoyable experience. We had a cook house there, we had cooks that were dead keen on really showing their capabilities and we found a stray chook here and there, and things like that, and it all added up to a most enjoyable stay. Plus the fact that you could suddenly rinse out your underwear, and hang it out, after six weeks, and clean yourself up. Have a shave standing in front of the mirror with some hot water, once we'd fired up the boiler,

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and it was quite a nice little time there.

What was the thing that you most enjoyed about getting back into the lap of luxury, so to speak.

The relaxation of it, knowing that the immediate battles were over and that someone else was doing it further down the line, and you were there mainly as guard duty. We put in nights, two on and four off, on guard duty. You couldn't just all go to sleep.

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The Arabs were dedicated looters, and they get a bit vicious at times, too, I believe. All in all it was a period of relaxation.

Were you getting any leave during this time?

No, we were on active service and we were in a campaign, there was no leave. There's not much I can tell you about Derna, either. After a period of time, we moved onto ? Benghazi.

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Again, we got caught up in rain, it rained like hell. There was no real battle in Benghazi. The 7th Armoured Division had cut around behind Benghazi and cut off the Italian retreat. We were taken up to near the end of it, after the town had capitulated.

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We were out in the desert country with thousands of Italians there, just out in the desert, like a big massive football field, except there were hundreds of square miles of it, raining like hell, mud six inches thick, and we were just standing around them, guarding them, and it was pouring with rain. It was the most miserable period you could think of. Fortunately the Argyle and Sutherland Highlanders took over our duties, then,

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as guards, and we were taken back to Tokra. We were billeted there in this old castle, which was an old Turkish castle of some sort.

What did that look like?

Standard castle, a couple of stories high, a tower on it, a brick wall right around it. It was right on the edge of the Mediterranean, of course, which was quite nice. It had a lot of out buildings where they set up cookhouses and so on.

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The whole battalion was there. We cleared out a little area and made ourselves comfortable, which we later found out was the tombstones of the area, of mortuary of the castle, which had been a monastery at one stage, I believe.

You must have quite liked that sort of surroundings?

Oh, it was all right. Again we could clean ourselves up, because the battles were over.

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As far as Benghazi, when that capitulated that was the end of our campaign there. Admittedly the Germans were up in Tripoli, but we were hundreds of miles away, we had no contact with them. There were a few humorous incidents there. We had been three months in these uniforms, mud and muck, they were pretty filthy, we were filthy. Through the Australian Comforts Fund there came a box of thirty Freddo Frogs.

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The colonel wasn't quite sure what to do with thirty Freddo Frogs, so he decided that the cleanest platoon on guard duty would get the Freddo Frogs. There was a scraping of uniforms, and of course you can imagine how it went over with the boys. Ever after whenever anything spectacular happened, you would hear someone sing out, ?Good boy!

Come and get your Freddo Frog!?

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There was formal guard duties, Freddo Frogs were duly handed them out, I don't know who got them, but it was one of those funny things that happened.

It's quite bizarre that you got Freddo Frogs out there ?

Well, the Australian Comforts Fund ? as I was say, we were going forward, you're going forward, anything can follow you through when you're going through. That is no trouble.

Freddos ?

So even now, these days when I go into a shop and I see Freddo Frogs, I think of the Western Desert.

They're actually an Australian product, really, aren't they?

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Yes, I believe they are. That was quite a humorous incident in my recollections. There were other things. We had a despatch rider attached to the colonel for despatch riding. It finished up, his gear, his clothing, was so torn and tattered and knocked around that the colonel gave the despatch rider his spare pair of pants so that he looked more respectable. That's another thing that happened.

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Could you get new uniforms at any point?

Well, we didn't get new uniforms, but we were moved back later and we were issued with new laundered underclothing, which had been washed. They were all right. We were re-equipped with clean underclothing and so on, but we still had the same uniforms,

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because the Australian uniforms were a pretty tough piece of equipment. We also had at one stage ? I never wore shorts, we were issued with shorts and shirt but we had them in Gaza. We never had them in the desert, we were fully clothed, because it was damn cold. In due course we were moved back to Amiriyah the whole division was moved back at Amiriyah.

Why was that decision made do you think?

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Winston Churchill decided he had better send a force up to Greece and Crete, and we were it. There was a British armoured unit up in Greece, near the border there, we were supposed to go up. The Greeks had driven the Italians out, and the Germans had decided to invade Greece and

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apparently it was our task to stop them, which was a bit like Gallipoli, in my books, I get very bitter about it all, because I have read up quite a bit about it since. It was an impossible thing. Getting back to Amiriyah, right, we were back there, and we were ? from Alexandria then, we went up into Greece.

Interviewee: Arthur Leggett Archive ID 1413 Tape 04

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We went up to Greece in a convoy, and we couldn't land at Piraeus, which is the port of Athens, because an ammunition ship blew up there a couple of days ahead of us and destroyed the town and all the facilities. We were taken ashore in little fishing boats and went into some area there called Daphne.

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How long were you at Daphne for?

Not for long because we were taken straight up to the frontline, I think, on the Yugoslav border. But once we got our gear, which was on another boat of course, we were taken straight away up to the Yugoslav border. Our task was to hold the front line until the British armoured column

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had moved back through it, through our position. Well, we were up there at night, the usual rain and every other thing. It was a different atmosphere entirely. We had been trained for desert warfare, which is dirty, which is flat, featureless. Here we were, everything was green, there were creeks going past, there was big rivers, there was mountains. It was an entirely different atmosphere to us in every way.

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How did you adjust?

You had to, that's all there was about it. It's a different thing, but you were still in the same spot, you were still in the army, you're still doing your best.

What were the difficulties you had in adjusting?

I can't say that there was any, really. Maybe the temperature, that might have had a bit to do with it, it was a bit cooler. But no, I can't recollect any real ?

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psychological or physical adjustment. It was a new country, beautiful, Greece. I know when I saw the Parthenon up there, that was a bit of a shock, there it was, you could see it, up there.

When did you get the opportunity to see the Parthenon?

As the boat came into the harbour, you could see it up there, we never got near it. We were straight away, as I say, up in the front line. But you could see it, and you realised then, 'Gee, ay? There it is.

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I've seen it in picture books, but there it is.? I can't recollect distinctly where we were when we went straight up the front line, but we had to move back, of course. Once the armoured column had got through our lines we moved back. Again, history is the best way if you want to follow this up. To me, we started to move back in trucks and so on,

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and this is where we came up against the German air force. We were bombed, we were strafed, all the way down through Greece. We had absolutely no aircraft support whatsoever. There was a Spitfire once, and we nearly shot it down. I can recollect that distinctly. We came back through Larisa, at night, which had been flattened by horrendous bombing raids during the course of the day,

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and as soon as it was daylight we would be subject to German aircraft attack, more than anything else.

What would you do during those attacks?

Well, you would have a lookout on the back of the truck, the convoy of trucks. You'd have a lookout on the back of each truck. These Stukas used to come over something like a swarm of blow flies. There didn't seem to be much order about them, but they could do what they wanted,

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it didn't mean a thing. A fellow would be looking out, he would bang on the truck, 'Right! Here they are! Out!?' You'd get out and spread over the country as far as you could and flatten yourself and just hope that you were going to survive this one. Stukas would usually, if they were a bridge for example, they would form a circle around the bridge, fly around and circle above it, and then the front one, or the leader, would just dive, drop his bombs and up again.

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By the time that bomb had gone off, the next one is on his way down. And they kept up such a continuous form of attack that it was damn hard to get up and have a go at them. As far as a convoy went, well they would go along the road dropping bombs, endeavouring to wreck trucks, and then they'd come back and machine gun beside the roadway, looking for troops and so on. But each one of their bombs had a whistle attachment

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to the fins, which reached a horrendous crescendo as that bomb came down, and the sound would blanket out that whole area so you really didn't know where a bomb was going to go. They also had similar whistles on the aircraft themselves, which increased as they dived, this was a nerve-wracking experience, plus the fact, again, that we knew we were on our own, we weren't going to get no help from no air force whatsoever.

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And gradually we worked our way back down through Greece. And at Brallos Pass, we had to make a stand, that was our task there, to hold the Germans up until about 9pm at night, and we lost a few men there. We also had lost a signaller attached to one of the forward companies. It was on a forward slope,

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and there was a line coming from battalion headquarters down to two companies on a T junction, and they lost contact with battalion headquarters during the mortar fire, which was rather heavy. So the signaller went out and repaired the cable under heavy fire and dashed back, and the damned line was dead again. So out he goes again. He was a chap named Ray Kennedy, he repaired the line as he told me later,

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not according to the manual, dated 1918, but he tied her up and dashed back to his slit trench, and that established communications again, and they managed to form a line of defence between the two companies. They did their job, they held the enemy off, which was exhausted as much as we were. Under the cover of ' near the end of the twilight,

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they started to retreat, the Germans staged a big attack. Tearing up the slope one of the boys jumped over a little hillock and hid there, and his mate joined him. When they stood up to go again, his offside was hit with a burst of machine gun fire and he was badly wounded. He couldn't pick him up, he was about 6'2" tall, and he was under danger of being captured himself. He just had to leave him.

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We found out later that this particular signaller Dan Smith had been picked up by the Germans and taken to a hospital in Athens, after it was all over, and he eventually died there. Ray got the military medal for his activity in that particular battle.

Do you remember your actions during that battle?

Besides being shit frightened? I was attached again to battalion headquarters and I was on the telephone exchange,

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so my job was to keep in contact with the front lines. When Ray repaired that cable, we were about to go out and find out where it was ourselves, because it was essential that we maintained communication with these two forward companies on this T line, because the whole thing hung on them. So we just had to keep in contact, but fortunately, or unfortunately, Ray fixed that.

What was range between the headquarters and those two companies?

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Oh, not a great deal. I can't recollect distinctly, but I would put it down to about three hundred metres, I suppose, it was quite a big area, but they were dug in forward and they accounted for the enemy. Our artillery, too, did a good job there. The shells they were firing were rustling the grass as they climbed over a slope to land on a village where the Germans had assembled in force and it played havoc down there.

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How long did you hold those positions for?

Only for several hours until, at night ? The plan was for us to withdraw under the cover of darkness, which we did do, and the Germans stayed static, because they were stuffed, too ? they were exhausted as well. So we withdrew up over a hill and made our way down to Megara on the coast, where from there we were evacuated.

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We were taken down from Brallos to Megara in trucks, it took about an eight hour journey. From there we were taken out in small boats to ships that were waiting to evacuate us from Greece. They had nets over the side, and you clambered up these nets, and what you had on your back was what you were going to fight the next battle with, because the artillery was left, the transport was left, the heavy stuff, it was all left behind.

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We all had our rifles. I had a bit of signalling gear hanging on me and so on, but basically we had suffered ? we had been kicked out of Greece, we had lost all our heavy gear, and we were taken across to Crete and expected to fight another battle.

Did your morale suffer at all while you were withdrawing?

No, not really. Suffered fear? Yes, quite a bit, but not the morale, no. We did our best.

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And mind you, we were dog-tired, too. When you're completely exhausted you don't really catch onto much at all. I sat in the corner on a crate in this truck and when I eventually got off it, I had a big right angle imprint on my buttock, which was there for several days after, but yet I never even realised it at the time. Everyone else was in the same condition, I think.

What about the command?

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Our colonel, during the retreat, a Stuka jumped his car and give it a burst of machine gun fire and killed the driver. The colonel was uninjured, but he was under a lot of strain, of course, organising the whole damn show. And I think in the last couple of days of that campaign he collapsed, taken to the rear and he was shipped back down to Alexandria.

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Major Sandover then took over the control of the battalion. So they suffered as well.

What was their command like?

They were no better off than we were. As I say, the colonel had a car, okay, he needed that to get around, but there was

no Jeeps or none of the gear that you see on TV, that wasn't in our day.

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Most of the officers were in slit trenches with the boys, there they were, we were all in together. In the Australian Army ? there was a division of command which was respected, put it that way, from captains down to Lieutenants and so on, the command was respected, but upwards, well, you knew the lieutenant as 'Joe' because you had been to school with him, you knew the captain as 'Charlie' because you had known him for years in Perth.

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As I said, even with our colonel I had known him for three years, as well as Major Sandover and several of the others, because we had all been in the Cameron Highlanders together. It didn't mean much to a captain to get into a trench with a private. I know at one stage at the Battle of Tobruk, Major Sandover and I were bunked up together in the same utility at night to keep warm, so there was that wonderful feeling amongst Australians anyway.

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This comradeship. And especially all coming from Western Australia. You're from Perth or you're from the gold fields, you're all bloody West Australians, and it had that wonderful feeling about it, even in the darkest moments. It's something that I've always treasured. And [UNCLEAR] it knocked all my snobbish attitude that had been drilled into me as a kid, and so on, about doing the right thing. You can do the wrong thing and still have some wonderful friends.

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Did the colonel rally the troops through the withdrawal?

No, I wouldn't say that, it wasn't a case like you see on TV where the colonel makes a marvellous speech. We knew him, but he did make a few speeches on the troop ship going up, saying that it wasn't going to be easy because we were going to be fighting Germans instead of Italians.

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There was none of these rallying speeches. You might have got it from your company commander. I know one historical phrase, one of our brigadiers, 'Well here we bloody well are and here we will bloody well stay.' And here's the situations you were in. I think that was Red Robby, as a matter of fact.

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But the rallying thing? No, it was esprit de corps all the way down and that's what carried you through.

You would say you were led by example?

Yeah, by example of your immediate officers or platoon commanders as much as anything else.

So you were booted out of Greece?

Yes, we were booted out of Greece. In the ship going across to Crete, we were all down below decks,

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and as soon as it was daylight over come the bombers and we were bombed for eight hours all the way across to Crete. It was quite an experience there, in as much as we were told to keep below decks, but the boys had a guts full of this and they got the Brens guns out and strapped the tripods to the railing of the boat and mounted their Bren guns. We had the ship ringed with Bren guns and we brought down quite a few planes purely with Bren gun fire.

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We got a message from the navy saying, 'Well done,' which is a marvellous thing from the navy, because they don't waste words. That is what we did, we fought all the way across. And even when we got out of the ships in the harbour

there at Souda Bay ? there was another big air raid then, we scattered like hell.

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And that was another funny thing. Souda Bay is not like it is now, there was quite a bit of scrub around, too. And after it's all over there's the company commander looking for his mob, and he's singing out, ?Sergeant Major Curtis!? I will never forget that. ?Sergeant Major Curtis!? And over one side of the hill you hear, ?Sir!? And over this side you a voice say, ?Come and get your Freddo Frog!? Anyway, the boys all got together, we moved up

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through to Georgiopolis, and finished up taking a position at Retimo, or the other side of Retimo, up in the olives there overlooking the airstrip. General Freiberg came around and addressed the troops, he told us exactly what was going to happen. ?You're going to be attacked by paratroopers. Be prepared.? And all this sort of thing. The campaign was, at the far end of the island, down at Khania was the main airport,

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such as it was, everything was very basic then, mind you. We had an airstrip at Retimo, roughly halfway along the island. The German idea was that they were going to attack the main aerodrome and drop troops at this airstrip where we were and attack from the rear. We had our battalion, the 2/8th Battalion, on the right flank and we had a Greek regiment in the middle, and we had dug in

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the olive groves overlooking this airstrip, the area between our olive groves and hillocks overlooking this airstrip. There was a flat area between our olive groves on the ? the hillocks, I suppose would be the best way to ? they weren't big hills, overlooking the airstrip which was on a stretch of flat country going from the base of the hillocks down to the ocean. We laid there quietly for a week or so, or the best part of a month, I think. Things got very tough then, we had very little gear, clothing was bad,

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everyone was cold, food was terrible, you scrounged around. I know at one stage there, as part of our meal, we got two pineapple cubes per man, which was not exactly a lavish meal, plus your potatoes and so on. We had a four gallon tin that the cook did all the cooking in. At this stage, we had coalesced

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into a little group, we had our own cook, as a platoon we had our own cook, we got them and he cooked them. We had a four gallon kerosene tin which was standard, and we used to throw our ration of bully beef in, and whatever we could scrounge, and cook it all up in there, and that would be the meal. We were dug in under olive trees overlooking the airstrip. We had a Bren gun. My offsider, he was very keen on this Bren gun,

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he was a good Bren gunner, too, by the way. The paratroopers came in about half past four in the afternoon. They came out, you could see them coming, these big troop carriers, I wouldn't say how many ? about twenty five at a time in a sort of a squadron. They were up the coast to our left and then turned around and came back and started to drop these paratroopers over the airstrip area,

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and it was quite a nasty battle there. The 2/8th Battalion on our right got stuck into them first, firing into the planes as they were approaching, then as paratroopers were coming down, well of course, there was quite a lot of cleaning up

there from where we were. At one stage, the 2/8th fire forced a group of these troop carriers up a little high, their chappies jumped out

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and the next lot flew through them. And it finished up going back to sea with paratroops hanging on wing tips and tail planes, and it was rather grim there. To the best of my knowledge, they dropped about two thousand paratroopers there then, about half past four in the afternoon, and by nine o'clock that night there was about five hundred of them left in a village

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where we couldn't get to during the course of the day. They dug in and fortified this village and we lost about twenty eight men trying to get there during the course of the next week. Again, because firstly we had bugger all equipment and we had absolutely no air force. We were dive bombed, strafed, machine gunned. As soon as you started to move towards this village you were machine gunned, because they had planes over all the time.

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They had contact with their aeroplanes, too, which didn't help much. We attacked them for a week, we, the battalion did. Eventually the Germans overwhelmed the fellows down at the far end of island, around Khania, again that is best referred to from history books than my words.

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But the fellows in the village were reinforced then with motor cycle platoons, plus I understand a bit of artillery and tanks, and the island capitulated. We weren't overrun, our position, we were just told the island has capitulated, it's every man for itself. This, of course, has disgusted me ever since then, because

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in the Prisoner of War Association we've got ? well, we had hundreds of fellows from Singapore who were captured because the island capitulated. We were captured, five hundred more men from our battalion because the island capitulated. You weren't taken in battle, you weren't overwhelmed, the island has capitulated. Dear old Mother England decided, ?Oh, can't do any more there, so ? ? So there it was.

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Do you think you had a fighting chance if you had not capitulated?

Theoretically, no, not where we were, because the island had been lost at the far end and they were just pouring stuff in. We were just three little battalions. The Greek battalion had pulled out, so that just the 2/8th and 2/11th at Retimo, and we were just the last pockets hanging out. Theoretically, we were winning, but they lost at the other end. There again, history books can tell you about more than I could.

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When the reinforcements come through, well, we had no hope in hell because we were just about out of ammunition, we were out of just about everything, food ? everything.

Did you feel that the odds may have been in your favour when you ambushed the numbers of German paratroopers?

Oh, yes, well, you had no alternative, they were the enemy, they had come to destroy you. In a war situation, it's a case of kill or be killed.

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We had some advantage in as much that they were not really aware of how many there were in the foothills, and as soon as they started to come in, well, the game was on. There were some men, I understand, who were actually down in the ocean having a swim when the paratroopers came over, and they grabbed their rifles and they were fighting right then and there before they were killed. We lost a lot of men, of course. But that was the situation. We had the top hand while they were trying to land and regroup.

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Once they had landed, we had the whole advantage there, because from their point of view, I know now, that they lost a lot of men in the planes, who were shot by our blokes, they had to throw them out to get out themselves, and then once they had landed they had to regroup. We damaged a lot of planes, of course.

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I know Jesse Varvell, my offsider, with his Bren gun, he took a few chunks off the engine of a troop carrier. I got into trouble, we had a boys anti-tank rifle which fired a .5 inch armour-piercing shell, it was just like a big rifle with a stand on the front of it, it must have been nearly six foot long, I don't know, it was a big thing. I hooked this up into a tree

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and took a sight on a plane and pulled the trigger. The boys cheered, but I don't know whether I hit anything, because I finished up flat on my back about six foot away from the recoil of this rifle. Plus the fact that I had the platoon commander going crook up at me then because I had used up half of the platoons anti tank ammunition by firing one lousy shot. This is the conditions we were working under. There was that problem there. And I know after the paratroopers had landed,

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I think it was the next day, things in front of us had simmered down, but there was still this battle on there. But there must have been other paratroopers around because I was standing up out of a slit trench, there was three of us standing there, and there was just a hissing noise, it wasn't like the crackle of a rifle fire or machine gun, I think they were spent bullets. But anyway, the corporal unfortunately copped the lot.

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He dropped to the ground screaming like hell, holding his guts, and we flew into slit trenches. And then the officer, Lieutenant Miller said to me, ?Cover me, I'll go out and get him.? So he crawled out there and dragged Thommo, on his back, into this slit trench, and Ray Kennedy, the chappie I mentioned earlier, he raced off to get the medical officer who

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gave him a shot of morphine, which quietened him down, then they took him away. Well, he died about two days later for several reasons. The 2/7th Field Ambulance had an advanced dressing station under some olive trees out in the bloody open, they had nothing, and they had wounded men lined up there, Germans and our blokes, all laying around there, they had no gear, they couldn't operate, they couldn't do a damn thing.

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And of course with Tom, I guess, he just died of gangrene. That's just my interpretation, which could be wrong, but there he was, shot to hell in the stomach, and they couldn't do a thing for him.

It is of interest that so many German paratroopers were shot in the sky ?

Oh yes, that happened all right, because they complained bitterly, later on, prisoners that we took.

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They said, 'You weren't fair. You were firing at us before we got out of the plane.' Well, they wanted to fight, we didn't ask them to come there. Not only that it was desperate, it was desperate. We had been in this position, where we were, for several weeks, and all through that time there had been patrolling aircraft, photographing, and then there had machine gunning, there would be dive bombing, this was on all the damn time, and you were a bit bloody annoyed

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by the time the paratroopers come. Because that's what you were there for, not to fight aircraft which were bombing you all the time, or strafing you, you were there to wait for the paratroopers. When they did arrive, well, you were that bloody mad you would have done anything.

Did you seize the opportunity?

How do you mean?

To be firing them as they were paratrooping?

Yes, the whole battalion ? well, that's it, we fired

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and destroyed as many of them as we could before they even got out of their planes, if you could. We also managed to shoot down a few planes. Then once they landed of course, well, they were the enemy. There was immediate patrols sent out to get stuck in amongst it. It was a very nasty battle. They put down two thousand men and within a few hours there's five hundred of them left. But again, I was fortunate.

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I know it sounds terrible to say this, again, I was attached to battalion headquarters and my job was communication and that's what I was there for. Therefore, I never got involved in any of this. When I look back, there is so many things where I was doing what I was meant to do ? But geez, I was fortunate I was there, where I was.

You were forced to take up arms when you took up the anti tank gun?

Oh yes, there was that side about it.

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The same with my mate, Jesse, with his old Bren gun, he was pretty good at that, too. We had this Bren gun on the platoon. I don't know how we got that.

I am just trying to imagine the strip once the Germans had attempted to land and a lot of paratroopers had been shot before they landed ?

Well now, the strip itself, it was just an air strip, but the paratroopers

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didn't actually land two thousand on the airstrip, they were spread over ? three quarters of a mile of coast. You get these planes coming in, they can't drop everyone right on there, it wasn't like a bomb, it was a human being. They would come in about twenty five, and when that twenty five ? You get twenty five of those planes with twenty men in and they all bail out together, you get a lot of men there,

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and the next lot come in, and in next to no time you have got a lot of men there. But they didn't land on the airstrip exclusively, they were spread all over the countryside. Some of it due to our attacking fire, but a lot of it was the way things go in a paratroop landing, you can't all land within a square foot of each other.

Were they coming down on your positions?

Yes, we did. We had a few land in our position, but we had

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a company up the rear. We had a front and a rear, because we realised ? the hierarchy realised there was always the chance of being surrounded in a paratroop drop, so we were covered in that aspect.

It sounds as though the countryside must have been littered with dead paratroopers?

Yes. It was bad.

Were there any measure to clean the ?

No, if you lift your head up you were likely to get shot for a while there. But you buried some as best you could,

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but it wasn't possible to bury everyone that was killed. There again, in all this, there was some humorous things I will tell you about, much to my detriment. We had a few prisoners, German prisoners, paratroopers, and the company sergeant major wanted a man, immediately, so they sent me around there, and

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the company sergeant major said, ?There's four Jerry cans,? or five I think it was, ?go around to the well, take these blokes round, and fill them up with water and bring them back.? ?Righto, sir.? So these blokes, pick them up. And we're about to wander off, and the sergeant major says, ?Halt! Come here you!? I go back. He looks at me, he says, ?That's the bloody enemy! They could kill you!

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Now unsling your rifle and put a bloody bayonet on it and look fierce, will you!? So away we go, and these Germans are chuckling to each other, they knew bloody well what had happened, they weren't dumb. Anyway, we filled these Jerry cans up and they had a wash and we all came back. It seemed rather strange at the time, as again, I was that damned naïve they could have killed me and walked away. But the way the sergeant major said, ?Now try and look fierce, will you!? So yes, it did have its humour.

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What had happened to the Greeks, that were in the other position?

I don't know what happened to them. As I said, we had the 2/8th Battalion on our extreme right of the position, the Greeks in the middle, and we were on the left. They withdrew only before the island capitulated, they probably got the drum [information] earlier somehow, I don't know, but it was that day, it wasn't abandoning us during the course of the battle or anything,

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no, they were there, right up until the finish. We were gone in a few hours after that. I was telling you about the kerosene tin that we cooked our grub in. A Bren gun usually has two barrels, when one gets hot, you change it with another one, but we only had one. So we had this kerosene tin full of water, and as Jesse is firing this Bren gun it got hot, so we'd dip

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the barrel in this kerosene tin of water, cool it down. That was all right while the battle was on, the stink came when it calmed down, after a few hours, and the cook was going to cook his meal, and the whole meal tasted of cordite. And everyone's abusing poor old Jesse for dipping his Bren gun barrel in the cooking water. The cook's going crook at him, and he said, ?I was only trying to kill bloody Germans!?

Did you have much regard for the Germans?

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Yes, the utmost regard, because, firstly, they had driven us out of Greece, we knew they were fighters, they had bombed us all the way, we knew they had an air force, they had been strafing us for weeks, while we were sitting around in Crete, and we knew damn well that they were not there to play silly buggers, like the Italians, they were dead dinkum. We had the utmost regard for them. The paratroopers, any front line chaps, were

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quite good type of person, put it that way, and they behaved accordingly. There was a battle on. But as prisoners, they didn't become any real trouble, they just waited until it was all over, they knew they were going to win. After they became our guards, they were quite presentable, quite respectful, they respected you, and those that could speak English treated you accordingly.

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They were soldiers, we were soldiers. It was later on that we met up with a different type of German. But right then and there, no, they were young men who had been trained to fight and they respected the enemy.

Did you have much regard for their lives?

For their life?

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I haven't encountered an enemy, so I don't know, really, what kind of regard you have for their enemy lives?

You mean their actual life, being alive? Well, that's one of the bloody problems of war that are bad, because you are destroying ? well, I look at it now, I still wake up at night, I can tell you periodically ? someone's Dad, some mother sons, they're someone's family, and you are destroying it, but they are going to

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destroy you, too. It's not a matter of capturing prisoners, it's bloody straight out murder. And you're caught up in that situation. But on the other hand, you don't brood over it. It's only years afterwards when, well, you've got your own kids and you think back and ? you think it was just a terrible bloody mess up. And all the outcome, mind you, well, we can't discuss history too much,

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there's a lot involved in history. But a lot of the Second World War we brought upon ourselves with the Treaty of Versailles, and that give grounds for a mongrel like Hitler to blossom and take over a country. But to me, I still maintain that the Nazi Party was just a cancerous growth in a fine nation, and we prepared the ground for it to grow.

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I could be wrong, but that's how I look at it. Anyone can be a critic. I wasn't there forming the opinions at the time.

It sounds like a valid opinion.

Well, yes, this is what I've read since and studied since. As the State President of the Ex-Prisoners of War Association, I felt I was obliged to learn these things, and try and understand why. Not that it makes much difference but it makes me understand things a bit better.

I think it is important to reflect on those issues ?

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You can't change history. The only thing you can change is the future and you use the knowledge of history to conduct

yourselves the future. One of the reasons why so much money was poured into Germany after the Second World War, because they realised the blunder they'd made trying to drain the country. I'm sure of that.

Denise [interviewer] has a saying about history, don't you, Denise?

If you want to see the future, look to the past.

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Would you like to close on what happened at Crete?

Yes, well, after ? I remember moving back from where I was, overlooking the scene, because the enemy was coming, firing on us.

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Where my mate and I were, we were inside a great big olive tree, and there was exploding bullets all around us, and the company commander that we were attached to, said, ?Get back! Pull back to battalion headquarters,? which we did do. And there one of the officers, he said, ?The island has capitulated. It's every man for himself.? He said, ?I'm going up over the mountains.? Well, behind where we were, if you know Crete at all,

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there's a razorback of mountains right down the centre of it, so we took off over the mountains. We were guided over there by an old Greek civilian who showed us all the goat tracks, and we finished up on a beach on the other side of the island. There would be about six hundred of us there, I suppose, eventually. We hung out there for a week, trusting that the navy was going to pick us up, they always got us out of strife, the navy.

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You could rely on them, but it wasn't on this time. Eventually a German officer, with an interpreter, strolled into the place. He said, ?Well, we've got mortars up there, we've got machine guns up there.? He said, ?And we've got some more trench mortars up there. Now, if you blokes want to fight you can have it, but if you want to give in, the island has capitulated. We will be back in two hours and await your decision.? There wasn't much you could do, you were surrounded by enemy

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who were heavily armed. Eventually he came back with a whole stack of guards, we were lined up, counted, marched off. It was as simple as that.

Interviewee: Arthur Leggett Archive ID 1413 Tape 05

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We were just talking about how you headed for the hills. How many of you were together to head to the hills?

In the little party that I was in there may have been twenty, but as I said, I estimate there would have been at least six hundred eventually on the beach, on the other side of the island. We were there for a week and of course we were running out of water, food,

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every other thing. And eventually, a German officer walked in with an interpreter and told us they had machine guns up there and mortars over there, and so on, ?And if you want a fight, you can have it, but we suggest you give up as prisoners of war.? Well, we had been sitting there for a week waiting for something to happen as far as our navy went. Not that we run down the navy, because they got us out of some terrible situations at times,

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and obviously they were not able to help.

Where was this rumour coming from that you would be meeting rescue on the beach?

There's always rumours when you're in a tight corner. We knew from experience the navy had always got us out of trouble, so they'd be around again. The poor buggers, they lost a lot of men and a lot of boats trying to do it as well. It was just the natural assumption.

Was there any way to communicate your situation to anyone?

No, this was one of the most

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horrendous feelings you had was one of complete abandonment. We all felt that we had been sold down the river, because there was no hope in Greece, there was no hope in Crete for us. The politicians can probably tell you why we were there, but from our point of view we were not supported, we were not supplied, we were not covered with aircraft. Again, it was only the navy that gave us real support.

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We just felt completely abandoned. My first thought was, 'God, how am I going to tell Mum??' That's just the thoughts that go through your head.

How much of that do you blame on the Brits?

You blamed everything at the time, but when you read about it afterwards England had its back to the wall, too. I know Churchill was a wonderful bloke,

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but he is not one of my heroes, because to me he used the Australians at Gallipoli in a ruthless manner, it was his idea. And this idea of Greece and Crete, it was his idea, and it cost us a lot of men. It's bad enough being put in those positions, but when you've got no support coming in, it makes it very hard to accept later in your life when you look back with bitterness. But that's war.

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You can't do much about war, that's it. While you're not influencing the outcome of the war, you're only doing your own little bit, which is usually just a few square meters in front of you.

How aware were you that you were being surrounded by the Germans?

Well, we weren't. We were winning. But the word got through the island had capitulated and then it suddenly hit you, it's all over, and we lost, and we're in a tight corner.

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One of our fellows, 'Titch' Carroll, he got a 16-foot boat and sailed it all the way across the Mediterranean to Egypt, this is recorded in history books around the place. But that was a pretty desperate situation. Some men got away in lighters, small boats, these were machine gunned, men were wounded, submarines popped up out of the water, took the senior officers off the lighters and took them back into captivity

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and told the rest to head back to where they come from. You didn't have much option if you've got a submarine sitting on your tail. There were all sorts of horrendous things happened, but it was capitulation after battles and as we know, a terrible situation.

At what point did you realise that you were going to be a POW?

When we marched away surrounded by guards. Right up until that moment, 'We're going to get away. Things are going to happen.'

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Quite a few fellows did get away, as long as three months afterwards. They hid up in the caves, the Greek population used to sneak them food. In fact, the monastery at Preveli, they did quite a lot for our fellows, protecting them. You may know down at Margaret River there is Preveli Caravan Park. There's a small replica of a Greek church down there. That was all done by one of our blokes who was looked after

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by the monks at the Preveli Monastery, and he did all this when he came back in memory of them.

That is delightful.

But one of the problems was, if you were in the Greek village and the Germans found out about it, they didn't muck around, they just sent a flight of Stukas over and bombed the village. You got that way you didn't go into the villages. But there were some fellows who hung out in caves, and so on, and as late as three months afterwards they were rescued.

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Was there any thought in your mind that you might literally head for the hills and escape the situation?

Yes, but it was too late, already the Germans were there, they'd surrounded you with armament. Where could you go? You're on the beach and they're in the hills, watching you. That was that.

Can you step me through what has happened after the German officer has given you the ultimatum, and you go, ?Okay, well we'll come with you guys.?

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What happens next? How did they get you off the beach?

In came a whole squad of guards, we were all lined up in fives, I think it was, counted, and just marched off. We came over mountains behind Retimo straight over to the other side of the island, but they marched us around that range of mountains.

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They had outposts spread right around the island by this time. One group would take you to the next village, you would be counted and handed over to them and they would you on to the next outpost. And in this way we were marched all through the night, whereas they were only doing short steps. We marched all the way back and we finished up camped in the vineyard by the airstrip at Retimo.

Were you given any food and water?

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No, not a thing. There is a terrible situation in POW existence, as far as the Germans were concerned. You were captured, but until such times as you were registered with the International Red Cross anything could happen to you because no one knew anything about you. It was just this horrible void. And it wasn't until some three months later when we finished up in Germany that we were registered. Your life was worth nothing.

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Were you aware of this at the time?

No. They were still hanging together as a group, trying to survive. We shared what little we could, what we had. But the Germans gave us nothing at all. They marched us right around the island and we finished up at Khania, where we were placed in the civilian prison amongst all the civilian prisoners that they had there.

What was the treatment that they gave you, up until now? Was there any violence involved?

No, there was no violence involved.

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As I said, these frontline troops were quite good blokes, as far as that goes. But once we were handed over to a group that came behind the lines, they were mongrel bastards, and they all had little Hitler moustaches, and they were all pushing thirty five or forty, they were all older than us, and they would shoot you at the drop of a hat, because they were trained to do that, I'm afraid. Your life wasn't worth much there.

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Did they have difference in uniform?

No, same uniform. Oh, paratroopers had uniforms relative to the requirements of their operations, put it that way, for jumping out of aircraft and bits and pieces like that. But the overall scheme, no, the uniform was standard. In this prison, we were just mixed in with the ordinary prisoners that the Greek population had in there, prior to the invasion. I can't recollect exactly how long we were in there,

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but we started to deteriorate. You see, you've got what you stand up in, there's no more supplies coming in. What you've got on you, that's it, that's all you've got. I was sleeping on cement floors and everything, not just me, everyone was. Some had managed to scrounge a quilt, or something like that to lay on, from some house going through,

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but in the main we had nothing, except maybe a couple of tin cans and a Dixie. No food, there was no extra clothing coming. Some were still in summer gear. It was a very nasty situation. And then food cut out. The Germans had a very happy knack, too, of having one chap in the corner of the parade ground where there would be several thousand men, and that's where you got your water from. Well, you can imagine, there were queues miles long waiting to get a bit of water to drink.

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And gradually all of this wears you down.

Can you describe this civilian prison to me?

Not particularly, it had a high wall around it, it had a building ? the cells inside ? it was a big area, like a hall, but it was divided up into cells by means of steel walls, put it that way. In effect you could stand

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at one end of the building and see the other end of the building, but there would be all manner of steel chambers and rooms, so that ? prisoners were locked away separate, they could see each other. We were crammed into these cells with just enough room to lay down on. They were open, and the building itself was open, but it still had a high wall around it, and on that wall they had machine guns posted, etc, etc.

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You were in a prison, that's all. You were in an area in which there was an area, put it that way.

How were the toilet facilities?

They were lousy, they're never good. They weren't meant to carry thousands of men, they were meant to carry a few hundred prisoners at the most. Washing capabilities were very negligible, and the toilets themselves, I can't fully recollect those at the prison camp there, in that particular spot.

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But I don't think they were nowhere near as bad as what we came up against in due course.

How long were you in this civilian prison?

I really can't truthfully recollect that. It may have been several weeks, four weeks or more, and then we were marched down to the harbour and crammed on board little coastal trading vessels, coal hulks and what have you,

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pushed down into the hold, hundreds of us, you would just have enough room for you and the bloke next to you and so on, and we were taken across up to Salonica. From there we were marched through Salonica up into some old Greek barracks which had been attended to, they had a very solid barbed wire fence right around this,

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machine gun posts mounted around it and every other thing necessary to keep men in. These barracks were derelict many years ago. They had no windows, no doors, just barracks.

Morale must have been pretty low by this point?

It was getting low, we were beginning to feel debilitated through lack of food. You get in your little groups ? it's funny, morale is not something you worry about. What you think about mainly is hanging on, to each other, you need mates.

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You have got to have mates to support you. These barracks were two stories high, they had nothing, no facilities, no washing facilities, and there were thousands in there. And the toilet facilities were the crudest you can imagine. A lot of men had dysentery, by this time. The toilets were not pedestal types, they were sort of a squat down arrangement,

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and there was no flushing system, so that in itself was bad enough. Up in the barracks, we were laying side by side. They had a strip of timber around the wall, about three foot off the floor, possibly to lean weapons against when they were military barracks, and in there was millions and millions of bugs. They would come down the wall at night,

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and God knows how many pints of blood they sucked out of us all during the course of a night.

What sort of bugs are we talking?

Blood sucking bugs, I don't know how else to describe them. Little round black type, and this was a bad thing. These particular Germans that I was telling you about, they would suddenly sweep into the barracks and drive everyone out, take all your gear, out into the parade ground. Being a military barracks it had a parade ground.

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There you would be lined up early in the morning, around eight-ish, not that you had any breakfast, you were there, and they would count you. And there you would sit all day, there was no food, there was no movement from where you were, the sun was beating down on you, there was no water, there was this one single tap. You had to ask permission to go and get that. Well, there was the usual queue formed for that. And of course if one bloke got a water bottle full,

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he would share it with his mates when he got back. This went on for weeks. And you gradually just got that way you were losing weight. I know that I had reached the stage where if I was sitting down on the cement floor, I couldn't stand up. I would have to crawl to the wall, climb up the wall, hang onto it until the vice slackened off in my head, it was like a vice, and my vision cleared, and then I could see where I was going. I wasn't the only one, we were all getting down that low.

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And this is lack of food?

Lack of food and sitting out in the open like that, debilitating us. It was a deliberate attempt to demoralise and debilitate you, that's for sure. And then, eventually, we're going to be moved up into Germany. We were marched down to the railway yard and there were rows and rows of those wonderful wagons that you see on TV. There was forty of us thrown into each wagon.

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Well, some of the more nimble ones got in first and cleared out all the dried up horse manure and cow manure that was in there before we got in. There was forty men in each wagon, the door was slammed shut, and there we were for six days and six nights. There was no window ? There was window in one end, a very small aperture which was heavily guarded, or nailed over with barbed wire. Some of the men, as I said, had dysentery,

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diarrhoea, some were ill, none of us had good clothing or anything like this. Those coal holds made us filthy, there was no hope of getting clean after that. I think we went three days and three nights and we got to Belgrade. They had an International Red Cross kitchen set up there, and we were let out one wagon at a time to go along and get a cup of tea, or a couple of nourishing bits of food, not much, compared to what we wanted.

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This was the Red Cross supplying ?

Yeah. You had to carry some of your mates along there.

Who were you travelling with at this point?

Amongst the forty in this wagon, there was five of us from this one platoon, the signal platoon. We had stuck together, and we were still hanging on together. You would have to pick up some of the blokes and carry them along to the platform.

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Well, it was the most degrading experience, because a lot of the men had excreta hanging off them, and you were filthy, and there you were helping your mates along from these female Red Cross workers. And some of the fellows never even had a pair of pants to put on because the material had been torn up to use in the corner, and then we used to pick up the four corners and just drop it outside this window I was telling you about. But then, one wagon at a time, as I said, and then we were put back in the wagon.

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And then we finished up in Moosburg Stalag 7A, about thirty five kilometres out from Munich.

Could you actually discuss anything with the Red Cross people?

No, you formed a bit of queue, you just went by and grabbed it and kept going. No, if you stopped you would get a rifle butt in the ribs. The treatment on that trip ? well, I've used the word horrendous several times, but that does apply. It's very hard for people to believe. They seem to think that

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all the atrocities happened up north of Australia, but we had some terrible times. One fellow dropped his little piece of rag out through the window, loaded with excreta, the wind caught that up, blew all over a guard, and the next stop, such as it was, the door was thrown open and we were all pushed up one end and they just systematically bashed everyone of us and pushed us up the other end of the wagon. As though it was our fault that we were in this situation!

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Funny thing there, the Germans have got a buckle in their uniform, or a belt, which has a silver buckle on, and on this was a swastika, an eagle on top of the swastika, and around it is the motto, 'God Is With Us.' And I thought, 'Well now, that's funny, I thought he was on our side.' And even your religion and all your beliefs are shaken, because no doubt they had been to church services and blessed

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the same as we had been, and you think, 'Well, what the hell is this all about?'

Is that something that came to the forefront of your mind during those times?

Oh yes, and it's something that I still battle with, because I've come to the conclusion that if there is a good Lord, he has turned his back on the world for a couple of thousand years now ? he might come back again, one day ?

Do you feel like you were deserted?

No, I can't say that. I was never a strongly religious character,

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but I always had a faith, and I've never had anything other than a belief in that faith. And even in my darkest moments, just before I'd fall asleep, I used to recite portions of the 23rd Psalm to myself, and I would go to sleep. And I believed it. I still try to believe it, but you get shaken.

So you are on the back of this truck for six days ?

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In this truck. Now it was an enclosed van, it wasn't the back of a truck, it was an enclosed van. You've probably seen them on TV, where they're locked in, it's an enclosed van, there's no outside view, nothing.

So there is not a lot of ventilation going on in there?

No, it was just one hell of an existence. And I marvelled that so many men survived it.

Were there any casualties on that trip?

Not to my knowledge, but there could have been. Because your world is restricted to inside this carriage, with forty men in it, and you don't know anything else about the world.

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Do you travel in silence for that entire time?

Most of the time you're too bloody weak to talk, or do anything, or move. Actually, you're dying, there's no other way to look at it. If you get to the stage that I mentioned, you're on the way down. But they did, obviously ? well, all those in our wagon survived. Although when we did get to Munich,

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to Stalag 7a at Moosburg, I know I jumped out of the train ? when you go to get down, the train floor, the wagon is a good metre and a half high, and I ended up laying on the ground. I must have blacked out, because when I opened my eyes there was a snarling German Shepherd dog there, with a snarling guard behind it, telling me to get up. A couple of my mates picked me up, put an arm around their shoulders and that's how I staggered into the camp.

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Were you told where you were heading when you were in these trucks?

No. You were nothing. You were nothing. Nothing at all.

What are some of your first memories of Stalag 7A?

Well, we were put into big barracks. We arrived there at night. We were put into big barracks. It's not hard to explain

7a, but it was a big area, and it was divided by tall barbed wire fences,

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and wire mesh fences, machine gun posts everywhere. It must have covered fifteen or twenty acres, it could have been more than that, but these enclosures were much smaller. Usually there was a barrack with the enclosure around it, which meant that they could put anyone in the barrack, they were separate. For example, they had Russians on one side of the camp, but we were on the other side.

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The camp administration, this is not the German administration, they got the NCOs, and so on, to act as administrators within the camp, and the next day we were taken to a barracks, like an office barrack. The French chaps there, they had hundreds of Frenchmen around of course, they registered us, we were then recorded with the International Red Cross.

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We were then taken into big shower rooms, as big as our house, we were stripped and showered. Oh, first all our hair was cut off, which was a good thing, because when we showered we realised we had filth a quarter of an inch thick all over your skull, you had to scrape that all off. I remember standing there laughing at each other, how skinny we were, because all your bones and knees and everything were so obvious.

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We had a good hot shower and then we were issued with clean uniforms, but these uniforms were parts of uniforms of every nation that Germany had conquered. They had been cleaned, they had been deloused and cleaned, but I know I had a pair of wooden clogs, I had a pair of Polish pants and I had a French jacket, and some other type of head gear. You looked like characters out of a comedy, but at least we were clean and we were feeling a lot better, even the first day.

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Then, I think, within a day after we got a Red Cross parcel between four men, and we started to pick up from that moment onwards.

What sort of nationalities were in this camp with you?

There was French, Polish, Dutch, a few Dutch ? there was Russians there, but they were divided from us, and they were treated like mongrel dogs, I'm afraid.

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There were a lot of French, non commissioned officers. Under the Geneva Convention, officers and non commissioned officers, that is sergeants, corporals, don't have to go out and work if they don't desire. But of course, the Germans changed that in time. They were administering the camp, internally. They took over the distribution of clothing, parcels and all that sort of thing. Mail,

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after awhile we got mail through the International Red Cross, and all this was administered internally by prisoners of war. I don't think there was much else there besides Frenchmen, Dutchmen and Polish, and us. The Germans had a tendency to keep English speaking characters together ? Oh, South Africans they were another one, they were there. We all spoke English, put it that way.

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We were more or less kept that way. When we went into Munich in working parties, the whole camp was British.

When I say British, of British decent. It wasn't half a dozen English and half a dozen Polish and Czechoslovakians, we were kept separate as nations because we were all signatories to the International Red Cross.

So you didn't have a lot of interaction with, say, the French?

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Oh yes, in the main camp, when we got to Stalag 7a ? in this barrack of ours, we were buggered, and the next day in strolled several dozens of French prisoners of war, and they had a biscuit that come from Paris, and they didn't think much of it, and they handed them around to us and we thought they were the greatest thing we had ever tasted. They strolled through our camp and gave us all these biscuits. They got them issued on a regular basis.

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We got to know some of them quite well. They also put on concerts, orchestral concerts and plays. So that in itself was a bit enlightening after awhile.

Red Cross parcels sound like they were a pretty important part ?

Oh, without them half of us would have perished. The Germans really gave us very little good food, mainly it was a type of soup. It was either boiled potatoes,

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and cabbage soup, that was all they gave us. If it wasn't for the Red Cross ? it was not only the Red Cross parcels, it was what you could do with it when you got out working. Cigarettes, chocolate, good soap, you could work a lot of things with that. We'll come to all that later. From the main stalag, we were taken in Munich and there we were put into camps

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of roughly five hundred men, three barracks. There would a German guards' barrack as well. They were well set up. There was an entertainment hall, a cookhouse, good toilet facilities, good washroom, everything was there to help you get up on your own two feet again. In fact, the Germans addressed us several times, they sent around ranking officers, who emphasised the fact that we were soldiers still, and we had to conduct ourselves accordingly,

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and they expected us to. This did quite a lot of good for the boys because we started to lift our heads up there. And from the camp of five hundred men, you would go out in working parties to different firms. The size of work party depending on what the firm required to make itself work, function. I was in a group of about twenty and we worked for the town asphalt works.

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When we got there, we were all marshaled in a canteen, it was still dark in the morning ? we used to leave the camp with one guard and we would go to this asphalt work, and we wouldn't see the guard until it was time to come back home again.

Is that like blue metal asphalt?

Yeah, mixing up bitumen, tar, in blue metal to go on the roads. The first thing that happened, this German foreman was trying to sort us out, who was the oldest. Of course, none of us could speak German,

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he didn't speak English. And we worked out one old bloke that we had, he must have been every bit of thirty five, he was the old fellow, so he takes him and opens the door and says, ?Hans?? Hans comes over, yours. Well, Hans was a truck driver and this bloke was his offsider and he used to go out the gate in the truck every morning, come back at the

end of the day. This mate and I, we were listening to this chap trying to pick out words, and we come across this word 'specialist.'

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So we decided we were specialists, and it finished up I got a job in the fitting shop. They had a maintenance shop for all the machinery in this place. He and I got a job in there, and there was three Frenchmen working in there as well. So we got on well with the Frenchmen. We got to know them quite well. They were in a different camp to us, but they came to the same places.

What were you doing there?

Maintenance work for the machinery within the asphalt works. But it was a cushy sort of a job.

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We had a little blacksmith, we had an electrical fitter, and we just fiddled away the day, mainly making keys and things to escape out of the prison camp. There was others in a machine shop where they had a couple of lathes, but none of us did very much. But a group of the boys were in the yard, put it that way. There was piles of blue metal

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and such like, and stuff to be mixed to make tar. Their job was handling all this. They had quite an interesting job, mixing stuff, or carting it on four wheel electrical driven trolleys, something like front end loaders and so on. It was quite an interesting little setup there. One chap was the gardener for the director, he was growing vegetables for the director. But the people of Munich are remarkable people,

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they're the finest people I met in all my life, actually. They really took to us. The day that we were taken to this place, the Germans just looked at us, and we thought, 'Yeah, we're bloody British, you're German, all right.' But the next day they came in and they brought in food off their ration cards, because they never realised men could look so bloody awful. We thought it was hostility, but it wasn't, it was just shock. We grew quite well. And of course,

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as we got our Red Cross parcels on a regular basis, which was one parcel a fortnight, well you would muck in with someone else so the two of you would have a parcel between you every week. We would whack out a few things to these Germans and we become quite matey, actually. But there was rackets developed, of course. Tea for example. We used to get two ounces of tea - let me start again. We had one group working in a rubbish tip,

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and they just about refurbished the camp with pots and pans and so on. We had a teapot, similar to a teapot, a beautiful thing, with seraphims on it and carvings. So you get your two ounces of tea in your Red Cross parcel, it's stuck over with a little label on the end. You steam the label off and you tip the tea into a jar and you put the container packet in another jar, then you make tea with that.

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You don't throw the tea leaves out, you leave it there until the pot gets nearly full, then you dry it out in a dish and put it back in the packet and stick it down and then you sell that for a kilo of sugar, you see. And this is the sort of racket that went on. That's just one of them.

Who would you sell it to?

The Germans workers that you were working with, or anyone around. It was a clean swap. They'd get some sugar, so you would get tea for sugar, and this way we got sugar.

They didn't get smart that the tea was pretty weak?

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There was that much of it done that we suspect that it was going off to somewhere else, probably the hierarchy. And anyone who did complain, we said, "Oh England, kaput." "Ja, ja, ja." They were quite happy with that. That was one of the larks. I had a job. I had a row with the chappie in the fitting shop where I was, and I got a job on one of the wagons.

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When they had mixed the tar to a consistency where it could be put on the road, they had to get out to the roads. Now they had a type of vehicle, four wheeled trailer, it had a firebox underneath, and from the wheels was driven a chain driver which drove a paddle inside that kept the tar moving, and they had a fire box underneath. They had two of those behind a tractor. And someone had to be on one of these, according to the law, in case it broke away and they had to stop it with the brake.

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And me and my mate used to get on these, early in the morning, and we would go all around Munich, have a wonderful time around Munich, with the gangs who were working on the roads. We wouldn't see our guard until it was time to go home at the end of the day. There was quite a few funny acts there. For example, we weren't allowed to have German money, that wasn't legal. There was one group, from another camp, working on a strip of roadway,

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they had been there about a month, and we came from our depot to deliver this bitumen for them. And there was an underground toilet just nearby which they had to make use of. Now in this underground toilet, there was a delightful old frau, who used to charge five pence to use the toilet. But we didn't have any money, so we had to sign a book to prove it was being used and make her job worthwhile.

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And once when we went out there, I went down into this toilet and over to this book with this dear old frau, and she finished up shaking her finger under my nose. "And nichsmeer Winston Churchill or the Ned Kelly," she said. And there was page after page of Winston Churchill and Ned Kelly written in her book, and she had taken the time to "there was this other episode that I was telling you about, or glossed over earlier.

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The offsider, he worked out where the house of ill fame was, he must have had an instinct for this sort of thing, I don't know. And we bribed the tractor driver to have a breakdown outside this place. Now it was wintertime in Munich, and snow every-damn-where. And we were dressed in long johns and thick singlet "I forget to mention. In due course we were completely re-equipped with English uniform and the clothing.

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We had warm winter clothing, we had a battle dress, we had thick woollen socks, we had English army boots, even had overcoats. So from that point of view, we did all right. Anyway, when we were out on the wagon we had blue overalls on, as well, over our battle dress. So we bribed this tractor driver, he breaks down simply by turning the gas bottles off. He climbs under his tractor with a spanner and bangs away, gives us the nod.

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Well, we get out of our wagons and see two big doors. And there's was a big lounge room. And just inside the door was a counter, I suppose there was a till there in the early days, I don't know. And over the far side, there is half a dozen

blokes from the German army Afrika Korps talking to half a dozen of the women. I said to my mate, 'Let's get out of here. I thought they would all be in the front line.' 'No,' he said, 'hang in.'

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So we stood by this counter, near the door, to get out in a hurry, and two of these blokes come over and they looked us up and down. We had been in Munich about eighteen months now and we could speak the language a bit. They looked us up and down. 'You're not German?' 'No, we're not German.' 'And you're not Dutch?' 'No.' 'Well, what are you?' Now that starts a fight in any brothel, I can tell you. 'We're bloody Australians.' 'Oh, Australians!'

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And here they are 'Now, have you been in Tobruk?' 'We took Tobruk, mate. We took Tobruk from the Italians.' 'Oh, the Italians.' So here's one, he puts his finger in his mouth and he draws the outline of Tobruk defences. He says, 'We were there. Where were you?' And I said, 'We weren't dug in there. We took Tobruk from the Italians.' 'Oh, the Italians.' And then we started discussing the virtue of the Italian soldier, as a mate.

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It's hard, but here we were, there's the Germans and us blokes discussing this in a German house of ill fame. Finally he says, 'You want women?' 'Well, that's what we come in for, more or less, mate.' He said, 'A blonde or brunette?' Well, my mate laughed. This German said, 'What's funny?' He said, 'Jesus mate, we haven't seen a women for two years. We don't give a damn what colour they are.'

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They put their thumb up for one, and that's two. Two of these girls come over 'I won't go into all the details. Later on coming down the stairs, these two blokes over there, 'Good?' 'Yes, thank you.' My mate said, 'Well, what did you give her?' I said, 'I gave her tea, ounces of tea, and got five marks change.' He said, 'Yeah, so did I.' So we got back in our little wagons and off we go. But that was Munich for you.

So that must have been pretty good to get some action for the first time in two years?

Yes, I suppose.

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We won't go into all the gaudy details, but at one stage there the young lady's there waiting for the business while one of Australia's heroes takes off one pair of blue overalls, one battle dress jacket, one pair of army boots, and she was laughing like hell. Okay, let's gloss over that one. That's enough of that episode.

It is good to hear about, because it was a way of life back then. It's the kinds of situations that happened, particularly with Alexandria ?

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You've got thousands of men out in the desert, or locked up in a prison camp, things are going to happen.

You can't tell me that they're not out to find women, that's for sure. So you had pretty much a free range.

This is Munich I'm talking about. Yes, we did. There was another episode 'there were moments, of course, we were locked up. We were in a prison camp. You can't overcome that, it's not a nice thing at all. So as we started to pick up in our health

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and our attitudes and our spirits, so you would look around a bit. You're in a German city and you get the hang of the Germans and you don't exactly hate them like you did, because they're no different to us, you begin to realise this, and they respond to your friendship. I know, in this fitting shops where I was, I got a message the night before, in a letter,

that my father had passed away.

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Well, the next day I was down in the dumps and the German asked me, 'Mate? What's wrong?' I told him. They all came over to me, 'What happened?' I said, 'He just died.' They said, 'How old was he?' 'Fifty-three.' 'That's not old.' 'No, he was gassed in the First War on the German front.' And one of them just walked away and he swore in German something terrible, and then he came back and he put his arm around me, I've never forgotten this, he put his arm around me,

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and, in German you can understand, he said, 'Arthur, I am so sorry for you.'

Interviewee: Arthur Leggett Archive ID 1413 Tape 06

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You just learnt that terrible news about your father passing away?

Yes, that was an unhappy period. That happens ?

What was your reaction to the German officer who put his hand on your shoulder and ?

No, it wasn't an officer, it was one of my work mates, just one of the work mates I was working with. Well, you just think, 'Well, what the hell's it all about?'

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in fact, there were several Germans there said to me, 'What the hell are we fighting each other for? You and I are getting along all right. We're not scrapping. We're working in harmony with each other.' But what can you say? You can't say, 'Look, mate. There's this bastard Hitler,' because they weren't allowed to say that themselves. People don't realise the power that that man had, because no one could argue with him, he was a dictator, his word was law, and if you went against it, he had the blokes that would back him,

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and they'd just destroy you. So you had to bow to it all the way. Again, as I said to you earlier, I couldn't very well say to him, 'There's this Treaty of Versailles, mate,' and carry on from there. There was another incident in Munich ? I'm telling you all the humorous things because Munich was a good place to be. It didn't last forever. But gradually over

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a period, I got to establish contact with a German girl, who was a charming girl, and in due course we were going to be moved across to Poland to work in the coal mines. The chap who used to go down to our camp at lunch time, to get a billy can of soup for our lunch, he said, 'They're packing up, they're moving. Everyone's leaving.'

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I said, 'Oh, bulldust.' He said, 'No, they're all going. We're going tomorrow.' Cripes, I thought, 'How am I going to tell this girl?' I knew where she lived, it was just in a block of flats in the top left hand corner, sewing like hell. So I shot through. I scrambled over the fence and hid in a forest nearby a bowling green, of a forest, they had indoor bowling, and waited until everyone had gone.

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Of course there was a lot of fun and games amongst the boys in the counting, moving around, trying to confuse the guards, but eventually it was realised that I had escaped and this was bad business. They were marched back to the camp, I saw them go through the forest. I stood then on the corner where I knew this lass came home, and it was

snowing like hell, and there was this little old lady looking at me through the window. I thought, 'I can't stand here all day. I must have missed her, I'll go and knock on the door.'

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One of our chaps had been planning an escape, but of course this move frustrated that, so he leant me his Tyrolean hat to wear a disguise this afternoon around the town, while I was trying to find this lass. So I go and knock on the door when I worked out where she lived, and her mother opened the door, a short dumpy woman, and I asked her if Ellen was home.

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Well, Ellen suddenly appears, 'Oh, it's my Australian! Come on in!' She puts her arms around me and Mum puts her arms around me and they take me into the kitchen, sit me down, open up a bottle, a small bottle of beer, and here I am yapping away with these two women. And after awhile there is a sound at the front door, and her Mum flies out of the kitchen. I said to Ellen, 'Who is this?' 'Oh, that's Dad.' 'Oh cripes, I thought he would be up the Russian front.' In comes Dad, a big bloke and shakes me hand. 'Oh, sit down. This war is bloody awful.'

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Here I am with this family until about nine o'clock at night, I had a meal with them, we're yarning over every damn thing. Well, I've got to go back to camp anyway. I bid them all farewell, and Mum hands me back my little Tyrolean hat. And I tramp back to the camp. And inside the camp there's all the guards going around and around the camp shining all these torches on the shuttered up windows and all the doors. The German guard barracks

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were inside the compound, inside the barbed wire. I couldn't get in the place, I didn't know what to do. So I finished up shaking the gate, and the German sergeant major came out and said, 'Yes?' I had blue overalls on and the Tyrolean hat. I said, 'I'm one of the prisoners of war, I'm just coming home. Can I get bed and breakfast in there?' And he opens the gate and bows and says, 'Welcome home. Into the guard house.'

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Well, they take me into the guard house, into the commandant's office, and our British interpreter is there, too. 'You're back?' 'Yes, I'm back.' 'Name and number?' I give them my name and number and he opens a drawer and I think, 'Oh this is it, rubber truncheons. He drags out a bit of paper and scrapes it off. 'Right. Take him away.' So on the way back I said to our English chap, 'What's going to happen to me, do you reckon?' 'Oh nothing.' I said, 'Come on, there is bound to be some reprisal for this.'

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He said 'No, there was about fifteen of you love birds shot through, during the afternoon, and the commandant has been worried, he should call out the police the Gestapo to round you all up. But I convinced him that you would all be back by morning.' So he wrote out a list of who was missing and he said that if we weren't all back he was going to tell the Gestapo that our sergeant major had assisted in the mass escape

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and he would probably be shot. There was only one bloke missing. By the time I got back all the rest had come in, there was still one bloke missing and they knew where he was, so they sent a couple of guards down to get him. And that was the end of that episode. Nothing ever came of it. So, as I say, that was Munich, that was Bavaria. The funny thing about Bavaria and Germany. The Bavarians had no time for the people up north. The people up north reckoned they were going to win the war, but the Bavarians didn't care very much.

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And the Austrians had no time for either of them. There was a very strict division amongst the nationalities. Anyway, we were taken to a railway siding, which was elevated above the common level, placed in carriages, which was much more nicer than we had been used to, they were sit up carriages.

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And you won't believe this, but around that station area there would be about two to three hundred Germans come to see us off. So we were taken then right across then to Lamsdorf Stalag 13B, which was similar to Munich, and from there we were sent out to smaller camps to work in the coal mines in Poland.

How long were you there?

About two and a half years.

Do you remember your arrival?

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Oh yes, that was no trouble. You see, we were pretty docile by this time, in as much as we realised where the hell are you going to go if you do shoot through? You were going to get caught eventually, one way or another. So escapes were common down in Munich, the Germans regarded that as the eastern sport. You were entitled to escape, if you wished, that was your duty. But over in Poland, they had different ideas again.

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Things were different altogether because there was a lot of underground movement in Poland and you weren't allowed out. The barracks were similar, except they were a bit better for winter conditions because we were out in that flat country, and gosh it got cold there. There were three barracks, about five hundred men, and we were on shift. You would do three weeks day shift and three weeks night shift. So you could have your mate there, but you wouldn't see him for three weeks at a time.

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We were taken underground and worked on the coal face, shovelling coal. It started off that way. I had never seen so much coal in all my life as in Upper Silesia, it's just hundreds of metres deep. You can't imagine it. They put a drive down and then from the sides of that drive they put in more.

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They would take all the coal out of a drive and then block it up, fill it up, throw water and sand in, the water would flow off, the sand would stay. And they would go a bit further down, do the same again, and then they would take out the piece in the middle. You have no idea of how much coal came out of that place. We started off, there was a coal face, it must have been about a hundred meters long, with a conveyor belt beside it, and they blew the face, and then the idea was

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to shovel the coal onto the conveyor belt. And there was a German on the other side, raving and ranting, up and down, shouting at everyone. This was our introduction to it. But by the magic of the Red Cross parcels, etc, etc ? I finished up, I used to go down and hang my lamp on a post just near where the motor was that drove the conveyor belt. When he blew a whistle I pressed the button

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and that started the conveyor belt, and when he blew the whistle at the end of the shift I pressed the other one and that

stopped it. I wrote several plays sitting down around that post. It was just one of those things you could do. Not everyone got away with it like that, but I was rather fortunate.

Do you remember the subjects of some of those plays?

Oh, yes. I wrote the Christmas pantomime, Cinderella, which went over quite well. There was others, usually little skits about Australians or something.

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I must admit, a lot of it you get from your bush poems and you put them into a play form, which gives them a bit of atmosphere ? other incidents there? Well, to give you an idea how things were in Poland, they took us chaps down the pit earlier than the rest, and I was sitting down with a Polish shift boss, one day,

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waiting for the men to come up and start work. And there was a Pole came up and gave the shift boss a bit of paper, and the bloke read it and he ranted and raved and pointed down there and so on. The bloke looked very down cast and away he went. And I said, ?What's all that about?? In our language. And he said, ?Well, he's got a piece of paper from a doctor to say he has got to be put on light duties.? He says, ?The German say there's fifteen men down there, and for every man there has got to be about five wagons of coal come out,

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about two ton in a wagon. ?Now,? he says, ?if I put him on, the quota is going to be down, what do you think they will do?? I said, ?They'll probably be crook at you.? He said, ?No, they'll take my wife and kids, take them away.? And that was the system they were working under. You got the feel, after awhile, the Germans weren't such a nice mob after all. It depended entirely where you were. Back in the camp, I was

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the President of the camp's entertainment committee, and we had a secretary as well. We could get plays from England through the Red Cross and we could put on plays. We were paid in token money, originally, for our services in the mine, but the place that printed it got bombed out, so we were paid in German money to us then, which was of no damn value to us, we were in this camp. But with it, we could give it to the guards ?

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(BREAK)

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We got paid in German money, and with this we could hire costumes from the local town to put on a decent sort of a play when we had the script. We finished up with quite a whack of money. Well now, we lived this way for two and a half years, roughly. Then the Russians put on this big drive in 1944 towards Berlin, and we were right in the road.

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Mid winter. So they just upped the lot of us and marched us out the gate. And the secretary said, ?Well, look, we've got this roll of money. What are going to do with it? Give it back to the boys?? I said, ?No, we'll split it in half and we'll buy something for the boys along the way. You take half, I'll take half.? I had a big roll of German money, like this, because there was nothing ? this march went on for three months. We marched right across Europe. We went

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over the Czechoslovakian Alps, hotly pursued by the Russians, but there was over a million men on the move across Europe, at that time. We finished up back down at Regensburg, not far from Munich, if you've got a motor car. We just

lived on what we could scrounge. We all had a Red Cross parcel each, but that was used up in due course. We lived in barns, cowsheds,

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a few nights we slept out in the bloody open, in the snow. It was just one very bad experience. We were pushed along. You get a whole stack of men in a barn like that at night ? as you walked along, for example, the snow would stick to your boot. Now the heat of your foot and the movement of your boot would melt that snow, so your boot became saturated and your sock became saturated and you were squelching along in it.

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At the end of the day you would take them off, wring your socks out, pour the water out of your boot, bury it in the straw underneath you to try and keep it warm. The next morning you had to belt your sock up against a post to loosen it up, you had an 8th of an inch of ice inside your boot to start your day off. And this went on for three months, and that was just one of the things. There was no washing, there was no cleaning. Whatever we walked out of that camp in we were still wearing at the end of three months.

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We just lost weight, we went down hill of course ?

How did you care for your feet in those conditions?

What could you do? You just looked after them as best you could. You might have a towel, you could wrap that around your feet at night, but that wouldn't overcome the problem of your boots and socks, things of this nature. Fortunately, most of us had two pairs of socks, which lasted the distance.

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We had long woollen underpants and good clothing, generally, when we started, but it was looking a bit tattered after three months. We started off as prisoners of war and guards, and we finished up as a conglomeration of humanity, actually. We were just moving all the time.

What was morale like?

Well, you shut up during the course of the day, there wasn't much conversation. If you had been marching for a week in snowstorms,

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mile after mile, just snow and more snow coming in, you feel as though you can't go another damn step. When you think, ?I'm bugged,? in the gutter there, there would be a political prisoner with a bullet hole right between the eyes, and you'd think, ?Maybe I can go a bit further.? These were the things you just had to put up with.

Were there any men amongst you who couldn't make the distance?

No, most of us made the distance.

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We had one or two taken away because of frostbite in their feet ? This is peculiar thing about it, and I met up with them in England later on, they were taken to hospital and they're feet were treated. They weren't inhumane, it was just the situation the whole army was in. The Russians were following up behind us. We finished up down near Regensburg where we were camped in a big barn once,

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one night ? for several days, actually. There was a road up the top, it was on the end of a big slope, there was a road up the top, a gravel road coming down, and our German guard commander said, ?Look, we're going to leave you here for

a few days. Don't go out of the barn. The fellows coming back are nasty blokes. They'll set fire to the barn if they feel like it.? We sat there for a few days. And after awhile one of the blokes said ?There's a lot of tanks going along

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up the top of that road there.? He said, ?I think they're Russian tanks, they have all got stars on them.? One bloke said, ?Well, what colour's the stars?? He said, ?They're white.? ?Oh,? he said, ?They're Americans. They must be Americans.? So our sergeant major, in charge, trying to exercise authority, he said, ?No, sit here for another day, fellows. We can hang here for a day. Just watch it.? Well, later in that day, down this gravel road came three American Jeeps, loaded with fellows,

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and they fanned out, fellows jumped out with Tommy guns and everything. And one of the Americans got two white stripes on his hat, I didn't know what he was at that time, he looks in, throws the door open. ?OK, fellows! You're all free! We all looked at him and said, ?Where have you been?? He said, ?Bloody hell, where are you blokes from?? ?We are Australians.? He said, ?Australians. I've been there, nice place.

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OK, just take it easy for a day or so, will you? We'll be back.? They all got back in their Jeeps and shot through. Instead of waving little Union Jacks and cheering, we were waiting for him just inside the door, we said, ?Where have you been?? ?Oh,? he said, ?we had a bit of trouble along the way.? So we did that, and then we were free. We split up into little groups, we wandered off here, there and everywhere.

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I went down to a village there to do some work for the Germans. What happened there, the Americans sent a fellow back and asked could anyone speak the language ? digressing again, my mate Jesse had a violin. Don't ask me how he got it, but he had a violin, and it was in a wooden case, it was on his back. I followed it for three months right across Poland. At nights he used to play a few tunes on this violin in the barn,

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which was always acceptable. So the Americans wanted to know if someone could do some interpreting down the village for them, so I go down there, and this bloke down there, he said, ?All I want you to do is tell the boss here that we're not going to rape the women and burn the village. We just want to set up a signal station in the school.? ?Oh, no trouble.? And they give me a whole stack of K-rations [US rations] for this, all marked ?morning,' breakfast units. When I get back, I'm looking for Jesse and I can't find him.

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Someone said, ?I think he's gone around the back of the barn there.? I go around the back of the barn, and through this snow, there's two feet going over the snow. And I go up there, and down in a hollow, Jesse is sitting there, he has got a fire going, and somehow he's got a chicken in this billy can, boiling away, and he's playing his violin. I go over to him and said, ?Look, what I've got! Breakfast units! He looks at them, ?You can't eat them.? I said, ?Why not?? He said, ?Well, its bloody dinner time.?

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I said, ?I'm not worried about that.? He said, ?Well, I bloody am. There's your bloody dinner in there?? And that's the first argument we had in four years, over this chicken in this billy can. We got together in small groups, we eventually made our way to Regensburg. The Americans said, ?Get to Regensburg Aerodrome. That's where they're flying you out from.?

How did you make your way to Regensburg?

Some of the way we walked.

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Another stage we commandeered a tractor and a wagon and loaded that up with the boys, but we eventually finished up there. The Red Cross parcels met us somehow. We got a Red Cross parcel. That was a funny thing, we would go into a little café in one of the villages, and the woman there is horrified, there's half a dozen prisoners of war loose inside her café. And when she found out that all we really wanted to do was for her to cook some of the food for us, then that was different. Then we made her sit down and have some food with us.

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And she couldn't believe all this, because they had heard such terrible tales. We finished up at this aerodrome, which I suspect was one of Willy Messerschmitt's depots, because they had quite a big factory there and a big kitchen for the workers. Now the Germans are very fond of soup, and they had big vats for making soup, stainless steel, and so we filled them up with water and broke up some furniture and lit it underneath and warmed it up.

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And we all had a beaut bonza bath each, and then we washed our clothes in it, and then we sat out on the tarmac in the nuddy, with our clothes spread over the cement until they dried, and it really was a most enjoyable time. And, most of all, important to me, I found in an office a fountain pen and some ink and some paper and I could start to write again. I thought, 'This is great.' In due course, a flock of US Dakota aeroplanes

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came out of the sky, somewhere 'Oh, the Poms who were administering us characters said, 'Get in groups of twenty and write out the names in duplicate. One for the pilot and one for the other end,' something like this. In come the Dakotas. So we stroll over. I'm in charge of twenty men, not because I've got any authority, I just happened to have a pen and paper that could write names. I had this piece of paper to the Yank, who incidentally gave me a stick of chewing gum, and he said, 'What's this?' I said, 'A list of the names of the men.'

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'We don't want paper, we want the men! Get in!' So we all got in. We finished up in Brussels that night and taken to a military camp there which had been set up for us, it was in an army barracks, a solid job. And we get out of this truck, twenty of us, a bunch of blokes who've come in on this aircraft flight, and there's a Pommy corporal.

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'Righto, now, get into line! Straighten up!' We looked at him and thought, 'What the hell is all this about?' 'Come on! Shake it up!' So we shook it up, we got into line, that suited him anyway. But we'd had nothing like this for four years. He gave us a lecture on Brussels. 'Now you're all in groups of twenty and you'll all be here in the morning. You can go out the gate, but I want you all here at nine o'clock in the morning. One man missing from a group, that group stops, that's it.'

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So, OK. I've still got the two lists of paper in my pocket. This German money, I was telling you about, I found I could change it to Belgian money, a bigger roll. We could go into Brussels, and we are there on the day the Germans turned it in. It was on VE Day [Victory in Europe Day]. And the town was packed, there was people going around and around the streets. There was a Grenadier Guards band marching around, and everyone's following that.

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I get up an ornamental lamp post to see what's going on, I had lost Jesse somehow in the crowd, and there's gorgeous creatures coming along there, and I waved to them and they waved to me, 'Come and join us!' Well, who I am to fight this? It's three to one. So I slid down this pole and I've got a girl on each arm, and after we've been marching around for awhile, I said 'Where can we get a drink?' 'Oh, I don't know if you'll get one, the place is crowded.'

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So we tried this café, we go into a café. I said to this bloke, 'I want a table.' 'I haven't got a table.' They all speak English, I don't know why but they do. So I've got this roll of notes, you see. 'Well, I'm the last of the great Australian cattle-station owners and I'm in Brussels on VE night, and I want to buy drinks for everybody.' All right, they found me a table and I'm buying drinks everywhere. The real joke of it all is that one of our fellows had been on a cattle station,

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he did have a group of photos of the work around the cattle station and the homestead, and in Munich we'd all had a print of these made for each of us, because we were all cattle station owners. I'm showing these around. And one of these girls said, 'Well, what's an Australian doing here on VE night?' 'Oh, we're everywhere, just like we were in the First War. All over the place.' She says, 'No, I think you've been a prisoner of war.' I said, 'Yes, actually I have. The last three months we've been sleeping in cow sheds and barns.'

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She said 'Oh, while you've been sleeping in cowsheds and barns and I've been sleeping in my comfortable bed at home?' 'You don't have to be smart to work out what the next question was. So she said, 'Yes, all right. You can come home to my place.' It was eleven o'clock at night, I didn't want to rush things, but I thought it was getting a bit late. We get out to her place in a bus, and she gets in first and tells Mum and Dad they've got a visitor. She takes me upstairs

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and opens the door and there's a lovely bedroom there. And she says, 'This is my brother's bedroom, he's in hospital with appendicitis. You'll find pyjamas under the pillow and I will see you in the morning.' Well, I looked around. The carpet was all beautiful, lace curtains, lovely bed, clean pyjamas. I didn't give a damn where she slept, I never had it so good. She woke me up next morning and away we go, and it's Sunday and there is no conveyances anywhere, there's no transport,

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and I'm getting a bit worried about this because it's getting a bit late. I get a lift in an 'American Jeep. She guides this fellow, he has a cigar in his mouth and he's chatting away all the time. It was a hell of a journey, I thought. And we come around the corner of these barracks, and there is one truck with nineteen men standing in the back of it. And later on when I wrote to this girl, and she wrote back, and she said,

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'The last I saw of you, you were hanging over the back of the truck and all your friends were hitting you. What were they hitting you for?' Well, I held them up for half an hour, they didn't know where I was, and I was the bloke in charge. We go out to the airport, and this airport at Brussels, there is Avro Lancasters parked everywhere, oh, all over the place. I'd never seen anything like this. So we were taken in a truck out to the end of the airstrip.

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You might believe this, what I'm going to tell you now, but it's dinkum. There's an army issue table there, on army issue trestles, there's an army issue form there with an army issue Pommy corporal and a lieutenant from Sandhurst Military Academy, brass polished, everything set to perfection and stiff as a ramrod. I wander over and I've got this bit of paper. ?What's that?? ?A list of names.? ?A list of names ? what?? I said, ?The blokes, over there.?

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He said, ?The list of names, sir!?! ?Oh yeah, sir.? And he takes this list as though it's filthy, he looks at me as though I am a bit of rubbish that has blown across the aerodrome and lobbed at his feet somehow. He says, ?That plane over there.? We go over there and this plane is manned by an Australian crew, of all things, and they called it the Ham Crammed Spam Special. They had a ginger headed pilot, and he made us most welcome. We get into this plane

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and I'm just under the turret gunner, sitting on a projection, where the bombs fit underneath. They trundled her out the end of the airstrip and give her the gun. And I'm looking towards the tail, the tail comes up, it goes a little bit to the left, a little bit to the right, up in the air, down. I thought, ?This doesn't look quite right to me.? Then all hell breaks loose. What actually happened, the wheel come off the bloody thing and the pilot wound the other wheel up,

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switched on the fire extinguishers and sat her down. There we were skidding along, we were actually airborne in an Avro Lancaster and he sits her down on this tarmac. She screamed and bounced and thumped around, and filled up with dust. Eventually it stops. The rear gunner gets out and he's trying to open the door, and the buckle side of this thing. The pilot is chucking blokes out the top. ?Get out of here as quick as you can fellows!?! We're big bronzed Anzacs. ?She's right, skip.?

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Well, as we said this, the fellow opened the door on the side and we're sitting in a pool of petrol. It went out to the wing tips, right down to the tail and there's four motors smoking in the middle of this. We smashed our way through there. Talking to the crew, I said to the pilot, ?That wasn't exactly a nice thing to do, was it?? He said, ?We can't help having a little joke now and then.? We were put in another truck, taken back to the end of this airstrip. And I wander over to this bloke.

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?Sir!?! Responding to training. I had twenty men hanging on this. ?Group twenty, corporal.? ?Sir, they've gone.? He looked at me and said, ?You've gone.? I said, ?See that heap ? smoking away at the end of the airstrip? We've just come out of that.? And I don't know to this day if he was joking or not, but he says, ?You can't do that! What about my books??

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Well, being a polite Australian, I told him what he could do with his books, and got the boys back in the truck and we went back to the hangar where the Aussies were, and we were having a great old time there, drinking their beer and what have you, because they're still celebrating VE Day. And in comes a bloke with a row of rings up his arm, I don't know what he was, because there was no air force when we were in the army. He asks what we were doing there, and I told him the sad tale, and he said, ?We'll get you out of here,? he said, ?straight away.

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Not that we don't like your company. I just want to conserve our beer.? He got us out within twenty minutes. That was just getting out of Europe, it was quite an experience.

I was going to ask you some more questions about the time you spent in Poland. What did you learn about the underground while you were there?

Nothing very much, we were isolated. We did mix with the workers, but those who were working there

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weren't part of the underground, they were just workers, and they didn't want anything to do with it, because belonging to the underground meant death, for sure. There was a lot of them that had families which they wished to preserve and protect. However, it did have a spin off. As I said, you wouldn't see your mate for three weeks, but you do a bit of bargaining underground. There was one fellow who brought up a kilo of sugar, into the camp, smuggled into the camp.

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You did that by simply having it in your dixie, and when they give you a body search you held your arms out. They never thought to look in the dixie. And he puts a note on this, 'One spoonful per cup, or else you will become a victim of the Claw.' And he drew a horrible bloody claw. Well, then, someone else wrote a note to his mate, 'Don't do this, or that, or you become a victim of The Claw.' Well, it got down underground, and on one of the cement walls one of the blokes with his lamp,

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'Twenty wagons per man today or you will become a victim of The Claw.' Well, the Poles got onto this, there is a secret society springing up amongst the prisoners. Oh, it's terrible, reported it to the Germans. And we were all lined up on our day off, and in came a German colonel with an interpreter, and he made a brilliant speech, 'We're all soldiers. We mustn't lose our sense of pride in what we are doing,' etc, etc.

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'And we've found out there is a secret society sprung up amongst you. Now step forward all those who are victims of the Claw.' We had been locked up for four years, and the whole parade dissolves in laughter, and he could never work out what the joke was. But that's how the influence of the Poles, they were terror-stricken of everything that was going on round them, yes. There were fellows where we were, big men, they had nothing on them

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as far as flesh goes. And we were told, they would be going home from work, and suddenly the street would be blocked off, and all the men would be swept up and taken out to Auschwitz and systematically ill-treated. This fellow had been put in a cell where he couldn't stand up, and there would be about three inches of water in the cell as well. And there he was kept in pitch darkness, not just him, quite a few of them, for a week or so.

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That was just to keep the mob down, stop the civilian population lifting their head up. You get that sort of thing going on, you toe the line, all right. Because meanwhile your wife and kids don't know what has happened. You've vanished. You could have been killed, for all they know.

What was the treatment you received from the guards like there compared to the treatment you received around Munich?

That was all right. Occasionally if we didn't get dressed quick enough, they might come in and throw their weight around,

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push you around a bit with the butt of a rifle. But usually they were fairly good. The guards that we had on the coal mines would be men in their forty-fives, fifties, not exactly old men, but they were by no means young men. And they

were as bored with their job as we were with ours. They never got over excited about it, and if things were going right there would be no trouble.

What was the daily routine?

Well, you would get up in the dark,

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you would be marched to the mine with a group of guards around you. You would go into the dressing room ? we all had coal hard hats and a change of clothes. You'd get changed, then you would be put in a skip and down you would go, and you would make your way to the work face, then you would come home. By that time in Poland, it's already dark again, so you'd six months without seeing the sun. But that was the normal routine. You would be there about twelve hours a day, I suppose.

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By the time you left the camp, and by the time you got back, it would be about twelve hours. There would be a bit of fraternity amongst the boys, and socialism, but mainly you would turn in. All in rooms with about twelve men in the rooms, with double bunks, a room not much bigger than this. But it was a pretty monotonous sort of thing. That's one of the reasons why I started up this entertainment committee, to sort of lift the boys up a bit. And it worked, too. It worked good.

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Where about did you stage those performances?

They had a hall in the camp, an entertainment hall, with a stage on it, a platform. We had a mouth organ band, a string band, guitar, ukulele, a mandolin, any string instrument. We had a few of those.

Where did you collect those instruments?

They came over a period of time,

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I'm talking about three years into it now. Some came through the Red Cross, some came as gifts from their parents. I don't know how the hell Jesse got this violin. He did a deal underground with it and got it into the camp somehow. There were a couple of violins. One fellow had a trumpet, which came through the Red Cross. Things like this, you gradually you build up.

I think you mentioned that you had done some trading, equivalent to black market trading, to get yourself a comfortable position in the coal mine? Is that right?

Yes.

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Okay, so you pick on the biggest bully or bloody Hun there is, slip him a chocolate, or offer him a few English cigarettes and so on. Gradually it worked, because you've got him in a corner then, he's accepted a bribe. If they put the Gestapo onto you, mate, you would go down the plug hole, too. So you just had to work that way. It was a bit without scruple, but we did it. We had to.

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How long was it before you managed to get the comfortable position that you had?

About three months or so, that's all. It was just a matter of watching, thinking, and working out who is who, what's what, what authority they had and how you could get to them.

I imagine you would have to be quite on the ball or street smart if you like?

Oh, yes. Well, you've got a big bullying, stand-over type of character, you approach him

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with a bit of chocolate or a cigarette. On the other hand, you could cop a back hander. It's a chance you've got to take, that's all.

Did you see much physical aggression administered by the guards to the other prisoners of war?

No, I did hear of some, but I never actually witnessed it myself. We got on fairly well with our guards. But I do know ? well, the story I got was, one of the chaps we had with us

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on the asphalt work, he got separated from us, when we were redistributed, he was in another camp, and he was a religious frame of mind. He was a pastor in some church and he had strong beliefs of what was right and what was wrong. So we heard that one of the guards got stuck into one of the boys in the change room of this mine where he was working, he knocked him unconscious and kept hitting him. So this lad just stepped in.

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He took the rifle off the guard and told him to cut it out. ?No more of this!? Well, that's very humiliating. Not every guard, incidentally, was German. There was Silesians, there was all sorts that had joined the German army from all over. Anyhow, the guard took his rifle and walked out one door, poked his rifle through the other and shot our mate through the head.

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They left him there for a couple of days before anyone was allowed to touch him. So there were moments like then which, of course, had a very sobering influence on you.

That would encourage you to toe the line, I would imagine.

Yes, that's right. But from our camp, there might be a butt stroke now and again, but nothing serious.

Interviewee: Arthur Leggett Archive ID 1413 Tape 07

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You mentioned when you were talking to Julian [interviewer] that you were aware that the Polish people were being taken away to concentration camps. How were you made aware of that?

Well, they wouldn't be at work the next day. When I say, ?taken away,? yes, that's how it would be, they just weren't around. You would say, ?Where's so and so?? They'd just go horribly pale and tell you nothing. You didn't have to work it out, they just disappeared. They might turn up again

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a few weeks later and they looked like different men, you had to work out who the hell they were. That's how the Germans were, they used to swoop up a section of the community, ill treat it, punish it for no reason, and then return it back again, so that they could tell the others what had happened to them. In this way you keep your population subdued.

Were they being taken away to concentration camps, these Polish people?

The ones, I understand, the ones I'm talking about went to Auschwitz.

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From what I can gather, not all of Auschwitz was gas ovens and incinerators, there was other sections of it. They had it down to a refined art, I understand, that portion of the German community. It's a big problem. Sometimes I often think it's a bit like getting all the bikies together and giving them a uniform and authority, and what are you going to do about it? That was the situation they were in.

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Did you see any religious repression as far as the Germans were concerned?

Not in the Christian sense, no, I didn't, and as regards the Jewish situation, we never saw any of that either. In Munich, we did see many Jews walking around the streets with the Star of David on their coats. What happened to them eventually, I don't know, I don't think they were allowed to carry on.

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They would have probably been all rounded up in due course, but at that particular stage they were just branded as Jews.

What did you think about people walking around having to declare their ?

Oh well, that disgusted me. Being an Australian, you don't believe this, how can you discriminate within the community? But that's how it was. And there was nothing you can do about it. The only thing is, with political prisoners and so on, occasionally they had them doing bits around the town.

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You made sure you dropped a few cigarettes and so on where they happened to be working. That's all we could do.

Was there any insignias that you had to wear?

No, we never ? it's a remarkable thing, we weren't branded. I understand they had the right to put a big POW sign 'KGF' [krieggafengler ? prisoner of war] on your tunic in big letters, paint them on if they so desired but they never. It's a peculiar thing.

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They endeavoured to make you feel as though you were still a soldier. Mind you, we all wore battle dress which is distinctive from the rest. But no, no insignias.

Can you describe to me an average day in Poland when you were in the coal mines?

As I said, you left in the dark, you went into the change room, you got changed into your working clothes and you would go

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down in a skip, down to whatever level you were working out, make your way out to wherever you were working, put in your day's effort, sometimes it would be maintenance work ? Quite a few of our blokes were working with tradesmen as tradesmen's assistants. You would be down the mine for eight hours ? You had showers, you handed in your lamp, and get yourself dressed and then hand in the lamp as you went,

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and make your way back to the camp in a group, with guards. It would be a twelve hour stretch and it would still be dark, because the night would have set in. If you blinked, you missed the day in that country.

It sounds like pretty hard physical work, though?

Yeah, it was. And they expected it from you, too. There was that about it. We were fortunate, in our mine, the attitude of those who were controlling the mine underground, once you got there you never saw the guards again

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until you were coming home, mind you, they weren't underground with you unless there was a bit of a problem, they might bring one of the guards down then. But some mines were rather bad, yes, they were rather bad, men were belted up most of the time and driven to the max, but it wasn't in our particular camp.

What sort of food and refreshments were you given when you were working down there?

From the Germans, you got your boiled potatoes

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and your cabbage soup. If it wasn't for the Red Cross, we just couldn't have been able to handle it. You get a Red Cross parcel between two of you every week, so you'd muck in with someone so that you always had food coming. We all had little cupboards in our rooms, I think it was one cupboard to four men. Two of you would have top shelves and bottom shelves, and you would leave the stuff there.

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There was never any pilfering or thieving of this nature, it was quite good in that respect. The food situation, mind you, you would do quite a bit of haggling underground, too, to get a bit of extra grub. There was always black market going on. I know I brought in a dozen eggs once, the way I just told you. I did a bit of trade there, I've forgotten what it was now.

Was this in Germany or Poland?

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In Poland. And when I was being searched, I just held my arms out like that, and they were in the Dixie out the end of my arm. They never thought of looking out there. Another funny act, too, with a Polish boss I wanted to trade some tea for some eggs. I made this deal, he give me the eggs and I gave him the tea ? Incidentally, some of the fellows there had been captured at Dunkirk and they had been in Poland quite some time,

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and they spoke the language fairly well, by this time. Next day this bloke is going really crook, he was really putting on a show. I couldn't understand him. So I said to this Pommy bloke, ?What's he talking about?? And he said, ?The tobacco you gave him yesterday. It's the worst stuff he has ever smoked.? Mind you, I gave him two ounces of tea. So there were little moments like that. So I explained to him that it wasn't meant to be smoked, and I brought him some smokes to placate him.

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When you were in Poland, as I understand, there weren't any officers in your area?

No. Well, we had an English doctor, he was in the camp, he was there to look after us. Our highest rank other rank would be a sergeant major, and he was there purely voluntarily to administer the camp. He had a couple of sergeants there with him as well.

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I'm just wondering how leadership arises then?

Yeah, well, that's how it would be. They didn't have to be there, but they volunteered to be there, so it would make life easier for the rest of the troops, because they had a sense of duty towards the men for whom they were responsible, in a way. And it was common to have a sergeant major and several sergeants, depending on the size of the camp, to administer the camp itself.

What did you think of the blokes who were in charge of you lot?

They were there because they wanted to be there. They were there because they wished to be of service to the troops.

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And as a go-between the two. They stood up to the Germans, and demanded this or that, or if a man was summoned up to the camp commandant or anything for some misdemeanour, they were there, too, to see that everything was done as it should be in a military manner.

It seems from what you're telling me that there was some sort of respect

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that things were being done in a military way, from the point of view of the Germans.

Yes. They were very militarily minded, and if you behaved yourself you had no trouble. If you kicked over the traces you were up on a charge, just the same as you would be in your own army, and treated accordingly. You would be charged. If it was really bad ? I suppose the worst thing you could do would be to escape from the camp ?

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Well, when you were eventually caught, you would finish back up at the main camp, the big Stalag, and you would do about ten days solitary confinement and then you would be sent out to another camp. That was the normal routine.

Can you tell me a bit about some of the escape attempts?

Well, yes. Down in Munich it was a common thing. The Germans regarded that as the Spring Offensive, more or less.

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They regarded it as your duty to escape if you could. We had one fellow in our working party, at the asphalt work, named Alfred Passfield, who eventually wrote a book called The Escape Artist. He escaped that many times he became a real headache to the Germans, and I believe he got the Military Medal for being a bloody nuisance as a prisoner of war. I've got his book there, in my bookcase. Alf was a timber man,

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come from down south, and he knew how to live on his own. He was rugged. And he told some very funny tales after the war. For example, he had a beard, a ginger beard, and he grew it down to his chest, and he used to round his shoulders and hobble around, and the Germans used to think, ?Poor old fellow.? And they'd give him all the light jobs. And gradually he accumulated some gear and stuff, and he took off from Munich and he was heading for Switzerland.

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And got to the stage, he reckoned, where he could see the lights of Switzerland in the distance. And he was passing through a village where there was a Hitler Youth Movement rally on, and there was push bikes everywhere. So he swiped a push bike, from what I can gather, and he was boring through a village with his beard flowing over his shoulder, and the local cop thought, ?This isn't right.? So he pulled him up. And that was just one of the episodes that Alf tried.

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I did hear of a Frenchman, too, who just had ordinary overalls on and he had a pot of white paint and a pot of black paint, and he was painting all the kilometre stones, heading in the direction of Switzerland, but he ran out of paint. Another fellow was driving a cow in the same direction, but he couldn't find food for the cow and it died of starvation, so he lost out there. There were things like that.

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But escaping from Munich, not from Moosburg Stalag. It was chicken feed, you could just walk away. As I say, I was out in Munich all day, around the streets. You could mix, as I've explained. But when you got over to Poland that was a different story, because you were in an occupied country, and things were different, entirely.

Was it easier to stay, being POW, and having the amount of freedom you had in Munich

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than to actually attempt to try and escape to somewhere like Switzerland?

Well, yes, it is, but you have a duty to escape, to get away. I mean, you've got this sense that you shouldn't be here,

you should be on the other side, and that's what drove most of the fellows. And if you were an Australian, of course, being inside a barbed wire fence? You only had the cattle in things like that.

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Many fellows tried to escape, it was just normal routine. When we got up into Poland there were big signs put up in all our camps about escaping. It is no longer a spring sport. You are in dangerous country and there have been certain areas taken over by the military, and if you wander into them you will be shot without notice. So we were told when we got into Poland, no more mucking around, but in Munich, it was a fairly regular thing.

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The only time I escaped was to see my girlfriend, but other fellows were missing periodically, here and there.

Would they always get recaptured?

I would say nine out of ten. From Munich there was a couple of lakes which stretch across the country between there and Switzerland, and most of the boys tried to get in between these lakes. Well, that was that heavily patrolled? You were very lucky if you could get through there.

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But it wasn't a serious thing. When I say 'serious,' a life threatening thing to try and escape when you were in Bavaria. It was only when you were in the occupied countries it was dangerous.

Would men decide to do it in groups? Or would it be a single?

No, if you were in a group, you're going to attract attention. Maybe three, maybe two, but more than that? No. It was obvious you were going to attract attention.

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Mainly it was off one at a time, you had to take off on your own.

How much of the conversation was taken up by these great plans?

Not a great deal, because if a bloke was going to escape he wouldn't say much to anybody. You'd just gradually accumulate what food that you could, and you would just disappear from the work party. Because there was always a chance that somehow fellows would be talking about it,

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they would be overheard by English-speaking guards, so you wouldn't discuss it a great deal at all.

You mentioned before that you had a doctor in Poland. Can you describe the medical facilities that you had in both camps?

They were good? You mustn't overlook that the Germans were signatories

07:15:30:00

to the Geneva Convention, and some of the enemies of Germany were not signatories. But England was, and England treated prisoners of war the same, with respect and so on. When I say prisoners of war, captured Germans. Therefore we were treated with respect, and we had all the facilities that the Geneva Conventions expected you to have. In the work camps we had doctors.

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We even had German doctors used to come around and check on us, occasionally. Whether it was to see that we weren't bludging or whether we were really ill men, I don't know. They had our own doctor allocated to each little camp, we had little hospital facilities. He usually had a qualified medical orderly with him as well. In this respect you were fairly well looked after.

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In a work camp, they were only allowed so many sick men at once. Well, the doctor used to make sure he had that quota all the time. If they weren't sick, he would make them sick, I suppose. Put it this way, they'd try and keep the quota of men sick so that the hospital was always there.

What were some of the common ailments?

Oh, ordinary common things. Very severe cold, because underground was very damp, you got rheumatics, you get nasal troubles ?

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a lot of the men got badly constipated with the type of food we were on, that had to be attended to. And, of course, you could have a minor injury. You could chop a finger around a bit, or drop something on your toe, all those elementary things that go with working in a coal mine.

I was just wondering if there was a lot of dysentery or infection?

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No, the hygiene was very good, the toilet facilities were good. The necessary chemicals to keep them clean were supplied. There was also a maintenance staff within the camp, of the boys, whose job it was to keep the camp clean. Those facilities were quite good. The ablution block, the shower rooms, the toilet facilities were always good in the working camps.

Was there any opportunity to grow your own food?

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No, not where we were. I do believe that in some of the big camps some of the seniors managed to get a few square metres of earth to grow something in, but we never came up against it. It probably was there, but we never made use of it anyway.

It's interesting you mentioned, or you kind of glossed over, that you were in charge of entertainment. Was this in both camps?

No, it was in the one in Poland that we were at.

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I played several roles in the camp in Munich, in the camp there. I took part in the plays, put it that way. But I wasn't in charge of them. But when we got to Poland I stuck my neck out and said, 'Well, we better do something about this.' When I say I was in charge, I used to organise it, put it that way. You're never really in charge of anything in a prison camp because someone is likely to tell you to go and drop dead and that's the end of it.

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So it's mainly a matter of public relations and keeping things going. If you get a group around you who are interested in the same thing? Then you build something up. And then when you do get a show together, the boys support it and turn up to ? They've got nothing else to do, they might as well go and look at it. You've got a captive audience.

How would you have time to rehearse if you were working these twelve hour days in the coal mines?

Well, you've got another twelve hours, haven't you? You're only away twelve hours, that means you're inside twelve hours. You want eight hours sleep? You've got time to do these things.

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Well, enthusiasm is the key point, of course, and the desire to do it. If you've got enthusiasm and a desire to achieve a goal, you're going to make it. And that's what we did.

How long would you rehearse before you put a show together?

Oh, it depended on the quality of the players you had, and what you were trying to do. For example, some of the scripts which we got from England got quite complicated,

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deep thinking, that took a little bit of handling. But the Christmas pantomime I managed to put together, well, anyone who could do anything was in it. We had the King and the Prince, they played a good mouth organ. We had a carpenter who built up a carriage that moved across the stage. We had that.

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Oh, and we had a special group of fairies to dance. They called themselves 'the Hairy Fairies,' they come out of the Welsh coal mines, and their little dance was a bit crude, but it brought the house down. All these big massive men dressed up as in little skirts, dancing around and waving wands and singing some stupid song. That section, they produced that themselves you see, and then there was another section of entertainment which you fitted into it all.

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If I remember rightly, one of these scenes in this Cinderella was a ball at the palace. Well, you can fit in anything once you've done that. That's the same as being in a concert. And that went over fairly well.

Did you have any ability to create sets?

Create sets? Yes, we could. We could hire paint and paper, things of that nature, to set up a set.

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We managed to buy a beautiful curtain with an oil painting on it, which was our drop down curtain, that was quite good. And you could hire costumes from the local town, because we had the money to do it. You could produce a fair sort of a show. The fellows who produced the sets, of course, they're like everyone else, they got keen on it and they did the best they could. And it went over quite well, that sort of the side of the thing.

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How important was things like that for all round morale?

Oh, quite good, because blokes would talk about it for days after. It used to have its hectic moments, again. I used to do a bit of boxing and also, it was rather embarrassing, really, in several plays there, I played the part of the leading lady. I had this beautiful dress, I was nicely made up,

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and the wig. And I walked onto the stage. The front row of seats were there and these Welsh coal miners were there, and I could hear what they were saying, what they'd like to do with that Sheila up there. And it was very hard to concentrate on your script when you hear that sort of thing going on. And another time ? Oh yeah, I'd stepped into the ring for three rounds of boxing, and the MC [Master of Ceremonies] said, 'Now the leading lady will fight for her honour.' And here's these Welsh bastards, 'And what happens if she loses?'

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Little things like this all added up to life, and entertainment.

So you got the frock parts?

Yes, I played the part of the leading lady there for a few plays. A funny thing about that, it starts to affect you after awhile, and you start to become feminine, so I backed off. I could see that I was ? it sounds silly, I know, we're all sitting here. But if you've been locked up for four years,

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and it's a different atmosphere, a different life, and after you've played the part of a leading lady for three plays, which means you've been rehearsing it for months, you find you start walking around like this. I thought, 'Geez, this is no good, mate.' So I backed off then, gave it away.

You were just doing the full-on Stanislavski method acting technique out there?

Something like that.

Was there any homosexuality in the camps?

Well, I never came across. People have asked me this,

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but I never come across it. I honestly don't know. I doubt it, because they were all pretty vigorous sort of men. In the main camps, the big camps, particularly in 7A and 13B, the French had a few fellows there that everyone used to follow around, hold his hand, this sort of thing. And this shook us, we couldn't understand what was going on. But we suspect there was a bit of homosexuality, not necessarily because they were French, but this was what the situation was in that particular camp.

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Everyone talks about the French being a bit weird, but that was not the case. It was just this particular section, it could have been British, American or anything. But that was the only time I came across it. I don't recollect anything of it in our camp.

It just seems to be based more on real mateship rather than ?

Mateship, and a bit of the old macho business, you know.

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Tough man sort of thing.

Is it competitive?

No, I don't think so, I wouldn't say it was competitive. You had a mate, or you had a little group of mates, which you felt comfortable with ? there was basketball games, occasionally. In Munich we used to play soccer, so there was competition there. But as far as being a better man than you, no. Even the boxing events were friendly,

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there was no real animosity in the boxing, either. That's about all I can say about that topic.

You mentioned the French. What sort of nationalities did you have in Poland?

Only the Polish, we were just over the border of Germany and Poland, and if Poland had won the war they would have been Poles, and if Germany won the war they would have been Germans. We used to call them 'grensikinder.' They were children of the border, sort of thing.

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They were not one way or the other, so they were a bit cunning. You had the other type of Polish fellow that was a dead dinkum Polish patriot, you would meet them as well. They were a mixed up crew, but that's Europe. You get borders, but there's no rivers, there's no oceans between the borders, and of course you're going to get cross-breeding going on. That stands to reason ?

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When you were in the German camp, you said that you were making keys a lot of the time?

Yes, well. That was mainly a fun thing, it wasn't serious. But there was this friend I had, this lady friend. Well, on the

workshop

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where I was, all the Germans used to go down to their canteen for lunch. And I found that next door there was a door that needed a key, and you could go through that, unlock another door and you were out on the street. That was the theory of it, but it wasn't that way, it meant she was inside the building, if you follow me. I worked it out that way. Also, in the camps where we were, the Germans had a long passageway ?

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You had a barrack, entrance here, it had rooms off there, there and there, and at the end of the passage was a doorway. And some of the boys wanted to go out at night, so we worked out a key to unlock this door ? at night they used to bring the guards inside the camp and they patrolled around in pairs. Well, they talked all the times, the Germans, and you would just wait until they'd go past and you would unlock the door and step out and lock it again

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and you were outside the barrack. All you had to do was get under the wire. The way we did that, we had Saturdays ? Saturdays and Sundays in Munich were free, so we used to play Snakes & Ladders. You'd get outside, fairly close to the fence, and you'd play Snakes & Ladders, but you would have about thirty men around, cheering like hell. Someone would throw a six, ?Hooray!/? And they'd be all cheering like blazes.

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And the guards would come and have a look and work out what you were doing, mad Englishmen, you know. Well, when they'd wander off, you would snip the restraining wire at the bottom of the fence and you would pin it down with a couple of pins that I'd made in this workshop. Then at night, when they'd got out, they would shoot under there, just because the guards were inside, over the other side of the camp, they would shoot under that and go into town for the night and come back in again, and back inside the barrack.

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Well, the Germans felt that some of the boys ? I don't think they woke up that the boys were actually going out, at this stage, but they decided they wanted to fix those doors at the end. So they drove a bar through and they had a big piece of metal that came up and dropped in a slot, with a lock on it, which meant that when that when the boys went out that night they just had to duck their head as they went under this bit of bar, because the door opened the other way. The Germans, again, woke up to that and they drilled a hole through the bar

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and put a bolt through, so the boys had to hide outside. They'd hide outside, get up in the roof of the toilets, or the washhouse, and stay there. Inside the barracks, when the evening camp was on, we had to line up inside the passage, and as they passed they counted you and you'd break off and go into your room. Well then, we found that the wooden ceilings we had were panels, about a metre square.

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You'd prise one of them loose and you could tear along the roof and drop down in the end room and come out and be counted. So when the boys wanted to go out at night, you would arrange it for two or three to nip along and drop down and be counted at the end of the day. This went on quite well, for quite some time. Some smart Alec overdid it once and there was about five men too many, they couldn't work out how that happened. And later they found these pins holding the wire down, that blew that. But it was quite a good experiment, that.

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When blokes would be nicking off outside the camp, what would be the attraction out there?

If you can't work that out, I think you had better have a yarn with your Mum.

Was it just women? Or was it beer, or ?

Women, and plus the fact that you'd say, 'Stuff the bloody Germans! I can get out for a while.' And you'd just do it, because it was a challenge. That's all it was.

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This fence we had around the camp was about six foot high, and I was only a little bloke, and I wanted to get out to see a friend of mine, and I got tossed over this fence and I was on the outside looking in. And I had to walk across this football and I could feel the machine gun ploughing into my back all the way across, you know. I came back late at night, I was right, they never knew about it.

It sounds like it was pretty slack, I suppose, from their point of view?

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Well, as I said earlier, the Bavarians are different, and they were winning the war all the way through, at this stage, and we were just unfortunate fellows that got swept up in it. And we were an easy going mob of people, we weren't aggressive, like other captors that they had. We had no chips on our shoulders.

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We just sort of mingled in with them and they sort of trusted us quite a bit. The blokes that did shoot through, they were usually caught and reprimanded and punished accordingly. But they regarded that, as I said earlier, as part of their duty as a soldier. It's only when we got up into Poland and met up with the different country, entirely.

What did you miss the most when you were a POW?

That's a bit hard to say.

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I missed my family, because I had two sisters who I was very close to, and my Mum, of course, she was a battler. I felt it was a bit unfortunate that I couldn't help support them a bit, there was that side about it. I think the thing we missed most was a bloody good feed of mutton, or a baked dinner. That is something that you really ? do miss.

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The discussion on food varied with how you were, whether you were physically fit or just down. But that was a big thing, we did miss a good feed of meat.

That was something that you would discuss? As far as food was concerned?

Oh, sometimes sitting down ? But you would pass the time away in different ways. Now one fellow had a gramophone. We were in this camp for nearly eighteen months or so, he had a portable gramophone and a stack of 78s, and a lot of them were in English, and we used to sit down and listen to those in the afternoon.

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Things like Musseta's Waltz Song was one, The Flower Song was another ? some prominent Australian soprano, and you'd be home with them, sort of thing. We had our other activities. I had the entertainment, other fellows had different things, they would sketch ? You'd pass the time away. You'd settle into a routine after a while.

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When it came to sketching, you could always buy pencils.

With mail, was that a regular thing in both camps?

Pretty good, yes, it was. I don't know how often our parents could write, but we could write home once a fortnight. They gave you a special form, which you had to write on in pencil, and these all got home.

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I had a whole stack of them there, after the war, I don't know where they are now. And we got letters from Australia, from England, from my aunts and uncles in England, too, I got mail from them. My aunts in England sent me parcels, periodically. They weren't food parcels. Books, for example, she used to sneak a few off her shelf at home and they turned up. They were quite good in that respect. But we did write regularly,

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and we got regular mail right up until the time we walked out the gates, to walk across Europe.

Was there any form of censorship?

Oh, yes, strict all the way.

What were the rules?

Well, you didn't say anything ? your common sense would tell you what to say and what not to say, and it would be blanked out anyway. Whether they approved of it ? well, if they didn't approve of it, it was nothing, scrubbed.

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I even got photos from home, or some I took before the war. I was up in the hills there at Araluen, a girlfriend pointing to the lake. Well, they chopped the lake out, it was snipped out by the censor. How big's the lake at Araluen? And how important was that? I told her, 'Well, they left your arm on, anyway. That's one thing.'

That is quite bizarre.

That was, anyway.

That was Australian censorship?

Yeah.

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And the Germans, they used to give us special form, as I said, a very shiny paper, you couldn't really fudge anything on it, you couldn't muck around with it. If it was in anyway distraught or something they would just tear it up and throw it away, anyway, so it serves you right, you knew the rules. It serves you right you knew the rules. Invariably your letters were the same. 'I am well. I hope you are well,' and so on. You would never tell them the miserable things that would happen.

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So you couldn't actually give them any detail about your life?

No, except, well, okay, 'I'm in the camp entertainments. We put on this play or that play.' Something of this nature. But basically, you can't tell them the rotten things. I couldn't tell them that so and so got belted down with a rifle butt. You wouldn't do that, because it's going to make someone at home unhappy, anyway. It would have been censored and cut out, no doubt.

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Do you think there was a total misunderstanding of what life in a POW camp was like?

Oh, yes, I think there was. How do you describe the loneliness? The sense of being locked up for four years? Of not being able to make an opinion? Or think up something to do and do it, without being punished for doing something wrong? There was all of this. And it's with you for years and years, after the war, it really is. Well, I didn't know it at the time, but

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I was mad as a meat axe when I got home. I thought I was quite sane. It is probably the incarceration and the inability to do things for yourself, think for yourself, so that was a big problem.

Do you think it's the removal of freedom, or the combination of the removal of freedom and that being life threatening?

No, it wasn't the life threatening bit. The removal of freedom,

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and the inability to be with those who are most important to you in your life. There I was, my Dad died, I wasn't home to help my Mum and things of this nature. All your old mates that you used to play football with or go yachting with, they're not there, they're somewhere else. That was another traumatic thing, because when you got home half of team mates were gone.

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Gone up the islands and disappeared, and things of that nature. But that's another aspect of war we weren't really discussing. But no, loss of freedom and not being near to those who are most important to you in your life.

Can you remember the day that you were told that you could go?

Oh yes, as I said earlier, these American fellows turned up and said, 'You're right. You're free. Make your way up to Regensburg.'

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Which we did do. There was no mad rejoicing or anything, because we knew it was inevitable, that we were going to be freed. We never lost any doubt that we would have a win. We knew damn well we were going to win the war. When this American fellow turned us loose, well, there it was, we were free. Simple. And we hung together and made our way up to Regensburg, as I have already explained.

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Was there at any point some sort of air raid when you were moved between camps?

I've been bombed from one end of Germany to the other, I think. In Munich there were a few raids there, not big raids. But I understand one of the reasons why we were moved out of Munich was because according to the Geneva Conventions, they had to do that sort of thing,

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in the event of frequent air raids. We had slit trenches, or big trenches, six foot deep dug in the camp at Munich, and when the air raid siren sounded we had to go out into them, so you could watch the air raid from where you were. But it would be only five or six planes. But later, in the war, we got mixed up in some of those thousand-bomber raids which were really bad news.

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One was at Regensburg. We were camped in a barn about fifteen kilometres out of Regensburg, a place called Obertraubling. And they used to take us in a little choofer train into Regensburg to clean up the bomb damage that had been going on long before we got there. You passed through a railway marshalling yard to get to the town.

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And then one day, coming back, the train pulled up and the fellow said, 'Everyone out!' And we got out because there were bombers coming over from one horizon to the other, big four-engine bombers, and they started dropping their

bombs. We were between the town and the marshalling yards, and they started bombing, and bits of the town were disappearing, and they were steadily coming toward you. And you could see the planes, you could see the bombs leaving. ?Oh, this lot's for us.?

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You would swear that they were going to land on you, but they passed us and landed on the marshalling yards and wiped out the marshalling yards. We were in the middle of all this. It was quite a thing to hang onto, I can tell you.

It was quite a stressful situation.

Interviewee: Arthur Leggett Archive ID 1413 Tape 08

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Your second take off was a little more successful than the first one, Arthur?

Yes. You mean in the Avro Lancasters? Yes. We arrived in England and from there on life just become wonderful.

Whereabouts were you in England?

Somewhere up the north of England. We immediately got in a train and we travelled for hours down to Eastbourne, on the south coast.

What was going on board the flight? Any memories?

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Oh yes, there was indeed, because in an Avro Lancaster, they're not built for tourists, you can't see out of them, and I'm sitting on this projection over the bomb bay, under the turret gunner. And after we had taken off from Brussels, or we had been flying for awhile, he gives me a kick with his foot, signals me, and I get up there in this cramped little dome and he points down and you can see the coast straight away,

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and you're over the channel, and you can see, there's England. Well, there it was. England. The history that I had been taught, thousands of year of English history that had been drummed into me. There was uncles, aunts and cousins there, this was where my Mum and Dad came from. All this crap that had been pumped into us as kids, it all welled up, and I thought, ?Gee, this is marvellous, it's really England.? It took a great big lot of swallowing, I can tell you there.

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It was quite an experience, that bit, because of the reasons I have just stated, more than anything else. Not the sense of freedom, it was just the sense of heredity and belonging.

Was that sense of freedom discussed between you and the other ex POWs?

No, we just accepted it. You're free, that's it, as simple as that. In military life, you became a little bit blasé about events that go on around you, because you have to be, otherwise you'd go. Being free ? we were free.

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But we were looking forward to what we had in store once we were free.

Where about did you land?

I can't tell you the name of the place. It was up north of England, because the train journey down to Eastbourne was quite some hours. Eastbourne was the town taken by the Australian Army for repatriation and movement of its troops from Germany

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to Australia. It was staffed by Australian military personnel, who had done quite a bit of service, most of them were well decorated, they had been in it. And this apparently, I gathered, was a bit of a reward for services rendered, and

they were administering this ? process of getting men in, equipping them with uniforms and sending them home.

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I had a particular mate as a teenager who was in the 2/28th Battalion, he had grown up more or less as my brother, and he had been captured in Tobruk, he was one of the 'Rats Of Tobruk.' Well, we met up again at Eastbourne, he and I, and we were as thick as thieves, and we started conniving and thinking there ? A funny thing again, military discipline ? Let's go back a bit. The day we got into Eastbourne, we were taken to a big house

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which had been commandeered, because all that area had been evacuated, the army had taken over these big houses, there was billets and so on, and there was camp stretchers spread all around the floor in these big rooms. We were given a parcel each which had pyjamas, shaving gear, soap, towel and a little dressing gown with slippers, and I thought, 'Oh, this is all right.' This was about six o'clock at night. So we all had a shower and we got into our pyjamas

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and we were sitting around there, smoking and yarning, and thinking how good it all was. And a bloke who had come in earlier in the day, he comes bursting into the place, and he said, 'Down the bottom of the hill there's a town, and it's got a dance hall in it and it's full of sheilas and they all speak English.' Well, gosh, we hadn't spoken to a sheila in English for years. So we put on these uniforms that we had walked across Europe in, you can imagine what they were like, filthy and dirty and so on, but that's all we had.

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And about twenty of us go down this hill to the town, a place called the Wintergarden, and the dance hall was in the basement of this building. It would cover, oh, about four acres I suppose, the dance hall. All around it was beer bars and sandwich bars and tables and chairs. But we didn't know it at the time, but we go there. The girl in the ticket office wouldn't take any money from us, probably because she thought

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we might wreck the joint, because you can imagine what we looked like. And as you go into this dance hall, there's like semi-circular platform, and three or four steps going down to the dance floor. Well, we stood on this platform, bunched together, because we had been bunched together for four years. This was protection, we didn't know what the hell to do. And there's this beautiful sight that I just described to you. And as we're standing there, suddenly there's movement and all the girls got up and come across and took our hands

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and took us back to the tables and sat us down, because they knew we were coming. And that's a moment I still get emotional about it, because it was just such a wonderful experience to know that you belong somewhere, at last. This was quite good. And of course that became a regular spot, the dance hall.

What happened when you joined the girls?

Oh, we didn't talk about what we had been doing, we just talked about the usual froth and bubble stuff.

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Of course, I'm telling them I'm the great Australian cattle station owner, because the Belgian money I had all ready to change into English money, and it amounted to several hundred quid, actually. Plus the fact that our pay books had been accumulating our military pay and we were fairly rich men. The next morning we were to be issued with Australian uniforms.

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We were all lined up outside the quartermaster's, and there was a telephone box nearby, so I thought, 'Gee, I'll go and ring my aunty up.' So I phoned up my aunty and told her I was there, and that I would get up to see her, and so on ?

Can I just ask you where you got her number from?

I had it with me, from the time I left Australia ?

You had managed to hang onto that?

Yeah, there were a few things that I hung onto. It's surprising, you hear about wristwatches being snatched off you and all that. I've still got the wristwatch my family bought me in 1939, when I was going overseas.

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It's got my regimental number on the back of it and everything. I wore it, I never had to take it off once, yet other blokes had them snatched off them straight away. Anyway, I phoned Aunty, and then I go back to get in the queue and up comes the sergeant major. 'Where have you been?' 'Oh, I just went to phone my aunty, tell her I was here.' 'You were absent without leave.' I thought, 'Jesus, hang on, mate.' Anyway, he gave me quite a dressing down because you can't do that, here in the army.

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Well, being ex-POW, so discipline is something you fought all the way. I had to get on the end of the queue, that's where I first met my ginger headed mate from the 2/28th Battalion. He said, 'If it had been me, I would have put you on a bloody charge, too.' We were equipped with uniforms, and I stayed there for a few days, so did my mate. As I say, we did a bit of conniving.

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He found out that they needed transport drivers, well, he reckoned he was a good transport driver because he used to ride horses on the station, and I was a signaller, so I got a job on the telephone exchange in this ? what we called Number 3 Transit Camp. All the troops were eventually gone, so they were looking for telephone exchange operators at Australian Army Headquarters, in a nice hotel down on the waterfront, so I got that job.

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We had six men to man this hotel. You come in the doorway, there's a big lobby, desks everywhere where all the captains, lieutenants and rubber stamp merchants sat, to process the men, and then around the corner there was a little room with a telephone exchange was. You can imagine the hotel and that is where the telephone exchange was. There was six of us to man that twenty-four hours a day.

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Well, we worked out that if you did it in twelve hour shifts you could vanish for days on end, no-one knew where you were. So this we did, quite often. My mate got a job as a transport driver for one of the officers there, and we managed to stay in England for three months before we left there. It was quite an experience. All sorts of funny things happened there, I'm talking about the good times now, of course, which you remember more than the bad times.

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My wife, I will tell you how I met my wife. I was set up there. She had a very attractive sister who was out in the middle of this floor, jitterbugging around, and I had never seen anything like this before in my life, so I thought, 'I've got to get to know her.' So I asked her for a dance, and while we were doing my interpretation of the Fox Trot, or whatever it was, prattling away, 'You should meet my sister,' she said. 'Why?' 'Hates Australians, she hates them.'

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Well, I can tell you now, fifty-four years and two daughters and six grandkids and six great grandkids, I'm still trying to convince her that we're a pretty good mob of blokes. I still reckon I was set up. On this telephone exchange one night ? well, by eight o'clock at night there would be no business, and we used to sleep beside it with the buzzer on. And the damn phone goes mad, it's my wife's sister, she's on the loose with a bunch of air force characters around the town and they'd missed the last train. Five of them were billeted around the town

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and she still had one left, and can I help them at all. ?Yeah, I've got a bed upstairs, up on the seventh floor. Bring him in, I'll sneak him up there,? because the place is dead. no one around. So in he comes. I said, ?When you pull up, does he know the Morse code?? She said, ?Oh, yes.? I said, ?Well, tell him to sound Vic Eddy [Morse code call signal], knock on the door. Vic Eddy.? Well, they pull up in a clapped out old heap of tin and they blast Vic Eddy on a claxon horn just to let people know they'd arrived.

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I sneak him and take him up to my room. Next morning, on comes my relief, and I get my breakfast eating gear, I go and have breakfast, come back. The fellow says, ?Quiet night?? I said, ?Oh, yes.? And oh geez, I've got that bloke upstairs, what am I gong to do? Because all the majors, colonels and captains and whatever are in with their rubber stamps in this lobby, I've got this bloke upstairs and the lift doesn't work, you had to come down the stairs. So I go and shake him, ?Come on. I have got to get you out of here,

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and I don't know how we're going to go about it. We'll just have to see what happens.? So we wind our way down the steps and when we get to the last flight of steps, before we go round the corner, I said, ?Look, it is full of bloody officers. You shouldn't really be in here, so I don't know what's going to happen. But the door is straight in front of the end of the stairway. Okay?? ?Yes, leave it to me.? He straightens up his tie and his uniform, tilts his cap right, you know, walks around the corner and just stands there.

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And I said, ?Jesus, we're gone now.? And one of the officers spots him and yells out, ?Attention!?! And everyone jumps to attention, and he walks right through the middle, tosses a salute. I've got a wing commander under my care for the night. And we go straight through that door and I never come back for two days, and by that time they had forgotten all about it. That was just one of the funny things that happened. We met up with my wife and she had a girlfriend

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and my mate finished up marrying this girlfriend, and my wife and I still get together. She came out to Australia. They still go out together, and this is ? what, sixty years now. So there's a lot of good things like that.

How long was it before you proposed?

About six weeks, but she was a bit slow. It took her several weeks to make up her mind. I had a lot of competition with a Canadian fellow, who happened to be in France at the time when I arrived in England.

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Eileen was very worried about what happened when we met up, because this fellow was under the impression that he was going to marry Eileen. When we did meet up, we went out and got blind drunk together, which didn't please her very much. There was a bit of a battle, we tore the poor woman to pieces between us, I think. But anyway, eventually, he handed over.

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He was a good competitor, and I have a lot of respect for him, it was an honest to goodness show. So there we are. I came home first.

Where about did you propose?

That's another remarkable incident. My mate and I, we bought a couple of motor bikes. Mine was a 1927 BSA Sloper, and this was 1945,

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so it wasn't exactly the best of bikes, but it suited us. He had an old Ariel. I pick up Eileen one night. My mate had been accepted by his future wife, so I said, 'I think I might propose tonight. I'll think about it. So I got Eileen on the pillion on this bike and we go up to Beachy Head, we park the bike by the roadside, and we just wander up the slope a bit.

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And I'm sitting there trying to think up a bit of courage, this was a big moment, and didn't know exactly what to do. And I can hear a bloody motor bike coming up the hill. I thought, 'Oh no.' Eileen said, 'Yeah, I can hear it, too.' And they pull up beside my bike and this silly hen comes racing up the slope. 'Has he asked you yet? Has he asked you yet?' She said, 'Asked what?' So I said, 'Well, the idea was, I was going to ask you if you'd think of marrying me.'

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Anyway, she said, 'I will have to think about this.' And that's what she did, but eventually it came off. So, anyway, eventually we agreed. But I said, 'Look, I've been locked up for a long while. I think I had better go home first and sort all this out.'

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Which was a logical thing to do, but not very wise, because naturally the girls thought, 'Oh, another bloody soldier come and gone,' sort of thing. It was fourteen months before she managed to get out, and when she came out here, I think there was something like thirty brides in the cabin when she came out here as well. It was a very rugged set up, but anyway, she did come out here and we were married in Perth.

What did you do during that time you were apart?

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Back home, I realised that I was going to get married and I had to do something about a living, so I went back to the firm that I had been working for as a junior worker. Part of the scheme was they had to take me back, being an ex-serviceman, that was the law of the land, and under the post-war Reconstruction Scheme I could learn a trade, having been employed in that work before the war.

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Of course a two year apprenticeship, and it was not exactly accepted by the unions, they were against this, but nevertheless, it was a right. In my ignorance, I wanted to be a boiler maker. A boiler maker in structural steelworks is not making boilers, he's marking out the steel and shaping it up for welders and so on to put together, or rivet it. But no, the boiler makers wouldn't have me doing that

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because I wasn't doing boiling making work in the war. I asked them, how about an electric welder's apprenticeship. So they said, 'Well, that wouldn't apply there, would it?' Well, fortunately, I was working with welders in Munich, so

a couple of my mates wrote out statutory declarations to that effect, and I got an apprenticeship as an arc welder, or a boilermaker's welder, as they call them.

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So when the wife came out, we were obliged to be married within three weeks, under the conditions she came out in, and I was working then as a boilermaker welder, at the time. So we more or less got on our feet from there.

So you had come home to get on your feet?

Yes.

I should ask you, how you came how and where you discharged?

Oh, we came home from England in the Dominion Monarch was the ship.

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It had been converted into a troop ship. There was eighteen of us Australians they were left that they had rounded up in England to send home, and we had one of these mess tables, I had explained earlier, with eighteen men in it. The rest of the whole ship was empty. We get to the Suez Canal and they fill it up with Kiwis, who are going home from North Africa, and we come in for a lot of ribbing just being the only eighteen Australians there.

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They'd ask us, 'What do you think of the New Zealand mutton, and the New Zealand butter?? All this. We came right down past the coast, and I was listening to the grand final of the football that year, and we finished up in New Zealand. They took us right past Western Australia, all the way round to New Zealand, unloaded these Kiwis and then we went back to Sydney. We had a lot of air force personnel on board the ship, the Royal Australian Air Force.

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And incidentally, when we got on the ship the first thing you do is boat drill. You are issued with a life jacket which you hang onto all the time. They sound this boat drill, and I'm boring along the deck, around a corner, and I smack into an air force bloke and put him on his arse, and I'm sitting on mine, too. And it's this ginger headed pilot from this Lancaster that had crashed in Brussels. He said, 'Look where you're going, soldier.' I said, 'Look, if you're on this bloody boat, mate,

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and they sound any alarms, I'm not looking around for anybody. I'm just going.' And then he recognised me, of course, and it was quite a reunion. We finished up from New Zealand back in Sydney, and that was a lovely entry there, because all these air force blokes were stacked all over the boat. We had a wonderful welcome there. There was a drive through Sydney, at lunchtime, and then the brass come on the ship and said,

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'You Queenslanders? Train going in a couple of hours, get on that.' Allocated to everyone, 'You West Australians, pick up your gear and move down the wharf. There's a ship moving out this afternoon to Fremantle.' Well, we bucked about this, we had a captain and a lieutenant with us, there was only five of us West Australians. We said, 'Sir, we've been on this thing six weeks. Now come on, give us a bit of leave.' They bucked and we got four days leave.

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I shot down to Newcastle where I've got some friends there. Little points that I've forgotten as I go along ? when we were camped in Greta, in New South Wales, a mate of I got leave into Newcastle on a Sunday, where nothing ever happened in those days, and we met up with three girls there, and they showed us all round Newcastle. That evening we took them to tea, and when our train left we put them in taxis and sent them home. When we got back we wrote and

thanked them,

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and they wrote to us. Well, now we don't write any more, we just pick the phone up and have a yarn, and we're still the best of friends. And this started way back then. It was great. So when I got this leave in Sydney, on my way home, I went straight down to Newcastle, of course, to be with these girls, who had written to us all through the war. They had joined the Red Cross, told where my Mum where I was before the army could tell her. They knew where I was. They did all these wonderful things.

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Then we get back to Sydney, we're in Sydney Showground, and the chappie there said, 'We've got some fellows coming from Japan prisoner of war camps. We could do with a bit of a hand to get them from the bus onto the train. Can you give us a hand?' 'Oh yeah.' We'd been three months in England on good food, we'd had a six week voyage home, we were pretty right, she's right. We go up to Central Railway station,

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and these buses pull up, and these skeletons come out of the door of these buses. They step down these steps and finish on their knees on the bloody dirt there. We had to pick them and take them to the train and put them in a bed, it was a train full of sleeping carriages. That was a very nasty experience, that. We had our gear, we were going to Melbourne on the same train. We tried to talk to them,

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but they talked out the side of their mouths, and they just looked around before they said anything. They had a very rough time.

Where had they been taken prisoners?

They were taken down to Melbourne, they come from Victoria.

Where about had they been taken ?

They had come from the Japanese hands, they had been brought down by ship, and from the ship in a bus to the station to go down to Melbourne. We went down with them. When we got to Melbourne, we shunted up into a yard,

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and there was cars, a hundred cars or more, waiting for us, and they were put in these cars, and it was just around lunch time, and there was a car parade through the streets of Melbourne. Thousands of people there had turned out, just to make you feel as though you were part of the country. That, too, was a pretty great feeling, I can tell you. The Lord Mayor was there, he took his hat off to us.

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But the people just leant through the window to touch you, and to say, 'Welcome home.' It was a very touching experience. They took most of the blokes off to some hospital to look after them. We got leave in Melbourne, we had a pretty good time there. Then we were put on a boat and taken back to Perth around, by ship, which was quite nice.

I'd imagine you were quite frustrated by the first pass of Perth, when you came around ?

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Oh, yes, that was a bit hard, after all these years, especially when shipping news had now been published in the paper. My Mum knew what ship I was on, and it was coming into Fremantle on this particular day, and she had saved up for weeks, and she had a massive meal spread out with all our friends and relations there, and we were on our way around to New Zealand.

You did actually come into port, did you?

No, we never even saw the land.

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We never saw the land until we were going through Cape Howe at the bottom of Australia.

You said you listened to the football grand final?

Yes.

Was that the WAFL [Western Australian Football League]?

Yes, the WAFL, that was.

Who was playing that year?

Swan Districts, I think it was, and ? West Perth. I'm pretty sure that's who it was. I listened to that, but I never saw it for another six weeks until I got home.

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There would have been a crowd around the wireless wouldn't there?

No, there was only five or six of us West Australians on the boat, the rest couldn't care less. In fact, they were flinging the muck at us. ?We'll throw you bastards overboard if you really want to go.? That's the sort of thing it was.

Then you went with them all the way to New Zealand?

Yeah, oh yes. And we never touched land from the Suez until we got to New Zealand.

Where did they disembark?

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Oh, several ports. I can't tell you immediately, but there was a port in the North Island and one in the South Island as well, and they pulled into both of those, and it was very touching.

Did you get any leave in New Zealand?

Only twenty four hours at one of the towns ? No, it wasn't even twenty four hours, it was six hours ? No, we never even got leave. The RSL [Returned and Services League] I think it was, or the

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Ex-Serviceman's Organisation, they just picked us up and took us to somewhere where there was a celebration, and then took us back to the ship, on both islands.

I've heard stories about the New Zealanders being a pretty rugged mob. What was this crowd like?

Well, these were tough men, they had been in the Western Desert fighting the Germans, they had no illusions. But as individuals, we got on well with them. But, mind you, there was only five of us, or rather eighteen Australians, we couldn't much if we wanted to cut it rough. But no, it was quite an amicable arrangement.

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Did you trade war stories?

Not a great deal, no. You are looking forward rather than backward, from there onwards. Can't say we traded war stories, I can't remember any, unless of course we told them how good we were, I don't know if they were listening.

You weren't curious to ask them about the Western Desert?

No, we had been there, done that.

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That's an attitude we had of course, it's all muck slinging. ?We've been to the Western Desert.? ?We'd beaten you there, mate.? The same as today, when we go along and meet up with some of the ?Rats of Tobruk.' They say, ?Were you a Rat of Tobruk?? ?No, mate, we took Tobruk. We handed it over to you blokes to look after it, remember?? This sort of thing still goes on, of course it does.

Just a bit of chiacking?

Yes, chiacking.

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I think we were at the point of arriving in Fremantle, finally.

Yes, well, there was quite a big crowd at Fremantle to meet us, to bring the ship in. We got off the ship and we were put into a bus. I had no relatives there. That's right, take me into one of the sheds to be rubber stamped, I suppose. I don't know what it was. The army had to say we were back.

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We were put in a bus and taken up to Swanbourne Rifle Range. That was quite a big military set up there then. And all the family had been taken there as well to meet us, and that was quite nice.

That must have been an emotional greeting?

It was a bit. There were two of us, me and one of my boys, we couldn't see anyone we knew there so we were having a cup of tea, and my sister turned up,

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and she said, 'You can put that down, sport. Mum's over here.' So I went crook at her for interfering with me for having a cup of tea. Not getting too serious. But no, it was great. It was good to see the family there and Mum. Then there was a car provided that took us all back home to where we lived at the time.

So how long were you at Swanbourne?

Oh, not long at all. A few hours at the very most.

Were you processed again there?

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No, we were processed down at Fremantle in the shed. This was a welcome home thing, tea and cake. What do they say? Tea and sympathy, I suppose. No, we weren't there that long, once we got organised.

What happened when your mum took you home?

Well, again, she had managed to garnish up enough food to put on a lovely evening meal, with silverware and nice Irish linen cloths and serviettes.

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And then the room that I left when I went overseas, that was there, just as I left it. A photo of Nelson Eddie on one wall, and Diana Durban on the other, and my writing desk and little things like that, and the bed. It was just like getting back home again. And a whole heap of letters from Eileen.

It must have been quite surreal experience to be back in your little world again, your bedroom?

Well, that's right. It's the house that I knew, that I'd lived in.

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It was very much so. You think, 'Oh well, it's all over now. It's finished.' So we looked forward, and see where we'll go from here. And this is the attitude that I'll always adopt. Although I've been talking about the war for hours, I just regard it as a bit of a glitch in a long life, although I'm still associated with military activities. I was fortunate, too, in the year 2001, to be selected as the Australian contingent

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to go back to the 60th anniversaries in Greece and Crete, to represent Australia, which was another wonderful experience.

While we're on that subject, what did that mean to you, to go back?

Oh, that blew a lot of cobwebs away, because you go back to the sites where you had been in some horrendous situations, and ?

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Well, this nice land again, it's harmonious, there's no fighting. The village Migara, where we were evacuated from, is a lovely little seaside town. We sat down in a café there and had a leisurely cup of coffee, instead of backing out and scrambling for a boat, you were sitting there and looking at where it all happened, which made it most enjoyable. And we were spoilt, the Greeks couldn't do enough for you. You'd be walking along the street and they would just come up and put their hand on you and say, ?Australia.? And leave it at that.

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There was quite a few official functions which we had to attend, which were terrific.

You say you were selected to go back, were you Arthur?

Yes, the Commonwealth Government sent round circulars looking for ? men to go who had been in Greece and Crete, and the Ex-POW Association submitted my name, but the circulars went all around every military unit and

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ex-service unit, and so on. And anyway, I was selected to go. It was quite a privilege.

When did you actually discharge from the army?

Late 1945, and the process simply was, you had a fortnights leave when I got home, and you reported down to Karrakatta Military Barracks

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and you were discharged there. You walked in there as a soldier and you walked out as a civilian, with coupons to buy clothes. So that was quite a simple process, really.

What was the first thing you did as a civilian?

I can't quite remember, tell you the honest truth ? probably went into a pub with a few mates to have a beer or two.

What was the popular watering hole in those days?

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It's gone now, it was the Hotel Australia in Murray Street, just near Forest Place. That was a popular one with us. I was never a big drinker, but we still met up together, because of that oneness, you sort of felt that you needed to be near your mates, after all those years. I was never a big drinker and I got involved and let it go at that.

Did you have any difficulties adjusting, or re-acclimatising?

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I didn't think so at the time, but when I look back, God yes, I was in a hell of a mess. And things that I did that were just so ? disorientated. I won't say they were bad, but they were irregular and wrong. For example, they had a scheme where you could build your house under the war Service Land Scheme. I had a block of land in Bayswater, a quarter of an acre block.

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And when we married, the wife and I went to Manjimup for awhile, then that job cut out, we had two kids by then, two real young ones. One had just been born, actually. That job wasn't suitable so we were going to come back to Perth. We couldn't come back to where my Mum was because she had a couple of boarders in there, who had emigrated from England, a couple of young fellows. Whom we still see, by the way. So my brother in law,

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he had finished his house, so we moved in there, and so did my other sister. So there was this house that he built for him and his wife and his kids, there was him in it with his wife and two kids, there was Eileen and I with our two kids, and there was my other sister with her two kids, all in one house. And we lived that way for about thirteen to fifteen months. But gradually it dawned on me this was not the right thing, I had better do something.

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Well, I got a permit to build this house on the block. What you did, you worked weekends, and as you progressed, so they gave you progress payments. But I put up a ten by twenty cement brick garage on this block, and we lived in that for two years while I built this house. When I look back, of course, I really should have got stuck into this house and rallied men around and got it done, but I didn't, I fiddled around and I mucked about.

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And material was hard to get, for one thing. My brother in laws were both builders, both carpenters. And I gave them the job of doing a job, well, they were going to do it with cement with a travelling mould. Then the cement dried out and we got the floor height, so we were going to build a timber framed asbestos house, the asbestos dried up. So I got a brick house. Well, then, I had to get a brickie. Brickies were as scarce as hell.

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And we got a brickie who might turn up, might not, it depended on whether he got full the night before. And this went on for two years, and how my wife stuck to me I don't know, probably because she couldn't get home. But I did have a bad time. The same as at work. As you know with welding, you've got a hood over your head, and you'd be working away there, and all the things that you'd been through were crowding in on you all the time.

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And that's where I got my first bit of post war counselling from the foreman. I'd take this hood off, sit down, shake my head and take a few deep breaths, and he would come up and say, 'Get on with the bloody job, will you? You're not paid to sit on your arse all day.' And that was my post war counselling.

Did it work?

No. Well, in a sense that I realised that I was in the sort of work that I didn't really like at all, I wasn't cut out for that sort of work at all.

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So I went back to night school. I finished up being a job coster and timekeeper in a engineering firm, but I went from one job to another. I did earn my living as a welder for several years, and I got a job as a travelling salesman for agricultural machinery, while I'm building this house. And I would go away for a fortnight at a time, and I would be home for a weekend. Meanwhile my wife has got two kids in this ten by twenty bloody shed, and I'm way out in the countryside.

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I didn't think right. Probably because during the POW life, I used to think, 'Well, who are the backbone of Australia?? The agriculture community was then, therefore I'm going to be of service to the agricultural community. Well, the agricultural community gets on all right without my help, I should have thought of number one all the time. And so I fiddled around and moved from one job to another without any stability,

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until I went to night school and I finished up being a job coster and timekeeper in an engineering firm. Well, that was good. But the last eleven years of my life were the most productive. I finished up being the purchasing and expediting officer for a firm at Subiaco, and we were dealing with American firms that supplied material for the iron ore business up north,

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and I had to keep control of that stuff until it was delivered. I had my own typist, my own secretary, my own little office. Those were the last years. I still see the typist, the secretary and the old managing director, I still see them regularly, all of them. It's really only since I retired that I've really lined myself up properly, I feel.

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But becoming involved with ex-service units and other commitments, and schools, I'm associated with a school as a mentor for kids that are a bit off the beam up there. And I have also, in my capacity in the Prisoner of War Association, I have managed to get our memorial in Kings Park, at the Subiaco end, that has been adopted by Mount Rawley Senior High School,

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and we're going to spend \$32,000 to bring it up in the next six months, so when we fade away, there is something they can look up to in their mature adult life, and we trust show their kids. These things all sort of get you out of the smallness of yourself, and you expand without being aware of it. That's the way things are. And as I say, I'm off to Ballarat later this coming week

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to be at the commemoration service of that memorial there. Well, the WA Ex-POW Association insisted that I go, and they have paid my fare there and back, which I thought was very uplifting. It shows that you are leading the way that people want to be, and they think something of you.

Sounds like an important date there, Arthur.

Yes, I think it will be.

Interviewee: Arthur Leggett Archive ID 1413 Tape 09

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I was going to ask you about concentration camp atrocities. When you found out that the Germans were as completely and totally ugly as they were, did that surprise you?

In a sense we knew that there were political prisoners, and we knew that Jews were walking around with the Star of David on them ? quite frankly, no, I didn't know about the real atrocities,

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but as I have commented earlier I regard the Nazi Party as a cancerous growth within a fine nation. And we are partly to blame because we laid the base for it in the Treaty of Versailles, where we tried to bleed the country completely and that laid the ground for a bloke like Hitler to develop, which any nation would have done, I would think. But I had no idea that all these activities were going on.

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Although we did know that in Poland, some terrible things had happened in Auschwitz, that's all. But the gassing of people and the incineration, we never knew about that. Well, I never anyway.

Because Poland had quite a few death camps, didn't they?

Oh yes, Auschwitz and there was ? Dachau, and there was also a third one, fairly close to where we were.

I was wondering if that was Mauthausen.

No Baron von Munchausen

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was a character in German mythology. No I can't think of the other one. As I say, I've been trying to forget it.

Sure. It's just interesting that when they started walking some of the Germans through some of these concentration camps, to prove to them that it really happened ? what did you think about that sort of head space? Because a lot of the Germans they were walking through, they weren't walking through just necessarily the military, they were walking through civilians.

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I saw newsreels of it, they rounded up the civilian population and walked them through so that they would actually know what had happened within their own country. But I never knew of the vastness of it until I saw it on newsreels and read about it after the war. Because again, we were military and we were isolated from that sort of thing. We weren't subject to political pressures.

What did you think when you saw some of the Japanese POWs come back on the boat that you mentioned?

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Well, how can you feel? The bottom line is you think, 'Poor bastards.' But when you realise that amongst them were your mates that you knew, as a teenager, in those wonderful years, as I mentioned, while you're developing from boyhood into manhood, and you see these horrible wrecks come back. Oh, it instigated a hatred for the Japanese, which will never die in my generation.

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That I know, it won't. Even though you realize that it's not going to last forever, but as far as my generation's concerned ? because it was so totally foreign to our attitude towards your fellow men. We fought Germans, yes, and we took prisoners, they took prisoners. But those mongrel bastards, they just took men to destroy them, and worked them to death. You can never forgive that, no. No way.

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Is there a lot of that deep-seated hatred towards the Japanese in POW associations?

Oh, yes. Our blokes will never, ever forget it, nor change. In fact, one of our lads recently had a book published called One Fourteenth Part of an Elephant. And if you don't hate the Japs, just read that, and you will never feel the same again, if you're an old soldier.

What is the significance of that title?

They reckoned that fourteen men made up the strength of one elephant,

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so an individual was the fourteenth part of an elephant. That's how he got his title. A fellow named Denys Peek, he lives here in Perth, I know him well. It's certainly a book that I would recommend.

How difficult was it finding out about a lot of your friends? Because I mean you were isolated in prison camps, so you didn't have a lot of contact between, you know, who's where, who's lived, who's died. So when did you get bombarded by this information?

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It was really gradual, I suppose. Things like, 'Oh, remember Gus??' 'Yeah. He was in the navy.' 'Well, he went down with the Sydney.' And you think, 'Oh, gee, tough Gus.' Because we had seen so much death and destruction that you

didn't grieve deeply about someone going, it was bloody tough luck. You did miss some of your mates, when you got back that had gone.

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But just say, 'I can't do anything about it.' So you've just got to get on with it, get on with the business of living. But it was, from a national point of view, it was really appalling, the number of men, the warm bodies, that just disappeared from Australia. This hurts immensely, still, that men could ever be treated like it. It is horrendous. You've really got to read about it to understand,

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and mix with the men who did it. It's something that you will never, ever forgive or forget, no matter what the do-gooders say. I realise Japan is necessary for our existence, they got all our iron ore, but they realise they don't have to conquer this country. They can buy it. And we will gladly sell it to them. But we've got no alternative because if you want this country to develop, we haven't got the money, it has got to come from overseas.

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Again, there is old blokes like me still belly-aching, well, we don't really fit into the modern society, in that respect. You have just got to say, 'Well, we hate their guts.' It sounds silly, me being a European ex-prisoner of war, but it was my country and my mates that they were treating like mongrel dogs. So you have just got to accept things the way they are and say the new generation is not going to take

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all our hatred with them, into the future. Which is probably a good thing. But that is the experiences we had. And I'm talking about this attitude towards Japs, and yet I've said what good blokes the Germans are. So you get all mixed up with Europeans and Asians and Japanese, and the different attitudes that the different nations had. I saw a lot of good in the Germans, but by crikey, there was a lot of rotten things in them, too.

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So you accept things as they are, and you get on with the business of living.

Do you think that the fact that you almost cut yourself off from the grief of losing so many people throughout the war, do you think that actually affected you in later life? Not going through a normal grieving process?

I don't know. It's a bit hard to say. Because those of that were here,

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stuck together in our RSL gatherings, or our regimental ex-service units, and you still had mates all around you. And it's unfortunate that you lost some during the war, but a lot of people died in the war, and you were in amongst it, and you more or less emotionally accepted it, I think. The only thing that has an influence on me, we had a group, us oldies, somehow, we got together, there was about thirty of us, we used to dancing together,

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we used to go on caravan holidays and so on. And every Boxing Day, after the wear and tear of all our kids was over, we used to have a golden oldies gathering at a house. There used to be twenty four, well this year it was six. These are the people that you miss. The fellows, and their wives, that you've been mingling with since you were married, and while their children and your children were growing up.

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And while their children now have expanded, they've got lives of their own, and they've disappeared? That is the one I

find hardest, because they were pretty good mates, too. You mixed with them because you were all getting your feet on the ground and making your own way in the world, it was just that mutual support even then. I miss the companionship, for sure.

Is it important that you hang around other POWs, rather than people who weren't POWs?

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No, that doesn't mean a thing to me. There's some POWs I do meet regularly, I enjoy their company. I have a sense of commitment, as you can well understand, and I endeavour to carry out the responsibilities that they entrust me with, but I don't go looking for POWs to mix with. Some of the chaps from my old battalion, who were POWs, I see them fairly regularly.

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But no, I don't go looking for it. I've got enough on my plate anyway.

I just wanted to also ask you about, were there any special offers that were available considering the fact that your wife was a war bride?

Not a great deal. I got her out cheap. I think it cost me £45 at the time ?

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there was some arrangement, she was a fiancée, and not a bride. Brides were covered free travel out, but fiancées weren't, and I had to find £45. But that was a privilege, nevertheless, to get her out at that price. But outside of that, no, there was no real privileges on her behalf at all. Any privilege was mainly my way because I was an ex-serviceman.

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Whilst you have fellows belly-aching all the time, I think I've had a pretty good treatment from our government, since the war ended. They have looked after me physically, dentally, any sickness I get, all this, has been baksheesh for the last thirty years or more. That's really looking after a bloke, I reckon. But a lot of fellows don't, they whinge like hell about it. You volunteer for the services, so you can't go belly-aching if something goes wrong.

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Did a lot of your friends end up with a war bride?

Oh yes, quite a few in England. Yes, quite a few. I can't place them individually, but as I say, my very close mate, he married in England. And we have another friend, a widow, she's a war bride. And for years there, Eileen used to go to meetings of war brides, they all used to meet regularly. But that has sort of dropped off as time's marched on.

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Not a great deal of my friends, but a great deal of servicemen did, the fellows that got to Eastbourne. Unfortunately I think a lot of them married crap that was just laying around the place, because they were just hungry for a woman, I think. But there were some very good marriages come out of it. Well, I'd like to think that mine was a pretty good one, so was my mate's, and so was the widow,

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her husband was a good bloke and they have some wonderful kids, who are still around, looking after them. But not a lot of my personal friends married.

This is a question which is a bit of rewind. I wanted to know, did you see any refugees on your way out of Poland, after you came out of the prison camp?

Oh, yes. The roads were crowded with refugees coming out of Poland.

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Refugees were a tragic thing. We struck them, too, when we first went to Greece, they were coming out of Yugoslavia, thousands of them. And some have a wagon, this applies to Poland, too, they might have a hand cart with some bits and pieces packed on it, and that is their whole worldly possessions, reduced to that much, and they don't know where the hell they're going, where they're getting their next feed. It's a very depressing thing to see. And it just goes on twenty four hours a day, people going past.

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It was the same, from Poland, there was refugees of German descent heading back into Germany. Because the Russian ? fear of the Russian invasion was very real, a real fear. It wasn't just another army coming, because the difference between Communism ? the fact that Hitler had invaded their country.

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As far as they are concerned, the Germans invaded their country and destroyed their way of life, and he'd done his best, too. Well, they were out for revenge. They were very fierce men. And their prisoners of war had been starved and beaten and bashed to death. I've seen some terrible things happen there. And that's one of the real fears why there was so many refugees, probably.

It sounds like it was a country in absolute crisis once the war ended?

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Yes, oh yes, it was. Well, it's estimated that there was something like a million prisoners of war on the march, for one thing, across Europe. And then there's all the refugees. And there's no logistical supplies coming from anywhere, to anybody. Yes, it was a real situation, and we call it a crisis. Even though we were all bunched together, and there was every chance you would not get through the next day, either through an air raid or some other misadventure that cropped up.

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It was still a dangerous country?

Yes, that's right.

Were there a lot of Germans surrendering? What was going on with them? Did they just move it out?

No, I don't think the Germans surrendered that way, I think most of them were taken in battle, or caught in battle, put it that way, and disarmed. I don't recall any incidents of Germans surrendering.

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Although we did meet up with our guards after they had been captured. But they were just being surrounded by Americans, and put in little pockets, nothing much. ?Just put your arms down,? and you were a prisoner of war, and that was it. We met up with ? well, I did anyway, I met up with the camp commandants that had marched across Europe with us. Well, he was no longer an enemy, he was a bloke who had been through

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a rough time with the rest of us. So I just said to him, ?All the best.? ?Ja, good.? And away he went. That was that.

That's kind of a crazy situation, wasn't it?

Yes, it was, a stupid situation. But that's how things were.

You were talking about when you were in a really bad way,

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when you could barely pick yourself up when you were in the POW camp, that you made certain promises to yourself about your future. Can you extrapolate on that?

Yes, I vowed that I would never, ever get physically unfit again I would always look after my body, as something that had to be looked after. Mainly because before the war I was in a football team and that sort of thing, and physical fitness was important to me.

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And this bottom that I had sunk to appalled me that much ? when we got to England, we were fed like champions. We were built up. And then we had the six week trip home on the boat as well. By the time I got back to Australia, I was in pretty good nick already. In fact, I was discharged with a pat on the back. There was no talk of a pension or anything for me. The doctor said, 'Well, you're in marvellous physical condition,?' and showed me the door.

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But I've always looked after myself, I have engaged in physical activities ever since then, and that's just how it is.

Do you think that was a direct result of your POW experience?

Oh, yes, plus vanity, because I have had a bit of a success in that direction, and I suppose vanity has got a bit to do with it. If you become a champion, and you're out in front ? if you want to get there, you've got to be a bit vain. I don't call it vanity, I call it self-awareness.

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That's the expression I use, knowing who you are and what you're capable of doing it, and doing it. That's the bottom line.

You sound like you're a pretty motivated sort of gentleman?

Well, yes. You will only get through life if you give yourself goals and work towards them. If you do happen to fall a bit short, you're going to be better off than if you hadn't of tried. This is the attitude that I have adopted and kept working at, for sure.

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I'm just wondering why you actually chose to be associated with the POW's Association?

Everyone was in the POW Association after the war, it was quite a big organisation. Of course it has dwindled down now through natural attrition. I just went along as a member, I didn't do anything for years, and then the secretary was a mate of mine, that I knew well. He was getting overloaded with work, and I offered to be an assistant secretary

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to help him out, more than anything else. Well then, he passed away, and then I was the secretary for a while. The process of attrition wore us down that much that it looked as though we were not even going to be able to form an executive committee. And one of the chaps said, 'Well, look, I am going to nominate you for President.?'

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I said, 'Well, I couldn't do anything like that. I know nothing about it.?' He said, 'No, I'm going to nominate you. We'll see what will happen.?' He nominated me and I was accepted and suddenly, without me realising, blokes were coming around and making themselves available to run this show. Mind you, our wives, too, were amongst us. Our secretary is one of the chap's wives, and our treasurer, she's one of the wives, and our social committee are women.

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So it's all sort of fitted in, and it has just happened to flow along nicely. We have accumulated this \$32,000, we're also still battling with the government about the money they paid the Japanese prisoners of war without ? I don't know if you're aware of this, but they paid all the Japanese prisoners of war and their widows and the civilians captured by the Japanese

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\$25,000 each, and just drew the line between the European prisoners of war, including the air force, and we reckon they were discriminating between prisoners of war and so on, and anyway, we're still battling with them.

Your wives don't get paid any money being wives of POWs?

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No, no. I get well looked after, as I said, with medical and dental, and anything that goes wrong with me, it's all paid for by the government. I'm very fortunate there. But the government discriminated between the types of prisoners of war. They maintained that it was a special payment for the horrendous lives that these blokes had lived, which was bad, but we just objected to discrimination. We formed a committee,

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three of us, two of us in WA, one is in South Australia, and we got together ? a stack of papers, statutory declarations from all over Australia, and presented all to the Department of Veterans' Affairs, about twelve kilograms of paper we managed to get. We worked at it hard. It was taken and passed onto the Clark Review,

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which checked it out. Even the fellows who had been prisoners of war in Korea got no payment. So the upshot of it, again, is the Clarke Review has decided that fellows who were prisoners of war in Korea should get a payment, but the rest of the European, no. That comes up for debate in Parliament, these are recommendations, they're not the law, the law is not made yet. So of course we're hammering away at this stage, trying to get the

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politicians to look at it more favourably, but that is all up in the air, at the moment.

Was the recommendation from the Clarke Report to give that to the European POWs?

No. They recommended no payment to European POWs, but to Korean ex- prisoners of war, they had received nothing.

That must have caused a bit of a stink after all the work that you have managed to do?

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Oh yes. As I say, we are still at it, and that's the challenge that's on at the moment.

Do you think you will have eventual success?

Oh, I wouldn't comment on that, because you're forming an opinion based on nothing, at this stage. You're dealing with politicians, and that's a bit dicey. They're governed by so many things which are outside their own desires, put it that way, and they in turn have to conform.

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So you do it diplomatically, which is reputed to be the art of letting other people have your own way. So we'll just have to see what comes out of it all.

Well, you never know what you can achieve with an election coming up ?

Well, I wouldn't make that comment.

Just having a bit of a chat about Ballarat, and you're heading over there to do what you're going to do. Can you just explain what it is that you are going to do, that you find so important?

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Well, at Duntroon they have a replica of the Changi chapel, which they have stated is the national Ex-Prisoner of War Memorial. Right, well now with all due respect to the fellows who were up there, there were prisoners of war elsewhere, and we don't feel ? well, it's not appropriate.

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For some reason or other, the RSL at Ballarat, I think it's the RSL, decided they were going to put up a memorial, and they raised funds. They've somehow got over a million dollars that they've spent on this memorial. It has engraved on it the name of every prisoner of war in Australian history, going right back from the beginning, and it's going to be quite a big event. The Ex-POW Association of WA.

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wants me to go there to represent them, and they are standing the price of the air fare, as I mentioned, which is very gratifying. And I'm going over there to be there and lay a wreath on this memorial. That's basically what it is.

How did this idea eventuate?

This I don't know. All I know is that it has happened. And therefore you respond to the challenge.

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I was just wondering if it was a conglomerate effort form the POWs Associations?

No, it's not. I don't think the POW Association has had much to do with it, except contribute financially.

You have certainly had your work cut out for you with other things you have been doing here. I just wanted to talk to you a bit about Anzac, and the spirit and what Anzac Day means for you?

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Oh, that's a dicey one. I know that's a tricky statement to make. I like to read books and study Australian history and so on. And when you read up the real story of Gallipoli, what a horrendous stuff up it was. And you think of all those men who were sacrificed for no bloody reason at all, under the most horrendous conditions. Not only in the battles they were in,

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the aftermath of the battles. There were bodies laying around, rotting away. Even in an area they called The Nek, they packed a couple thousand of men in an area about as big as a tennis court. And in 1919, their bones were still out there in the sun. When you think of things like that. And then there were other occasions where men were just slaughtered needlessly, because of blundering and lack of real planning ?

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You get very cynical about Anzac Day. On the other hand, it is the spirit of the country. It's a day that we commemorate because we say it established us as a nation in the eyes of the world ? okay, we have to accept that. But personally, I support it, I take part in it, but I do it a little bit cynically, because I'm getting older and I get a bit cynical as I get a bit older.

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But you're allowed to get cynical as you get older.

Well yes, you do, because you learn a bit more.

It sounds like you have developed quite a bit of cynicism out of your war experience?

Yes, you do. I quoted a couple of examples there, about Winston Churchill, and what a great hero he was, and all the

wonderful things and so on, but from my point of view, where I was, he created Gallipoli,

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which achieved nothing. It could have, but it didn't, because of British blundering and lack of thought, lack of supplies. And the same with us in Greece and Crete, we were sent up there with not a hope in hell of winning. In fact, one of our leading Generals ? after North Africa, he consigned himself to hospital for varicose veins, because he said, ?You're not going to get anywhere up there.? He didn't want to be in it.

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I do know, in a book I read, Admiral Cunningham, the admiral in charge of the Mediterranean Fleet, as soon as he heard we were going into Greece he started to make arrangements for the evacuation. Well, good old Winston, he said, ?No. Up you go boys, good on you.? And the mob said, ?Good on you.? Well, that's where you get cynical. On the other hand, from Winston Churchill's point of view, he represented England, and England had its back to the wall, and anything could have been sacrificed to preserve it.

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So you think, ?Bloody hell. Where's it all lead you?? And you get cynical.

Does Anzac Day mean anything to you along the lines of mateship?

Well, we get together, yeah. But there again with natural attrition, where we marshaled up several hundred men from the 2/11th Battalion to march through Perth, there is just a handful of us now. I think it's down to about seventy five. So you still have mateship, but it's not as close as it used to be.

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Because those mates who were very close to you have passed away. We're all getting very old now and you've got to expect these things. I'm just fortunate. But there is a lot of people passed away. And, well, that's Anzac Day for you.

What's the way that you spend Anzac Day?

For the last two years I have been in a country town delivering the Anzac Day Address at the Anzac Day services.

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But I've jacked up on that, because my great grandkids say ?Why isn't my Pop in the march? We go in to see the march and he's not there.? So I thought, ?Well, who are you handing traditions onto?? But what it means to me is that my grandsons, who are mature lads, and their children, they come in because they believe in it, and you have to support that belief. They believe it's patriotism, or nationalism, or whatever.

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And of course, as an old soldier. it intrigues me the number of slant-eyed people who are there waving you and waving flags and cheering like hell. And you think, ?Jesus, mate, you're on the wrong track. You're getting too old.? I do, I think that. It used to worry me a lot about what is going to happen to the population of my country, but obviously we are eventually going to become like the Americans, whether we like it or not, and therefore it's time for old blokes like me to fade away from the scene.

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It is interesting that you brought up the fact that you've got people who look Japanese waving the Australian flag at you on Anzac Day. How has Anzac Day changed over the years?

It has changed in as much that the onlookers have changed. When we say Japanese looking onlookers,

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that is not quite correct, because I know they come from islands north of Australian, not necessarily from Japan, and their children are just as patriotic and Australian as anyone else's kids. This I know from the schools that I attend. That has changed. Of course, the number of ex-servicemen gets smaller and smaller each year, and that makes it a little awkward.

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From my point of view, and a lot of my mates, it's too bloody long. We got tired, so they rearranged Anzac Day to make the march a lot shorter now, not the drag that it used to be. It has changed all round, generally, but I still support it and obviously the community do because the crowds are getting bigger every year. Whether it's just for the spectacle, or whether it's for a belief in what it stands for, I wouldn't know. But they do get more people there every year now.

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Do you have any thoughts about why it is getting bigger?

Yes, I really think, as I said ? although the parents might have come from islands north of Australia, and we look upon them as foreigners and slant-eyed and all that, their children regard themselves as Australians, and they are just as strongly in support of Australia as what my great grandkids are. Of this I'm sure. Yeah, they believe it, and this is what gives me hope

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that there's a future in the population. Although, as one mate said to me, ?You know, your ideas are too nationalistic and that is bad for the community, because that's what starts divisions within the country, and that's what starts wars.? And he gave me quite a lecture on nationalism, which has a lot of points for it.

You think you might be too nationalistic?

I am, probably, yes. I probably am, because this is my country.

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I go camping, I spend a lot of time out in the open. I go kayaking, I go bike riding, and this is my country. And the thing I tell the kids, one of the reasons we fight a war is not for what we are going to get out of it, it's for what we are going to lose if we don't win it. And when you kids grow up and you want to travel around Australia, you can just go. You don't have to get permission, you don't have to have a passport. You can go right around Australia. You won't be pulled up by machine gun toting soldiers ? ?

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I said, ?This is why men died for this country. And if you remember that, they haven't died in vain. And this is how I feel about my country.?

Does it make you a republican?

Oh, yes, yes. Not an avid republican, but it is inevitable, and therefore you've got to think along those lines. But I think I might have left the scene by the time that comes to fruition, so that's someone else's problem.

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What do you think about grandchildren and great grandchildren marching in Anzac parades?

Well, that would be stimulated because of family traditions, and the desire to be part of what their grandfather was. We had a few problems like this in the 2/11th Battalion. There was a whole bunch of them, backed onto our group there at the beginning of Anzac Day marching, and we were most annoyed.

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But I can see now that those kids wanted to be there because some ancestor of theirs had been in our battalion, and they

wanted to represent him and wear his medals. Well, this is a good thing to me. And of course, my attitude has changed completely about that. I think myself, that whilst we can assemble as a group, we're getting less and less, and as long as we can march and the kids are following us, well, that was the whole idea of the war.

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How much more do you appreciate Australia after you have had to actually fight for it?

I don't know. Oh yes, I realise all the privileges in this country and the freedom we have. Yes, I respect that more than I ever did before, mainly because I wasn't aware of the other countries before. Yes, I have a lot more attachment for my country. And I have never been overseas since the war,

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because I've never wanted to. This is my country and there is plenty for me to see around here. Whereas Eileen, coming from England, she has been back there three times, I think. But no, I never wanted to go elsewhere. This is my country.

That's a lovely insight. I think people should see more of their own country before they nick off to other people's. After being a POW, what did that teach you about living the rest of your life? What changed in you?

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I say I don't whinge very much, but other people would probably tell you different. I don't complain about food. I must be about the easiest bloke in the world to feed, plus the fact that when I get the activities I'm in, they get under me and I get all tensed up. And I'm going to go to sleep at night,

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and I think of the worst moment in my POW life, whatever it was, whether it was living in the barn or the shed or something, with the danger of being exterminated by American bombers and everything, and I think, ?Now I'm laying here with my head on a soft pillow, I have got the blankets over me, I've got clean sheets, clean pyjamas, an Australian breeze is blowing through the windows, and I just go off to sleep. It has that effect on me. I have no trouble sleeping at all.

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That's one way I go about getting to sleep, realising the comfort and privileges that I've got. Here we are in this place, we own it. My wife has a car, I have a camper van. We don't owe anybody anything. Well, this is a great privilege, it really is. And that is a part of my country.

What have you learnt about freedom after being incarcerated?

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Well, as I pointed out, to what I tell kids when I'm speaking to them about freedom, and I also point out to them that they have the power to elect their own government, irrespective of where they come from, they may have an ethnic background, but they have the right to develop and become a leading citizen of the country, if they so desire. I also point out to them that education is there, if they want it, and they reach out to it. It won't be handed to them, you've got to look for things, and set yourself goals.

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From my point of view, you can talk on any subject you like, anywhere you like. You're not going to be put in jail ? .This is freedom. The same as, well, here I am, an ordinary common garden citizen, I write letters to senior government politicians in Canberra, on some topic, and they answer me back. This is freedom. It's not just putting pressure on politicians by letter,

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it's freedom. They could ring up the police and say, 'Take this bloke out and shoot him, will you? He's a problem?' But this is one of the privileges of freedom, and I really am conscious of it, and respect it.

Do you think we have got a bit blasé with the younger people?

Yes. When you say blasé, could you expand on that?

They don't really understand what you fought for, because they have never had to fight for freedom themselves?

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I don't think they really understand what we were fighting for, but I think they can appreciate that we did it. Put it that way. That's why you get so many kids at Anzac Day. You can't tell me that those kids know about the horrors of war, and all that. But they know it happened, and they are celebrating the occasion in their own little way. And if they have these thoughts in their mind, as they grow up, they become citizens that appreciate these things.

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Which, again, is one of the reasons why we are upgrading our memorial. The school holds an annual service there, which is a terrific service. That is the senior students. Now that group of students moves out, next year there is another group do the same thing, and we trust that they will take some of that sense and responsibility into their adulthood, and every time they pass that memorial, they say, 'That is part of me,

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because our school adopted it.' And that's one of the ideas we have behind these things. There are many wonderful kids around. And unfortunately, good news won't sell newspapers, so you don't hear about these kids. But there are some magnificent youngsters around who are going to be people you are always going to be proud to know. And unfortunately, it's only 'well, the media has got to sell its papers, of course, we appreciate that.

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But they are the type we read about, and they are such a minority. Again, if a newspaper published all the good things about kids they would go broke, because no one would be really interested.

I would like to thank you for taking part in the Archive.

I'm only too pleased to have it passed on. That's great.

INTERVIEW ENDS