Australians at War Film Archive

Harvey Wockner (Doctor) - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:35 **So Harvey can you give us a summarized overview of your life so far?**

Well, I'll start from when I was born sort of thing. I was born on 25 February 1918, in Toowoomba. My father was a grazier in those days, but before I can really

01:00 recollect anything, he left the farm and we moved down to Brisbane I think. And there wasn't much work about there, so we moved back to the South Burnett onto various farms and finally settled on a farm outside Wondai on the South Burnett. We were there for a couple of years and moved into Wondai where my father was engaged in

01:30 the building trade. I went to state school there, passed a scholarship in 1931 I think. Went to Kingaroy High School for two years. Commuted up there by train every day which isn't ideal; half past five in morning departure, got home at seven o'clock at night, but I enjoyed it. My first job after

02:00 I obtained my junior certificate…There was no work really in the country but I worked for six weeks as a cotton picker outside Wondai, and then we moved to Brisbane, and then we went onto a farm out near Dayboro for a couple of years, then back Brisbane. Work was very scarce in those days. I worked at

02:30 numerous things. I was a bellhop at the old people's palace for six months. I worked in the customs office for three years. I worked in a pineapple-canning factory for a few months and I went up to my grandparents' place on a cane farm at Bauple near Maryborough. I worked there off and on for two years and then in the sugar mill for two years in the season.

03:00 Came back home to Brisbane. We were living at Eagle Junction in those days. Worked for a builder for about eighteen months. Then war broke out. In the meantime I was playing rugby league for the North's football club. We won our premiership in the '39 year, a big year. Then war broke out. I went and enlisted.

03:30 I thought, "I won't hear anything more about this for a while," and to my shock, I suppose within a few days I had a letter saying, 'Report to Water Street on the Saturday morning with your knife, fork and spoon' type thing. So in I went and blokes were streaming in from all over the place. The Water Street drill hall was a big old place with about a twelve-foot high tin wall around it. And after you were sworn in they said, "Now you're not

04:00 to leave the parade ground. You're in the army now." And I took them at their word. By this time there were hundreds of fellows there milling around, swarming in, and all the old shrewdies – this was on a Saturday afternoon by this time – they were out the gate and down to the [Fortitude] Valley, to the nearest pub. And anyway, it took all day to swear in about three hundred men. Come about half past four, five o'clock

04:30 all the fellows that had shot through were back inside and a mark was called out and the order was given to fall in. Well the abuse and language that went on, you know, and the pandemonium. Anyway, I'm standing up in the front rank and I heard the officer say to the sergeant major, "Wait till we get these bastards up to Redbank. We'll pull them into gear."

05:00 Anyway, they finally got a bit of order and we set off to march down to the Valley railway station. All these shrewdies from before, they ran ahead of us into the pub and as we passed they'd be having a beer, you know. Then they'd come out and run past us to the next pub. Anyway, finally we got to the Valley railway station and boarded just an ordinary passenger train, to the alarm of the few passengers on it.

05:30 A mob of young blokes all clamouring aboard, and we set off for Redbank. A funny incident on the way, I think it was around Indooroopilly, because every station the train pulled up to the fellows would pile off onto the platform and start milling around, and they had to get them back on. Anyway at Indooroopilly a couple of chaps walked out the gate and the officer in charge said, "Hey, hey, hey, where do you fellows

think you're going? You're in the army now."

06:00 "We're going home." He said, "No you're not. You're in the army. Get back on the train." They said, "Go and get nicked." It turned out they were two civilians actually. They weren't in the army. Funnily enough I got to know both of them later on, and they served in the air force overseas. Anyway, we finally got to Redbank.

So you were telling us about you

06:30 **getting to know those blokes later.**

I've just forgotten their names but I think one was a chap who was flying Spitfires and he wrote a book after the war or during the war, Spitfires over Malta. Sadly, after they'd served in the Middle East we all came back to Australia, and he was in 75 Squadron, they were flying to New Guinea.

07:00 He landed in Townsville and another plane landed on top of him and he was killed. It was a shame, you know, he was a Spitfire ace. Anyway, get back to Redbank, we finally get down to the camp and the major, a Major Lubkey I think it was, called out, "Form yourselves into groups of eight for tent parties. And there's a big heap of straw over there and a palliasse, go and fill it up.

07:30 That's your bed." Which we did. Anyway, finally they got a bit of order and I think we spent six weeks just preliminary training, elementary training and then they formed units, and they called for volunteers – whether you wanted to be an engineer, artillery or infantry, machine gunner. I volunteered for machine gunners and joined the 2/9th Battalion

08:00 which was formed then. And then I think we spent a few weeks doing elementary training and then they sent an advanced party down to Rutherford to a new camp, and I was on that. We were there a few weeks before the battalion came down. I think there was a meningitis scare at Redbank and they held the battalion back. So we were there for a couple of months on our own.

08:30 And then after the 16th Brigade had left Ingleburn for the Middle East, our brigade moved down there into their camp outside Ingleburn. And we were there for a few months and carried on with our training, which was pretty hard. We used to get weekend leave into Sydney every weekend. And then

09:00 in early May the order was given and we embarked on the [SS] Mauritania, which was a brand new ship. It had only done one maiden trip to America before the war. We had all this luxury, two to a cabin sort of thing. And off we sailed. Our first port of call

09:30 was Fremantle, we had a couple of days there, then we sailed of the Middle East. We only got half way into the Indian Ocean before Italy came into the war and that closed the Red Sea. They diverted our convoy round Africa. Our first port of call was Cape Town; we had three day's leave there. And our next port was Free Town in Sierra Leone, off West Africa, and

10:00 we sailed on. I'll never forget one morning we woke up and went up on deck and we were surrounded by the British fleet, and there was a ship going down in flames not far away, which had been torpedoed. Anyway, we sailed on and eventually landed in Gourock, up in Scotland. We went by train from there way down to the Salisbury Plain in the south of England, and we encamped there for about three or three and a half months.

10:30 During this time the Battle of Britain occurred and we saw most of it overhead. We were in the path of their flight to London. It was really an unforgettable sight, really. The most planes I saw coming over one day, German planes, was eighty-nine I counted. They came over in orderly fashion and went overhead, and the Spitfires were amongst them

11:00 shooting them down. And they carried on and about half an hour later they came back all over the sky, scattered. And we took our hats off to those Spitfire pilots. We had a big drome just next door to us, Wallop drome they called it. Anyway it was getting cold by this time. We were just living in bell tents at that stage. We went up to Colchester, big,

11:30 brick barracks north of London. By this time, while we were in England, they converted the Vickers machine gun platoons. They took one away and sent them to the infantry and we were converted to Bren gun carriers. But unofficially we kept out Vickers guns. While we were in camp down on the Salisbury Plains a German bomber came over one morning and machined the camps

12:00 from a low altitude. Our gunners fired on him. Whether we got credit for it or not, I don't know, but he crashed not far away. Anyway, shortly afterwards, they must have known we were leaving because we took all our Bren guns up to a port called Grimsby and came back to camp, and the battalion moved up to Colchester and we were there for about

12:30 six weeks. And then we entrained back up to Gourock and sailed for the Middle East, called at Free Town again, didn't call at Cape Town. The first port of call after that was Durban. We had three days there. The people there said, "Don't do to Durban what you did to Cape Town," because the boys had played up there a bit, you know. Because there were a lot of Kiwis [New Zealanders] in the convoy too, from

13:00 New Zealand. Between Australia and New Zealand they gave Cape Town a pretty rough time. Anyway, after we left Durban half the ship went down with coastal fever, including me. We sailed on through the Suez Canal. We were on the old [SS] Strathaird, a ship from England. We ran aground outside Port

13:30 Said and it took a while to get off the sandbank there, then we eventually arrived at Alexandria in Egypt. We encamped about twenty miles out of Alexandria at a place called Mersa Matruh. We were there for a few months. We used to get day leave into Alexandria. By this time the first desert campaign was almost over but our battalion was sent down into the

14:00 desert to capture an Italian oasis, JeraBub. And that took us two days just driving through the desert, no roads you know. And the action there lasted about three days, and then we came back to our camp at Mersa Matruh. And shortly after that

14:30 they started sending RAF [Royal Air Force] to Greece and we were ready to go. I think we went in onto the ship when we were pulled back to our camp. And about this time Rommel started to come down, he was pushed down from Tripoli up in Libya, and we were rushed back into port, rushed onto a ship and rushed up to Tobruk. And we were only there about one day and, the

15:00 9th Divy [Division] it was, started coming back into the fortress and Rommel and his troops arrived on the perimeter. We were held back in reserve for a few days, then a few weeks later the Germans broke through and formed a salient [protrusion into the enemy's position] in the perimeter, and our brigade, that's the 9th , 10th and

15:30 12th were put in night attack to try and recapture it but it failed. And then a few days later we were sent back up to front the Germans in the perimeter. This time there was no barbed wire or anything between us and their front line. So one night, a couple of nights later an officer chap, Granny Suthers or Captain Suthers and a chap called Vince Ledbetter and I were

16:00 sent out to sort of survey where to run barbed wire. We just started to drive a few pegs when this burst of machine gun fire came and hit me. I got a bullet on the side of the tin hat unfortunately. It went in to the tin hat there and creased me around the head and went out the back. I've still got the tin hat actually with the bullet holes in it. I'll show it to you later.

Do.

Anyway the officer, Granny Suthers we called him,

16:30 he said, "I think we've had enough for the night. We'll go back." Which we did do. And I went back to the RAP [Regimental Aid Post] to see if I could get the wound dressed, and old Doc McGregor said, "Do you want to go back to the field hospital?" And I said, "No, I think I'll be right." So I went back up to the front and we were there for six weeks I think, and then we were withdrawn. In Tobruk you weren't out of shellfire range anywhere so it didn't matter where you were, you could be shelled.

17:00 Then we went back into the front line and were pulled out again. We were there five months and then they started to relieve the AIF [Australian Imperial Force]. We were the first brigade relieved by a Polish brigade. I meant to say, when I had this coastal fever, when we landed in Alexandria I had a relapse

17:30 and I had a week in a British hospital in Alexandria. I was sent back to convalescent camp on the Suez Canal at a place called Moascar I think, and a week back in Palestine where we had our training battalion, and then back to Egypt to rejoin the unit. Anyway, after we came out of Tobruk we went back to Palestine. We were only there a few weeks.

18:00 The next thing we were on the trucks and we were up in Syria. Our first camp was at a place called Baalbek where there were some fantastic ruins of temples. And then we went on to Tripoli and we were in big barracks there for a few weeks, and then we were moved across towards the coast to a place called Al Abdah.

18:30 We had a few weeks there and then we went to a place called [Al] Ladhiqiyah up on the Turkish border. We spent the, it would have been the '41 Christmas there. Shortly after that Japan came into the war. I think they were in the war by then. And then we packed up and transhipped, came by truck, all the way back down into Palestine. We were there for a few days. Then we

19:00 entrained back down to Suez with our Bren gun carriers and the battalion. We were there for a few days and we were put on the ship and sailed and went to Bombay. We were transhipped on to smaller boats then, and then down to Colombo. We were there for a few days but had no leave there. And then we sailed for Malaya, not Malaya,

19:30 Burma. We were out at sea for a few days and that's when Curtin insisted that the AIF be brought home. So we came back to Colombo. We were there a few days and then sailed for home and landed in Fremantle. We had a few days there and then we sailed on and landed in Adelaide.

20:00 We went into camp outside Adelaide for three weeks. Then we entrained from there up to Tenterfield, and we were there for a few weeks and we got seven days home leave to Brisbane, or wherever your home was. And then we reported back to camp in Brisbane and went into camp out at Kilcoy. And we were there for a few months. The next thing one night we were packed up over night and on the boats

20:30 in Brisbane, and sailed for Milne Bay. We were there about two weeks and the Japanese landed in Milne Bay and our battalion was held in reserve. We were the last put into action there and forced the Japs out. Shortly after that I got malaria and was hospitalized back to Australia, down to Sydney.

21:00 Had a week in hospital out at Concord, back to Brisbane to a convalescent camp, and then by this time the battalion had done the Buna-Sanananda campaign and were back in Australia on the Tablelands. And on the way back I spent six weeks in Townsville in a camp there waiting to rejoin the battalion. Which I eventually did on the Atherton

21:30 Tablelands. And it was a terrific shock to me to go back because we lost hundreds of men at Buna-Sanananda, a lot of friends I'd joined with, which was really depressing. Anyway, we were in camp at Mt Garnet, I think, on the Atherton Tablelands.

22:00 The next thing we were on the ships and sailed again to Port Moresby and trained there for a few months. Then we were flown over to the Ramu Valley. We did the Shaggy Ridge campaign. Withdrawn from there and came back to Australia to the Atherton Tablelands. And we were there for quite a long time, nearly eight or nine months I think.

22:30 During that time I was sent down to Bonegilla in Victoria to do a machine gun course of six weeks. Rejoined the unit and then next thing we were on the ships again and we sailed and landed at Morotai Island for a few weeks. And then we sailed and did the invasion of the landing at

23:00 Balikpapan in Borneo, and that's where the war finished. And they put all the fellows with five or six weeks service down on the beach waiting to come home because anyone, a married man or chaps from the country had priority on the boats and planes coming home. They just put us on the beach for six weeks and left us there to enjoy ourselves. All we did was nothing.

23:30 Anyway, eventually all the signalmen and that, we sailed for home on the old [HMAS] Kanimbla I think. It was a beautiful trip home just sailing through the islands doing nothing. We landed in Brisbane and they put us in trucks and around the back streets of Brisbane. No welcome home like the Vietnam blokes complain about, you know. Anyway,

24:00 we were pleased to get home. Up to Redbank and given seven days leave. We reported back and had a medical and then we were discharged. That was it.

Where do I start? There's so much information there Harvey. Well, we do have the day to go back over this. Just wondering now

24:30 **if you could let us know a little bit about your life after the war. So you decided not to join up again?**

Oh yes, yes. Couldn't get out quick enough. While we were in Morotai they called for a brigade to go to Japan, occupational forces. I was tempted to go and I'm sorry I didn't now really, but I knew quite a few of our fellows did go and they were there for six months.

25:00 Anyway, I came home and after our discharge we were milling around. All we used to do was go into the pub every day and do a session. We didn't know what we were going to do. Anyway, this went on for about six weeks, and quite a few of our fellows were in the repatriation department then.

25:30 One of the chaps said, "Why don't you come down and join the repat? We want more staff." So we trooped down there, about six of us and all got a job there in veterans' affairs, or the repatriation department in those days. Actually after the war that's all I wanted, a nine to five job where I could wear clean clothes and be clean. Anyway, I spent three years in repatriation and

26:00 got a bit fed up. A lot of chaps were leaving and going back to their other jobs and so on, and I happened to be in Sydney on holidays and I went into W.L. Carpenters, they're like Burns Philp in those days. They were a shipping company and owned a lot of plantations. I went back home and I just started work, and in a few days I got a telegram. "Catch the aeroplane on Saturday for New Guinea." Which was a bit of a shock. Which I did do.

26:30 I went out to Archerfield, that was the aerodrome in those days. I sat there all day in heavy fog and the plane couldn't take off so I went home, poor old Mum. Anyway, I went back in the next day and I took off and flew to New Guinea. Landed in Townsville, Lae, Madang and then on to Rabaul. And

27:00 from there I went on a small ship around the back to New Ireland, to a plantation there. I knew the chap that was managing it at the time, he was an ex-war service bloke. Spent about three months there and couldn't see any future in it so I flew back over to Lae and went up to Bulolo, and got a job with the Bulolo gold dredging company. And I wanted to get on the dredgers

27:30 but they put me in the building. They were rebuilding Bulolo because during the war they burned it to the ground when the Japs got close, about four hundred houses and stores. They just burned everything. They were rebuilding the whole place. And I spent about twenty months with them. Most of the time we were down in Lae. We built a lot of houses for Qantas down there and storerooms and what have you.

28:00 I enjoyed the life there. When I first went back I wasn't too happy but I was prepared to stop in New Guinea towards the end. Anyway, about this time I got word my mother was seriously ill and I flew home. She lived for about six months, and I had two young sisters living at home so I got a job in a couple of places in Brisbane just

28:30 to keep the home going, you know. I eventually got a job in the taxation department. I spent six years there and couldn't see much future there. So I came down to the Gold Coast and went into the building trade down here. Built some flats at Main Beach and started building spec houses and so on. Got married and had four children. And by that time Main Beach

29:00 was getting too busy with the kids on the roads so we came out here. We've been here just on thirty years. That's about it.

I was just trying to work out. You were born in 1918 so you're eighty-five?

29:30 **That's exceptionally well told. Very detailed.**

Well, you go back over it a lot, thinking about old times and that. I often think that actually the six years I spent in the army were the best years of my life.

Do you now? Well there is so much to talk about. Harvey I'm just thinking…Well first of all I'm going to ask why you wanted to volunteer as a machine gunner. Was there something that you knew about guns?

No. I don't know really.

30:00 Mainly while I volunteered…First of all my mother had a brother killed in the First World War. Apparently he was wounded, this was in France. They were carrying him back, the shelling started and they put him in a shell hole and went back to get help, and when they came back, just nothing. He was missing, you know. So I often felt, I spent a couple of years up at Bauple and went to school there, because there was eight in our

30:30 family and it was a bit too much for my mother I think, so I used to go up there and go to school there. I loved it. It was a second home.

That was your grandparents' house?

Yeah. My grandmother was still alive then. My grandfather died way back. He was actually a skipper on a sailing ship. He was a Scotsman, they came out from Scotland and settled on the farm up there, and he used to go away

31:00 sailing. The story is that he was a blackbirder actually.

What does that mean?

Oh bringing natives back from the islands to work on the plantations. They had sixty working on the farm up there in the early days, kanakas. Anyway, they were all repatriated eventually. But my grandmother kept the farm going and by this time she had another son and he

31:30 grew up and kept the place going. I went up there to school to take a bit of pressure off my mother, and eventually worked on the farm for a couple of years. But to get back to the army, I don't know, probably around that area up there, there were a lot of ex-First World War blokes who I knew and got to know pretty well. And in those days at school

32:00 it was a big thing, Anzac Day and stories about them and so on. Probably that's what influenced me. Why I wanted to be a machine gunner I don't know. I often think I was lucky really, because just before war broke out I got to know a chap who was a captain in the militia, in the artillery, before the war, a chap called Doug Crawford. Anyway, at Redbank when they called for

32:30 volunteers for the different arms of the army he came to me and he said, "Harvey, when they call for the artillery I want you to come over to the artillery." I said, "Oh no Doug, I want to be a machine gunner, mow them down." "No, no. I want you to come over. I want you in the artillery." "Oh no, Doug. No." Anyway when they called for volunteers I went into the infantry. I was lucky really because Doug's unit,

33:00 they went with us to England, the 2/4th Field Artillery, I think. They were sent to Greece when we came back from the Middle East and they all got taken prisoners of war. Doug spent four years in a POW [Prisoner of War] camp, which I probably would have done that too.

Had you joined the artillery.

Yeah. Poor old Doug. He only died a few years ago.

I might bring you back now to your childhood. You said there

33:30 **were eight children?**

Yes.

Where were you in the line?

Second. I've got an older brother. He lives in Moore Park outside Bundaberg. And there's me and then a younger brother, and then five girls. That maybe why I joined the army.

Well, I was going to ask you why you did join the army.

34:00 **Well, I don't know. It was patriotism I suppose, adventure.**

You didn't think about the navy or the air force?

No. I wasn't a sailor, I'm not a sailor. A boat's only got to rock and I've had it. And the air force, well the air force was hard to get into in the early days. A very good friend of mine, Peter Murphy who only died last year, he tried to join

34:30 the air force and they said, "Oh no, no it will be weeks, months before we need any air crew in the air force." So he joined the army. He was the same day as me, first day. He was QX218, Peter.

Can you explain what that is?

That's your army number. Queenslanders got

Everyone had an X, but Queenslanders were QX, New South Wales was NX,

35:00 **Victorians were VX, West Australians were WX, and so on. Tasmanians were TX and South Australians were SX. Very complicated.**

Was there a big divide in those days between the states in the service?

Well, West Australians, South Australians and Queenslanders got on. I think Victorians looked down on us a bit.

35:30 You're not a Victorian I hope.

No.

We got on with the Tasmanians because they were in a minority. I think Queenslanders were regarded a bit like backwards men in the early days, by Victorians and New South Welshman. But well, our battalion was all Queenslanders originally, the 2/9th. They were a very famous battalion in the First World War, first to land

36:00 on Gallipoli and so on. Our battalion ended up with a great record in the Second World War. Have you interviewed any 2/9th Battalion, do you know?

I don't know. When you enlisted did you happen to think, I'll go in the 9th Divy or did you just end up there?

No, you just joined up. There

36:30 wasn't a 9th Division then you see. The fist division was the 6th Division formed. That comprised of three brigades and each brigade had four battalions. So you had what, twelve battalions to a division. And then later on I think we'd sailed and they formed the 7th Division and then they formed the 8th Division, which went to Malaya,

37:00 and they formed the 9th Division.

So you would have joined up quite early on then.

First day.

After war was declared?

Yeah.

I wonder if you can just go back a little bit. Were you witness to the depression, Harvey?

Oh yes. Well, while I was in Wondai, going to Kingaroy High School, we used to go up by train every morning and it

37:30 was a mixed goods train, you know. Flat topped goods wagons with a few carriages on the back. It used to come through from Brisbane overnight and get to Kingaroy about seven o'clock in the morning. There were literally, in those days, hundreds of chaps what they called 'on the road', swagmen, jumping the rattler [train]. They used to get on the train to move from town to town and there would literally be hundreds of blokes

38:00 jumping on the train and moving on to the next station or the next town. Because in those days they had no such thing as the dole, they gave you food rations. So if they gave you food rations at Wondai, you had to move on to the next town before you could get another one, which was Kingaroy I think. The people just kept moving and moving. People of all professions and types.

38:30 As I say, we couldn't get work in Wondai. My eldest brother, he got an apprenticeship, carpenter, and he went with the builder to Mackay and worked up there for years. I got a job cotton picking for six weeks and then we moved to Brisbane. No work there and I went out onto that farm out near Dayboro then back to Brisbane, and that's where I got an assortment of jobs around

39:00 the place. I went back up to Bauple and worked on the farm there and worked in the sugar mill for two years in the season.

Was there any question that you could continue with schooling or did your family need you to work?

Oh well, in those days junior was about the limit. It cost money to go to university and people just couldn't afford it.

39:30 So it was a case of get work.

And did you find that you had a lot of responsibility being the second eldest in the family?

Oh, not really I suppose. You did everything you could to help your family money wise, not that you ever got much money. I think the basic wage in those days, just the basic wage for an adult

40:00 was four pound ten, which is the equivalent of nine dollars a week.

And what about your father, was he at home?

Yeah, he was at home but he was in and out of work too. He was in painting mainly, but he had relief work going then and you worked for so many days a week, depending on the size of your family.

40:30 I remember when we were living at Sandgate, they had all these chaps who built a big stonewall right round the sea front at Sandgate, it's probably still there. And we were living at Bald Hills at the time. And they levelled off the school parade ground there, virtually with pick and shovels and wheelbarrows, the men. From there we moved into Eagle Junction and work was starting to become more

41:00 prevalent then. Jobs were coming up, and war broke out. I was working for a builder at the time.

And was your family Catholic to have so many children?

No. No. They didn't know what was causing it.

Maybe they didn't have a television in those days.

No, that's right.

Tape 2

00:30 **Harvey, you were just telling me in the break that you moved around a lot from farm to farm to farm. Why was that principally?**

Probably because we couldn't make a living on the... My first recollection after we left Toowoomba – I don't remember anything up there – apparently we came to Sandgate

01:00 on a couple of places there, Sandgate and then at Boondall. I can just vaguely remember Boondall, and then we went up to Rosewood and I think my father was carting coal from the mines to the railway. I can remember going on a truck one day and I went down this big open black hole. That was Rosewood. Then I think from there moved to Brisbane, to Fairfield, and

01:30 that's where I started school. And from there we went to a place called, outside Nanango, Wanora, a really wild place, a dairy farm. And from there we went across to a place called Brooklands where a chap was establishing a new dairy farm. And then from there we went onto a farm outside Wondai. We were there for about eighteen months and then we moved into Wondai.

02:00 I think we spent six years there. Went to state school there for about four years and two years at high school. And came we came back to Sandgate originally for a while, and then went down to this dairy farm outside Dayboro at Mount Glorious I think it was, no Clear Mountain. There for about eighteen months and then down to Bald Hills and then to Eagle Junction.

02:30 And that's where war broke out.

You saw a lot of the place.

A bloody lot of farms. I don't want to see another cow. In those days it was all hand milking. Pop had us boys milking as soon as we could.

How old were you when you started milking?

Probably would have been about seven or eight, I suppose. We didn't mind it.

03:00 I suppose it's the way you were brought up.

And I mean obviously the depression made it really tough, but how did your parents try to make ends meet with eight kids around the place?

Oh, funnily enough we always seemed to eat well. Being on farms, of course you've got milk, and I think Pop used to kill his own beasts. He did a bit of butchering when he was young, apparently.

03:30 I'd like to know his story. I always regret I never asked my parents their story. Because his grandfather apparently, or his father, three brothers came out from Germany and settled on the Darling Downs, out at a place called Birnam outside Toowoomba. His father apparently became very successful. I think he built one of the first pubs around Toowoomba. I think Pop had his own

04:00 farm, and the story, he never told me this but he told one of my brother-in-laws that he was racehorse mad, and he had a bet with his brother, apparently they both had farms, that his horse could beat his brother Dick's horse. Anyway they had the race and my father lost. The bet was, they bet their farms. And Pop lost his farm. That's the story I've been told.

04:30 So how true it is, I don't know.

I guess a bet's a bet.

Well, that's what it was apparently. My Uncle Dick, the other brother, he didn't want to go ahead with it. Pop said, "A bet's a bet," and that was it.

You mentioned earlier Harvey, that there was a bit of conflict between Protestants and Catholics in those early days before the war.

You know,

05:00 if a story was, because I was a bit young and I didn't understand it too much. Say a Catholic was the head man of a place and there was a job going, it would go to a Catholic. Whereas Protestants would give a Protestant a job, and that sort of thing. And actually it happened to me in the sugar mill the first year. I got a job in a certain part of the mill and this other lad, he got

05:30 a job somewhere else but he wanted my job, and because the manager of the mill was a Catholic so he made us swap jobs. But as I was saying, Grandmother, they were strict Presbyterians. No drinking or smoking. Sunday was a day of rest – Sunday school in the morning and church in the afternoon.

06:00 You couldn't play games and you couldn't run around or anything like that, but you could sit and read. That was it for a Sunday, which wasn't bad really, because in those days you worked six days a week on the farm and you were quite happy to have the day of rest. I used to envy my mates, going down to church on a Sunday, because we used to drive past in the sulky, past the big sugar mill dam, and all my mates would be in there swimming.

06:30 I would be in my hot clothes going to church.

And when you could get away with it, what did you do for fun?

Oh there was nothing, no cars or bikes in those days. You were quite happy. Say you worked all day and had tea at night, and we used to play various board games with one of my aunties

07:00 that was living with her grandmother and another younger uncle. And we'd go to bed reasonably early and that was it. The best part I liked about it was my aunts used to wake us. My uncle, he was only a few years older than me and we were like brothers really. My aunt used to come and wake us up early in the morning with a cup of tea and toast in bed. I've never had it since. So they were great.

07:30 Wonderful people.

And whenever you say, "Those were the days," I'll know what you mean.

Yeah.

Did you have mates in the neighbourhood that you'd kick around with?

Oh, up at Bauple I did. I had some good mates there, one in particular. We used to get up to a bit of nonsense coming home from school. We'd get down in the creek and it had all this sort of jungley

08:00 undergrowth and we had these wild tobacco plants growing. They had big leaves just like a tobacco bush. We used to get the dried ones and roll them up and smoke them. We used to go past, there were a couple of share farmers on my grandmother's farm and one of our pet things was to… One of them had a fruit case nailed to a tree

08:30 for his mail delivery and whatever. We used to take great pleasure in knocking it off the tree with rocks. Apart from that, nothing much.

And did you get on with your brothers and sisters?

Oh yes. I sort of looked down on my sisters a bit. They were all younger, you know. I dismissed them. My two brothers, we got on very well together. Played in the same cricket team in later life and

09:00 went fishing together. All that sort of thing.

And I guess did you depend on each other a lot given that you were all moving around a lot?

Oh, I suppose we did, yes. We did a lot of things together. Always on the farm and trapping birds and going fishing and what have you. We used to go out together to the pictures, and in those days

09:30 pre-war, about your one delight was pictures Saturday night. We were living in Bald Hills then and you'd catch the bus into the pictures on a Saturday night, into Chermside. That's about it.

You mentioned before Harvey that I think it was your mother's brother that went away to World War I. As you were growing up did you know very much about

10:00 **World War I?**

Oh well, they used to put a lot of emphasis on it in the schools really. And of course, Anzac Day was a big day and I always went into the Anzac Day parades. As I said, up in around Bauple particularly, there was a lot of ex World War I chaps on the farms around there and I got to know them pretty well. One chap in particular, a neighbour, a chap called Cecil Stringer. He was only sixteen when he went away.

10:30 Bob Craddick, Johnny Walker. I can name them all still.

And what sort of stories or things…did they tell you about what they'd been through?

Oh, they didn't really talk about it. Just I admired them I suppose. And I said to…It got a lot of publicity in the schools in those days, Anzac Day.

Do you remember how they talked about it or…?

No. Not really. No.

11:00 **No that's all right. What about World War II Harvey? Did you know much about it before it happened, before it was declared? Did you know about the trouble in Europe?**

Oh well, I suppose we did, you know. I guess we could see it was coming, you know. But I think….I'm not sure where I was…

11:30 After the football season ended in '39 I worked for this builder, we went out with him to a little place called Taroom out west, past Dalby. And I'm not sure; you could see it coming then. Chamberlain had been to Europe and met Hitler and what have you and so on, and I think he'd invaded a couple of those…

12:00 Was it the Sudan [Sudetenland]? France had taken over after the First World War and he went back in there. I think I was back in Brisbane by this time and that's when war broke out. They called for volunteers and I went into Water Street and put my name down. I was only home a few days, as I said before, I got this letter

12:30 saying, "Come back. We need you."

Too quick.

It was the first call up really, on the Saturday morning.

Can you remember what you were doing or where you were when war was actually declared?

No, not really. No. I think I was just at home really.

And how did you get the news?

We might have had a

13:00 radio and that's about it. It was pretty eminent. Everyone could see it was coming.

And what motivated you to sign up so quickly?

Oh, I don't know. Probably a sense of adventure mainly, I think. A bit of patriotism.

13:30 **Did you consider yourself an English subject at the time or Australian?**

Consider myself what?

Did you consider yourself a British subject at the time?

No. Definitely Australian, yeah. I think in those days people still has a lot of feeling towards England. The mother country they called it. But

14:00 no, I think it was mainly just sort of a sense of adventure. You were young and rearing to go.

So Harvey can you tell me about the day you actually went to sign in. What actually happened?

Well, as I say, I went into Water Street. That's down in the [Fortitude] Valley. I don't know whether you know where that is. And reported in and

14:30 I think they gave us another medical there. We signed up and, as I said before, they told us we were in the army now. We weren't to leave the parade ground. Me being pretty young and naive took notice of them. The shrewdies…they were out the gate and gone for the morning. But no, that's where I met Peter Murphy and he became my best friend

15:00 in the army. He was there that first day too. I didn't know him before the war but funnily enough he lived not far from me at Eagle Junction, over at Clayfield. I got to know him very well after the war. His was rather, I suppose you would call it a sad story. His parents owned the Trans Continental Hotel in Brisbane, near Roma Street. The Trans Continental.

15:30 **I don't know Roma Street very well.**

Anyway, after the First World War that flu epidemic hit the world and literally millions died, and a relative of Peter's told me that both his parents caught it and died and Peter was only a babe in arms then. He and his brother Jack and their grandmother was living up at Stanthorpe.

16:00 She reared the two boys and I got to know her very well after the war, old Mrs Clarke. But, so Peter never ever knew his parents. And he joined up the first day. He was the chap that wanted to join the air force and they said, "You've got to wait for a while. Not calling for volunteers yet." So he turned around and joined the army. It was his two friends

16:30 that actually walked out the gate at the railway station. They both joined the air force later on. I think one was in bomber command in England and the other was a Spitfire pilot.

Now how did you and Peter adapt to army life, the discipline in training?

Oh, pretty good. I did all right. Peter wasn't actually a rebel but he didn't have

17:00 much time for the army. He didn't like the discipline much. He was a real practical joker all the time and a real morale booster through the war, you know. Always had a terrific sense of humour. And after the Buna-Sanananda campaign, and he and a few other originals went over to what they called ANGAU [Australia New Guinea Administrative Unit].

17:30 That was a force they formed to control the natives in New Guinea. They had natives under them, carrying lines and all that sort of thing, and Peter went over to ANGAU. And funnily enough he was attached to our unit up on Shaggy Ridge with a line of boys carrying food up to us and ammunition. And he was a wool classer before the war and then after the war he and a mate bought a wool company out at Mt Gravatt. It's gone now.

18:00 It used to be just down from Garden City, and they had it for a number of years.

Harvey can you give us a bit of a picture of what your initial training camp at Redbank was like?

Well, as I said, the first night we filled our palliasse up with straw and that's your bed sort of thing. And of course, not knowing and being any the wiser, you just filled it up and thought,

18:30 "That's good, nice and soft to lay on." Within a week all the straw had compacted and moved into the corners of the palliasse and you're sleeping on the hard ground. That was a bit of a shock to the system. Everyone was up before, the Reveille was at six o'clock, but I think everyone was awake long before then. Meals were just stew, stew, stew. I spent my first three days peeling potatoes in the cookhouse.

19:00 So if you want to know how to peel potatoes I'll show you. It was just virtually route marches and physical training. We didn't have, we weren't issued with rifles or anything. Our first uniforms were big red boots, two pairs of socks, two pairs of khaki long trousers, and a grey flannelette shirt with no collar and no sleeves, and a white

19:30 rag hat. That was our uniform. We used to go on leave to Brisbane in it, and I think people probably thought we were on parole from Boggo Road [jail], or somewhere.

It had no sleeves at all?

No, just short sleeves. It was a sort of civilian thing. Blokes in manual labour used to wear them. But no, virtually just route marches and PT [Physical Training], and as I say,

20:00 stew three times a day. There was one famous incident there. A mob from the north came in. When we first went in they formed what they called depot companies. A hundred men to a company, you know. I was in number 2 Depot Company. Anyway this crowd from North Queensland came in with some wild men amongst them. After a couple of days they had a mess hut and you went through and got your

20:30 dixie full of stew and sat at a table and so on. They got their stew and went straight out and emptied it in the rubbish bin. They paraded them again and put them through. Same procedure. The third time, same procedure. So they took them down onto the parade ground. I don't know where they got them from, must have been a militia unit. They surrounded the parade ground with these chaps with rifles with fixed bayonets. We thought, "God, what are they going to do with them? Shoot them or something."

21:00 Anyway, they gave them a couple of hours hard, parade ground drill, you know. It was all over. We didn't get our rifles for quite a while after that. We did our first initial shoot at Redbank. They used to have a rifle range over the road. It might still be there, I don't know. One of the funniest incidents

21:30 was there. What you used to do, you would be on the range and fire your shots and you'd walk up with the officer in charge, they had an officer up there, and he would explain what you'd done wrong or so on. Anyway, this day we were in the mounds doing a marking and this crowd had fired their five rounds, and they came up to inspect the targets. And one of our fellows, a chap called George Morris, he picked up these spent rounds from the mound behind the target,

22:00 stuck them in the holes in this fellow's target. When they came up, George said to this fellow, "I don't know what's wrong with you. Look at your rifle. Your bullets are not going through the target." This fellow was, "What? I don't know. Major, Major." He raced down and said, "Major there is something wrong with my rifle. The bullets aren't going through the target." He came back, "I don't know what's going wrong. You can't be pulling the trigger hard enough. Look they're not going through." Major

22:30 Lovett came up, and he was an ex-World War chap, "What's going on here?" He looked at the target and he looked at George Morris and he didn't say a word. He just went back to the mound with the fellows. Rang up, and he said, "There's a bloke up there on number five target who just made a fool out of me. Make him work."

He got a bit of extra drill for that?

No, I don't think so.

23:00 He had a sense of humour, sarcastic humour which we all liked, you know. Major Lovett.

And the rifles that you were issued with at that stage, what were they?

303. Just the First World War rifles actually, old 303 which we carried right through the war. Later on they started issuing and brought in the Bren guns and

23:30 the sub-machine guns. The first ones we got were the Thompson subs from America which were no good in New Guinea, in the climate up there.

What happened to them?

Oh, they used to block up with mud and rain. You know. The best one was the Australian one, the Owen gun, little cheap thing. Fantastic.

And what made it stand out above the others?

Oh, it didn't get blockages like the

24:00 Thompson did. There was another one they brought out too. I think they called it the Sten. I think it was a British one. But none of them compared to the Australian one.

So the whole training that you did at Redbank was effectively drill and rifle practise?

Just drill, yes, and then we started getting our rifles and rifle drills. We had plenty

24:30 of that – slope, port, order arms.

And how did fellows get on with, I guess the COs [Commanding Officer] and the fellows in charge?

Very well really, we had a great bunch of officers. The colonel was a strict disciplinarian. Martin, Lieutenant Colonel Martin. He was the youngest colonel in the AIF when it was formed.

25:00 He eventually became a brigadier.

And how would they keep all these new recruits in line? Like you've mentioned one of the officers was a strict disciplinarian.

Oh well, I don't know. I think a chap just accepted it, you know. A few rebels, but nothing outstanding. Most of the officers, they were all in the militia before the war

25:30 and they were trained men really. And a lot of the NCOs [Non Commissioned Officer] who joined up, they had been in the militia.

Now you mentioned before that there were also quite a few ex-World War I fellas who were training you as well. Did they share any wisdom of what war was like?

26:00 Oh no, it was never talked about really, the First World War. No. We had a couple that went away with us from the First World War. How old they would have been I don't know. They must have been pushing for around the forty mark, I guess. That was too old for the infantry really. It was a young man's game.

And were you all

26:30 **sort of excited to get away or …?**

Oh yes, yes. Actually, that… I didn't drink or smoke before the war, and the last night down in Ingleburn we decided to have a party, and this George Morris was a great organizer and we put in money and he bought grog and food and what have you. And there was a big quarry outside the camp and we went over there. And I went over to my mates and

27:00 said, "I'll probably never come back out of this." So I got into the grog, hated it too. I got violently ill, they carried me home. They got us up before daylight the next morning cleaning up the camp, burning our straw palliasses and what have you, and all I could do was stand and stare at the fire. Blank rounds are going off, I couldn't care less. We marched down to Ingleburn railway station and got on the train

27:30 into Circular Quay, Sydney and onto the Mauritania and sailed straight away, out through the Heads, and I wasn't well all the way to Fremantle.

Maybe you had a good reason.

I thought I'd never drink again. Once is enough. I'm afraid I did though.

Harvey, you went from Redbank down to Rutherford didn't you?

Rutherford, yes.

28:00 **How did training differ? What did they teach you down at Rutherford?**

Oh, virtually much the same thing there. We weren't actually doing any fieldwork, manoeuvres or anything like that. That only started when we went down to Ingleburn. We used to go out on night training exercises.

And just for the sake of the archive, can you give us a bit of a picture of what one of your late night training exercises would have been?

28:30 Well, we were in the machine gunners. Our positions were mostly static, you know, sort of defensive positions. The rifle companies would be out and they would come in, we'd be more or less a defence and they would come in and try to attack us. They used to have umpires to watch what's going on and say, "You're dead, you're dead. You're wounded."

29:00 But we used to dig in our positions with our machine guns and be static. And I'll never forget an incident one night. We had one of the machine guns set up and this chap, Bill McGough was number one on the gun, sitting behind the gun. And it was pretty late in the night or early in the morning I think, Billy Macintosh was our platoon sergeant then.

29:30 He used to go round checking on the guns and all the blokes were asleep on this gun and Bill came in, took the gun off the tripod and took it away and Bill never knew. He woke up and no gun. That's Billy Mackintosh. He was the most decorated chap in our battalion. He got three decorations, MD [Mentioned in Despatches], MM [Military Medal], and MC [Military Cross]. He died

30:00 five or six years ago now.

And was it at Ingleburn that you put your hand up for machine gun or was that earlier?

No, that was at Redbank when they formed the battalions. In those days the battalions had A, B, C, rifle companies, and Don they called a support company, and that was all Vickers machine guns, four platoons of Vickers guns. That was from the First World War.

30:30 After a while I went advance party to Rutherford and while I was away they changed the formations of the battalions and they cut it down to A, B, C, D rifle companies and then just a headquarter company, and took two platoons of Vickers guns away, abolished them and there were only two left. And then when we were in England they changed it again and did away with the machinegun platoons and turned us, sent one platoon

31:00 to the rifle companies and we became Bren gun carrier platoons. We were carrying Bren guns but unofficially we kept our Vickers guns.

Is that what you used to fire on the German bomber?

Yeah. It was funny that in England we were just in these little bell tents and they had just galvanised iron cookhouses.

31:30 You would just go and eat out in the open somewhere. And for days after this he would just come down low, about fifty feet and we could see him coming. We were walking down to get our leave pass to go to London and down he would come and brrrr through the camp. He didn't injure or hit anyone but he put

a few bullets through the cookhouse. But for days after that, anyone going past the cookhouse would get their bayonet and run it along the corrugated iron. Brrrr. All the cooks

32:00 would come flying. I'll never forget one evening we were going down to get our evening meal and the air alarm went and they were just bringing out the stuff to the tables in the open air. We'd had our meat, it was just meatloaf. You got no fresh meat. And this bloke was carrying these two dixies of custard across. And he starts running with the dixies of custard. Where he was going to run to I don't know.

32:30 One of our fellows was running after him. A chap called Tom Telleran saying, "Hey, hey, hey, wait a minute. What about my custard?" This orderly, he just went like a… "F… your custard." Tom wanted his custard. That was one of our favourite things. Particularly in Tobruk, air alarm. If you saw someone running you'd run too because

33:00 usually an air alarm, an air attack coming. And someone just for a joke would start running and we used to head for the dugouts.

Harvey, if I can just take you back to I guess Ingleburn for a moment to get a few more details on the

33:30 **additional training you got there to prepare you to go overseas.**

Well, it was at Ingleburn we actually started to do our Vickers gun, machinegun training. We used to go out on the range there training and, as I said, doing a lot of night manoeuvres. We were in Ingleburn for about three months I think, before we sailed.

34:00 We did a big march through Sydney before we sailed. That was rather odd actually. When we left Redbank on the advanced party we still only had these grey flannelette singlets on. We marched through, got off at Central, there were only about twenty of us I think, and we marched across to Roma Street, Brisbane, to get the train and here we are marching down Queen Street,

34:30 Adelaide Street, across Victoria Bridge. We had no rifles or anything, and I often wonder what people thought. And we did a march through Newcastle. Quite a peculiar feeling that because Newcastle was sort of a bit of a Communist inclined town in those days, and we had quite a chilly reception there.

In what way?

No cheering or anything like that.

35:00 And then before we sailed from Ingleburn the brigade did a big march through Sydney, which was good. But no, Newcastle was a queer sort of experience.

How did they react to you on a…?

Oh, they just stood and looked. Different to other marches we had.

That would have been odd.

Yeah, well while we were in England

35:30 we were reviewed by, Churchill came down and reviewed us and the King came down and inspected us. And when we were at Colchester, before we left for the Middle East, the battalion formed a special guard of honour and the King came down and inspected us. I was the marker for that. They call the marker out and you go out, and then they form the guard of honour in on you.

36:00 We marched down through Colchester where the King inspected us and that was it. But old Churchill kept us waiting nearly two hours on the parade ground. I suppose he had other things to do. It was funny there, our regimental sergeant major was from the First World War, old Charlie Timms. He was a pretty illiterate sort of fellow really.

36:30 He had his First World War ribbons up and you could see the King speak to him as he went past. And someone said to Charlie after the war, "What did the King say to Charlie?" "It was good to see youse blokes, what was over here last time, back here again."

I guess it's nice to know you're appreciated.

I can imagine the King saying that.

37:00 **Harvey I wanted to ask this before but how did your parents react to you signing up?**

Oh poor old Mum didn't say anything really. I don't know if my father was too happy. I think he might have been a bit German inclined really because of his parents, they had come out from Germany. But oh no, later on I don't know how many times I came home and

37:30 Pop said, "They're not sending you away again, surely." I was always keen to go. We were always happy to be on the move in the battalion. Our longest stay was on the Atherton Tablelands the last time. By that time I think the fellows had had enough of war. They were quite happy to just stop in camp. I think they realised the war was practically over by

38:00 then and we weren't pressured too much.

And do you remember getting the news that you were going to disembark, head off from Australia to the Middle East?

Oh well, we knew it was going to come. We'd done the big march through Sydney, which was usually a sign something was happening and I can't remember actually how we got word but

38:30 it must have been on this one day , that's when we organized this party and got the camp cleaned up.

Getting ready to get drunk.

Yeah. It was a long time before I had a drink again. Funnily enough it was in England and I started drinking Scotch whisky. I've never been a beer drinker actually. I'm not that inclined to drink beer. There wasn't much choice sometimes.

Tape 3

00:31 **Harvey we were just talking about going over on the Mauritania, now you were going over to England?**

Yeah. Well we were going to the Middle East.

So when you left Ingleburn did you just get on the ship and then have lots of people come at the dock and wave goodbye?

No, no, none of that. I don't think people were allowed on the dock in those days, and we were all Queenslanders so our families were all back up here.

01:00 As I said, as soon as we were on the ship we up anchored and sailed. And soon after we left Fremantle a mumps epidemic broke out on the ship. I think it started before we left Australia. A few chaps got left behind and soon after we left Fremantle I went down with the mumps. And I was in the ship's hospital in Cape Town. I couldn't go ashore

01:30 and it carried on until we got to England. A lot of chaps went into hospital in England with the mumps. It was coming back from England where I went down with the coastal fever on the boat. Most of the fellas went down, they were lying on the decks everywhere. They had no room in the ship's hospital.

Can you tell us what that is, coastal fever?

Oh well, it's just

02:00 a bit like malaria in a way but nowhere near as bad. I've had malaria. You're just sort of sick and feverish for a few days. As I say, I recovered but soon after we got to Egypt I had a relapse in the camp there and they put me in a British hospital in Alexandria.

Did you try to

02:30 **you know, basically get out of being put into hospital so you could go and see Alexandria or were you too sick, and happy to be taken care of?**

No. I was happy to stop in the hospital. I had a pretty nurse.

This was a British hospital. How were you treated there?

Very good, very good. One of the nurses even did a little drawing of me, a sketch. I had it for years. I don't know what happened to it.

03:00 No, they were very good, and from there I was sent down to Moascar I think, on the Suez Canal, to a New Zealand convalescent camp. I had a week there.

What were the Kiwi's like?

Oh we didn't have much to do with them really. But as I say, going over to England a convoy of New Zealanders joined us after we left Fremantle and we landed in Cape Town at the same time. When they got together on shore they

03:30 played up a bit I believe.

This is in Cape Town?

Yeah.

What did you think of Cape Town?

Well, I didn't get ashore there. I just stood at the ships rail and gazed over the city. And up at Table Mountain, that's the high mountain behind Cape Town, they have a cable car going up to it.

I've heard it's beautiful.

Yeah. Beautiful.

So did you hear what the Aussies and the Kiwis got up to?

04:00 Not really, but someone said they threw a piano off a second storey building somewhere. That would have made a nice clang.

What was the opinion of the Aussies of the Kiwis as fighters in the Second World War?

Oh, I don't know. I don't remember it ever being discussed because we were never in action at the same time anywhere.

04:30 There were none in Tobruk. I'm just trying to think. I'm just trying to think where they were actually.

So you had a week in the convalescent camp in...

Moascar.

Moascar. How far away from Alexandria is that?

I suppose a hundred miles.

So how do they get you down there?

05:00 You could go by train or truck. I was fit. I could walk around. There was nothing wrong with me much by then after a week in the hospital.

You mention this pretty nurse. Did you meet any women and keep in touch with them?

A pretty girl in Scotland I wrote to for donkeys' years. I should have married her. Her father owned two

05:30 pubs.

And lucky you like Scotch.

Well I have Scotch descent. I had an old aunty, I went to see her. While we were in England we got six days leave to any part in the British Isles, apart from Ireland. I went up to Edinburgh to see my old aunt, Aunt Tatty. She had a little hospital outside Edinburgh, and I went out to see her and I came back into Edinburgh and went up onto Edinburgh Castle.

06:00 I was standing there gazing out over the city and there was a lady standing near me and she said, "Do you know what you're looking at?" I said, "Not really." And she told me everything. She said, "I'm just waiting for my daughter. She's up visiting at a hospital up there. It is an army hospital." She was up visiting the hospital so I thought I would hang around, you know. Anyway, the daughter came out and I met her and they took me home and fed me

06:30 and what have you. I spent the evening with them but I never saw them again. I wrote to her for donkeys' years even after the war. Nan Ketchie, 24 Fotheringham Road, Ayr. They moved from Edinburgh to Ayr apparently.

Do you think she liked you?

Oh, she kept writing to me. We exchanged photographs.

07:00 A couple of our chaps went back after the war and married girls they met over there. As a matter of fact, one of our chaps, after the second New Guinea campaign, he disappeared. A good friend of mine. It wasn't till years later we found out he'd stowed away and gone back to Scotland and married a girl he'd met over there while we were there. He was virtually a deserter from the army.

What happens if you're a deserter? Do you have to go to gaol?

Oh yeah. Clarrie Cotterell, he was one of five brothers

07:30 that joined the army from Stanthorpe. The Cotterell brothers.

And what about your brothers? Did they join up?

Yes, they joined up. Well Eric the older brother, he was in the army for a while and he was stationed over on Moreton Island and he was in the building trade. They pulled him out, back into civilian life. He was building for the army. And the other, younger

08:00 brother saw service in New Guinea and Borneo, and the north Australia there.

Did your paths ever cross, you and your younger brother?

Oh, only once on the Tablelands. Both our units were stationed up there. I went over to see if he would come across to our battalion but he didn't want to. He stayed where he was, which was probably a good thing. But we had a lot of

08:30 brothers in the unit, you know.

What did you think about that? We've heard stories. Some blokes think that's a bad thing because they'd be looking after your brothers instead of…

Well, that's the problem, yeah. But all the Cotterells, they all survived. There's only one alive now. He is living down the coast here somewhere; Miami I think. The others are all dead.

Harvey, where did you

09:00 **see ships that were burning and sinking? Was that on the way to England?**

Yeah, after we left Sierra Leone. That's on the…West Africa. We were only a few days out of England and came up this morning and were surrounded by the British fleet, and on the horizon the ship was going down in flames. And the alarm went about that time and all the ships just took

09:30 off. You could feel them underneath you, just pick up speed and go.

Do you remember the name of that ship?

No. No.

It was a British ship though.

Yeah, it would have been. I think it was after we left to come back to the Middle East we were sailing down the Clyde and I've got a photograph of this destroyer being towed up the Clyde, and all the bow underneath

10:00 was all cut away. It had must have rammed a submarine or something and it was being towed back up the Clyde River.

Was there many men in the water from that burning ship or did they all go down?

It was too far away for us to see, you know. It would have been a few miles away on the horizon.

So how many days did you get to spend in Sierra Leone?

Oh, we were there for about three days but we weren't allowed ashore.

10:30 No.

Why weren't you allowed ashore?

Well, it was only a small town and I suppose for sickness and secrecy reasons and what have you. But oddly enough, we had two brothers in the battalion, Sid and Eliot and they joined up the first day. They had a sister nursing in a British hospital in Sierra Leone and they weren't allowed ashore to see her.

11:00 **That would have been disappointing.**

Oh yeah. You'd think they could have organized a meeting.

So after your time in Alexandria and in the convalescent camp, that's when you got back on the ship…What ship did you…?

No, no.

That was a different ship now?

No. That was, I went back to Palestine – that was what we called the infantry battalion base. That was where we had our base.

11:30 And I went back there.

So that was your first base? That was the first place you went to for operations?

No, in Palestine, and from there I went back to join the battalion outside Alexandria. And from there that's when we went up the desert.

Well how did you handle the sea coming over on the ship in the first place?

It was okay on the big ships.

You said before that

12:00 **you weren't a sailor so I was curious to know how you went.**

No, on the big ships it was all right. As long as you stop in the middle, the ship's going like that, you know. No. We used to… Particularly on the Strathaird coming back from England, it was a cruise ship that used to come to Australia before the war but they converted it into a troop carrier, and all below deck all they had was bunks like that and I couldn't…and a lot of us couldn't

12:30 sleep there. We used to always sleep on the deck up top providing it wasn't raining. And then in the morning you had to get up in the morning because the Lascars…They were a crew from Ceylon, the Indians. They would come down around hosing the decks down with big hoses. "Washie deckie…" If you weren't quick you'd have your bedding all wet.

13:00 No. Sleeping below decks, the portholes were all closed up and there was no ventilation. No air-conditioning or anything like that. Terrible ventilation.

So when you got to Palestine what were your first impressions there?

Oh well, a new land and strange people. Not that we had much to do with them really. They used to come round the camps

13:30 trying to sell bottles of whisky. They were supposed to be bottles of whisky and things like that, cooked eggs. Funny enough, it didn't matter where you were at night time you could almost bet one would appear trying to sell you cooked eggs. "Eggs are cooked."

Do you remember if the action had started, the desert campaign had actually

14:00 **started when you were in Palestine?**

Oh yeah. The 6th Division, or the first two brigades that went over, they were involved in it. They went through pretty quickly, right up as far as Benghazi I think it was. That's where they stopped and I think they sent the 9th Division up by then to relieve them. They were brought back, the 6th Division and sent to Greece. And we were to go there too. We got as far as the ships

14:30 and were turned back and we went back to our camp and were there for about a week, and then got on a ship in Alex [Alexandria] and went up to Tobruk. We were only there about two days when the Germans got to the outside perimeter.

So what were you expecting? You were this young man and here you are, you've arrived in Palestine and

15:00 **you're like reinforcements for the desert campaign. What did you think would happen? Was it what you expected?**

Oh, I don't know really. It was a bit of a shock to the system. I'll say this. We went up by train to Mersa Matruh when we were going out to

15:30 capture this Italian oasis. And we got on trucks then and there were no roads down there, just through the sand hills and what have you, and we just drove. The trucks were sort of a line abreast to keep out of each other's dust. The first night we just stopped where we were and had a meal and the next day we drove on and got to the oasis. And the first night,

16:00 our platoon, we were sent up as escort to the colonel. He went up to make an inspection and reconnaissance of the place, and we went with him as protection. I remember coming back and our truck got bogged in the sand. We didn't get back to the battalion. We just spent the night there in the sand hills and rejoined the battalion next morning, and the next evening we went up again.

16:30 That's when the rifle companies put in their attack. Actually most of our casualties at JeraBub were caused by our own artillery. We had British artillery there, four guns a troop. The idea is they fired and then the infantry comes so far and they lift their barrage and the infantry goes on. This company went too far ahead and got caught in their own artillery. That's where we lost most of our men there.

17:00 This good friend of mine, Jimmy Smith, he sort of looked after me when I joined at Redbank. He was one of the first there, killed. Lost both his legs, blown off, poor old Jim. Apparently he had been a medical student before the war and they couldn't afford to carry on with it. He ended up a wharf labourer.

How long were you in operation when this happened?

17:30 **Did you take part in this with the British artillery doing the barraging?**

We went up in another direction and we got to this Italian outpost and they pulled back, and we sort of occupied it for the night. And there was a howling sandstorm going, a moonlight night and of all things we got a slight shower of rain.

18:00 We were only in shorts and shirts, and we froze. Anyway, the Italians counter attacked and they came up throwing grenades. And we fired our rifles. I fired one shot and couldn't open the bolt, it had jammed full of sand. It happened to a lot of us. And then we withdrew back to a position further back. I remember the next day, come day light my mate and I were just lying out in this open plateau,

18:30 just a bit of a depression in the ground. We couldn't move because we were under enemy fire. We just lay there all day till just on dusk and we got up and ran back and joined our fellows.

Is that mate still alive?

No. Poor old Sid, he died soon after the war. He got bad malaria in the Buna campaign and his health was never the same again.

19:00 Yeah, QX35 I think his number was.

Do you recall what the Italians were like as fighters there?

Oh no, they weren't really, they weren't too keen on it. Apparently like in the desert campaign they just surrendered when the Australians got close. Same as in Tobruk when Rommel came down the Italians came down with them, and the Italian infantry

19:30 used go come in first. When they got near our front lines they'd surrender. And in the finish the Germans were sending them in with tanks behind them to try and make them fight. No, they weren't too enthusiastic about the war.

But you were there too early before the Italians had surrendered. This would have been 1940? Is that correct?

'41.

'41.

Yeah, early '41, '40 – '41.

20:00 **So what happened then? You had to move back that next day because you had been under enemy fire. You were in the front line then? So what happed after that?**

Well, the next day they attacked again and our company went round on the flank on one side and came in on the fort. And the other company, by this time the Italians had surrendered and we went in and occupied the

20:30 oasis.

When you say oasis was that the name of the Italian…?

No, an oasis is sort of a…

A campaign name?

No, in the desert where there is fresh water and a few coconut trees. An oasis in the desert – JeraBub was the name of the place.

21:00 **You were telling us downstairs, when we were having a cup of tea, about the fact that the blokes wouldn't actually get to have a bath for what five weeks…six weeks?**

Five months.

Five months. Goodness. How did you manage that?

We used to get…All we got was a water bottle full of water a day. They used to bring up drums of salt water which you could try and wash yourself in.

21:30 Because there were no toilet facilities or anything like that.

What did you do if you had to go and do a number two?

Go out and dig a hole in the desert. Or if you were in the front line, this is not a very nice subject, but a lot of blokes would do them in empty bully beef tins and throw them at the enemy.

It would be worse getting hit by one of them than a bullet.

Yeah. That would be a real bomb.

I always wanted to know that, so thank you for telling me.

22:00 **And what about your fresh water? You said you only got a pint a day. What about the men who needed more than a pint a day?**

I don't remember anyone…just that's all you got. That used to do you for meals too. You used to get issued with a tin of bully beef a day and dog biscuits they call them. They were like a Sao biscuit size but hard.

22:30 And you would share your tin of bully beef and biscuits with a mate for breakfast and lunchtime, and at night time they would try and bring up a hot meal which was virtually just bully beef. They used to do all sorts of things with it; make stew out of it, rissoles. We didn't get fresh vegetables. Not till really late in the

23:00 piece. And you never got your meal at night until late. At night time they used to have what they called stand-to. An hour before dawn everyone had to be awake standing-to with their rifles ready, and an hour after sunset just standing-to, because those were times most likely for an attack. And after that was over you sent men back. The cookhouse would be back, a mile back, and they'd bring up these big dixies of hot food at night. They were about this big and round

23:30 say, with stew in them or what have you, and tea, black tea usually. And each platoon would send a couple of men back to bring up the… These dixies would feed one section. They would bring it up and you'd have your meal then, so you probably wouldn't eat until eight or nine o'clock at night.

How many men in the section?

Ten. There were thirty in a platoon.

But who'd make the food, the hot food?

We had cooks. They had cookhouses

24:00 and they'd be back…They'd be half a mile behind the front line or closer according to wherever you were. Up on Shaggy Ridge they would only be a hundred yards back. They'd bring it up as close as they could to the front line by truck, and then you'd carry it up to the front line.

Where were your sleeping quarters, Harvey, in relation to the front line?

Well, you'd just sleep in the trench.

24:30 **How would you do that? I mean did you have a hammock?**

Oh no, just two blankets and a groundsheet, and sleep on the ground. If you were back just behind the front line, in the second line, you'd have a dug out, but it was all rock in Tobruk and you could only dig down about that deep. You'd just sleep in your hole in the ground.

One man per hole?

Yeah. Well, it used to be two of you but you had sort of little separate sections.

25:00 Well the idea was to spread them out so… there used to be a lot of shelling at night time and the more you were spread out the less chance of casualties.

And I'm trying to think what you could do to make life a little bit easier for yourself. You had rotten food it sounds like, you didn't get to wash and you were on the front line. What would you do to make life a little bit

25:30 **easier for yourself?**

Nothing. At night time, no one slept at night time, of course, because that's when most of the activity went on and in daytime you just keep your head down because you were in rifle shot of the enemy. Not like one of our silly… We had a young fellow, Merv Penney. He was only sixteen when he joined up, and he got into this habit of jumping up on the parapet in Tobruk at daylight and stretching, and

26:00 a sniper got him. So at daytime in the front line you just kept your head down and tried to get a bit of sleep. Because at night time you're…They're sending out patrols all the time.

Were you on patrols quite a lot?

I went out of a few, not many. I was in the carrier platoon and the officer used to send us up

26:30 to go out with the rifle companies for experience, you know. I went out on mainly just reconnaissance patrols. You'd go out into no man's land until you could locate where the enemy were. You avoided getting engaged in fights. Some of the rifle companies sent out fighting patrols just looking for trouble.

Were they ordered to make trouble or…?

Yeah. They'd go out

27:00 and try and capture prisoners and what have you. And by sending out a fighting patrol they could locate where the enemy were, where the guns were, and what have you.

Did you lose many men in those kind of patrols?

Oh, not many, no. I think most of our men were lost with shellfire. That caused a lot of casualties because they had this awful

27:30 gun that used to fire and the shell would burst above ground level with shrapnel.

What were they called?

Well, it was a seventy-eight millimetre gun that the Germans used to use. It was an anti-tank gun but they could use it for anything. It was a fantastic gun. Not like our shells, they'd hit the ground and burst, but theirs used to burst twenty feet up in the air and you've got all the shrapnel, would be coming down.

Was that the kind of activity that you saw at night mainly?

28:00 Yeah, there used to be artillery duels. We had British artillery in Tobruk and they used to have duels

with the enemy. Another thing in the daytime, of course, in the early days of Tobruk it was virtually continuous air attacks, Stuka dive-bombers coming down and they were trying to…mainly for our artillery they were aiming for.

28:30 They used to go for the front line sometimes. They caused amazingly few casualties actually, the bombing.

Did you just hide as low as you could in your trench because you…?

Yeah. That's all you could do. Sit down and hang on.

And put your tin hat on.

Oh yeah. That was like a… You'd sleep with your tin hat. If they started a shelling you'd just put it over the side of your head and carry on.

Wouldn't have been very comfortable.

29:00 No.

And how wide were the trenches? How long and how wide?

Oh, about that wide. They had a certain sort of system they called them star trenches. They had zig zag, and they'd have deeper pits where they had their guns mounted, machine guns and what have you. But the Italian themselves at the Tobruk fortresses had this fantastic system right round, a big anti-tank ditch

29:30 so the tanks….the places wasn't complete but they would be ten or twelve foot deep and steep sides, so if the tanks got in them they couldn't get out. Barbed wire, a mass of barbed wire, and these concrete underground pits where you could get into shelter if you were stationed in them. That was for shellfire and bombing, but we were mainly just in open pits outside. You could only dig about this deep by hand.

30:00 **Were the men expected to dig their own?**

Oh yeah, you dug your own holes.

The ones who were maybe more tenacious, they could build themselves a pretty deep one.

You only could go about that deep as I say, because you only had just little light picks and shovels and you just went down deep enough to get below ground level.

30:30 **By the way. how did you fix your gun that jammed with all the sand?**

I think I eventually bashed it open. Everyone had the same trouble. I've got miles of stuff from the war there, chaps' diaries and that. See I'm president, not president, patron of the 2/9th Battalion association at the moment, and

31:00 a few of the keen collectors over the years have sent me a copy of the stuff down. I've got it all stacked there.

So are you saying a lot of blokes had the same problem with their weapons?

Yeah. One platoon had this Archie Nixon-Smith. He mentioned how all their guns were jammed with sand.

You just have to bash them open and get the sand out.

Get it up and back like that because they were the old rifle. You just lifted it up

31:30 pushed it forward and down. That loaded it. As I say, I fired this first shot and just couldn't open it again. And they were throwing these grenades at us as they were coming up the hill. Fortunately they weren't a very affective grenade. They were just like a percussion grenade. If you got hit with one it could do damage.

Were you the only one…You were on a Bren gun, is that correct?

32:00 No, a Vickers gun.

A Vickers gun. So you kept the Vickers gun at this point?

Yeah.

So you never relinquished it for the Bren gun?

No. We just kept them right through the war actually, even in New Guinea. We brought them back from the Middle East and took them to New Guinea with us.

Do you think they were better than the Bren guns?

Oh in certain…Bren gun, the infantry used those because you could use those firing while you were walking whereas the Vickers gun is a heavy gun mounted on a tripod.

32:30 **So who would carry the Vickers gun?**

Well, it took about five men to carry everything. One bloke would carry the tripod, another would carry the gun and the other three would carry a can of water and two boxes of ammunition. And then the other blokes behind would carry belts of ammunition too.

And did you swap around so that every day you were not carrying the same thing?

Not really. A

33:00 number one on a gun, that was his job.

And what about you, did you operate the gun?

In the last couple of years of the war I was in charge of the machine gun platoon. We didn't have any officers in New Guinea for a while. We just had all sergeants in charge of the different platoons.

Now this might be a bit of an obvious observation and question,

33:30 **but you were talking about the British artillery actually being the cause of some of our men's deaths.**

Mmm.

Was there then a resentment on the Australian behalf towards the British?

It was the Australians' own fault. No. We had fantastic admiration for the British artillery, particularly in Tobruk, they were fantastic. They were that accurate with their firing and even through air raids they would be firing.

34:00 Because the air raids were directed mainly at the artillery to try and knock their guns out.

Why do you say it was the Aussies fault that the…

Well in the attack the artillery fires while the infantry comes up so far. Then the artillery lifts and another few hundred yards and the infantry keeps following behind it. A creeping barrage they call it. But this company went too

34:30 far ahead and got caught in the barrage. The officer, the captain in charge, he got killed. A chap called Reedy. Captain Reedy.

What were the opinions of the officers in Tobruk? Do you remember?

No. We never had any trouble with officers. No. They were all good men.

So you were a Rat of Tobruk.

Mmm.

35:00 **Did the men know that they were being called Rats of Tobruk at the time?**

Oh yeah. You could listen to Lord Haw Haw at night. Some of the places had radio, you know. The signal platoon had radios and we used to think it was quite amusing really.

That you were being called a rat?

Yeah. No, morale was good there. No worries. It was good right through the war really.

35:30 All the chaps in our battalion anyway.

Did you lose many men from the 2/9 Divi when you were there in Tobruk?

Yeah. I've forgotten how many men we lost in Tobruk. About forty killed I think. I don't know how many wounded. No our biggest casualties were at Buna and Sanananda in New Guinea. Shocker.

Were you mates with any of these

36:00 **men in the desert that died?**

Oh yes. I knew quite a few of them. As I say, Jimmy Smith. He was a chap who sort of befriended me when I first went in. Two others out of our platoon were killed. I think about thirty killed there at JeraBub.

Harvey did you see any of your mates killed?

No. I saw them after they were

36:30 killed.

This might sound like a horrible question but I'm curious to know. Those young men that

were killed in Tobruk, if the ground was so hard what could they do? Could they still bury them?

Yeah, well they did bury them after it was all over. They buried them in an oasis that was there. It would have been just sand in some places, soft sand. But I think they brought all those bodies back.

37:00 They were brought back to Tobruk now and buried in the cemetery there, a big cemetery in Tobruk.

What was the opinion of the Germans in Tobruk of their fighting skills or not skills?

Oh we knew we were up against a real enemy there. Yeah. I wasn't, I didn't actually go in person

37:30 and witness…After we were in the salient we were just back behind and the blokes in front of us put in a counter attack to try and put the Germans back in daylight. And that's where we had a lot of casualties. And they called a truce so the ambulances could come in and take the wounded and dead out. This German officer said to one of our fellows out there, "You won't be trying this again in a hurry, will you?"

38:00 Because we lost quite a few men there, just in daylight. That's why everything happened at night there.

Did you have funeral services for the men killed?

No. No. They were just taken away and buried.

That would have affected the men deeply.

No, I don't know. It sort of, you might get word, "So and so

38:30 has been killed," or something and you just sort of accepted it.

What about that time from home, did you get post or mail from home, from Australia?

Oh we didn't get mail for a long time. Not until we came back to the Middle East. See we weren't expected to go to England and we didn't get any mail for months and months. When we got back to the Middle East

39:00 we got mail pretty regularly. Particularly in Tobruk they tried to keep the mail up to us there, parcels and what have you. People were sending parcels from home and the Comforts Fund and what have you. It was a big day when you got a few parcels with a cake in it or something.

Did you get anything silly like a tennis racquet or something that you couldn't use?

No, I don't recall that.

39:30 You used to get a lot of knitted things. They used to like making these balaclavas and gloves because it was cold in Tobruk, you know, freezing at night. And they used to make these balaclavas that went over your hat and all you had was your eyes, like this, like a Ned Kelly business.

You could rob a bank.

Yeah, like a captive.

Actually you told us about what you used to do with your socks. Can you tell us again, with your socks?

40:00 They'd get a bit muddy round the toes with sweat and dust, and you'd dry them out in the sun and just belt them on a rock, get the dust out. You could rinse them out occasionally in salt water but, no.

Tape 4

00:30 **Harvey you mentioned to us earlier on that you were rationed a pint of water per day. Can you tell us how you would spend that pint of water?**

Mainly just for drinking. That's all.

What about things like shaving or anything like that?

Well, I don't know. We shaved. I don't remember never ever shaving…not shaving during the war.

01:00 It was a great morale booster to keep yourself shaved and what have you. I know in New Guinea I used to shave at night. Just sit there and shave in the blind sort of thing, by feel, and then look for the patches of skin in the morning. No. We used to shave every day in Tobruk. You don't need much water for that really.

01:30 I don't recall ever having a real…getting thirsty or craving water or a shortage of water. You'd have your tea at night time and a pint of water would do you for the rest of the day. I suppose as far as washing goes you'd just damp a cloth or something and wipe your face with it.

02:00 **And was it just the one cup of tea a day?**

Oh well, that's all there was, but in the Comforts Funds and the parcels from home people used to send us lots of stuff. Cakes and chocolates and a bit of coffee or tea or what have you. It seemed to make up for a lot.

What were one of the

02:30 **best parcels you were happiest to receive?**

Oh, I guess the ones with food in them of course. Get away from the bully beef and biscuits. You'd always share it round of course.

You mentioned to Heather [interviewer] earlier that when you were on the front line there, I mean basically

03:00 **you wouldn't sleep at night because of the shelling and at day you had to keep your head down. So what could you actually do, I guess, to get back at the Germans. What kinds of things were you doing?**

Oh, you really couldn't do much unless you were put in an attack.

03:30 Well only really twice our battalion put an attack in Tobruk. One at night and there was this one in the daytime which was a failure. The one at night time was a success because we recaptured a couple of posts but the other battalions had no luck so we had to withdraw.

Harvey for the record can

04:00 **you actually lead us through I guess, what happened on both of those attacks, say firstly the night one?**

Well, the night one, our battalion was sent round on the left side to try and go along the line and capture these posts. The other battalion would come along the other way. We went, the battalion had gone up and we came up after them in our Bren gun carriers. And the battalion had its sort of headquarters then which was just in one of the dugouts.

04:30 And the machine gun fire was shocking. How a person never ever got hit I don't know. But the rifle companies had captured a few of the posts ahead of us. We just waited there to advance and go on and then the order was given to pull back. We withdrew back to where we were stationed back at an area called Er Regima. We were only there a couple of days when we went back up… where the Germans

05:00 had come through there was a gap in the front line, we went up to fill that gap. That's when one of the rifle companies put in an attack in broad daylight and just got mowed down actually. That night we moved up and started digging trenches to make a perimeter round like that. And that's where we spent six weeks there and virtually everyone just kept their head down. There was a lot

05:30 of firing. A lot of it was blind firing. At night time, that's where I got a bullet through the hat. We went out to try and establish a line of barbed wire between us and the Germans. I'll never forget, we were out one night putting the wire up and we had our sergeant, old Chris Tibbets. Someone had dropped a shell and made a bit of a noise, and old Chris is down and at the top…

06:00 He had a bull voice. "Don't make bloody noise up there." He made more noise than anyone.

Can you tell us you mentioned it briefly before but the incident where you got a bullet right though your hat. Can you tell us I guess in detail what happened?

Well as I said, I went out with this Captain Suthers and Vince Ledbetter.

06:30 We went out and put in some pegs for where to run the wire. And me being the tallest I just started to drive the first peg, star pickets they were. We had them in those days. And next thing I saw this string of lights coming and they seemed to float like that. Next thing they were flashing past me. It was a machine gun burst with tracer bullets. Next thing I

07:00 got this whack on the head and I was knocked head over heels, and the others came over to me and they couldn't see anything, it was dark…a bit of blood, and I put my field dressing on under my hat, and old Granny Suthers said, "I think we've had enough for the night." So I went back to where the front line was and then I went back to the RAP to the doc. That was back a few

07:30 hundred yards and they had a look at it and said, "That's not too bad. You've just got a cut there." And, "Do you want to go to the field hospital for a few day?" I said, "I'll be right. I'll go back up to the front line." So I went back and I was walking back and all of a sudden I realized there was a minefield between the front and the second line, only a few hundred yards. I realized I was in

08:00 the minefield. So I got down and felt my way out of it. When you're burying mines there are just three little prongs sticking up. And I got out of the minefield and found my dugout and just got settled in there, just got to sleep and the next thing something woke me up. It was this bloody enormous

centipede crawling across my face, and I let him go. And anyway,

08:30 he eventually got off my face and I killed him. But I reckon that was one of the worst nights I had had.

I think so. When you saw the burst of fire and felt the hit and got knocked over. Did you think you'd kind of died in that moment? Did you know what had actually happened?

I knew what happened, and when I hit the ground I knew I was still alive. I didn't know how badly

09:00 I'd been hit but, I'll show you the hat later on and you can see where it really saved my life. The battalion, they want to put it in their…They've got a museum in Brisbane, the 2/9th Battalion, at Enoggera, and they want to put it in that. That's where it will end up one day I suppose. The kids want me to keep it.

And in the dugouts how would you protect yourselves against

09:30 **the shell fire that would explode above ground and send shrapnel?**

Oh, you couldn't really. You'd just crouch in one corner of the pit and hope for the best.

And did those particular shells make a particular sound, or were they coming all night?

Oh, they didn't use them that much, but I had this particular friend of mine, Peter Murphy. They were on a machinegun in one area of the salient

10:00 and they just got posted in the daytime. A few of them were there killed with this gun, particular gun. The others used to use conventional shelling a lot. The shell would hit the ground and explode. Providing you were up in that end of the pit and the shell was going that way, well the shrapnel would just go ahead.

And,

10:30 **I mean how close would the shellfire be to the pits of all of you guys?**

Some of it would land right in the pits. We had quite a few fellows killed with shellfire. I've had them. I'd be crouched in a trench here and they'd virtually hit about there on top of the parapet. Although because you were below ground level it

11:00 sort of saved your life. No, I hated the shellfire because the shells were on top of you before you realized. Whereas the bombing in daylight, you could watch the bombs falling out of the plane and you knew where they were going to land.

That must have been horrible. And in the pit what would you feel? Would it be like a mini

11:30 **earthquake or would the ground rattle a little bit?**

Oh well, it was just a terrific explosion and a lot of dirt and dust flying. No, they used to shell any time. I remember once we were back a few hundred yards. We were out in the open, we were sort of out of sight of the Germans but they must have been able to see us. I don't know what we were doing.

12:00 The officer of all things, he called for a kit inspection. That's where you put all your gear out and they inspect to see that you've got everything in broad daylight. The next thing a salvo of shells landed amongst us. One of my mates, poor old Charlie Dash, he was running and he went down and yelled out, "I'm hit, I'm hit." I ran over to him and fortunately he had a big webbing belt on and he was hit right on his webbing belt in the back. It went through the webbing belt and just

12:30 sort of bruised his back. But of all the stupid things to do, like a kit inspection in broad daylight within range of the guns.

You wouldn't have thought that's something you'd do on the front line.

No. That's the least thing you'd worry about.

Very strange. So what kind of…I mean I've heard quite a lot… Obviously to get called

13:00 **Rats of Tobruk you were frustrating the Germans quite a lot. What kinds of things would you do to keep them occupied or keep them frustrated?**

Oh well, I think one of the main things was General Morshead had adopted this policy of sending patrols out all night to harass them. They never knew when they were going to be attacked. I don't think they ever put in a

13:30 night attack, only the one time when they took this little section of the front line, which they held on right to the end. They couldn't push them out. We tried a few times but weren't successful.

This might be a bit of an obvious question but from someone who wasn't there, how

14:00 **did you all stay dug in? I'm getting a picture of the Australians and the Germans quite close to one and another and you keep digging into the front line. And they were shelling you**

constantly so couldn't they, I guess, wipe you out through barrage?

Well, there were breaks. Some days there was no shelling at all. You used to get these terrific sandstorms

14:30 and all you could do was sit in your hole and hope you weren't buried by sand. And in daytimes, particularly with the sandstorms, you couldn't see ten yards in front of you. Nothing could be done really. Everyone just hung on and they'd go for a couple of days sometimes. But as I say, most

15:00 of the shelling was done at night time and they used to have what they called fire fights. Everyone would be firing blindly in the night. Away on one other side of the perimeter you'd hear terrific bursts of fire and you'd think, "Something's happening over there tonight."

And would others sort of join in to this mad firing?

Oh yes,

15:30 particularly in New Guinea, at Milne Bay there. Everyone's nerves were really on edge there at night time. Someone would fire a shot and someone else would fire and the next thing everyone would be firing. Different sort of warfare in New Guinea. It was all virtually blind shooting. I'd say most of the chaps who were killed or wounded up there never saw a Jap, a live one. It was just, you know, jungle.

16:00 **And how close did you get to the Germans in Tobruk?**

Oh, it would have been hard to say. There would have been fifty yards or a hundred yards between us. In parts the front lines were miles apart. A lot of it was just flat open ground. There was nowhere to sort of take protection.

16:30 **I guess that's why they were so surprised that you were so hard to get rid of.**

Yeah, well.

And you've talked, you've mentioned a bit about having a sense of humour going a long way. Can you give any particular examples that stand out to you in your memory of

17:00 **getting through the day with a bit of a joke?**

I remember one night we were moving our Bren gun carriers around somewhere, and I think there was a lot of activity that night, a lot of shellfire going on. Of course, in Tobruk there was Italian ammunition everywhere and dumps of it. And this particular friend of mine, Harry Maffie, was driving his carrier along.

17:30 And above the roaring of the motor and the shell fire, and old Chris Tibbets was the command of the carrier, the corporal, and Harry's driving along singing away like there's nothing happening. He thought he was moving along the road, you know. And what happened was he had driven up onto a heap of ammunition and the carrier couldn't move.

18:00 Another one of our fellows, Harry Stevens, he was a despatch rider in Tobruk at that time, on a motorbike. He got on the rum somewhere behind the lines and must have had a bit and he was roaring around there on his motorbike…full.

You'd have to do something to relieve the tension, wouldn't you?

Another time we were back in another area sort of resting,

18:30 and somehow I had rinsed my clothes out in salt water and I couldn't find a clothesline anywhere. There was masses of sig [signal] wire running along the ground, and there was heaps of them, and I thought they were all Italian lines. So I cut a lump out of one of them and made a clothes line out of it, and hung my clothes out. About twenty minutes later this Royal Horse Artillery van came along, checking the line, checking the line, and they came to this gap in the line.

19:00 He saw the clothesline and came over and, "Whose clothesline's that?" And he came over and said, "Do you realize you've just cut a line to the front line, to our observation post on the front line?" I thought, "Oh well that's it." I hadn't heard any more about it but he reported it to our officer. I don't know whether they thought it was a spy or not but I got a bit of a reprimand. "Don't do it again."

19:30 **That's a good story.**

We were always getting a bit bomb happy there. One of our fellows had an Italian machine gun there and he was a bit of a gun crack. All day he'd just sit there shooting into a bit of a hole in the ground. Pop, pop, pop. A couple of days later one of the Royal Horse Artillery, they had a troop of guns not far from us came across and said, "If you don't stop that shooting

20:00 I'll turn the guns on you." Apparently they were getting a lot of ricochets coming across.

I guess what was your position in the machine guns unit at that stage in Tobruk?

Oh we changed. You'd be number one on a gunner sometimes, or number two, three, and so on, back.

20:30 We used to do a lot of…When we were just back behind the front lines a hundred yards, we used to do a lot of carrying at night, carrying up supplies to the boys in the front and so on. Digging extra trenches. That's when we used to do most of our digging, at night time, and we'd get out above ground level. We had one old bloke, old Barney Drury form the West. He smoked a pipe

21:00 and we were digging these trenches this night and old Barney said, no one lit a match or anything in Tobruk at night. Old Barney said, "I think I'll have a smoke." "No, no Barney. No, no." He went down in the trench he had been digging and lit his pipe. The next thing is a salvo of shells right on top of us. How the hell, they had us pinpointed, you know, even at night. There were no casualties fortunately and old Barney put his

21:30 pipe out.

He lit it above ground, he lit it outside the trench?

It would have been, the trench's only that deep. They would have got a flare off the match.

Keen eyed.

He didn't survive. He was on a machine gun that got a shell right on top of it in one of the pits when he was in the front line. But old Barney, all he wanted to be was number one on the gun.

22:00 Mow them down, poor old beggar.

You mentioned earlier that some of the fellows in training that came out from the west were the roughest and the wildest bunch of fellows.

Yeah.

Did you have some of them with you in Tobruk?

None in our platoon, no. Most of them… in the early days in Ingleburn the transport platoon had horses, believe it or not, horse transport.

22:30 Of course they handled the horses. But when we went to England we didn't take horses with us, and they commandeered all these civilian trucks and what have you, and gave them to us. The greatest assortment of vehicles you've ever seen. A lot of chaps had never even driven a vehicle in those days. I can remember at one stage there, everyone had to learn to drive and ride a motorbike. I'd never ridden a motorbike.

23:00 I hated the things. But I had done a little bit of driving. My father had an old T Model Ford and I was able to drive that. We all learned to drive trucks in England and we got to Bren gun carriers and had to learn to drive those. We had a lot of fun in those in England. We were always the enemy, the carrier platoon. We'd go out and set up roadblocks and the battalion would be attacking, you know.

23:30 But at night time when the action was over we'd clear out of the area and go to the nearest village and spend the night there.

That sounds pretty good.

Yeah. British people were great. They were really.

They received the Aussies well?

Yes.

I actually want to get to your time in England in a minute but here's my last question about Tobruk.

24:00 **It was five months you were there. That is quite a while in that kind of action.**

You know, you were in and out of the front line and sometimes you'd go a week, particularly in the sand storms and dust storms where nothing would happen. Everyone just hung in there really, just to survive it.

What would have been the worst of it, I guess for you, with what you

24:30 **were doing?**

Oh, I don't know. Probably…well I suppose the worst would be the shelling at night time or the shelling any time because you never knew when it was going to happen. The shells were on top of you before the sound gets to you. The shells would land and next thing you'd

25:00 hear the explosions of where they had been fired from. The gunfire came after the shell.

And I guess, what was it… I mean it sounds like a horrid question, but what was it like losing fellows that you knew?

Well as I said, you sort of

25:30 mightn't have been there with them. I was never really there, they might have been on another gun somewhere and someone would say, "Barney Drury's copped it," or so and so and so and so. But no one ever went to the funeral or anything like that. Probably the padre would have gone, the minister priests. But you couldn't…They wouldn't pull you back out of the front line to go to a funeral.

26:00 A few of our chaps that had been wounded in the front line were in hospital in Tobruk and were wounded again. They bombed the hospital there a few times. One of me mates lost his leg there, in the hospital actually.

That's bad luck.

Yeah.

That sounds unusual for Germans to be bombing a hospital?

26:30 Well, whether it was marked or not I don't know, you know. And it was near the harbour and they bombed the harbour a lot so it could have been just a miss-hit sort of thing.

I guess, is that how the fellows took it, that it was a miss-hit?

Yeah. Because you didn't get much news of what was going on around the place. Later on they brought out a paper in Tobruk. What did they call it? The Tobruk Truth, or something.

27:00 Someone started up a little paper with the local news. That was about all you got.

Were the Germans dropping any propaganda leaflets or anything like that?

Yeah, they did drop them in Tobruk. I never ever, I saw them but I never souvenired one unfortunately. They were wanting us to surrender.

Do you remember what sort of things they'd say?

No, I can't really, no.

27:30 **Okay, Harvey, were there any fellows who with all the constant shellfire got affected by that and found it a bit hard to take after a while?**

No, I only know of one. He was our Major, Fred Lubkey, and he had been in the First World War. I believe it affected him. He went out of Tobruk.

What happened to him?

28:00 Oh, he stopped in the battalion but he was back in Palestine in the training area. I believe later on he got onto the….It might have been after the war, the war crimes commission. He might have been an advocate or a judge or something on that.

And do you recall how it affected him at the time?

No, not really. No. Well, I think it affected probably older blokes

28:30 more than young fellows. But I never ever saw anyone crack up.

Ok Harvey, if I can just take you back to before you got to Tobruk, getting into the UK [United Kingdom], or Scotland and the UK for the first time. That was your first, I guess, first place overseas

29:00 **in a sense from Australia. What were your first impressions of England?**

Well, you know, when we landed in England, see we landed up in Gourock, and as we were coming down by train troops were coming off Dunkirk. We landed there about the same time as Dunkirk. They were coming up in the trains and we were coming down onto Salisbury Plains. One amusing thing as you'd go though the villages was all the people out giving us

29:30 the victory sign like that. Of course we didn't know anything about the victory sign and we thought, "What's this?" So we were giving it back to them. But no, as I say, the first six weeks in England was glorious. It didn't rain, the weather was perfect. It was a drought they reckon. We thought it was wonderful and actually we were,

30:00 our brigade was put on standby because when it looked like the Germans were going to invade, they had all the barges ready to go and they must have got an alert put out, and we were out in the fields that night on standby. And that's when the Germans called off the invasion.

So there was a genuine fear that they were going to…

Oh yeah. I think

30:30 that initiated our battalion a lot of the war because, you know, saw a lot of bombing there and the air

battle overhead. Having a big fighter drome next door, we saw the blokes coming and going.

Can you tell us a little bit about what you saw of the damage from bombing and things?

Oh well, we never…We only got thirty-six hours London leave and that was before the

31:00 bombing started. And then after that we got six days leave to anywhere and I went up to Edinburgh. And we didn't see much bombing actually. We never got into the towns again. I think we left England the night they flattened Coventry, the Germans. I think that's the night we left England and sailed. But see we were pretty close to

31:30 Winchester and Salisbury and they used to bomb those towns. You could see the ack-ack [anti-aircraft] firing at night and the searchlights. Hundreds of searchlights all night going, weaving around and picking up the planes if they could. They didn't do it very often. And then the Germans started the daylight bombing and we must have been in their flight path because they used to come overhead in their droves, bombing.

32:00 The fighter planes would go up. We saw a lot of aerial battles. I think that gave us a bit of initiation into the war before we got to the Middle East instead of sort of going in cold.

I guess of the air battles that you saw, what was your opinion of the British pilots versus the German?

Oh fantastic. They'd just take off,

32:30 and take off in formation, the whole squadron across the field. You could hear their engines screaming to get a bit of height.

And what would you see of the actual dogfights between them and the Germans?

You would see it all overhead and all of a sudden you'd hear this tinkling on the ground around you and it would be all the

33:00 little clips. You know how they would clip the bullets together? All these little metal clips would come tinkling down on the ground. It was fantastic really.

And how did the German pilots size up to the Allies?

Well I didn't see any of the…. I don't think the German fighters could get that far, but the Spitfires when they got amongst the bombers, they'd

33:30 be dropping them here and there. I think a lot of the bombers never got to their targets. They'd just jettison their bombs and head for home. At about that time they called for volunteers for the air gunners for the Royal Air Force, thank God. We all volunteered by no one took us, thank God.

34:00 **Very lucky. It was incredible. You mentioned before that when you were all stationed there you were living in bell tents.**

They were like a round tent that comes up to a peak and they were about, they'd take about eight men I think and you'd sleep with your feet into the centre. The sidewall was only about that high and it would come up to a peak. But

34:30 we were there for about three months I think, and then it started to get really cold so they moved us up to Colchester, north of London into proper barracks.

You mentioned that you were doing quite a few exercises while you were there for that time, just keeping in training and…?

Yeah, in training.

35:00 We were training every day. You'd be out doing something and someone would take out a defensive position and others would put in attacks and so on. And you'd have referees out there to say who'd been killed and who hadn't been, and so on.

Actually you reminded me of a question I had earlier when you mentioned that. You said you'd get told by a referee if you'd been killed or if you were wounded and how would you act if you had

35:30 **been wounded. Say you'd been shot in the arm….?**

Oh well, they had stretcher-bearers. It was their job to come up and do a pretend job on you. Yeah. The stretcher-bearers were also the band. We had a band of course. Every battalion had a band. Their initial job was a stretcher-bearer, first aid and what have you.

36:00 **And what would you do with time off, I guess?**

Well, we never had much money. Most of the blokes had money allotted home; we were only on six shillings a day. I allotted half home to my mother and you couldn't do much with three shillings. Oh now

and again you could shoot through, if you had a leave pass, to the nearest little village, and have a few drinkies, walk home.

36:30 But they had a big NAAFI [Navy Army Air Force Institute]. It was a British thing. What did it stand for? Navy, army, air force. It was a big tent and you could go and buy a bit of food there, a bun and have a cup of coffee, and I think they used to get games of bingo going or two up. One of our battalion fellows, he ran a two up game.

37:00 And oh, just go and read there. Lights out was ten o'clock. You weren't allowed any lights in your tent. That was the only place there would be a light in this big tent. But everyone had to be in bed by ten o'clock anyway. We used to get, not weekend leave but Sunday leave and most of us used to go over to Bournemouth. They used to run buses there, and spend the day there and wander round, and have

37:30 drinks and back to camp.

A little seaside town.

Yeah, I'll never forget we were over there one day, and when I talk about a beach it's just gravel actually. They've got all these little beach huts along. You've probably seen them like any families have them. Two mates and I were walking along…three of us I think,

38:00 through these huts and a little girl came running after us and said, "Mummy wants to know if you'd like to come and have a cup of tea?" Back we went and these ladies were there in front of their little private hut and we had tea and bickies with them. One of them said, "Now you know why we feel so safe with you Aussies here. You all look so tough."

You had a good reputation.

Apparently.

Tape 5

00:31 **Harvey, can you let us know. You mentioned before about going into Syria after Tobruk. Can you tell us about that time and if you continued training? What did you do in Syria?**

Well when we came out of Tobruk back to Palestine, the colonel lined the battalion up and said, "There's no need for you to all go AWL [Absent Without Leave]. You'll all get seven days' leave to Cairo and what have you."

01:00 Well most of us are still waiting for that. We didn't get it because within a few days we were packed up and were on trucks on the way up to Syria. The first stop was at a little place called Baalbek. There are some fantastic ruins there. We were there for a few weeks and then we moved up to just outside Idlib. Not Idlib…anyway, another little place. We were there for a few weeks

01:30 and then we moved up to Aleppo into big stone barracks, French barracks. And we were there for a few weeks. In that time we weren't doing any training. We were just sort of resting. We would walk down into town every night, into Aleppo. The Australian Army made a sort of big canteen there. We would go and sit and drink and smoke and have something to eat, which most of us were quite content to do.

02:00 From there we moved across towards the coast to a little village called Idlib. We were just in tents there in the olive groves and we virtually did nothing there. Then we moved over to Ladhiqiyah on the coast, right up near the Turkish border. Some of the battalion were actually stationed on the Turkish border, facing the Turks. Well we did nothing there…no training. We were just left to ourselves.

02:30 **Sorry but Harvey did they leave you there until they got word of what to do with you, or did they leave you there to give you a bit of a break?**

Oh, just to give us a break really. And I think they must have…you often think of the logistics of the army moving people and how far they had to plan ahead. It must have been terrific. We were there for a couple of months I suppose. We were there for the 1941

03:00 Christmas it would have been. When did Japan come into the war? December '41?

December '41.

Yeah, well we knew Japan was in the war.

What were the feelings amongst the men when Japan came into the war?

Oh well, I don't know. We didn't think much about it. We had no thought that we would be brought home. Actually, we were expecting the Turks to attack.

03:30 Particularly on Christmas day we had to stand-to expecting an attack but it didn't happen. And shortly after Christmas the next thing we were packed up and we got word we were coming back to Australia. We drove by truck down through Syria and we stopped overnight at one place in Beirut I think, and

back into Palestine.

04:00 We were there for a couple of weeks I think, and then we came by train back down to Suez with our Bren gun carriers and the whole battalion. And we were there for about a week and then we went onto the [SS] Nieuw Amsterdam, a big Dutch steamer and all the transport went onto another ship. They came home a different way. We went across to Bombay and then

04:30 we transhipped onto small coastal boats. We had one day…I think we had one day's leave in Bombay. We went ashore or just enough to walk round the town and have a look round. My mate and I went and watched a cricket match. Went out and had a look at the Gate of India.

Who was playing in Bombay? Do you remember?

Just a couple of local teams, English teams I think.

Let me ask you Harvey, when you were in Syria, actually Palestine, I've heard stories

05:00 **of the brothels there. Did you happen to come across any?**

No. We were all pretty good boys really. No. I'm just trying to think. As I say, we didn't get any leave first of all in Palestine. Up in Syria…Well at one stage, over in Ladhiqiyah, there were a couple of brothels there.

05:30 **Where were they, sorry?**

Ladhiqiyah.

Ladhiqiyah.

And it was quite funny really. One night it was for the Australians and another night for the French, and in between it was for anyone. The local population I guess. It was our duty to go down at night on guard, and keep the Australians out when it wasn't their night. I'll never forget this one night and we were on guard there and this big room like this and little rooms off it.

06:00 It was cold and they used to have these open brazier type fires going, and all the girls would sit around in the lounge and we'd sit and talk to them. And this one night the madam came to us and said, "There's some of your fellows trying to come in at the front door. You better go and chase them away." It wasn't their night you see. So out we went, and of course the fellows had shot through. We walked all round the building and couldn't find them anywhere. It wasn't till later on, I knew who the fellows were later on.

06:30 What they'd done, they'd gone around the back, and there was a well there. They'd climbed down the ladder and hid there until we went off duty and then emerged. Of course, the ladies didn't mind because it was all money.

So they let them back in?

Oh of course, because it's all money to them. No, your biggest worry over there was disease, VD [Venereal Disease]. You used to get

07:00 lectures on it and they'd show slides. It was enough to put you off it for life.

So you didn't get a girl there?

No. No. Don't think I ever spoke to a woman in the Middle East because we weren't in contact with the civilian population, and there were that many troops there. Hundreds of thousands of French, English, Australians, and New Zealanders.

Gee, those girls must have been busy.

Yeah.

07:30 They would have made a packet. I felt sorry for the girls really because things were pretty grim in Europe. A lot of them were refugees and what have you. What else could they do really?

A lot of them, their husbands were probably off fighting or been killed.

Yeah, could have been killed, particularly if they were Jewish or what have you.

So what would you do? Would you just sit around the fire and talk to the women while

08:00 **they were having a break?**

Yes, they weren't that busy. They were funny.

Are you thinking what I'm thinking, meaning these men hadn't seen women for so long that they wouldn't have long episodes with these men?

No, they'd be in and out and gone in five minutes. They reckon that's what the girls used to like over there,

08:30 the Australians. Not like the French. They used to muck around and all this and take ages, whereas the Aussies were in and out and gone.

So they could have a good turnover, pardon the pun. So I'm just actually thinking, how would you keep the men at bay? Was that your only one night guarding the brothel, that one night?

09:00 I think I did a couple of nights but every company had it in turns, you know. So you wouldn't get many turns to do guard duty. You had other things to do at night. You could be on battalion guard. Around the battalion, they always had a guard round the battalion on all night in the lines for security. That would have been one of the pick jobs down there.

So for instance, if it was the French night, there

09:30 **would you have been French guards?**

Well, if it was the French turn to go in there then the Australians would be on guard to keep the Australians out.

And if it was an Australian night the French would be?

Oh, I guess so. Yeah.

How did the Aussies get on with the other men there from other nationalities?

Oh, we never mixed. I don't think I ever met a Frenchman all the time I was over there. They were hostile against the Australians because

10:00 the French governed Syria at the time you see. And when the 7th Division captured Syria, when they went through they were fighting the French, you see. So I don't think the French and the Australians got on too well. They had been virtual enemies. I don't think much of the French anyway, if you don't mind me saying.

I don't mind you saying so but why do you say that?

Well, I think they've been a bit of failure in both world wars

10:30 really. In the last war they capitulated easily and in the first war, and so on. No, I don't know, I just don't.

That's all right. That's okay.

I'll never forget going over in a ship, where we had in our platoon, claimed to be a Frenchman, and France capitulated while we were going to England. And one of our boys said something to him about it

11:00 and he really was upset about it.

What did he say?

Oh, I don't know but he didn't like it. This chap said something about the French tossing it in, giving it away so early, and he resented it.

Didn't the French have one of the most structured underground though?

11:30 I don't know. I don't doubt a lot of the Free French, they fought, well same as the Free Poles. A Polish brigade relieved us in Tobruk actually, and they were really sort of not mad men but really stirred up about it. Same as the Polish air force, the Free Polish pilots, they had a fantastic record for flying.

12:00 No. We got on well with the Poles though.

So can you tell us Harvey, after Syria you came back through India.

No, well we came to Bombay and then Colombo and then we were going to Burma. That's when Curtin insisted the AIF be brought home. We came back to Bombay and sat there for a couple of days

12:30 then came home and landed in Fremantle first.

How was that like, coming back into Australia after the Middle East?

Anticipation. Funnily enough, I think I might have told you, I had an uncle living in Perth. He was my grandfather's brother and he had been in the First World War. I went up to see him anyway, Uncle Jim, and I thought I'd get a warm welcome.

13:00 It was quite cold. He said, "It's a pity they brought you back." Apparently the first convoy coming back from the Middle East had really played up in Perth.

What do you mean played up? Drinking and on the booze.

On the grog and what have you and fighting I guess, and probably doing a bit of damage around the town. He was all right. He was in the First World War. We came back to Adelaide

13:30 and went out to a camp just outside there at Sandy Creek. We were there for about three weeks. About this time our Bren gun carriers, all our transport came back on the boats. The boys went in one day to get their Bren gun carriers off the ship and the wharfies wouldn't unload them.

Why wouldn't they unload them?

Well they were sort of pro Communist and what have you,

14:00 and sort of anti-AIF, the wharfies.

In Adelaide?

In Australia. Even going to New Guinea and the Japs were on our doorstep they wouldn't load the ships in Brisbane. But anyway, getting back to Adelaide, the boys went in to get our carriers off and Chris Tibbets, our sergeant said, "We'll get them off ourselves." They said, "No, you won't." Chris said, "Get out of the way. We're going to do it."

14:30 Anyway this boss wharfie tried to stop Chris and he picked him up and threw him into the sea. And the boys got their carriers off. So anyway, they came out and something was said, and they came out and interviewed the colonel, our Colonel Clem Cummins. And he called Chris Tibbets up and wanted to know what had gone on and Chris told him and he said, "Good on you."

15:00 He was all for his men, the Colonel, Clem Cummins. Anyway, we were there for a few weeks and we transhipped up to Tenterfield by train all through the back of New South Wales. We were there for a few weeks and they gave us seven days home leave. Most of us were from Brisbane so it was a matter of just a day and we were home.

Can you tell us about coming home for the first time? That would have been…Was this early in

15:30 **1942 then?**

Well it would have…We went to Milne Bay in August. It would have been early '42.

How was your mum and dad seeing you?

Well, we got off the train at Roma Street and Mum was there. Another girl I knew, she was there. A girl I'd written to all the time. She ran up

16:00 and gave me a big hug and a kiss and I got a bit of a yahoo from my mates.

Was she your girlfriend?

Well sort of. Not serious but we were still good friends. She was sort of second cousin. It was amazing that we wrote all those years. We still right occasionally and ring up occasionally. I've known her ever since we were seventeen or eighteen.

16:30 I was pretty keen on her actually but never had the courage. Probably a good thing.

That must have been very strange for you after not seeing any…Well you saw some women obviously in Syria but only to talk to. It must have felt strange to get a cuddle from a woman?

Oh yeah, it was. So anyway, we had three weeks

17:00 home leave and then we went into camp up near Kilcoy. We were there for a couple of months, trained very hard then.

Can you tell us about Kilcoy? Did you happen to know then what was going on in the islands over in New Guinea.

Well, nothing was happening then at the time. The Japs were sort of coming down. You didn't get much news. I'm just trying to think.

17:30 I think at that stage they were pushing the Australians back over the Owen Stanleys because they only had militia up there then, young fellows. A book worth reading is the history of the 39th Battalion. They were all only lads of seventeen and eighteen. Everyone used to run the militia down and we did ourselves too. Chocolate soldiers we called them, but after what they did

18:00 you know, fantastic. Anyway we were at Kilcoy, we were just camped out in the bush actually. [Mount] Marysmokes they called it. I think we've got a memorial stone set up there on the side of the road…boys who paid for it. And the next thing one night, pack up, we packed up overnight into Brisbane, down to Newstead and on the boat and gone

18:30 in twenty-four hours. We didn't know where we were going but we knew New Guinea.

How did you know New Guinea, did they tell you?

Oh, it would be the only place to go. Anyway we ended up in Milne Bay.

Can I ask you about that trip going up from…Did you get on that ship in Sydney?

No, in Brisbane, Newstead.

Brisbane, Newstead then down to

19:00 **Sydney?**

No, it just sailed…

Straight up through the Islands. The Whitsundays. How was that?

Fantastic sailing through the Whitsundays just on dusk on a perfect calm day, all out on deck. One of the boys took an old gramophone with him, Peter Murphy, and playing all the old records. One of the saddest things though was that one of our fellows came from Townsville, Ted Bussey, and as we got near Townsville just on dusk, Ted got all

19:30 dressed up, polished his boots up. We said, "What's going on Ted?" He said, "Oh we're going on leave. We're going into Townsville. We'll get overnight leave." "No, we're not Ted. No way." And as we got to Townsville we turned out to go round Magnetic Island. I said, "Look Ted. We're not going in." "Yes we are. We're just dispersing for the night." Anyway, we just kept sailing and poor old Ted got killed at Buna. Never ever did

20:00 get home.

That is a sad story.

Well anyway, we got to Milne Bay. It was just mud, rain, mud, mosquitoes.

When you came into Milne Bay… See we all know Milne Bay now as the confrontation and the fighting that occurred then but were you one of the very first ones there

20:30 **at Milne Bay?**

No. There was a Queensland militia brigade there, the 9th, 21st, and 61st Militia Battalions. They were there and an American engineering unit, SeaBees [US construction battalion] they called them. They built aerodromes and airstrips and all that sort of thing. Anyway, we went out a couple of miles and set up camp. We were just in tents

21:00 then and we were there about two weeks and the next thing I think we heard gunfire, and someone said the Japs have landed across the bay. Well we didn't go into action for the first week. The militia battalions, they were stationed round, they took the first attack and they just kept getting pushed back and back and back.

21:30 And in the meantime we had moved down to the strip and we were on guard there with our machineguns. And that's where the RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force] did a fantastic job, those Kittyhawk squadrons. Just flying, landing and loading up and off again. They only had to fly five minutes and they were machine-gunning back. Load up…off…off…all day. Anyway, the Japs were getting close and closer and decided to

22:00 evacuate the RAAF back to Moresby overnight, flew all the planes off. We thought this was getting a bit serious. Anyway, they came back the next evening just on dusk. That was one of the saddest things I saw. The planes all landed safely. They only had flares along the strip and it was getting pretty dark,

22:30 and this one chap came in and almost landed and took off again, and came round and almost landed and took off again. He must have thought he was on the wrong side of the flares. Anyway, the next time he came in he landed on the other side and he was just near us and he flew straight into the coconut trees. Killed of course, the plane blew up, and his name was Davis, Flying Officer Davis. But while we were on the strip there with the machine guns the Japs strafed it a few times

23:00 with their Zeros.

What are Zeros?

That was their fighter plane, the Jap Zero, a fantastic plane. They could out-fly all ours. Anyway, shortly after that we were moved up to the front. Overnight they barged us up a couple of miles and we landed. Pouring rain and pitch black, and my particular platoon, we just got round a big tree

23:30 and sat back to back, to it waiting for daylight. Daylight came and there were dead Japs everywhere where they'd counter attacked across another drome they were building, a few days earlier. Anyway, we went up to the front and relieved the battalion up there, and over the next three days we pushed the Japs back until eventually they evacuated what was left of them, overnight.

Can you tell

24:00 **us, you arrived there at that place during the night time so it was hard to see I imagine, and then you sat back to back all night and then you woke up in the morning and there were all these dead bodies. What did you think? Did you think then that it was serious?**

Yeah, I remember there was one person I admired, was the frontline infantry man,

24:30 the real man in the front. I reckon every one of them should have got a VC [Victoria Cross] because see, really at Milne Bay, I doubt if anyone that got wounded or killed saw a Jap. I didn't see a live Jap, only one live one actually. Because everything was point blank. There was just thick jungle and you just fired madly, blindly into it. And as I say, a lot of the chaps got wounded wouldn't have seen

25:00 a Jap. I know at night time what used to happen is we would form a tight perimeter with our backs to the sea, and the company, whoever you were with, just virtually men side-by-side round in a tight perimeter like that, so that no one could get through the lines. Someone would fire a shot or something and the next thing everyone would be firing blindly into the jungle.

25:30 You never knew if you were being attacked or not. Well that went on for three days I think, till we finally got to the last place and the Japs had gone. They had been evacuated over night. Some of them had escaped over the island to the other side. And then we came back to our original camp. That's where I got malaria there. Most of us had malaria.

Harvey did you lose…Sorry, firstly

26:00 **did all the men that went with you in the 9th Divi in Tobruk go…?**

Actually we were an independent brigade at that stage, the 18th Brigade. We were originally 6th Divi but it's a long story. See while I was in England they changed the formation of the AIF. In a division there used to be twelve battalions, and in each …three battalions to a brigade,

26:30 three brigades in a division, four battalions in a brigade. And they took one battalion away from each brigade and that made us sort of independent. And all the time overseas we were sort of an independent brigade. We were attached to the 9th Divi in Tobruk. We were attached to the 7th Divi in New Guinea for a while, and then we were made part of the 7th Division. So

27:00 it's complicated but it's simple if I can draw a plan on paper.

So ultimately now you'd be the 7th Divi, men from the 7th Divi?

Yeah.

So were they all the same blokes that you had in the Middle East that went to New Guinea with you, to Milne Bay?

Yes. Unless they got a transfer out, but everyone just came back to their own unit. Some were sick and went away or were wounded, but when you were better you always came back to your own unit

27:30 unless you wanted to transfer somewhere else. But most blokes didn't, they just wanted to come back to your mates. It's amazing really when we were going to New Guinea, because an awful lot of chaps had gone AWL, you know, without leave. Well we were close to home in Brisbane so you could shoot through over night. Somehow or other word got out that we were on the wharf and chaps were coming back from AWL and getting on the ship.

28:00 **Would they have been court martialled?**

Oh not court martialled. You'd go up before the colonel and get a fine or so many days without pay or without leave, or what have you.

These were the blokes from your divi?

Yeah, our battalion.

Were you tempted to go AWL?

Oh yeah. I went a few times. The worst thing that happened was when we were at Kilcoy,

28:30 my older brother was getting married and I was to be his best man. I had organized it all, a day's leave from the battalion. Of all days in the whole AIF they clamped on leave. No one was allowed to leave. There were so many fellows absent without leave that they were trying to clean them out of the cities. So I missed out being my brother's best man. I should have gone AWL.

29:00 **Did he understand?**

Yeah. He roped in someone else.

Could you get word to your parents or to your family easily from the base, from Kilcoy?

Well, there was no phones but you could nearly go home and get weekend leave every weekend. It was only a matter of…A lot of us used to

29:30 hitchhike a ride and get down to the coast. People were pretty good, civilians. They'd give you a ride. I'll never forget my mate and I, Peter Murphy, hitching a ride one day. This chap had an old ute, and there was a petrol shortage in those days and they had these coke things they used to put on them. It burned the coke and made gas to drive the motor. Of course they were terribly smoky and smelly.

30:00 Peter and I were in the back of this ute and we just about suffocated before we got to Brisbane. No, it was funny at Kilcoy. They gave us unlimited grog. If you had the money you could go up and buy a keg from the canteen. That's what fellows would do nearly every night. They would go and buy a five-gallon keg and make a big bonfire and sit around it and drink.

30:30 That's when we weren't on manoeuvres. We did some pretty hard manoeuvres in those days, all up through the ranges there, up Kingaroy, Nanango, on foot.

What were you doing? Were you going through the ranges there to get ready for New Guinea?

Yeah, virtually training to get us fit, physically fit mainly because New Guinea is a very tough place physically.

31:00 We would just camp at night and sleep where you stopped. No such thing as blankets or anything like that. Just to get us more or less used to moving and hard work, hard training.

Were you fit when you went to Milne Bay?

Yeah. We were pretty fit, because back in Australia the food was good

31:30 and so on.

Harvey, can you tell us about the conflict that you first came across in Milne Bay? You told us that you arrived the night before and woke up in the morning and you took over from which battalion?

I think it was the 2/12th Battalion.

Did you see those men coming out?

Yeah.

32:00 You'd see the look on their faces looking round all the time and looking up and one of them said to me, "Watch the trees." Because the Japs used to get in the trees, the snipers, and snipe from there. That's the first thing I noticed is how alert they were. They warned us to watch the trees and be careful.

32:30 I think it was on the second night there we just formed a perimeter for the night, and there was just a track alongside the beach through the coconut groves and the jungle, and this chap walked out on the track behind us a hundred meters down. Hands up, and said, "Don't shoot. Don't shoot. I'm Chinese." And he looked Chinese to me.

33:00 Anyway Captain Anderson beckoned him in and he came in through the lines and we were all sort of standing around him like this. He was standing just there and the next thing Anderson said, "Shoot him." And they just shot him in cold blood. I reckon he was Chinese because they had a lot of carriers and that, they had conscripted to carry their supplies. See then it was kill or be killed really, because orders were given, "No prisoners

33:30 taken." And there weren't any taken at Milne Bay. We lost one man there, unaccounted for, right through the war. We only had one man ever lost, unaccounted for, and they never ever found his body wherever he was.

Can you remember who he was?

No. I've got his name somewhere in the records there. But everyone else was recovered, their bodies.

What about your friends, your mates?

34:00 **Did you lose many mates there at Milne Bay?**

No, there was only a couple there. The rifle companies lost the most of course. That's where Jack French got his VC.

Was he the one that took the post?

Yeah, but he wasn't the only one. There was two other fellows did the same thing. They should have got VCs too. There was so many acts of bravery done that, as I say, every

34:30 infantry man should have got a VC, some sort of decoration. Yeah, Jack French, I knew him well. Actually a very distant relative from Toowoomba, he lived outside Toowoomba, last year his two sisters came to the battalion reunion, and they presented them with some commemorative sort of plate for

35:00 Jack.

Can you tell us, what were your instructions in the first conflict with the Japanese that you had at Milne Bay?

Well the orders were sort of, "No prisoners." That was the understanding.

But when you're put in the front line, I know this might sound silly, but I'm just trying to

understand, do they say, "Okay, well now you've replaced

35:30 **these blokes, now you just stay here and protect it." Or did you have to take over a certain amount?**

We took over their positions but nothing happened at night time, only a lot of blind shooting into the jungle if any sort of slight sound was heard or whatever, we'd just fire madly. The next day the companies would move forward until

36:00 it came on dusk and take up a position there again and wait until next morning, till we finally got to KB Mission. That was the last place. That's where the Japanese landed. Anyway, that's where the last action with the Japs. I

36:30 remember the colonel was standing beside me, he was shooting into the trees, old Clem Cummins. That's when they brought out a fellow, one of the original battalion. Harry Salisbury, he was a lieutenant. Poor beggar, half his jaw, face shot away here. His mates carried him out and we said to him, "Do you want us to go in and help you bring out the others?" "No. We're right." Anyway he didn't survive. He died.

37:00 And then…What happened then? We stopped there for a day or so and then we moved back to Milne Bay proper, to our original campsite.

How long did you stay there at the front line in Milne Bay?

Oh, our battalion was in action then right in the front line for the last four-days of the action. We were actually the last ones to repel them. We had the heaviest casualties there at Milne Bay, our battalion.

37:30 I think we had forty-three killed there.

How do you think you survived?

I don't know. I never ever thought I'd get killed, you know. I really didn't. You think you're indestructible when you are young.

You would have only been about twenty then?

Oh no. I was twenty-one when I joined. I would have been about twenty-three.

38:00 Yeah.

And since you were with the same men that you were with in the Middle East, in Tobruk…

I went right through the war in the one platoon.

Did they say anything, did you talk saying this is far worse than being a rat?

No, not really. I know we thought the conditions terrible. I remember before the action sitting there one night

38:30 because the Japs hadn't been stopped, you know. They seemed unstoppable. A few of us talked there one night. "Well if we get beaten what will we do?" sort of thing. We worked out we'd take off across the island to the other side to, where was it? It would have been a plantation there with a bit of a port I suppose. There were no towns there. But no, really, the fellows I

39:00 was with, I don't ever remember any sort of defeatist talk really, anywhere. No. We had been together for two, two and a half years then and everyone knew each other. There was no doubting anyone.

I think I've asked this before but it sort of struck me

39:30 **that in every kind of workplace there's a bad apple. Did you have any bad apples with you?**

Well they weren't bad men. We had a few wild men that used to get into a bit of trouble on leave and that, but they weren't bad. We had one fellow in our platoon, he was South African. He was a bit of a strange egg, a chap called Helsinger.

40:00 I think he was actually a, what's the word? Not a sex maniac, what are they called?

Nymphomaniac?

What's the word for blokes who like blokes?

A homosexual.

Yeah. Because I remember in England… as a matter of fact the story was that he was caught on the ship going over to England with one of the

40:30 ship's stewards, one of the Pommy stewards on the ship. And in England I remember another time we were left in the rear party to clean up after we left Langdon Corner to go up to Colchester, we were in a mess parade one morning. I think he fancied me.

Well you were pretty good looking from the photographs.

Innocent looking.

41:00 Anyway, he came up behind me and he was pushing himself into me and I said, “Cut it out Les, come on.” And he wouldn’t so I turned round and I hit him as hard as I could, under the heart. He dropped like a stone and I thought, “I’ve killed him.” He lay there for five minutes and he didn’t move. No one tried to help him. He eventually got up and he was all right.

41:30 He showed a tendency to that, to other blokes too. And when we landed at Alexandria he was one of the ones who had coastal fever on the boat, and he had a relapse and went to hospital. We never saw him again but he survived the war, and the story is that he came back to Brisbane after the war but he was barred from all the picture shows there because of his tendencies.

Tape 6

00:31 **I was just wondering Harvey, before you went over to Milne Bay during the training what did they tell you about the Japanese? What did they actually teach you?**

They didn’t tell us anything really. No, nothing. We didn’t have any lectures on them or anything like that. No.

Did you have any sense of what to expect?

Well, I don’t know.

01:00 We knew what was going to happen and that it would be pretty tough going. Because, as I said, it looked indestructible, didn’t it? They just kept coming.

When you got up to Milne Bay what contact did you have with natives?

01:30 Oh none. There weren’t many there, only a few. We didn’t see any at all before the action only after it was all over they started coming out of the jungle, but there weren’t many there really. It was a big coconut plantation. Lever Brothers owned it. But it was pretty overgrown

02:00 because they had neglected it. They weren’t working it at the time. But no, it was pretty tight there for a while. Ships couldn’t come in and we were running a bit short on food. At one stage there was cattle running wild on the plantation, and we used to go out and shoot a cow for meat and get green paw paw for greens and cook them up as chokos, type of thing.

02:30 But, no, the feed was pretty tight there for a while. They weren’t game to bring ships into the bay because it was very easy to get trapped in Milne Bay. It had a narrow entrance that runs right in.

I guess it would have been a bit different to having the old bully beef though.

No. It was on there too, the old bully beef. Back on the bully beef. They were improving the rations actually, in the Australian Army, by that time.

03:00 Funnily enough the Yanks liked our bully beef. They preferred it to their tin stuff. That was later on when we got to mix with them more.

Was there much trading going on?

No. There was only this one American engineering unit at Milne Bay at that time. We didn’t have any contact with them. There was one American who attached himself to our battalion and he went right through the action

03:30 and he called us the ‘two bar nine’ men. And when we were on leave in Brisbane later on, if he was on leave he used to come looking for us. Two bar nine he called us. One of our officers, he is still alive in Sydney, Garth Suthers, the chap I went out in no man’s land with. He had a cattle property somewhere in the middle of New South Wales and he called it the two bar nine, his brand.

Why was it named

04:00 **two bar nine?**

Well, that was the two and a stroke and a nine for the 2/9th, that was the way it was written, and the Yank called it the two bar nine. He attached himself to the battalion and went right through the action with us. Whereas the engineers, they used to build. They were building airstrips there.

04:30 **It was just after the Milne Bay show had finished that you got malaria.**

Mmm.

Can you tell us about the onset of that or how you first came to know you had it?

Well, you know your temperature goes up, you get a fever and you get these shivering fits.

05:00 And that lasts, I've forgotten now…might be an hour or so and then they go off but they keep repeating themselves. So I was put in hospital there. They had nurses up there by then. They had a field hospital there and nurse. I remember them coming round late one night, the doctors an nurses checking on all their beds and looking at their sheets, whatever they call them. The doctor was saying, "Yeah, this one

05:30 goes, this one stays." He came to me, "Yeah, he goes," and so on. The next day we were put onto the hospital ship, the [HMAS] Manoora I think, or the [SS] Manunda. And we sailed and went straight through to Sydney and by the time we got to Sydney I was over it. There was no preventative malaria in those days. They gave you quinine when you got it. Anyway, I was over it and I had a week in Concord Hospital,

06:00 came back to Brisbane and had a week at the old racecourse, they had a camp there. I only lived at Eagle Junction so I could go home. The next thing I was on the train back to Townsville, and got to Townsville and I was getting a taxi. I just used to lay in the tent then. I didn't go to the doctor. I was in Townsville for six weeks and during this time the

06:30 battalion and brigade had gone round to Buna-Sanananda and done that campaign. That's one of the most depressing times in my life there. They started printing casualty lists and there were literally dozens and dozens of our blokes being killed, great mates and I just sort of thought, "God, the war, all the fun's gone out of it." Anyway, they brought the brigade back to the Atherton Tablelands and we went on and rejoined them.

07:00 And I got there and practically all my old mates had gone.

Were there any of them left?

Well there was quite a few but you know… Anyway…

Did any of the fellows who were up there at Buna and Sanananda, because they were horrible campaigns, did they tell you what had happened and what it was like?

Oh a little bit about it but not much, they didn't talk about it. Most of them talked about

07:30 it later on in books and what have you. And, no, then we got back to the Tablelands and they gave us seven days home leave again. And I got back to the battalion and we had no officers then so I was made sergeant of the platoon. It was a machine gun platoon and our carriers were gone. They were useless in New Guinea, just bogged down, so we were back to a machine gun platoon.

08:00 I was in charge of it for about eighteen months. We had no officers actually. Nearly all the platoons and headquarter companies only had sergeants in charge of them.

Because of the high casualties or for other reasons?

We lost a lot of officers in Buna and Sanananda, and most of the companies were taken over by sergeants and corporals, carried on the fight. You know, when you read the story about it.

08:30 They did a fantastic job. I think the colonel was quite happy. He didn't want any new officers coming into the unit. They eventually brought them in in the last stages of the war, when we went to Balikpapan we had officers but no, a few of the old fellows hung on. I've got photographs here. I think out of the original machine gun platoon there were only two of us still there serving in the platoon when war finished.

09:00 Out of a whole battalion of a thousand men that sailed form Ingleburn there were thirty-five of us left. I've got a photograph of that there.

These were the lucky ones.

A lot survived but there were only thirty-five still serving.

What was it like for you suddenly having to lead thirty men as

09:30 **opposed to…?**

Well, I never ever thought it would happen. When I think leadoff the fellows who had the platoon before me I thought I couldn't replace them. Billy Macintosh, he was a decorated fellow, he was our first sergeant. He was badly wounded at Buna and that was the finish for him. It was after that when I rejoined the battalion that I took machine gunners over.

10:00 **Now you mentioned an Angus Suthers. Was he in your battalion as well?**

He was a company commander, Garth Suthers. He came from Townsville. I think he is still alive Garth, in Sydney. Granny we called him. He was a bit of an old woman.

10:30 **So the training you were doing up at the Atherton Tablelands, how did that differ from the training you were doing at Kilcoy?**

Oh, it wasn't as strenuous because we were more or less resting our boys because they were pretty well down health-wise. But mainly route marches, and we used to take our Vickers guns out on the range and shoot them there. But

11:00 there was nowhere to go on leave. You could go into Atherton, Tolga and places like that, but there was nothing in the towns so you never bothered to go anywhere. Started playing a bit of sport up there, football and what have you. We had played it right through the war intermittently. Never got too many games.

What was your position on the team?

11:30 Rugby league I was 'tight head' in the scrum. You might have read about it recently. A great mate of mine, only buried him a couple of weeks ago, Rod McMaster. Heard of him?

I have actually over the last couple of weeks.

He died. He went to England on a rugby league team the year war broke out. He got to England and they never played a game. They brought them back to Australia. He was in some other unit

12:00 and then he joined our battalion, and after the war he played rugby union and went back to England as an Australian rep [representative]. He became a professional wrestler over there. He came back to Australia and took over the Mudgeerabah Hotel out here and he was president of the battalion association for a few years. Only a month or so ago he went up to this big reunion in Brisbane they had

12:30 for rugby union players. We were up at Fraser Island, I think, or Rockhampton, and he just dropped dead. I used to go up to the reunion ever year with him on the train, nothing wrong with him.

So what did he die from?

Don't know. Probably heart attack. That would kill you wouldn't it?

Yeah, they can do that. So what was the morale like of the fellows

13:00 **that had come back from Buna and Sanananda, up at the Tablelands?**

It was all right, good. They were all pretty subdued really. But we lost that many men there that they brought in a whole ex-militia unit based around Gympie. They brought in four-hundred men in one go as reinforcements. But Shaggy Ridge

13:30 physically was a tough show, but casualty-wise was nothing. Balikpapan in Borneo was nothing either really.

Even so I'd like to talk to you about it in a bit of detail if we could as well before we finished. You'd had

14:00 **a bunch of fellows who had gone all the way from Ingleburn, all the way over to the Middle East, back to New Guinea and now you were getting a whole stack of reinforcements. How did they merge in I guess?**

Well, they moved in pretty well. For a while the older blokes sort of…The new boys weren't on the outer but they didn't mix too well for a while. But gradually it ended up with not too many older fellows left. They were all

14:30 new blokes. But a lot of them had been through the Buna-Sanananda campaign and survived and were prepared to soldier on which to me was enough. And I got on well with all of them.

And you mentioned earlier about the early militia.

Yes.

We've read about conflict between the AIF and the militia but you were there in person. What

15:00 **was it for the AIF that kind of turned your view around at the time as to what the militia were?**

Probably Milne Bay. A lot of our battalion chaps, see the militia brigade in Milne Bay were all Queenslanders too. A lot of our blokes had younger brothers in those units. Later on a lot of them transferred back over to our battalion. But they did a good job there and earned our respect and so on.

15:30 When you read the history of the 39th Militia Battalion over the Owen Stanleys, they did a fantastic job considering that they were only seventeen and eighteen year old.

Not much training.

No. No. Oh no.

Had you heard or seen much evidence of the atrocities committed by the Japanese?

No, not really. Only at Milne

16:00 Bay we saw a few natives that had been tied to trees and bayoneted and what have you. But well, I wasn't at Buna. There weren't any natives there apparently. Apparently theirs was a case of kill or be killed too. There were no prisoners taken. Apparently there were signs of a bit of cannibalism there from the Japanese.

16:30 Shaggy Ridge? No, nothing there. Dead Japanese, that's all.

Was there much of a hatred towards the Japanese as an enemy because…?

Oh yeah. You sort of just despised them. In a way you didn't regard them as human, whereas in the Middle East you had a lot of respect for the Germans.

17:00 **So leaving the Tablelands and going back up to New Guinea you were in Port Moresby first.**

Yeah. We were there for about three months.

Can you give us a picture of what Port Moresby was like then just in terms of how it was laid out and…?

Well we never got into the town much. We just went landed and went out a few miles into camp. There was nothing in the town then no brick buildings or anything like that and sort of no nightlife, no civilian life. So we

17:30 virtually were in camp and we trained very hard there too.

What sorts of things were you doing?

Mainly route marches up the mountains and that to get us physically fit because they must have known what was in front of us. We were camped just on the end of one of the strips there. I don't know whether it was Jackson strip or nine mile. And they started flying the 7th Division over

18:00 the Owen Stanleys to do that second campaign. They flew the first few brigades over and they advanced down towards Lae and then they flew us over, up the Ramu Valley to Dumpu, which was just a dirt strip, nothing else. And we went from there up Shaggy Ridge. It took us two days to climb there. There was already an AIF battalion there. We relieved them.

18:30 **What did you find when you got there?**

Oh well, just a bloody mountain over a great ridge. I'll show you photos later on of it, like this, blokes clinging to the sides. We lost a few men there. The Japanese had mountain guns they were firing which killed a few men. But it was just wet and soggy, wet every night.

19:00 Six thousand feet high it is, Shaggy Ridge. The Yanks were coming in before we finally attacked. We were stationary there for a few weeks. Finally we had to attack along the ridge. The Yanks came in with their planes. They'd just fly over us, and they had these seventy-five millimetre guns mounted in the front of their planes, Mitchell bombers. You almost swore the plane would jump backwards when they fired.

19:30 Anyway, the companies attacked along the ridge and the Japs pulled out pretty quickly and we kept pushing along until we came to what they called Kankiryo Saddle. That's where it divides. The water goes that way to Madang and this way it goes down Ramu Valley and finishes in Lae, and that's where we were relieved there once again. Went back down to

20:00 Ramu Valley and got on the planes. We were there for about a couple of weeks waiting for the planes and then flew back to Lae, and came home by ship once again.

When you were at Shaggy Ridge where would you camp during the night and how would you…?

What, up on Shaggy Ridge?

Yeah.

You had these, what they call just a ground sheet, and you'd try and rig up some sort of a shelter from the rain.

20:30 I've got some photos there so you'll what they're like. No, you were wet all the time.

So it never really worked?

No. Wet for weeks. In the Middle East at least you never got any rain.

Were there any little tricks or things that you worked out that made your life a little bit easier when you were in the jungle rather than what they had taught you?

21:00 No, not really. Well I know climbing up Shaggy Ridge practically everyone just went into the jungle and cut a walking stick to help yourself up the hill, which was a big help really because slipping and sliding. But the engineers followed us up and out of the jungle trees they virtually cut these steps all the way up.

21:30 They did the same on the Kokoda Trail I believe, which made things easier because the mud was this deep and you'd take one-step forward and slide back two sort of thing. The engineers did a fantastic job making these steps up the mountains.

And you've mentioned the Americans a couple of times. What was your opinion of them as soldiers?

22:00 At Milne Bay there weren't any actual front line men. They weren't too popular at Buna and Sanananda I believe, because there had been an American division which is twenty-thousand men almost, and they'd been sitting there for weeks and did nothing. Every time when they went to advance the Japs would fire and they'd just go to ground and that was it.

22:30 That was when they brought the 18th Brigade round and they took the boys up by destroyer, landed them down at Oro Bay I think, and they had to walk up twenty miles lugging their gear through rivers, and what have you. They gave them one day's rest and then put them into attack. And the 2/9th Battalion was first in. It was all over in one day,

23:00 what the Yanks had been trying to do for six weeks. Of course it carried on from there. That was the first action but the 2/9th Battalion took the objective the first day. From then on, you know, I think the next day there were terrific casualties. There was an American general there, Freyberg. It was documented, I've got it in my books there.

23:30 He was in the First World War too apparently, and he said to the Australians that he had never seen men going forward, taking so many casualties and keeping on advancing. So the boys are very proud of their record there.

It seems to be a bit of a common reputation actually. Just going back to Shaggy Ridge for a moment.

24:00 **By the time you got to the top what did you find of the Japanese?**

Well, virtually without exaggeration the ridge was only about this wide. I'll show you the photos. There was virtually one man. We had our machine gun mounted back. There was a bend along and we had our machine gun mounted slightly to the left. We could fire across that way. But

24:30 the Japs virtually withdrew when our chaps started to try and advance along the ridge. They pushed them back for a couple of miles till we got to this Kankiryo Saddle and they put a bit of a stand there for a while. We lost a few men there and then they withdrew and kept going back down towards Madang. That's where we lost another one of our originals there. The colonel was mad as hell. He was one of our sig sergeants.

25:00 His number was, Doc Hyde, QX36. Apparently the Japs had cut one of the signal wires, which was a trick of theirs, and they had gone out to trace it down and mend it. And they were ambushed by the Japs and poor old Doc Hyde got killed. The colonel hated losing the original members…kept coming.

25:30 **And you've mentioned that you barely saw a live Japanese in your time in New Guinea but how close would you get fighting them. I mean I know the jungle was dense but…?**

Oh, it was just blind shooting except at Milne Bay where those infantry companies went in and attacked

26:00 the machine gun posts. That would be the closest they got to them. But I was never ever actually in an infantry company. I was just in machine gunners. We did a bit of sort of firing at night time and that sort of thing.

How did your duties change, I guess, on a day-to-day basis going from someone who was in a machine gun platoon to someone who was commanding it?

26:30 Oh well, the main thing is you had to check the fellows and make sure everything was okay with them. And make sure they took their Atebrin tablets. By this stage we were getting anti-malaria tablets, you see. And every evening you had to go round every man and make sure he took it. Oh, and generally look after their wellbeing. Keep the

27:00 platoon records up and so on. Who was sick and what have you. And when it came your turn as duty platoon, battalion guard or what have you, you had to pick the men. Who was going to be the runners, and who was going to be mess orderlies, and who was going to be battalion guard, and make sure you rotated them properly because they didn't like getting their turn

27:30 out of turn, sort of thing.

And I guess how did you fare as a platoon leader, did you feel…was it a role that you fell into quite easily?

Yeah, I think I did it all right. I had no complaints.

Did you prefer it to what you were doing before?

Yes, I suppose so. By this time I was a sergeant.

28:00 Money was better of course.

That always helps.

Nine bob a day.

Once you'd taken Shaggy Ridge you still had to chase the Japanese as they retreated.

28:30 **Did you get into any more direct fights with them?**

No, well only at the end there, at this Kankiryo Saddle divide. There was skirmishes there. We lost a few men there and they lost a few men.

Can you give us a sense, Harvey, just to kind of put is in that picture, what a fight like that in the jungle was like?

29:00 **What you might see or not see around you and where your men are and kind of thing?**

Most of it was just blind firing. You'd be shooting, they'd be shooting back and you'd sort of move forward and they would be gone. There might be a dead body here and there. That's what it was really. You were never really face to face except at Milne Bay, and Buna I believe,

29:30 where the boys were overrunning the weapon pits and what have you. That must have been horrendous at Milne Bay, Buna and Sanananda. We lost a hundred men there the first day.

I mean apart from the terrible weather,

30:00 **how would you, I guess, compare the fighting in the jungle over the fighting in the desert , sandstorms and things?**

Oh, I think the boys preferred the desert with the dry weather. In New Guinea the wet, and endless rain and mud, and mosquitos were the biggest curse. There were just hordes of the damn things.

30:30 And there was no preventative medicine in the early days at Milne Bay. You just got malaria and then you'd get quinine. Later on they brought out these tablets. Atebrin and Erion I think. You took a course before you left Australia and then you took one a day. I can't think of any cases of malaria after that. They almost treated it as a self-inflicted wound if you got it. So it was a pretty good preventative.

31:00 I did get it later on when I went back to New Guinea after the war.

Well they say once it's with you it can just keep popping up now and again.

Well it can, yes, I believe.

You mentioned in Tobruk you had to deal with centipedes and fleas and lice. I know you had mosquitos in New Guinea but were there any other kinds of bugs and insects that…?

31:30 The only ones in Tobruk were flies and fleas. I know of the first position that we were in we were just back behind the front line but we used to get shelled, and everyone had his own dugouts. Mine was flea ridden. So I thought I'll fix this, one day. I had my boots off I think. I got some petrol out of the carrier and threw it down into the dugout and stood back and threw a match

32:00 and it just came out like a blast. Scorched all my feet, blistered the tops of my feet. And the next two days, next thing we were up in the frontline and I thought, God, I'm not game to report this to the medical because they'll think it's a self inflicted wound or something. So for a couple of weeks I went round in sandshoes. Because they used to issue us with sandshoes in Tobruk on patrol, because the boots were too noisy stumbling

32:30 through the camel bush and what have you, so we used to wear sandshoes, a lot quieter.

And how about the wildlife in New Guinea? Apart from the mosquitos what other things did you have to contend with?

Well, there were a lot of death adders there. After we came out of the action we went to another area to establish a camp and there were heaps of rotting

33:00 coconuts and we used to clear them away and they'd be full of death adders. We'd set fire to them and burn it out. Snakes, I don't know. I'll never forget one night one chap sitting on the floor of the tent playing his mouth organ and a snake came though the tent like this at him. Snake charmer.

33:30 **He must have been Indian. Once the Shaggy Ridge op [operation] was over, where did you return to?**

We came back down to Lae and we came back by ship back to the Atherton Tablelands. Landed in Cairns and

34:00 were given seven days home leave again; came home; back to the Tablelands. We were there for nearly

six months then. We didn't do too much training and the word came through that they wanted someone to go to Bonegilla, down near Albury, to do a machine gun course. So I volunteered myself. I was in charge of the platoon so I put my own name up.

34:30 So I went down there for ten weeks to a machine gun school.

What would they teach you over ten weeks?

Well, they couldn't teach us much really because we had already done it all. Anyway, it was a good break. We used to get weekend leave, not weekend leave, day leave, into Albury. It was a good town. What happened then?

Well actually if we can just take you back to the Tablelands for a second

35:00 **before you did the machine guns course. You said you weren't doing much training. What were you doing to keep yourselves busy?**

Nothing, no. They were pretty lenient on us. They knew the blokes were in pretty poor physical condition. So we used to go on route marches. We'd march out and settle down somewhere for the day and then march home again. Now and again we'd…

35:30 We weren't far from the lakes up there, Lake Hume or one of those and we could get a truck and go across there and have a swim, went to a couple of dances. They had a big army hospital outside Meribah, I think it was. I had a cousin, a nurse there. She used to invite a few of us down to the dances. So that was about it.

36:00 There was nowhere else to go. Nothing in the towns because when you've got about two or three divisions, a hundred thousand men around, the places get a bit crowded.

The dances would have been popular for the boys to go and hook up with a girl.

Yes, I don't know what happened to her.

36:30 **What was the perception or attitude towards Blamey at the time amongst the men?**

Oh, he wasn't particularly well liked.

Why was that?

Oh, I don't know. You never saw much of him. I only ever saw him twice. Before he left Australia, initially

37:00 he reviewed us in Sydney and at the end of the war, in Balikpapan, he addressed the battalion and probably all the other troops in the area. He gave a terrific speech, if I can remember rightly. He was telling us all what a job we'd done and stick together after the war and so on. But no, I don't suppose you can blame him but

37:30 we never ever saw him in the frontline. I don't suppose it was their job to go there. He did run the militia down at one stage for not doing a job in New Guinea, which was wrong, particularly that 39th Battalion. But I think he had a…At Buna when the Yanks weren't doing any good there he said to

38:00 MacArthur, "Send the AIF in and they'll do the job for you." Which they did do.

Yeah, at a bit of a cost.

Yeah. Well he wasn't popular, MacArthur. He never gave the Australians credit for anything really. If a war report came out on what was going on, if the Yanks did it, it was

38:30 the Americans, if the Australians did it, it was the Allies. He never mentioned the Australians.

Tape 7

00:31 **We were just talking about, I was asking what biscuit bombs were and they were DC3s you were saying Harvey?**

They did all the transporting of troops and food. They weren't a bomber, they didn't drop bombs. But we called them…In New Guinea they used to drop the food out the side and hoped it landed in one piece.

Is that how they got

01:00 **called biscuit bombers?**

Yeah. They'd fly over the jungle, over a cleared patch and just push the stuff out the door and watch it bounce away in pieces.

Well it wouldn't have been good for dropping biscuits that's for sure.

About the only thing – the biscuit would be hard enough. No, I don't think bags of flour would go too well.

Do you think in all your time in service,

01:30 **which would have been the hairiest campaign for you?**

I really think Milne Bay, it really was, because our backs were virtually to the wall there, Australia at that stage. The Japs had never been stopped and didn't look like being stopped, and we had nowhere to go if we'd been beaten. We had talked about shooting through to the jungle over the other

02:00 side of the island but not seriously. But you know, you never knew what to expect there. Night time, pitch black and raining and so on and the Japs could be amongst you and you wouldn't know it.

Can you remember if that was a big threat in Australia at the time of Japan actually taking over Australia?

Yes. If they had won at Milne Bay

02:30 they would have gone round and taken Port Moresby and Australia wouldn't have had any sort of outposts then, because there was nothing in Port Moresby at the time. Of course, the Battle of the Coral Sea was a turning point really, when they sunk all those ships. But if they'd won at Milne Bay, God knows what would have happened.

Can you tell us about,

03:00 **you just mentioned it very briefly, about Borneo but that was towards the end of the war.**

That was the end of the war, yeah.

Can you tell us what the feeling was in Borneo when you arrived there?

Well, as I say, we went up and we landed at Moratai, that's an island way up there. We were there for a couple of weeks. We went up there by big barge and then they brought these landing ships in and we did a bit of training on those. You know, climbing up the big rope ladders they drop over

03:30 and down into barges and so on. We sailed from there to Borneo and we arrived there at night time and I went up on deck. The navy was out, it was still dark but the navy was out behind us shelling, and Balikpapan was a big, Dutch oil town pre-war and they had five hundred of these big oil reservoirs, tanks plus the refinery

04:00 of course. It was all going up in flames. Come daylight the allied bombers were coming in. We were the second wave ashore and the place was just burned to pieces and the Japs were pulling back. We didn't come into contact with them initially. And then we went though the town and we went across the other side of the bay in these alligators they called them.

04:30 They were sort of track vehicles that could go through water and climb up on land. And I don't think we had any contact with the Japs. They pulled back then, we were only there a week and then one night – we knew the war must have been near the end – we could hear all this shooting and flares going up over the mainland and we heard the war was over.

The shooting of the flares was in celebration?

Celebration, yeah.

05:00 And that's the first time during the war we came in contact with any civilian population. There were a lot of Chinese there. There was a big Chinese village near where we were. But otherwise right through the war, in all the actions there weren't any civilian populations involved. There were a few natives at Milne Bay that's all. At Tobruk there were no civilians of course, and at JeraBub,

05:30 no civilians, which was lucky for them I suppose.

Very lucky. Who owned the alligators?

The Americans.

And they were at Moratai?

Balikpapan. They went with us to Balikpapan and landed with us. I think an American engineering, the CBs, they landed there too, an engineering unit.

06:00 They looked after themselves, ice-cream and what have you, all the time.

Did you get offered any?

No. We didn't have any contact with them really. But at the end of the war when they were leaving, the Americans, they had all of their refrigerators and jeeps and what have you, they just loaded them onto barges. We saw them just take them out to sea five or six miles and just sunk them, barge and all.

06:30 Left nothing behind. What a terrible waste.

What about the natives there? Did you only come across them at Milne Bay but not in Borneo?

No. It was mainly Chinese in Balikpapan. There was a big Chinese settlement there.

07:00 They were across…I can't think of the name of the place across the bay where we landed. They were all right. We used to buy a bit of food off them now and again for a bit of a variety of stuff. Oh, the cook used to trade his bully beef for stuff. Cooks were always popular with their food.

07:30 We had a few, made friends with a few natives in Borneo at Balikpapan. One little boy there, Treacle we called him, he was about this high. We have pictures of him sitting around playing the drums, fantastic little drummer. That was where they took a lot of official photographs there, of the battalion and officers and survivors and the

08:00 originals.

You took the photographs?

No, official photographs, official photographer. They'd all be in the War Museum but if you wanted a copy you could get one. I've got a lot of them.

You've mentioned a lot of photos. Were you a bit of a cameraman?

Yeah, well I took the camera away with me, weren't supposed to. We weren't supposed to have cameras or keep diaries. And I took a lot

08:30 in Sydney before we left, on the ship going over to England. I took a few in Tobruk. I took my camera to Milne Bay and took a lot of photos there but couldn't get the films out. In the finish the humidity ruined them.

What a shame.

Yeah, I took some beauties there. So I didn't bother from then on.

What would have happened to you if they'd found out

09:00 **you had a camera?**

Oh, you probably would have got a reprimand or something, nothing drastic. A lot of fellows had cameras and a lot of fellows kept diaries. But you weren't supposed to do it in case you fell into enemy hands and they got information from it.

Just something you brought up before at Milne Bay when the sergeant at the time said it was best kill that Chinese man?

It was a captain.

09:30 **Oh, a captain sorry.**

He just said, "Shoot him," that's all.

Who had to shoot him?

Half a dozen blokes round. It's a wonder I didn't get shot myself, there were bullets flying everywhere. He was about from here to you from me, and there were blokes all round and everyone was going bang, bang, bang. Terrible really. As soon as he realized what was happening I saw the change of expression on his face. And I reckon he was Chinese. He was tall,

10:00 didn't look like a Jap.

You think it was wrong then, what happened?

Well, not at the time, things were pretty tense, but thinking back they should have taken him prisoner and they would have got a bit of information out of him. The Japs never took any prisoners.

Is it something that

10:30 **comes back to you now in your memories, what happened at Milne Bay?**

No, not really. I always sort of think, I survived it, and on that last day when I realized the Japs had gone and I had survived it. I must admit towards the end of the war I started to think well you know, luck

11:00 might be running out. Because actually I've got a photograph there they took it in Borneo at the end of the war. Out of a thousand and one men sailed from Australia in 1940 there were still only thirty-five still left serving with the battalion. They weren't all killed of course but you know, we had over three hundred killed and over seven hundred wounded. A lot of them

11:30 were wounded two and three times really and came back for more.

What about your younger brother, how did he fare?

Well, he didn't get to the Middle East. He got to New Guinea. They were posted on Thursday Island for a while and then he went across to a place called Merauke. That's in Irian Jaya now, on the southern side. There was no action there.

12:00 And then from there they went to Borneo and they landed up round the top end somewhere. I think at Labuan. No, he was pretty fortunate really. The older brother, he joined up and was posted on Moreton Island and he wasn't going to see the war out there so he got a discharge, which I was pleased. Three brothers in the

12:30 army. And next thing he was back on Morton Island building army huts and whatever over there. He had flat feet anyway, so he wasn't suited for the infantry. No. He was unlucky though. He was a builder and he was working out at Blackwater about thirty odd years ago. He used to work night and day and he had a blackout on the building roof and

13:00 fell off and crushed his vertebra there. It partly crushed the nerve. He was a quadriplegic for months but he just kept working and working and eventually he got on his feet again. And he was made supervisor of all Blackwater's building on the coalfields. He did a bit of physical work but he has had it now, he is confined to a wheelchair and bed. He's got a …his wife Thelma, she fell over a couple of years ago and

13:30 broke her hip. Eric's confined to a wheelchair and bed. His son left his job out on the coalfields and he has been full time carer for them, and he can't get a penny of help. They won't give him a cent. And he gives Eric all his injections, washes him, bathes him, dresses him, puts him on the toilet,

14:00 moves him in and out of bed. Poor old Thelma, Eric's eighty-seven and I think Thelma's eighty-eight and they can't get a penny of assistance. That's what they were screaming about on the news. You might have seen it. All these home care people looking after elderly people, and they won't give them a cent. If the two of them were in an age home, where they would be without Maurice, it would cost the government a fortune.

14:30 Whereas he can't even get that home care, forty or fifty dollars a week.

That's so silly. There are the two extremes. One, if they stay home in their own environment they get nothing otherwise it costs a lot of money.

If you put two of them in a care home, what would it cost them to keep them? Well they don't want to go into a home.

You mentioned your mate

15:00 **Peter Murphy before. Did you have another good mate from your army days?**

Oh yes. I had a few actually. Harry Maffie, he mothered me a bit early in the army.

Was he older then you?

Probably a couple of years, that's all. He had had a pretty hard life. He had been a cane cutter and what have you before the war. Whereas I lived at home and didn't drink or smoke or go out with bad

15:30 women, damn it. Anyway, I didn't drink and I remember when we first went down to Rutherford, Harry used to go into Maitland every night, that was the nearest little town, and he would always bring home a flagon of draught beer. I could hear him coming through the tent. "Harvey, where are you?" He'd be singing away with his flagon of beer.

16:00 He was a pretty tough hombre, Harry. I remember in Milne Bay he was going around the dead Japs pulling the gold fillings out of their teeth with his pliers. Apparently the gold was no good. It was some funny stuff they used.

Were the chaps from the country in Queensland,

16:30 **were they the ones that had this character that people talk about?**

Oh yeah, they were real characters. We had one chap who was Wombat, Wombat Ears. We had another chap from Camooweal. Camooweal Williams. Oh yeah, they didn't take to discipline kindly.

How did you find that when you had to be in charge for a while?

Oh well, I didn't have any in my

17:00 platoon at that stage. Most of them were all young fellows who joined the battalion over the years. Apart from me there was only one other original left in the platoon when the war finished. A chap called Mellish from Rockhampton. They were all a lot younger. A lot of them were only eighteen or nineteen. I was twenty-six or twenty-seven by then.

17:30 **It must have been a sight coming into Balikpapan and seeing the…**

Oh it was. It was the culmination of the war I reckon that invasion, the landings.

What was it like? Was it fireworks?

As I say, all these big oil tanks going up in flames and black smoke. As we were going in and landing barges were shooting back at us, shells were bouncing off the water and

18:00 what have you. You didn't know what to expect when you hit the shore and they dropped that front gate, you know. Fortunately we were lucky and none of our fellows were hit. We went ashore there and took off positions and we moved through the town. The town was just going up in flames. All these beautiful little houses and what have you, wrecked, ruined.

18:30 We kept going and they took us across the bay and landed on the other side. I can't think of the name of the little place there. It was only a mile across. And the rifle companies went forward and they had a few skirmishes with the Japs, nothing much. They actually captured a ship there, our battalion. Four or five hundred ton of it anchored up the river.

19:00 They got it going, some of the boys, and brought it back down and anchored it. The battalion tried to claim it as war salvage so we would get the money but we didn't.

Did you go out on it?

No, no. It was quite a big ship, a little coastal steamer.

I suppose you had to do something until you got your next order, didn't you?

19:30 Oh yeah. Mainly you just waited round and thankful for the spell. But while you were over the other side waiting for the war to finish virtually, I had a chap in my platoon who built a boat, a fantastic rowboat out of some timber he found. We used to go rowing out in the bay and the locals used to put out these fish traps. At low tide they'd run this line

20:00 of little low fences out and then the fish trap…no, at high tide they'd do that. When the tide went out the fish would all head out and they'd all end up in this trap. We used to go out there and raid the trap and get fresh fish. Monkeys, first time I'd ever seen monkeys. They'd come racing through the camp at night. I'll never forget, apparently one stage in Borneo one of the rifle companies was going through the

20:30 jungle and they came on a bit of a stream, and one of them was down washing his hands or having a drink or something and he had this peculiar feeling someone was watching him. And he looked and here's a big orangoutang on the other bank watching him.

What did he do?

Oh, I suppose he took off. The monkeys used to come through the camp at night. Right through the war really we didn't have much contact with

21:00 the civilian population at all. Probably in England the most when we went on leave, nothing in New Guinean nothing in Moresby.

You said when the gate comes down and then you went ashore. Can you explain that? You were on the barges, you mean?

Yeah.

Would you be just waiting there and the gate would drop down?

The front would drop down and they could run vehicles out on it and what have you. We didn't have any vehicles.

21:30 We all raced down into water about that deep and you had to wade ashore. But fortunately there was nothing waiting for us when we got off because the rifle company, the first wave had gone ashore and pushed inland. We were just getting a few stray bullets and things coming through.

I wonder if many men were killed in that first wave.

I don't know to tell you the truth, because they weren't in our battalion.

22:00 They were in another battalion.

This sounds like a very girly question but when you went into the water off the barge, did you have any clean pants to change into?

You didn't worry about that. Oh good lord, no. You never changed our clothes. Like at Milne Bay we never changed our clothes or socks for a fortnight.

Well, it's no wonder you didn't meet any civilians.

No. You know why I wanted to

22:30 be a civilian and have clean clothes.

So you'd have to wade in all this water, which is difficult to walk through, and then you'd be wet all night.

Oh, your feet would be wet and your boots would be wet but they dried out.

So where were you when you heard that the war in the Pacific was over?

Across the bay at this, I can't …it wasn't Banjarmasin, but a name like that. And as I say, when all these

23:00 fireworks started going off we realized something had happened. Peace had been declared. I think we knew the atomic bomb had been dropped.

You knew that it had been dropped?

Yeah. Because they dropped a couple, didn't they, before the Japs threw it in?

What was the feeling then? Did you all go crazy?

No, not really. I think we were all sort of

23:30 immune to feeling at that stage. So what? No, we were pleased. Relaxed and then we went back onto the mainland and that's when they called for volunteers to go to Japan for an occupation force. I was a bit tempted to go. As a matter of fact one of the officers wanted me to go but

24:00 I said, "No, I've had enough." So they took all the fellows with long service, five years or more, and put us down on the beach and dribbled us back home according to our priorities.

So is that what happened? When the war was declared over you were on this little island, which effectively was the Borneo campaign, and then you were sent back to just be there on the beach?

We came back

24:30 to the mainland and, as I say, they called for volunteers, and then they took all the long service fellows out of the units and put us down on the beach in tents and just left us there to do what we wanted to do, which was virtually nothing. We played deck tennis and quoits all day, and when the tide came in we used to swim a lot which probably built us up in the six weeks. It was quite funny on the beach there,

25:00 a lot of the blokes ended up wearing nothing and some of the chaps just used to wear a little loin cloth, and there was an Australian hospital up on the hill above us and complaints came down about all the naked men on the beach. I don't know what they were complaining about.

That's what I was going to say. What would they be complaining about? When you look back now do you think that

25:30 **it was right for the men to go into the islands? Towards the end of the war there were a lot of Australian men that were sent up and ended up doing the Sandakan.**

Oh, they were 8th Divi blokes who had been taken prisoner in Malaya – the Sandakan death march.

Oh, you talked about that didn't you? You mentioned it before?

Yeah.

26:00 **Right.**

We didn't know anything about that of course.

You didn't know anything about that then?

No. That only came out after the war. Apparently the pity of it is they wanted to send in the commandos and they could have saved a lot of those blokes. They didn't do it.

And so tell us about coming home. What was that like? Did you come home on a

26:30 **ship?**

Yeah. We came home on the Kanimbla, I think. And they just treated us like tourists on the boat. They just fed us and that's it. No parades, nothing. Came all down through the islands, you know, what you dream about – still water and moonlight nights down through the Whitsundays. It took us, I don't know how many days to get home. We landed down at Newstead. No welcoming committee of course, not that we cared.

27:00 They put us on trucks and shot us round the back streets of Brisbane up to Redbank, and they gave us seven days leave. We reported back to Redbank and they gave us a medical and wanted to know if there was anything wrong with you. Pretty feeble actually, because I don't think they wanted to know. If you said you had something or other you could claim it later on

27:30 for a pension entitlement. They gave us an IQ [Intelligence Quotient] test and told everyone they could do anything they wanted to as long as they tried, sort of thing, you know. Anyway, we eventually got out and didn't know what to do because most of us were round twenty-one when we joined the army. A lot of us didn't have permanent positions or any training.

28:00 We used to meet at the old Globe Hotel in Brisbane every day and did the session there. I did that for six weeks and some of our fellows that had been in the battalion and got out earlier, wounded and what have you, were working in the repatriation then. And one of them, he was fairly high up and he said, "Why don't you come down to repat and get a job?" "I wouldn't know what to do." He said, "You'll be right. Come on, we need men."

28:30 So a lot of us marched down there and the next thing we were all employed as clerks.

Just before we talk about the repatriation process there, were you aware at the end of the war there were a lot of men that hadn't come home. Was it true that it took quite a long time for all the men to come home from all the different parts of the world?

I guess it did with us being a low priority. We would have been the last

29:00 to come home really, we were six weeks. Six or eight weeks after the war finished before we came home. I don't know whether the occupation force had gone to Japan by then. They probably had, I can't recall that. But there would have still been a lot of troops left through the islands. But veteran affairs, repatriation, was a madhouse then.

29:30 Chaps coming home…In those days you could get a ten-pound 'tools of trade' grant and everyone was coming in claiming it and medical. I was what they called the appropriation ledger. We paid all the accounts and we were getting all the accounts coming through and approvals, and literally it was a madhouse. Of course all the fellows, we were all a bit restless and in those days,

30:00 they only employed ex-servicemen at repat. The bosses were First World War. For a while there, every lunchtime a lot of us would go out and forget to come back. Go out to the pub and come back hours later, sort of thing. They were pretty understanding, they never said a word. We all settled down in the finish and did our job.

Did some of the guys that

30:30 **did that, did the repat job with you, were they also men that served with you?**

Yeah. We had a lot of our battalion chaps working there. It was almost like a 2/9th Battalion club. I don't know if you know Brisbane, but the old Perry House?

No, I don't.

You know where the old taxation building is up on the corner where that square is?

Queen Victoria Square, yes.

Well going down,

31:00 that's Anne Street isn't it…going north? Anyway, going further down on the corner of Anne and…

Adelaide.

No, what's the next cross one down? Not George Street, what's the next cross?

Albert?

Albert, there is a building there about ten storeys there. I don't know if it is still there. It could have been knocked down but it was occupied entirely by the repatriation department, ten floors of staff.

31:30 They are poked away now somewhere up in the taxation building. Where are they now?

I don't know.

Somewhere down there. Of course, they've got an office here and you don't have to go to Brisbane any more.

What were the feelings in the troops about the Americans dropping the bombs in Japan?

It was all right I think. We didn't realize what it done of course, til years later.

32:00 But no, I don't think there was any opposition to it. I don't think we knew what an atomic bomb was actually.

It was all very hush-hush, wasn't it, the whole process? What about your parents? How were they when you got home?

Well. Poor old Mum, I guess she was pleased to see us all home and

32:30 into jobs and settled down. Practically all the family were still home then except my oldest brother. He was married by then. So they had five girls and two sons at home, which was a houseful. They always had a house full of troops during the war, entertaining our boys and what have you.

At your house?

Yeah. Well the girls always had boyfriends after them.

33:00 They used to bring them home. They'd always feed them. And people we knew from Bauple who had joined the services, they used to call in at home. It was like a second home to them. And after the war, one of my good mates, he lived with us for six months. He got a job in repat and lived there for six months.

33:30 But he went to another job. No, I stopped at home for about three years and then I got fed up then and a bit restless. I was in Sydney on holidays and I went into W.L. Carpenters, plantation people, and asked for a job in New Guinea.

What made you say New Guinea though?

Oh I don't know. A lot of our fellows went back there after the war working.

34:00 I knew a few fellows who had gone back so I fancied a job on a plantation. Anyway, next thing I found myself on a plane back to New Guinea onto a plantation.

We'll talk about that in a second but do you think your parents were very much happy to be hosts for the troops from other services because their sons were in the

34:30 **service?**

Well, I suppose that helped, yes. They didn't have much choice with the girls bringing the blokes home.

Did any of them marry them?

Well no. My third sister married the boy from across the road, the grocer's son from across the road. He was in the army.

Did she? She didn't have to go far.

No.

35:00 How that all happened I believe she was going out with another bloke and he used to ring, they had a shop across the road, and she went over to see if there had been a phone message for her from this fellow and there had been none. And Kev Lukey and his mate were there and they said, "What are you doing tonight." And she said, "Nothing now." And they said, "What about coming out with us?" That's how their romance started.

35:30 She went out with Kevin and they eventually married, which was handy being across the road. He only died last year, Kev.

What was it like being back home and being surrounded by your mother and five sisters?

Oh, it was funny really, I don't know. I'm sort of a pretty private person in a way, I'm not a partygoer.

36:00 I went to a few after the war but mainly grog parties.

I'm just thinking, which was worse, the fleas in the trench at Tobruk or the five sisters at home?

Oh, being home was the best of course. Come home and relax, and in those days no one lead a wild social life. Just pictures on Saturday night or maybe a dance

36:30 was the only thing. No one had cars and no one had pushbikes so we virtually relied on public transport. That was one thing during the war. I used to take my films into Kodak in Brisbane to get them developed. I got friendly with the girl there, Hazel, from West End of all places. I used to take her to pictures, take her home on the tram to West End, and then catch the tram back into town and catch the last tram from Brisbane.

37:00 The trains had all gone and the last tram out my way went to Newfarm. So I had to get off at Breakfast Creek and walk to Eagle Junction, which I didn't think much of. Fortunately I only took her out a few times while I was on leave.

But that was the thing to do in those days wasn't it?

Oh take the girls home, yeah. No matter how inconvenient it was

37:30 you had to escort them home. Her father had been in the First World War and he used to give me an ear bashing though when I went there.

What did he say?

Oh he used to try and talk about the war and what have you. I can't remember what he said.

Did your family treat you well when you came home?

Yeah. Oh the girls had their interests. But no, I didn't. I was pretty independent.

38:00 Ever since being the three oldest boys with all the girls we used to look after ourselves pretty much before the war. Do all the hanging and pressing our sheets and ironing our shirts and all that sort of thing. Poor old Mum did the washing.

In the old boiler?

Yes. We didn't have a washing machine in those days. We didn't even have a refrigerator. We just had the old icebox.

38:30 It wasn't an easy life when you think back. But you know, we got by. No one seemed to worry anyone. You were happy with what you got. We had pushbikes which were a bit of a luxury then, and at weekends we'd ride out to Pine River or somewhere and spend a day there swimming, or down to Redcliffe or Sandgate. You'd just have a swim and ride home. I used to play football

39:00 in the wintertime and cricket in the summer. No, we didn't get into any mischief.

How did your father treat you when you got home? Was he proud of you?

I guess he was. He never said much. Probably thankful we were all home.

Did you and your brothers, well particularly your

39:30 **younger brother, did you feel like you really understood each other, what you'd been through?**

Oh yes. I think so. I think they all realized what our battalion went through because we had quite a few books written on our battalion history. Three of them have written books on their experiences and they have all read them.

40:00 I think they envy it in a way with all the trips around. We used to be called Menzies Marines because we were always at sea or somewhere.

Are you glad you were in the army?

Yes I am. I really think, apart form the bad parts, they were the best six years of my life. Because you are young and you didn't have

40:30 a care in the world. You met great people and saw a lot of the world. There was hardly a dull moment so when you think back that's all you think about, your war years.

So how long were you back until you met Nola?

Oh crickey, I thought I was over the hill and home and dried, a single man, same as my mate Peter Murphy.

41:00 Peter got… and next thing… I was living at home at this stage. My mother had died and my sisters had gone and I batched [bachelor] for nearly six years in Brisbane at Eagle Junction. Peter and I used to come down the coast a lot nearly every weekend. Anyway, I was working round the yard one Saturday afternoon and Peter called in. He never, ever did and I said, "What are you doing here?" "Oh," he said, "I'm going visiting." I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "I'm going over to propose to a girl."

41:30 I said, "What?" I didn't even know he had a girlfriend. I said, "Let me know how you go."

Tape 8

00:30 **Harvey, you were just getting to tell Heather about how you met your wife and you were talking about your bachelorhood.**

As I say, Peter and I used to come down the coast every weekend and sometimes we used to sleep on the beach. In those days you only had the old Surfers [Paradise] pub.

01:00 And quite a few of our fellows were living on the coast then and we used to meet them there and do the session and go and have a pie. There was only a pie shop down Orchid Avenue in those days, have a pie and go and sleep on the beach, or if any of our mates had a flat somewhere we'd go and crash there. Anyway, we had a good friend, a chap called Charlie Lees. He had a band at the old Southport Hotel. It's gone now. We got to know

01:30 him pretty well. He was a fantastic guitar player and he had been in the commandos during the war. And we used to go round there. Anyway, I don't know where Peter was this weekend but I went round

there one night. Charlie was working at the pub playing and Audrey, his wife, was home and this girl was there. I got to know her and she just lived round the corner. Anyway, I used to come down weekends and

02:00 visit her, and that was my wife. She used to go away working. I knew her for about three years before we got married. She used to go away working on the tourist boats up North Queensland in the tourist season, and about three years later I decided I'd had enough of the taxation department and bought a block of land at Main Beach and decided to build some flats there.

02:30 I wasn't married at this stage. I had no thought of getting married. It took me seven months to build the flats virtually on my own. I had a bit of help, but anyway, shortly after that Nola and I got serious and got married. We lived in the flats for awhile, eighteen months till the first boy came along and then built various houses around the coast,

03:00 lived in caravans while we were building the houses. Built about six houses on Main Beach I think, and a couple of blocks of flats for people. By this time we had the four kids and Main Beach was getting pretty busy then. We lived up the end of a main road and the little fellows were running across the road to friends' places so we decided to get out of it. Came looking around out here. Well this

03:30 was all bush. There wasn't a house within half a mile of us except one over here. School down here, there was dairy farm down here and dairy farms over there and all bush through up here. And I knew one of the blokes who was developing this estate, Keith Spleigh. It was his house over here, and he told us about the estate and we came out here, a lot of the blocks were sold and he said, "The best block's still not sold."

04:00 So we bought it. We only had it twelve months. We were still living at Main Beach and the next thing the main roads came out with this plan to build a big highway through here, going through here, taking the two blocks below us and right through here. We thought, "Oh we're going to end up in the same position as we did at Main Beach with a highway beside us." So we went up to the main roads and told them the circumstances and they said, "Oh well we'll buy it off you.

04:30 How much do you want for it?" And I just asked for what we paid for it. They held it for nearly three years. There was a lot of controversy over the highway. Bruce Small owned all down here and he was jacking the prices up on the land that main roads wanted, so in the end they scrapped the plan. We heard about it and we raced up to main roads and said, "Could we buy the block back?" They said, "Yes." And we said, "What do you want for it?" And they said, "Seeing you didn't pressure us in the first place

05:00 you can have it for what you paid for it, four-thousand two-hundred dollars." And then in the mean time they had paid rates on it for three years and so on. So we ended up building here.

That's pretty good isn't it?

Mmm. We've been here nearly thirty years now, nearly half my lifetime.

And Harvey did you share any of your war experiences with

05:30 **your family as they were growing up?**

Not really. Family, in a way they're not interested. I get a bit embarrassed talking about it. Now and then I tell a few of them the funny side of things that happened. Older people are interested and the young fellow, young Steven is. He likes to hear about it. And Kent, the second boy, underneath I think he is

06:00 probably proud of what I did. He has been to a few reunions. We used to take our sons to reunions years ago. He's been to a few of them. He knows Peter Murphy. He had four boys and a daughter and his sons were all friends with mine.

And did you stay in touch with…I mean you've mentioned a couple

06:30 **of mates that you obviously did…But did you stay in touch with a lot of your mates from the war years?**

Oh, none at all from the taxation department. There were a lot of ex-servicemen there and we ended up good friends. But there were none out of our unit there. I can only remember one fellow coming in there. A big Maori chap. His name was Ted Pickering. Now before the war Ted was a

07:00 professional wrestler, he used to wrestle in Brisbane down at the old stadium. When war broke out he must have been one of the first…He joined up straight away. He must have been a regimental sergeant major in the militia which he was in the AIF when he joined up. And he was RSM [Regimental Sergeant Major] of this artillery unit I was talking about that got taken prisoner of war. I'll never forget when we went to Rutherford he was on the advance party too and he organized

07:30 this boxing tournament. He was going around and getting volunteers to get in the ring. Ted came to me and said…I must have looked young and silly or something. He said, "I want you to get in the ring with me and box a few rounds." I knew who Ted was. I knew he was a professional wrestler. I said, "No way in the world." He said, "No. I won't hurt you. We'll just box around. Throw a few punches."

08:00 I said, “No Ted. I won’t be in it.” No. He could have thrown me out of the ring.

You were lucky you didn’t fall for it. Did you have yourself or did you know of anyone who had trouble settling down

08:30 **after the war?**

Oh, there were a few. A few drank themselves to death. They couldn’t settle down. I guess I couldn’t settle down in a way. So, all the fellows that shot back to New Guinea were pretty unsettled. They were all in settled jobs up there but it was a different lifestyle. Some were on plantations, some were working on small ships.

09:00 A couple were running trade stores.

And given that you yourself have spent time back up there after the war, what was it about that lifestyle in New Guinea that appealed?

Well when I first went back up I thought, “What the hell am I doing here?” You know, especially on the plantation. I couldn’t see any future in it. The money was no good. You got about a hundred and eighty men under you, which you’ve got to be,

09:30 not brutal but pretty strong with. The chap that was the manager of the plantation had boss boys telling the natives to do what you told them to do. If any of them played up, this particular bloke, he’d say to the boss, “Bash him up.” Oh no, “Fight him.” And he’d go over and belt him up. I mean really get stuck in to him. Well that wasn’t for me.

10:00 Anyway, I think it was about that time that I got a note that my mother was dangerously ill and only had six weeks to live and so on. So I made my way back to Rabaul and rang home. They said, “Oh no, don’t come home. She’ll be right for a while. So I flew back over to Lae and then I knew a couple of chaps who were working up at Bulolo gold fields then. They had come up. So I flew up there and went in and saw the manager and he said, “This is pretty unusual.

10:30 We recruit people from Australia, they don’t walk in here looking for work.” Anyway he said, “What do you want to do?” I said, “Oh I want to get on a dredger.” He said, “Everyone wants to get on that. That’s where the money is,” sort of thing. I said I’ve done a bit of building, and they needed carpenters badly so I worked for them for eighteen months in the carpentry. And in the end we worked in Bulolo for a while and then we went down to Lae and built this big

11:00 depot for Qantas. About twenty-three houses and storerooms and recreation rooms, plus a lot of places for Bulolo themselves down on the wharves, barracks and houses and what have you. Don’t tell my wife this but I met a girl up there, a schoolteacher. She was white by the way, and we became very good friends.

11:30 She’d had a pretty sad life. I think she’d lost a fiancé up there, killed during the war just across from Lae at Salamaua. We went out to the Lae cemetery one day and she was wondering around. I didn’t know this at the time, but she was wandering around looking at the graves. I said, “What are you doing?” She stopped at a certain grave and it was here ex fiancé buried at Lae. Betty

12:00 Brown.

And how did she find herself in New Guinea? I mean I know she was a schoolteacher but…?

There were white schoolteachers up there. I don’t know. They used to have dances. They used to have this competition going between Lae, Bulolo, and Wau, the Levine trophy they called it. It went all weekend. You played cricket, tennis, football, billiards, and anything you could play, and have a dance every night.

12:30 We used to take it in turns each town and I happened to be down in Lae when this one came up for Lae. I met her at the dance and we became good friends. I could have married her if I’d stopped up there. I wanted to stop in New Guinea actually. Then I got word that my mother only had weeks to live and I flew home and didn’t go back.

And what was it that you liked about the life in

13:00 **New Guinea, apart from Betty?**

A sort of carefree life and a great bunch of people. Still a bit primitive in a way I suppose, but that was something you get used to. Oh, we used to have picnics. Bulolo gold dredging had their own boat and they used to go

13:30 way up the Sepik River recruiting labour. They didn’t employ local labour because they could shoot through and go home. They used to send this recruiter and the ship, way up the Sepik River recruiting labour and they’d come back and employ them. And I liked the natives, I liked the New Guinea boys. Now and again we used to, when the ship was in port, it was only ever like a prawning sized boat,

14:00 we used to go across the bay for picnics and what have you, go to the pictures on Saturday night, a good standby. I haven’t been to the pictures for twenty years now, or thirty years.

Should make a special trip.

Oh, I don't know. They haven't got the stars like they had. They haven't got the actors.

That's true.

14:30 **And what was it about the local New Guineans that you liked as well?**

Oh, I don't know. They were so intelligent, boys, and to think you took them out of the Sepik River where half of them had never seen a white man and bring them down. They used to only do labouring jobs but you know, they could, in no time they could speak Pidgin English so you could converse with them. They used to give every white

15:00 man a native boy offsider who'd work with them. And my boy was named Amin. He looked more like an Arab than a New Guinean. He had a hooked nose. I think the Arabs must have got round up there in the early days. Well they did really, you know.

He might have had Arabian relatives.

15:30 **Actually I just wanted to go back to the repatriation office for a little bit if I could. I mean it was just after the war that you were there. What was the main aim and duties of the office at that time? What were they mainly busy doing?**

Well, every man that came in, if he was a tradesman but I don't think they took

16:00 much notice of it, he could go down and they'd give him a ten-pound voucher for ten pounds of trade tools. He'd go out…no, we didn't give him a voucher. How did we work it? I think he went out and got the docket from the firm, wherever he was and he'd come into us and we'd pay it. Literally thousands of them, and apart from that there's be medical claims

16:30 and all sorts of things like that, and purchasing supplies say for the artificial limb factory. They were buying masses of materials to build artificial limbs and doctors' bills to pay. There were three of us on what they called the appropriation ledger, appropriating money, and every month we used to estimate how much money we needed for the month

17:00 and we would send in a claim for it. You never ever got it right. You were always under and you had to send in another one. Actually two chaps had been in my battalion. There were a heck of a lot of 2/9th Battalion blokes working there. And the two chaps I was working with were 2/9th, so it was sort of a home away from home. There were a few girls working

17:30 there. There was a family of three Irish girls working there. They had migrated out from Ireland. I can't tell you their names now. We used to give them hell.

Why?

Oh, just their accent, and they were pretty girls. One of them lived just in here actually. Married a schoolteacher from TSS [The Southport School].

A lot of the boys probably

18:00 **liked them?**

Oh well, I suppose they were a bit woman starved. No, I don't know that any of them ever went out with anyone from repat. No, I enjoyed the first couple of years there. It was steady work and the money was good. Clean clothes, good holidays and so on. And a great lot of people to work with because they only employed ex-servicemen then at that stage.

18:30 **I guess that was part of them giving back to.**

Well a lot of the older chaps when we first went there, they were all from the First World War.

Had Australia sort of changed much for you after the war to what it was like before the war?

Well, we often talked about it at reunions.

19:00 We reckon we had the best days. I think we all might be a bit bigoted with migrants lately, to tell you the truth.

Really? Why do you think that?

I don't know. I might be saying the wrong thing here but I think they're bringing too many Asians in. Europeans are all right, they'll integrate, but Asians never will. They'll always be

19:30 segregated.

Is that a feeling that you have partly because of your wartime experience or is that something you've observed.

Oh no, I don't think so. But I think what has really brought it to head was when they allowed the Vietnamese in freely…not unlimited access but just because they'd been in the Vietnamese

20:00 Freedom Army they were granted access to Australia, and I think a lot of them are entitled to veterans affairs, aren't they? I'm not sure about that. They get benefits.

I think I heard something along those lines but I'm not a hundred per cent.

I'm not sure about that. No, but as I say, before the war everyone,

20:30 when the war ended I suppose everyone looked on other Australians as equals. It didn't matter what you did. From the colonel down, you'd go to a reunion and everyone would address each other by his first name. You'd go into a town. I used to drive my wife a bit crazy really. We would go north on holidays, caravanning, and call into Bundaberg, Rockhampton, Mackay, Townsville. "I know a few blokes here."

21:00 But that's all gone now I'm afraid. I can only think of one fellow left alive up North Queensland, an original in Cairns. He would be a good man to interview but I think he's too sick. A chap called Vince Donnelly. He was an original and he was a real soldier.

He was with you the whole

21:30 **way through?**

I think he left towards the end. I'm not sure where he went to but he wasn't there at the finish.

Just a couple of questions of your wartime experiences. Just in those final days or final campaigns like Balikpapan the landings and things you were doing there. Was there much feeling amongst the fellows at the time

22:00 **that what you were doing was a bit of a filler, a bit of a wasted campaign?**

A backwater? Oh, I don't think we realized at the time what MacArthur was up to, wanting all the honour and glory for the Americans. When we were looking back I think a lot of what we did was unnecessary, particularly up in the islands, you know. They were sending the militia units into

22:30 Rabaul and those places. They could have just let them starve themselves to death, virtually. They would have surrendered at the finish. But, no, I think the Australians probably Borneo campaign might have been unnecessary.

But at the time you felt…?

We would have been disappointed if we hadn't gone away and finished it there.

23:00 **How so?**

After a while you get bored just sitting in camp and we'd been sitting on the Tablelands there for months and months. And as I say, when the Middle East and through there, we were always on the move, never a dull moment. We reckon it spoiled the war when they brought us back to Australia because the Middle East was a good place to fight a war.

23:30 **Why, I mean you've…**

Well there's town there to fall back on and go on leave and that, but in the islands there's nothing.

You could actually continue and adventure. When you, just coming back to after the war years now. Did you join the RSL [Returned and Services League] clubs and unit associations?

I didn't join anything.

24:00 I was still very keen on the unit. We used to have our reunions every year. We still do.

How soon after the war did you start having reunions?

Straight away. Anyway, this Major Lovett, I think we decided to form a battalion association and we used to have monthly meetings and then we decided

24:30 to form a Tobruk association and we formed the Rats of Tobruk association. I was in that for years. I think they still have, there are a few left that goes, but I don't associate any more. I was very keen on the battalion association. I was treasurer for donkey's years before I came to the coast. As a matter of fact if you ever go into the crypt at

25:00 Anzac Square… Have you ever been in there?

I haven't yet. No.

Go and have a look sometime .You'll see the 2/9th Battalion memorial there. It's a chap leaning on his rifle. One of our fellows posed for it. And I was the treasurer at the time and we raised enough money to pay for it. I don't know how many thousands of dollars we raised. And this young, new Australian that

we knew, he carved it out of

25:30 solid timber. All our casualty lists are there and so on and where we served. But it's worth seeing. I've only been in there a couple of times but it's worth going in and having a look. Oh the battalion, we've raised a bit of money. Recently they've put two…I haven't seen them but they've put two big seats in Anzac Square with the battalion motto on it or something. No.

26:00 but the memorials up at Marysmokes, Kilcoy and on the Atherton Tablelands and so on, Redbank. The old reunions are fading away now, I'm afraid. The best one was our fiftieth one. And this is the tragedy of it all… There was this woman and her husband was in the army, I can't think of her name.

26:30 She was in Toowoomba. There has been a few chaps who have tried to have a go at writing a history of the battalion. The first chap was a Major Court of the battalion soon after the war. He was a schoolteacher and he died. Then the postal sergeant started to do it and he had a fantastic collection of material I believe, a whole port full. He died and I believe his family

27:00 dumped the port of material. And then now this woman decided she'd have a go and we all took material to the fiftieth reunion and gave it to her, and she started it and she's never finished it, and she won't return the material to those blokes. Apparently she said, "All I wanted to do…" She wrote part of it, half way. Apparently she said, "All I wanted to do was to get my thesis at the

27:30 university." A uni degree or whatever they get. Well most of the blokes are dead now but she'd hung onto all of their material. Terrible. One bloke even put up twenty thousand dollars for her to do the book. She's never done it. So I'm afraid the history will never be written. There's one fellow wrote a… He was in the intelligence section, Bill Spence from South Australia,

28:00 and he was a dying man. In the last few years he had. And a couple of years ago he sat down and wrote as much as he knew about it. What did he call it? In the Footsteps of Ghosts. How that name came about, he joined the battalion. He was south Australian and they were going to the 2/10th Battalion which consisted of more South Australians. And they were coming up the desert

28:30 in the train, these box trucks and all on the inside of the trucks were names carved and written of chaps from the First World War. They had obviously been used as trucks then. And this one chap, Wog Dixon we called him. He said to Bill Spence, "I feel as though I am walking in the steps of ghosts." That's what he named the book.

29:00 They came to the 2/9th by mistake. They should have gone to the 2/10th Battalion. Anyway, a few months later they said, "You can all go back over to the 2/10th Battalion if you want to." "No, we're stopping here with the 2/9th." And they all became very good friends, you know. Bill wrote a good book.

It is a wonderful title for that book.

You might have heard of Peter Brune, have you?

Peter Brune?

29:30 He has written a lot of war books. He wrote the history of Milne Bay mainly. What did he call it? [There] To the Bitter End, I think. He came up to Brisbane and interviewed a lot of us and got photos and materials and what have you. He's written a story. Another chap in Mackay, he wrote his version of the battalion. What did he call it?

30:00 Not as a Conquering Hero, I think. And who else? Oh, another chap from Gympie. You might have his name to be interviewed. A chap called… Anyway, he wrote his life story, childhood, and through the war, and since the war, very interesting.

30:30 I'll get his name shortly. We were good mates. He got an OAM a few years ago, an Order of Australia Medal, for service to this Gympie community. But he would be a good man to interview. He got badly wounded at Buna and was B classed there. I think he saw the war out as a, what do you call them? Not coast watchers but

31:00 listening posts, out in the never-never, you know.

I'll have to grab his name off you later.

It will come to me shortly.

Harvey, what has Anzac Day meant to you over the last few years?

I haven't been going the last few years. I have been going to the dawn service. About three years ago they conned me into going to Brisbane to the Anzac Day march, and I got up there and

31:30 I thought, "I won't see the distance out." I've got bad knees. They said, "You'll be right." And they said, "You're leading the march, the battalion." I said, "What?" So I had to lead the boys out. There were only about twenty of us there, you know, but I was out in front striding along. I saw the distance out all right. Des Rickards is the chap from Gympie.

32:00 He'd be worth interviewing. So this chap down here, Alec Marshall…a few months ago they

32:30 sent a delegation to New Guinea, to Milne Bay and opened a memorial there. I was nominated to go for that but they only took about twenty from all over Australia so I missed out. This Des Rickards, he was nominated. But they took a few fellows who hadn't been there. That's what some of our fellows were a bit sour about. One of our fellows did go.

33:00 All they saw was the tops of coconut trees, anyway, out of the aeroplane.

Not quite the same thing.

They rushed from place to place. They were only there for a few days. I would have gone back with mixed feelings actually.

What do you mean?

Seeing what we were like then and what we are like now, a lot of decrepit old soldiers; the same as the Middle East.

33:30 Some of boys have been back to Tobruk, earlier days. But I wouldn't have minded going then because all the fellows were still alive then, you know. I wouldn't go now. The same as going back to England, I wouldn't go now. I would have loved to have gone back. Peter Murphy went back. As a matter of fact they went back on their honeymoon and then he went back to Tobruk. They had a big do over there years ago.

34:00 They couldn't have been to… and walk back…

And so Harvey, is Anzac Day still a special day for you even though you don't go in the march and stuff?

Not really. I don't think too much about it. I watch the march on TV, the Brisbane march on TV. You just look at a pitiful few 2/9th blokes staggering along and you think, "Oh." Surprising

34:30 enough, this year I was surprised at the roll up of relatives and friends and kids, quite surprising. I always used to go in Brisbane I always used to march there. I marched down the coast here a few times. I've been to a few Anzac Days. I haven't been to the last two Anzac Day services – four o'clock in the morning, God.

35:00 **As someone who went though the Second World War with all the things you've experienced, what's been your feelings towards the conflicts Australia has been involved in recently?**

Well, as far as this Iraq business goes I think they might have been a bit hasty there. You know, when you think

35:30 oil is behind the whole show really. America is that dependent on those Arab countries for oil, it's not funny really. I think they've bitten off a bit more than they can chew there. They don't know what to do about it. They've lost more men there since the war finished, haven't they? It's amazing there hasn't been one Australian lost. I don't know what they are doing there. Still,

36:00 no, they might know more than us but I do think they are a bit hasty rushing into it. They stirred up a hornet's nest with the Muslims anyway. Just when you think of it, as I say, at the reunions we often say we had the best years. We never had all this looking over your shoulder that people have now. You never know when

36:30 there's going be a bomb attack or what have you. I still think we are pretty safe in Australia but with all these different migrant groups they're letting in. I don't think they'll ever integrate really. Even though I like the Chinese, they keep to themselves, don't they? I don't remember a Chinaman ever being in the army and there were a lot in Australia during the war.

37:00 It would be interesting to know how many migrants are in the services really.

If a young fellow came up to you and was looking for advice about joining the service and wanting to go off to war what sort of advice would you give him?

Oh, I think I'd say go, yeah. I suppose we thought our war was a worthwhile one.

37:30 But now it's… There are so many things behind the wars aren't there? I think oils really behind the Iraq business and Vietnam, well I don't know. One of my best friends in the army lost his son in Vietnam. They couldn't get there quick enough.

38:00 **And Harvey just one last question, with your battalion history that's had a hard time getting written, I guess, what would be the most important thing for you about your battalion to actually see written down and kept for the future,**

38:30 **and to let people to know about?**

Oh, I suppose just the campaigns they went through and the numbers of men lost. It's all written down

unofficially really, and the last I heard they were talking about some group of university people talking about getting together and doing it. It will be long after we're all gone of course, but still,

39:00 I hope they do it. There's enough material around to do it if they get it all together, that's the thing.

Where there's a will there's a way.

I guess someone will. The 2/12th only wrote their history only a couple of years ago. Someone did it and it was done. As I say, if they can get all these books together.

39:30 And this Peter Murphy and the secretary, treasurer of the association now, they have done a tremendous amount of work. They send me all the paper work. I've got a list of every man that joined the battalion. Over four thousand went through the battalion. I've got every man's name there on the list. I've got a list of every man killed and wounded in action. I've got personal diaries written by

40:00 people. It's all there on paper; all I need is someone to put it together. And this woman in Toowoomba, I don't know what's happened to all her material. I can't think of her name now. Her husband was in the army at the time, I think he was a major, whether he still is or not. But I know everyone was very disappointed with her.

40:30 **Harvey is there any last words or anything that we haven't covered…**

Don't say, "Any last words."

Anything that we haven't covered that you wanted to say? I didn't mean it like that. You're going to outlive me. Is there anything that we haven't covered that you're…?

No, I think we've covered it pretty well mate. There's nothing much else. Well I suppose there are thousands of things really but you can go on forever.

INTERVIEW ENDS