

# Australians at War Film Archive

## Keith Bennett - Transcript of interview

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<http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/106>

### Tape 1

00:40 **So, Keith can we start off by, if you could give us a summary of your life to date.**

Surely, Yes well I was born in Victoria in 1922, which makes me now 81 years since February 14th. And in my early life I went to various schools.

01:00 I was fortunate enough to attend Trinity Grammar, which gave me a public education. This was due to the fact that I was able to sing in the St Paul's Cathedral as a choirboy. But with those years of course, it was the depression in the early days of the thirties and we had to do without a lot of things and consequently we were asked to leave school early so that we could supplement the income. And my first job

01:30 was a messenger boy on a pushbike earning the magnificent sum of 10 and 6, which is a bit over a dollar a week. And that was the way we went about things. I was then an apprentice to an engineering firm at a fitter and turner in Melbourne. And at that time my mother went across to Sydney and I was transferred across in 1939 to the Eastern

02:00 Trading company, which was an engineering firm based in Redfern, they made cockpit controls for the Wirraways which was an aircraft built by the Australians. At that time I was, well of course the war was on by that stage and in 1940 when I turned 18 I wanted to join up and consequently I got accepted into the army in August of 1940,

02:30 just over the age of 18. At that time I did our initial training at the showground and then out to Greta in the Mid West or Mid North at least of New South Wales. And from there we came back and went overseas in August, sorry in September I think it was, on board the Strathallan. This was quite a unique voyage in so

03:00 far that we were passengers on that ship and travelled from there from Sydney through to Melbourne, Adelaide, Fremantle picking up troops on the way through. We left Fremantle and headed north up to Singapore where there was a detachment of the air force, the RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force], had landed there to be stationed in Singapore. And we went on to India via Ceylon

03:30 and at that time of course Italy had come into the war and we were diverted off the ship into Bombay. And we stopped about a month I think, in India whilst the ship went onto England and we were doing training in India. We eventually got on to a French Mediterranean luxury cruise liner called the President Doumer. And we went up the Red Sea. Now the unique

04:00 part of that voyage of course half way up the Red Sea and to the East of the, or to the West at least was Abyssinia where the Italians were occupying and we were the first Australians to actually come under enemy fire by their aircraft. And that was something we boasted about when we go to the Middle East because nobody had seen enemy action as such in the Australian 2nd RAR [Royal Australian Regiment] at that time. And we arrived at Suez, discharged,

04:30 went to a camp and did some training through there, mainly in marching into the desert and getting the feel of how it was to work under heat conditions. And moved from there then into a camp outside Alexandria and again we came under attack there because of nightly air raids by the Italians and their nightly forays, they weren't of a worry, when I say a worry that they were too high up to avoid any anti aircraft fire

05:00 to be accurately bombing. We didn't suffer any casualties fortunately. And from there we then went into Libya where we started our first campaign with the capture of Bardia through the towns of Tobruk and then up to Benghazi and that was the first role of the 6th Division and its push up to the far point there. We then moved back to Egypt and then onto Greece,

05:30 at that time I was with 17th Brigade in the Signals section and half way through the Libyan campaign was transferred to the 19th Brigade, which was another Infantry Brigade and they in turn moved on

about another hundred kilometres on from Benghazi to support a British Armoured Brigade that was in trouble up there. When we return back we then went across to Greece

- 06:00 and up to the Yugoslav border. There was a lot of controversy about, because of our easy victory as it was in Libya and the onslaught that we received as we virtually fled out of Greece. Was mistaken because the enemy was in such vast numbers, we had some seven divisions opposing us on the Yugoslavian border. Against we had one Australian division, one New Zealand division
- 06:30 and two Greek divisions who were poorly trained and poorly equipped and so it was as a consequence that we greatly withdrew down and it was half way out of Greece that we ran into extremely heavy fire at a place called Brallos Pass, which probably many people may recall as you interview them. This was an area where we held the high ground, but of course the infantry held the flat outside the town of Lamia and it was there that I
- 07:00 was first wounded with a close bomb that buried me and I lost the hearing in one ear. That didn't prevent me from carrying on, but it was just that, it was a not a really known discomfort at that point, but we were losing a lot of our men through wounding and we eventually got back to the south of Greece where we were taken off on a ship called the HMS Wryneck it was an Ack-ack [anti aircraft] ship of the British Navy. They escorted us, took us out from Greece
- 07:30 to Suda Bay in Crete. It was unfortunate that that ship was sank the following day with all hands, they lost the whole lot. Marvellous crew. And in Crete, we were disoriented; we had very little equipment, because most of our equipment was lost in Greece. And we came under paratrooper attack there and we found that first you know, signals were not supposed to fight the enemy, we were there to create the communications, but it was all hands on deck to
- 08:00 repel the invasion. But of course their sheer numbers outweighed the equipment we had and the ammunition that we had and we were gradually run out of time and we were eventually pushed back from that point. My section, which was depleted down from 30 men, we were 6 only when we got out of that. The other 3 were killed or captured. And I wasn't happy there because it wasn't my original brigade, I belonged to the 17th Brigade so
- 08:30 I asked for and was given permission to go back to my original brigade so I went back to the 17th Brigade and walked from the frying pan into the fire because we straight went into the Syrian campaign against the Vichy French so that gave me a unique situation along with the other two Battalions that I fought all the kings enemies by the end of the war. The Italians in Libya, the Germans in Greece and Crete and the Vichy French in Syria and of course in 42 the
- 09:00 Japanese on two separate campaigns. So that was basically the war history. After the war, I came out and then met up with my good wife and courted her and married her. We were in a state of the duration of the war and the 6 months thereafter you were supposed to be able to be called up, but of course the Korean threat was on then. So I rejoined the army in the form of the CMF [Civilian Military Forces],
- 09:30 which was the Lancers of the 1/15 Royal New South Wales Lancers, and we taught and trained the National Service that came into being at that time. And it was there that I gained a commission and rose to the rank of Captain, so that was from 1952 - 1964 and then because of the work content I had I couldn't ably compete on so I withdrew from the army there, retired and went on with my normal work life
- 10:00 until I retired. I've been retired now for some fifteen years due to the problem with my health condition which is mainly emphysema and have lived a fairly active live until recently times. Because the emphysema has caught up and I'm now mainly restricted to mental work as opposed to physical work. So there's where I am at the moment.

**Thank you very much Keith, that's a very concise and interesting life that you have had there.**

- 10:30 Thank you.

**So perhaps if we can go right back to the start, to where it all began. If you could retell us again where and when you were born?**

Born in a suburb, of Camberwell near a place called Wattle Park in an outer suburb of, it was a countrified area in those days, outside Melbourne. About 7 or 8 miles outside Melbourne if

- 11:00 memory serves. We had our grandfather's house there, it was a lovely old place right on a creek line, there we spent many years. Well my father was a World War One Australian soldier, he married my mother in Scotland who he met when he was on leave from France, and when he came back and she came back, I think the drama of World War One and the
- 11:30 horrific situations they went through, which compared to us, that didn't make for a happy marriage, consequently Mum and Dad parted company and never divorced but Mum took me and we travelled a lot of places in our own right.

**How old were you when they split up?**

I suppose I would have been in my early years, I wouldn't have been a teenager even. No, no I would

probably have been 7 or 8. I can always remember,

- 12:00 I always had a good association with my father and mum never, there was no resentment it was just the incapability because of the dramas of the war, I should imagine.

**So how would your father display this experience that he had had?**

Not to me, I never recall dad ever being angry in a situation, my mother was the one with a Scottish temper, she used to fly off like nobody's business. But I didn't

- 12:30 recall Dad ever getting worked up but he used to. In those days, he had a motorbike and sidecar. And if things got a bit uncomfortable I'd be dumped in the sidecar and Dad would get on the bike and away we would go for a ride. But that was about it.

**And would he ever talk to you about his experiences?**

No. No the only time I got back in touch with Dad after the war was when I was given a commission, I became a

- 13:00 lieutenant and Dad who rejoined the army in World War Two and he was a Warrant Officer training troops on the Victorian Border. I can't remember the name of the camp, but it was somewhere there. And I was down at Puckapunyal and I invited he and his wife then, of course my mother had died, in 1942 with that event-taking place Dad then married

- 13:30 the person he was living with all those years.

**And what about brothers and sisters?**

I only had one sister and she died before I was born so, Sylvia Nell was her name but I never ever knew of her. So I was an only child in that effect.

**Had she died in childbirth?**

I couldn't tell. No, she was born but had died shortly after. I think there were a lot of problems with pneumonia in those days

- 14:00 just after World War One. There was a lot of suffering and perhaps that was one of the causes.

**I imagine that that must have affected your parents?**

That could have been a contributing factor I should imagine.

**So tell more about the town, it was Camberwell, isn't it?**

Yes it's a little suburb, just like a suburb of Sydney or anything of that nature, small country side, a few shops, a tram used to run through from there to the

- 14:30 centre of Melbourne. And that was it; it was just a quiet little spot. When they parted my mother was working in the Federal Hotel in Melbourne, she was receptionist there and I was living with a Catholic family, Johnny Begg was the boy's name and I had a, I went to the Catholic School, the brothers

- 15:00 school then in Glenferrie Road with him and I was given an education with them until such time as I left there and then went to the Trinity Grammar because I had at that time apparently a very good voice as far as choir singing was concerned. The choirmaster accepted me and for that privilege of being in the choir they therefore gave me part of my education at Trinity Grammar.

**So you actually didn't live with**

- 15:30 **your mother for some time?**

Only from the point of boarding in that area, but I was always with my mum. We would see each other on the weekends and things of that nature.

**So you were a boarder at Trinity?**

No, no I was a day boarder at Trinity.

**So what was Trinity College like?**

Another school, I guess. I had been to so many schools at the time. It was. I was not a happy student at

- 16:00 Trinity, it was one of these, you had to be well up in the society to belong to those, and I wasn't. We weren't of the social ladder climb that brought us into there. So I was never quite as happy as perhaps the others were, so I wasn't as comfortable as them, perhaps I could put it that way.

**Were you treated differently?**

Bullying was one of the things of the school, in those days. The public school never had it but

- 16:30 no I got into trouble on a number of occasions. We had a headmaster that used to have a rack of canes

and if you did anything wrong, he did give you the privilege of selecting the cane that you wanted to have used on you. I went through a number of canes in my day. But typical boy playing up in the normal way.

**I know this might seem like a silly detail, but what sort of cane would you go for when you were picking out your cane?**

I tried

17:00 most of them and they all hurt just as much as the other.

**So they were all as bad as each other were they?**

And now today you would not sort of allow that in any school, but that was the corporal punishment of the day in the school with the brothers they used to use the strap. There was one brother there that used to give you the strap and he used to call himself, or he was known as Vivian McCrae, now Vivian McCrae was a world renowned tennis player and he held the racket with two hands so when anybody

17:30 played up and was given the cane he had to hold both hands out together, so he go the strap across both hands. Now that was the schooling of those days. And being left-handed was another thing; I was a natural left hander and I had more bruised knuckles because I couldn't write with right hand and they would hit across the knuckles with this round ruler to bring the point home that I was using the wrong hand. I never overcome that and I could never use my

18:00 right hand, it was always my left-hand.

**So you would be rapped across the knuckles when you were writing with your left hand.**

They gave up in the end, admittedly but it was a stigma to be left-handed in those days.

**I'm kinda glad I grew left-handed in this age.**

And none of our children in any shape or form, I don't think any of them are left handed. But I always say

18:30 I'm different to other; because I'm right-handed as afar as holding a bat is concerned, I'm always convinced that people eating you use your right-hand to eat the soup or drink your soup, you use your left hand to eat your main course using your the fork with your left hand and then you go back to your right hand to eat your sweets, so I use my left hand on all occasions.

**So you were a choirboy?**

Yes, brief as it was, about 6 months I think.

**Did**

19:00 **you enjoy this activity?**

Oh yes, it was great. Because I liked singing at the time, we used to go to choir practice every afternoon and then there was an evening song at 4 o'clock and then on Saturday was the only day I was ever free from church. I was always at church. Morning and afternoon or evening service at St Paul's and Sunday school at the local church on a Sunday afternoon and then Monday to Friday coming from Trinity Grammar into the choir into St Paul's at Melbourne

19:30 and go through our choir practice for the forthcoming Sunday, whatever we were singing. And that's where we were at. But then we moved, mother moved into a county town and I moved out from Trinity to go with her.

**So of course around this time the depression was going on? What memories do you have of the depression?**

It was a pretty hard life, we didn't have much.

20:00 We lived at one point of our life, Mum worked for the AWA [Amalgamated Wireless Australasia] which was the wireless communication, or radio, line communication, cable communication between Melbourne and England and every morning she'd come on, she used to talk to England as a test line, now mum being Scottish of course and her other and father and sisters were in

20:30 Scotland at the time, on occasion they would arrange for them to talk to each other so that was a beautiful part. We lived in Albert Park right on the waterfront and to get to the AWA would have been about three mile. It was thruppence on the Tram and mum would walk one way to save the thruppence, so that was the desperation of the depression days. To earn money for shopping for kids, we'd go

21:00 shopping for the people who were unable to or quite happy for us to go to the greengrocer and the grocer and we'd be paid in empty lemonade bottles for which we'd get a penny when we took them back. So we'd get thruppence maybe sixpence in a week, by doing the shopping and carting groceries home to the various homes. That was the way we survived, we were happy, we went to the pictures once a week, swimming of course, we were on the waterfront. No, I'd

21:30 hate to see a depression like that was.

**So at what point did you move up to Sydney?**

In 1939, actually at Christmas time, I came up there. I had been in Sydney before, but I couldn't remember it, I must have been too young. We lived at Manly then; it was there that we used to travel from Manly across on the ferry

22:00 every morning to go to work and I used to go to Ultimo Tech [Technical College] for my training. I shouldn't have left work because I would have been in a protected industry being indentured, but at 18 and of course my father being World War One and my grandfather on my mothers side he was the RSM [Regimental Sergeant Major] of the Black Watch Regiment and I think there was an instinct to be military wise in that regard.

**So**

22:30 **when you left to come up to Sydney and you left Trinity that was also when you finished your schooling?**

Oh, yes, yes I left schooling long before that. I had been working for the Eastern Trading Company amongst other jobs I eventually ended up at that. As I said I was a messenger on a bicycle pushing a bike around Melbourne delivering little bits and pieces. Messengers, I think they have them today but they're a bit more erratic then we were. We were on Malvern Star, which was

23:00 5 pounds 10 and 6, and we paid 2 and 6 a week to pay the thing off, 10-shilling deposit.

**What was the reason why you left school?**

Financial. Maybe, I presume you know it's hard to think back. We never had two pennies to rub together, you never had a splurge where you could go out and do things you wanted to.

23:30 **At the time, can you recall having any regret at having to finish your schooling early?**

No, no I think that when I came away my job when I got to Sydney was 22 and 6 a week; you can work that out to decimal currency the conversion there. But then to get into the army became

24:00 35 shillings a week, it was big bickies. Never mind King and Country that was money in the pocket that we had never explored before. It was the adventure and also to get that extra money. And of course as you specialise being a Don R [Dispatch Rider] you got an extra shilling a day because of specialist pay. So and a shilling relative to today's money I don't know how you would compare that, but it was quite a substantial amount of money. When you consider that a bottle of beer was a shilling.

24:30 **So tell me about your arrival in Sydney and what you did when you arrived here?**

Well as I came as I said, from Melbourne up to Sydney by train, mum met me at Central Station and we went on down to Circular Quay and caught the ferry across to Manly and that's where we lived. And I of course went up to the new job, the new position with the Eastern Trading Company at Redfern and was employed

25:00 there. But the main thing of course was that the war was on. And like all young people we were anxious to keep an eye on it and do things about it. I was too young then of course, I was only 17. I wasn't 18 until February the 14th 1940.

**So where were you when you heard that the war had broken out?**

It was in Victoria.

25:30 But I've not got a clear recollection on the... I knew there was a war on but we never sort of got terribly involved in it and I wasn't old enough to see the seriousness of it at the time. And it was the phoney war as I said as the later history pages talked about that particular period of time. Until the evacuation of Dunkirk of course, it got a bit more meaningful and I think the King and Country thing came in about there.

26:00 **So did empire matter?**

I think I was proud to be a soldier. And serve the King, as we would know it in those days, because we had to swear to the Allegiance. So there must have been some rub off from that point of view.

**Did you consider yourself to be more a citizen of the Empire, or more a countryman**

26:30 **of Australia?**

Oh definitely Australia. We were always very strong on our own identity, or I was anyway, I was always proud of the fact I called myself an Aussie because part of my youth I spent two years in Scotland with my mother's sister and her husband and when I was in Scotland as a kiddie, I don't recall clearly, my nickname was Aussie

27:00 and when I came back from Scotland two years later, I, still a very young person, I was nicknamed

Scotchie and of course that riled me up no end, I was an Australian in a broad Scottish accent, I was saying that I wasn't a Scotsman, I was an Australian. So I had that identity proudness of myself, being an Australian.

**So you'd spent a couple of years in Scotland when you were quite small, is that right?**

Oh yes, I was only, must have been 7

27:30 or 8 perhaps.

**Why did you enlist? Why did you decide to join the army?**

Well as I said that I, the call was there, you were seeing men in uniform and it was the thing to do to my way of thinking, but it would've been good to do, it would've been good to get into the excitement of it. And again I must emphasize that from 22

28:00 and 6 a week to 35 shillings a week was a big change in terms of finance. Mum was then working at the AMP [Australian Mutual Provident Society], in Martin Place, or just around from Martin Place and so money was still a little tight in relation to what we had, but there was no board to pay, you were being fed, you were being clothed, you were being looked after.

28:30 **So when and where did you enlist?**

In Sydney, in Moore Park.

**Can you describe what happened at your enlistment?**

Only as so far as that I, we went in to go for the medicals of course, you had to do all the various things, hop about on one foot and cough and do all those other things and I can always recall the person,

29:00 when they said, "What do you do in civilian life?" I didn't want to say "I was a fitter and turner", I said "I have ridden motorbikes". "Oh, you will make a good Don R [dispatch rider]". I didn't know what the word Don R meant at the time. "We'll put you in signals", and the fellow behind me, whose number was one behind, was a chap by the name of Clive Mendham and this fellow said, "And what do you do for a living?" He said "I'm a butcher from Orange,

29:30 I'm a butcher." and he said, "You'll make a good linesman, you're in signals as well." And Clive and I have for many, many years we were good friends and we still have Cliety, we still write to Cliety his wife, he died a couple of years ago, so he and I went through the same unit but not the same section of course. He was in the line section and I was in the infantry section.

**From day one?**

Well after the

30:00 training, and when we got to Egypt then they allocated you to the various sections that were responsible for the communications. Communications in the army from a division they are responsible to create the communication downwards to the Brigade and backwards to the corps and the brigade division signals are responsible to create the communication forward to the infantry battalions and back

30:30 to the divisions and laterally, of course to the artillery and other supporting units we have. So that's where I was at. In the headquarters section which was made of the wireless section and the line section for cables etc and they had their own dispatch for either section, which was responsible for carrying dispatches security wise when or you didn't have lines to get from one point to another, you relied on the dispatch rider to carry those messages from

31:00 the Brigade through to the battalion or from the brigade back to the division, division down to the brigade, etc so that was my basic role, messenger boy or post man if you would like to call it in the more mundane term. But it was a unique situation being it I know because you saw more of the country, you travelled on a bike, you were independent, you didn't have anyone to see where you were. Well we travelled in Syria, our head office was in Beirut,

31:30 sorry in Tripoli, just outside Tripoli, a little town, village called El Mina and our battalion was up at the Turkish border which was a hundred miles away, that was one of our battalions up there so you had quite a distance to cover in relation to the particular area.

**That would have been wonderful to have seen the countryside?**

Yes, and we had good mates from all the sections because we were only a small section of 30 strong or 32 with the officers.

**Just**

32:00 **getting back to your enlistment? Why did you choose the army?**

I suppose because my dad was army and my grandfather was army. I did consider the navy in Melbourne but I think army was my choice.

**What did your mother think of your enlistment?**

She was quite proud that her son was a soldier.

32:30 **You obviously went off and did some training before you headed off? Where did you go?**

Into Greta was our main training camp area. We did our bike training there. The first thing we had to do, we had a little sergeant he was about 5 foot 4 and he said to us when we were lining up "O.K, who

33:00 can ride motorbikes?" Well we all looked at him silly, we had all rode motorbikes, we knew how to ride motorbikes and he said "O.K, who can fall off a motorbike?" so we all giggled. But for the next half-hour he described how we would get off a motorbike at 30 mile an hour. And in Greta of course there is a grass called onion grass which is a round, slidey very slippery grass and he just took this bike, we were standing in a group and he went up the hill and came down at about

33:30 30 miles an hour and just put the bike down and stood up on one side of it, and he said, "That's how you get off." So by the end of that day most of us had burns on our calves of our legs where we got caught up with the exhaust pipes of the bikes, because we didn't work it out too well, but it proved in the end to be beneficial that training, because in Syria at a railway crossing which was just a pole across a road, as I was coming around towards Damascus the

34:00 pole was down but I didn't see it because of the snow on the ground and the next thing I saw was one of the local inhabitants waving his flag frantically to let me know the train was there. I just put the bike down, the bike went across the line and I stood on this side and watched the train go between the two of us but that was the training of how to get off a bike.

**Thank goodness you learnt that one.**

Well that was the training, you see you can ride a bike but you gotta know how to get off a bike in a hurry.

**And what else did you learn during your training?**

34:30 Your normal weapon training. Rifle shooting, revolver shooting, Morse code, you had to master Morse code of course for communication, know how to work a switchboard, know how to repair lines, you were a jack of all trades and in any walk of life you had to repair lines because on Crete when we had very little equipment and we acquired a lot of equipment from the HMS York, which was sunk in Suda Bay and acquired

35:00 a lot of equipment from there. As the Germans bombed us of course we had to go out and repair the lines that were broken through bombing and that was part of an additional role and of course in New Guinea where there were no such requirements for bikes a linesman was then the line of the day and that was my role in New Guinea in the two campaigns.

**What type of bikes were you training on?**

On a Norton, it

35:30 was a 500cc Norton which had a high clearance underneath which was ideal for the desert warfare. Then in Crete, we came off with nothing, but we got some bikes from a military dump there, they were BSAs [Birmingham Small Arms], same size bike but a lower bike but I used that until such time that we ran out of petrol and we just gave up on them,

36:00 we were working our way back to the South Coast of the island to be evacuated at the time.

**Just getting back to the training. How long did it take for you to master Morse code?**

I still remember it today. I suppose 3 or 4 weeks not by speed,

36:30 group one operator had to be 30 words a minute. A Don R wasn't required to use Morse because he wasn't a sig but he had to, to get his group one pay, he had to be able to pass through, he had pass at 5 words a minute, now that sounds pretty slow, but when you come on of a night time and maybe relieve somebody on one of the instruments for passing through the reports, casualty reports, ration reports and things, most of it

37:00 was all done in code, I'd get about 10 or twelve words a minute, basically it was all letter or all figures.

**Was this training that you were doing, was it difficult?**

No, hard of course, discipline. They say jump and you say how high.

**And what were the conditions like at the training camp?**

Cold, old silver city. In Greta was just

37:30 tin sheds, Quonset type huts with no linings in them, in the middle of winter it was bitterly cold there of a night time and of course you only had your 3 blankets and you slept on hard concrete, there was no such things as beds to sleep on, you had straw mattress, a straw palliasses was what they called it, it was a satchel of straw, a sack cloth and you filled it with straw, one blanket underneath and two on top of you and your grey

38:00 coat and anything else you could find to keep you warm.

**And did you feel like your training prepared you well for what you encountered when you did go overseas?**

Yes I think so, we were disciplined, we knew how to march, we knew how to salute, we knew how to do the various things. Yes, we didn't do infantry training per say apart from skirmishing

38:30 when we were in the Middle East we went across into Egypt, we were doing forced marches across the desert on half a bottle of water a day and that was to discipline you on your control of your intake of water and that in itself was a control, but when you got back you were very thirsty.

**I believe that at some point in your training you got a visit from General Bennett?**

Oh, yes that was in Greta when we were

39:00 training in Greta. And he came up to a group of us and I could remember that clearly because his aid was there and he said "And your name son?" And I said "Bennett" and of course General Bennett said "Ah, another Bennett, good show, good show." So that was my one minute, I always had a soft spot for him because I always thought they did the wrong thing by him, if you look at the world history, or the war record history of his, escaping from

39:30 Singapore and coming back to pass on information that we sadly lacked in Jungle warfare, he had it.

**We're actually going to have to finish there, we will start that back up on the next tape, because I'm interested to hear your opinion of him.**

## Tape 2

00:33 **So Keith, on the last tape you were just talking about your opinion about General Bennett, if you could continue that?**

Yes well as I said, in post war when I was, went on to become an officer myself my horizons broaden and I was reading a lot of military history, and of course I was involved in part of the World War history, World War Two history and out of that was Bennett's demise in his role as a

01:00 Major General and that to me was a sin, because he had brought back with him all the information required for Jungle Warfare, we didn't know about Jungle Warfare. And the government didn't want to know him because as far as they were concerned he escaped leaving his troops behind, they didn't say anything about MacArthur who did exactly the same thing, you know our love for the Americans is not as strong

01:30 as perhaps some people will make out. Because it's the Americans that made an advance with some allied troops in support, and to quote a particular example of that was in Wau the American communique came out "Americans with allied support retook Wau", there were 3 Americans. Wireless operators. So the Americans are really hoodwinked into

02:00 what the truth of the total scene is or was in those days. And that's just the issue where we felt that Bennett should have got more recognition than he did.

**So at the time though, when Singapore did fall and Bennett did leave what was your opinion of him at that time.**

Well, like we didn't know, we did not know, because we were involved when Japan gone into the war of course, at that

02:30 time history of course tells that Churchill refused our government to get our troops back. He wanted our divisions to support the Middle East; they would save Australia later, that was the story that came across to us. However, it was insisted that we come back to Australia to defend Australia and we were told to find our own ships which ultimately they must have done so but in the mean time we were landed at Ceylon which is now known as Sri Lanka and

03:00 it was there that we came under attack from aircraft, from aircraft carriers of the Japanese army. Nothing of great damage was done but it was proving that they were going to, that their intention was to look at that. But I think, they thought their lines were too far extended to continue with that. So from there we came back to Australia and then straight in to Milne Bay and straight on up to New Guinea. Now the 16th Brigade

03:30 was involved but I can't quite give you the history of that, I'm not too up to date in that area but the 17th Brigade where as I said we went in to Wau, we were in the what we call the Battle of the Ridges which was a series of very high mountainous countryside and you could look across from one point to another and we never measured it in miles or kilometres, it was in hours, how many hours it took you to walk



from point A to point B.

04:00 Now half way through that campaign being a linesman then, the lines went out and I was stationed at what we call a staging post, where if the line went out you went back to find the line or you went forward. But if you had to go forward you always called up the Infantry to support you or to protect you, because you wouldn't go out on your own and on this particular instance, we did run into trouble, we ran into an ambush of a sort, it wasn't a serious ambush but it was an ambush.

04:30 And the Japanese came, and the one that came at me, unfortunately his gun jammed but he caught me on the side of the neck with his bayonet, well it wasn't a wound as such, it was a scratch but the Jap, the man concerned was killed. I killed him with an Owen sub machine gun, a carbine and it wasn't for 2 or 3 days later that thing had had a reaction, the bayonet must have been full of germs and I

05:00 ended up with Encephalitis on the neck and was carted out by the Fuzzy Wuzzies from there back to Wau and subsequently flown back to Port Moresby to be operated on and then after I was operated on I came back to the unit via the north coast of New Guinea.

**That was a very close call?**

It was, it was, it was one of these things at the time. That was one of my disturbing parts and my wife will verify

05:30 it. For years I used to scream in my sleep and I could never wake up, Jen would shake me, shake me, "Wake up, wake up" and I'd wake up and go back to sleep. And anyway one night I don't know how many years after I suddenly woke up and "I got the bastard" - that was the words I used. And that's where it ended because that's what, was the whole thing that was holding the nightmares to me.

06:00 **So you got rid of him in your dreams?**

He went, once I'd recognised what had happened. But I didn't do, in military training you never fire a complete magazine of bullets in one burst to one single man when there's 32 bullets in that magazine. That poor Japanese got the whole 32 bullets. I mean that was war but ....

06:30 **Did you have a moment of reflection at any point about the death of that Japanese man?**

Not him, the one I did have reports on was in Crete, we shot a girl who was a fifth columnist, we were coming down the track, and she was, suddenly there was a loud explosion and next thing we had a Greek interpreter with us and they grabbed this very pretty girl, very pretty girl and they ripped her blouse off, she didn't have any underclothes

07:00 other than the blouse and she was festooned with grenades around her so we shot her. And that took many, many years to get out of my system. She mightn't have been a fifth columnist, we don't know, but she was throwing grenades into our troops and killing, she killed a number of our people.

**That must have been very traumatic?**

At that time it was, there was no front, there was

07:30 a front as such but when you're getting people doing things like that and your trying to co ordinate things there's no time to question, there no court to hold to see whether your guilty or not, you just action on the spot. So that was my two events of my life as I said I was a signalmen not an infanteer , it wasn't my fault to kill. I remember when the paratroopers were coming down all I was loaded with was a Webley 45 and firing at these paratrooper coming down,

08:00 whether I hit anyone or not, I don't know, I don't think I would, I don't think the range was. But that was the way it was. But those were the two instances that troubled me after the war.

**They're obviously very significant moments in your life and I'd really like to explore them further when we get up to them in the chronology because,**

08:30 **it's great that you feel comfortable about talking about those experiences.**

Oh yes now, but before I was in a bit of strife with it. But now I've come to terms. I spoke to my minister about it, when we listen to the word of the Lord and we're fairly religious in our beliefs, always have been of course, I was brought up strictly in the religious field and but somewhere along the line I've gotta answer to a maker for what I've done

09:00 whether it be right or wrong, whether we've been seen to what we've done is right or wrong.

**And that's the only person you should have to answer to?**

Well that's true.

**Well we'll return to those incidences either later on today or tomorrow because they are a very important aspect to your story but I was hoping that we might be able to get back to your training**

09:30 **and just before you were going abroad to the Middle East etc. And I think we got up to the point where you were completing your training.**

We were learning, as I said our training then consisted of in the Signals of course you were learning to Wireless operator and many of them were Telegraphers in civilian life and they were already very well versed with Morse.

10:00 The linesmen were laying out cables and repairing cables and were doing all sorts of things in that role. We were all taught map reading, and of course map reading was a very important part of the role of a Don R, you had to know where you were going, in terms of travelling from point A to point B and in particularly in the night time we had no lights the only identification we had were little symbols on a four gallon petrol tin, which was punch in through a series

10:30 of holes and that told you what that unit was and where you had to go and you followed that line down as you went through there. Map reading, compass reading, Morse code of course was part of the scene but that was a secondary consideration from the Don R point of view but that was our role or our training role that we were bringing to perfection.

**At this point, while you were still in Australia, where were you getting information**

11:00 **about the war from?**

We weren't. I don't recall.

**I'm thinking of newspapers or radio or was there anything?**

Well, probably yes on the radio news when we come on leave. We would be given weekend leave and we would get the train from Greta, the train would pull up and the troop train would take us back to Sydney and of course our parents or our relatives would know when we were coming down and they would meet us and we would. I remember

11:30 mum picking me up at Central Station and we would get a taxi home to Manly and we have a pull into a, you'd get home and even the old taxi driver in those days would pull up and share a bottle of beer with us when we got back. That was as far as hearing where the war was and what the war was, I think we were more engrossed in our own lifestyle as we had it at that time.

12:00 **Had the bombing of Darwin happened at this point?**

Oh no, no that didn't happen until about 1942. No that was after we came back from the Middle East.

**We'll get your impressions of that when we arrive at that.**

I don't recall much of Darwin, in so far that our 19th Brigade which was the one that I was in Greece and Crete, it was moved up into Darwin and a defence force. Being the 17th Brigade we were basically into the New Guinea side, you see

12:30 your censorship was very strict, you heard very little, you wouldn't have heard anything on the radio that wasn't meant for your ears and everything was rosy. There was no defeatism in the communication that we were receiving.

**So when did you hear that you would first be going abroad?**

We were up in Greta. Yes I

13:00 remember the time, we were going to march out and there was an old World War One Sergeant and he came out and came in with a big teapot of tea and the old song We All Love You Sergeant Major was being played on the speakers in the camp, and he was bringing us a cup of tea for us as we were marching out. Well we knew we were marching out, but as for the precise time I couldn't tell you that.

**Were you excited about the prospect**

13:30 **of going overseas?**

Yes, it was an adventure, yes, yes, moving back, getting all our gear and equipment, getting dressed up. We didn't march through the streets of Sydney as others had done prior to, we just moved from Greta to... I can't recall how we got from there onto the ship. We must have come down by bus or some nature. And we go onto the Strathallan; it was

14:00 Pier One was where the Strathallan had berthed. That's where we go on the ship, because mum came with a friend and somebody came around and said, "There's somebody looking for you." and I went over the side, and you can imagine how deep it was, to the bottom water was and here was mum in a tiny little boat to come to say good bye to me. I don't know how she got the information that we were going, but anyway somebody must have told her, but

14:30 she wanted to know how much money I had and I said, "Not too much." but I remember that we got a ball of string and lowered it down and she tied a 10 shilling note to the ball into the string and I pulled it up and I had 10 shillings more to spend prior to.

**She's looking after you?**

Yep

**Gosh what a lovely way to farewell you son. Going up in a boat. So what else do you remember of the farewell from Australia?**

Very little, that

15:00 was we got on board the ship, we went to Melbourne we had leave, and I went and saw my Grandfather out at Wattle Park and said good bye to him. Adelaide, we did pull into Adelaide but I just can't remember what happened there. But I know when we go to Fremantle we were taken up to Perth and we were treated

15:30 right royally at Perth as far as the Ladies Auxiliaries and all those that looked after us and wined us and dined us, a lot of us got drunk and anyway we go onto the train and back to Fremantle and onto the ship and away we went.

**So how long was your stop over in Perth?**

It must have been about two days, I should imagine.

**You gave a suggestion of the wining and dining, but what actually did you do with the Ladies Auxiliary?**

16:00 They were all, you know the dances, the progressive barn dances, they were there to see that we were given meals and things away from the army tucker that was their gestures to us. Of course it was a very mute point in West Australia where Perth was the jumping off place for the first AIF [Australian Imperial Force] when, that's where the dawn service actually originated

16:30 from Albany, they remembered that from there and that's something that goes back over history back to World War One and I think that they had a strong relationship with those troops from World War Two, which wasn't a great span of years between the end of the First World War and the beginning of the Second World War for them to remember the sacrifices that were made then perhaps.

**I didn't know that. I didn't know that that was where the**

17:00 **Dawn Services originated from?**

**Can you describe the Strathallan to me?**

Well it was one of the P & O [Pacific and Orient] ships. It was a proper passenger ship, it wasn't like one of the troop ships that we sailed in in later days; we had a berth, Clive Mendham as I mentioned to you before and I, and we shared a cabin, a two berth cabin. We had our cup of tea brought to us by the lesser Seaman who was responsible for looking after us, he made our

17:30 beds, we were really.... it all changed when we got on the President Doumer from India on up to the Red Sea. But the 1/16th Brigade, they were on ships that were passengers; you see they hadn't geared themselves into troop ships at that point in time. They were just grabbing every ship they could and loading troops on, off and course they were still basically a passenger ships, with passenger decks and

18:00 cabins and of course the officers naturally enough would get the better cabins and the lesser known would be down below deck. But we had an outside cabin I can always remember we had a porthole and you could see out the porthole.

**And what route did the ship take?**

We went from Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide, Fremantle then on up to Singapore. We berth in Singapore and stopped there for a matter of hours and we were

18:30 given a route march, we passed the Queen Mary, which was in dry- dock. We saw her in dry-dock and then we were back on board the ship and away we sailed and we went to Ceylon to Colombo.

**How long were you in Colombo for?**

Not a great length of time, I think it was just a maybe a fuelling point or something of that nature. And then from where we went on up to Bombay and there we got off the ship. The ship was going on to England and we were taken

19:00 off because obviously we were destined for the Middle East. But of course we weren't to know that.

**So what was your first impression of Bombay?**

Very hot, very smelly, very pucker in the English scene. Again we were looked after right royally, we were stationed at the Stadium, which was a Cricket Ground in Bombay. The Indian families took us under their wings.

19:30 They had balls there in those days that went for two nights, you had a ball and people would come from hundreds of miles away and they'd stop and they'd have the first night and then they'd have the second night and I can remember we were invited to attend this ball, but no Indians were allowed, it was all

English very, very pucker,

- 20:00 you couldn't mix with the natives as they called them in those days and yet we, at one stage whilst we in Bombay we went out to one of the Raja's places, an Indian, and he had air-conditioning which we had never seen before in this one room, a huge palace he had. And he had a car, he had 2 cars or a number of cars but the one car we travelled in he drove us around, or his chauffeur drove us around with him in it.
- 20:30 It was a Delage which was a French car and a Delahaye which was another car, either one of them was air-conditioned but I'm not too sure which but I can always remember sitting in this air-conditioned car in Bombay, which is very hot, as you can appreciate and the driver ruthlessly blowing his horn and making the local natives skip out of the road. The poverty in Bombay had to be seen to be believed, they slept on the ground. You know where their bed was, that's where they lived
- 21:00 from. They cobbled shoes and they did sewing and things and that was their life. A very very big contrast of the rich to the poor. And then of course the rich, the Indian himself was not accepted by the English people. It was a funny sort of circumstances. And we didn't see it that way, we were never that Let me
- 21:30 try to remember, when we came back we were stationed at Ceylon, I went down with Dengue Fever, and Dengue Fever is supposedly worse than malaria which I got later on but I ended up in the hospital in Colombo and they sent us up into the Highlands to recoup and there was a town there called Detarlarwa and there was an estate, tea estate, tea plantation called Hinduagarma and it's an area where
- 22:00 you go up by rail and the rail does a corkscrew around a circle and up to, climb up this mountain and this tea plantation they have a club there in which the tea planters themselves go in after their days work and the aristocracy of the British nobility if you would like to put it, who maybe weren't doing the right thing in England were shot out to manage the plantations
- 22:30 of the Ceylon area. And I can remember we were invited, we stayed at one of these plantations, with the guests and it was quite polite and we were in the club one night this, there was another fellow who was also convalescing, where he was from I don't know but what unit he was from I can't remember. We got to talking about
- 23:00 different things like Scotland versus England, and we brought up the old rivalry of Melbourne versus Sydney and we were yakking on about this and we were having a few drinks and I can always see to this day this very, very young English aristocratic sort of person saying "How Bloody, how awfully bloody." As far as we were bickering over the difference between two cities. We made the caustic
- 23:30 remarks, and every now and again we would mimic these people in their disparaging remarks as far as we were concerned. So it was a different race over there, a different lifestyle.

**How did you come to meet that Indian man, was his name a Raja?**

Yes, a Raja.

**How did you come to meet him?**

By invite. We were alongside of the Stadium, was on

- 24:01 the waterfront. There were a lot of high-rise building there and there was a passé family with a passé religion, they ate no meat. But their burial beliefs were that they didn't bury their deceased in the ground because it would pollute the earth, nor did they bury them in the water, because it would pollute the water, so they had them on a rack up on the top of a hill in Bombay and they lay them there for the
- 24:30 carrion birds to pick their bits and pieces away and that was their religion and I presumed it still is today. But I can remember going up to them and they invited us in for dinner one day and they had this bowl of rice and this yellowy, mustardy coloured paste and they said "Do you like curry?" And I said "Oh yes, I love curry." "Well" she said "This is panther's breath and it's very very hot." She said "You just take a minute
- 25:00 bit and a lot of rice and you will enjoy it." And of course muggins me, I took a lot of the curry and a little rice and topped it down with a jug full of water to take the taste out. But it was through them that we were introduced to the ... They had their own swimming pool, you see the Indians could swim in their own swimming pool but the couldn't go into the European swimming pool, so that was the class distinction that occurred

- 25:30 there, and it was there that we were introduced and invited to go and visit this Raja. I've forgotten his name now.

**What did you actually think about the class distinction in India?**

I think as typical Australians, we never, we didn't disagree but we didn't take in up the same

- 26:00 cudgel as they did. To us a bloke was a bloke.

**It seems like you were quite accepting and you were accepted by the local population to a certain extent, and I have heard that other Australian Soldiers weren't as well accepted because of various things they had got up to and I was wondering if you had heard of any of the antics Australian Soldiers had got up to in Bombay?**

26:30 I must admit, that everywhere we went, we were looked after. I can't recall of anything that was untoward as far as the people that we knew or did I hear of any. I mean we all drank a lot, I must admit we weren't light on the grog. We consumed alcohol like it was going

27:00 out of fashion but no in most instances, well obviously there would have been the odd bod that would have played up, like any walk of life I should imagine. But I don't recall anything untoward where they were looked upon with distaste, there must have been some there I should imagine.

**Your experience in Bombay**

27:30 **sounds like an amazing experience?**

Yes, well we, again when we moved inland about 100-mile inland to a camp called Meenni it was a British camp it was still under construction and we were moved into there away from Bombay and all the local natives, they had all their letters of introduction from various

28:00 people they had looked after before, they'd clean your boots, they'd bring you your cup of tea in, and they were your batman to use a phrase. And all you had to pay for their services was not eat all the food that you were served in the mess and you brought that back and that was their payment and of course when you brought it back you had to make sure that the Kites which were the birds that flew around the camp, you had to be careful if your weren't covered they would swoop down and take the food out of the tray. But that was their reward for

28:30 looking after you.

**And every man had one of those?**

Everybody, everyone, had their own personal clean your boots, and do your washing, we were spoilt rotten I must admit we were only in there a couple of weeks and then we shipped back to Bombay and boarded with a troop, boarded with, I think it was a battalion of Ghurkhas or a regiment of Ghurkhas got on board the ship with us. I think I've got a photo there somewhere of them. And from there

29:00 we got onto this President Doumer and up we went to Egypt.

**So can you describe the trip from Bombay to Egypt?**

Well it was again a slow ship, again we had cabins it wasn't a troop ship as such. And there was 3 of us in a cabin. We drew straws to see who would sleep on the floor, two had beds

29:30 and one had a .....in the first instance we had 3 days about where you would get three days and then we would swap. The first stint I slept on the floor and the second two stints I slept in the beds so that was. But each of us took a turn at sleeping on the floor. The only other situation was it was terribly hot, there was no air-conditioning as such in those days and the Italians when they came across at a very great height

30:00 and I can always recall the alarm sounding and as untrained as we were, then we rushed up on deck to see what it was all about. And here was a French ack-ack gunner stark naked, all he had on was his hat, his French helmet, firing at an aircraft that was just a tiny dot in the sky, he was that high up, he had no chance of doing any accurate bombing, and I don't know how many was in the convoy, there must have been 20, 25, 30

30:30 ships in that convoy and they would just, flew over and just all dropped their bombs at random and of course you would see the splint of water spurt up when the bomb hit the water and landed. But I don't think any ships were hit at the time.

**Why was he naked?**

Battle stations, and of course you come as you are, you see.

**That was very well trained of him?**

Yes, he was just so excited to be in it.

**That must have caused**

31:00 **a bit of a laugh after the...?**

Yeah

**I guess that was your first experience?**

That's right. Yes we'd never seen any enemy fire up until that point of time and then as I said it was remote there was no association of old. It was like watching a fire works as such but spurts of water. The other experience

31:30 I think closest to that when we were on the Yugoslav border and of course the night we landed there which was on the pass, the Viva something [Veria] or other pass we bedded down and we dug our little trench and put our shelter over it, heavy snow came down and when we got up in the morning and the next thing suddenly you could hear the shell coming and of course the screech and then suddenly where the white is there was a brown eruption of earth as the shell hit the ground.

32:00 And we realized we were under shell of course on the ridge you could see all the German Tanks lined up and firing at the Brigade Headquarters and giving us mortar fire as well as guns. So we went back into the woods and withdrew as our officers said at the time as we madly packed our gear and threw it all onto the trucks, this is what's known as a strategic withdrawal. There were too

32:30 many enemy troops to even think of.

**So with that first bombing attack, that was the Italians that were bombing?**

Yes from Abyssinia.

**What was going through your head at that first bombing?**

That we were being bombed, that was all. There was no fear at that time it was more curiosity than anything else. I don't think, the only time

33:00 that I felt fear because as I said an infantryman is there to face the enemy, a signal man is there to create the communications, so we weren't face to face with an enemy but having gone through Libya and come back and then into Greece and then coming back from Greece we were still no, it was an upset and a concern but when we go to this Brallos Pass

33:30 you may hear it from other interviewers, it was one of these mountains that controlled the ground and when we moved in we held the high ground and we had a cliff underneath the high ground where we had two artillery pieces and they couldn't do anything about it, the Germans. We could see the Germans landing on the aircraft, they were setting up their camp, they were doing everything outside the town of Lamia. Now my role as a Don R

34:00 was to go down taking the dispatches to the front line, it was a very twisty windy path of road down there, quite good surface and that particular area that was the first time we ran into the Stuka Dive bomber, now you've got to experience something that you've never heard before, if you see a bomber coming across you'd say, "Oh, he's ok." and you wouldn't worry about him anymore,

34:30 but suddenly out of the blue there's a screech and you'd think the thing is landing on the back of your neck and it was these Stukas had these whistles or sirens in their wings that created this crescendo of sound that you would think was bombs, but it was the Stuka diving before it released its bombs. One of our mates got in the way of one; the concussion didn't physically damage him like cuts and bruises or anything of that nature

35:00 but every stitch on his clothes including his boots just came apart with the concussion and he was standing there like a scarecrow flapping the ground and he was quite dazed, anyway he was sorted out and he came back to normal. Until the second day and the second attack came and the same thing happened, we just led him away and I never know what happened to him after that, whether he completely lost his mind or not.

35:30 **Could you explain how the stitching came apart?**

Concussion, the concussion of the bombing, because the bomb landed fairly close.

**The pressure and .....**

Obviously yes the pressure. All the stitching on his clothing just disintegrated it was amazing. It didn't make sense to us of course to see this but the clothing would have been

36:00 worn and rotted because over the time of wearing we hadn't been reissued with clothing, we were still in our winter uniform, we still wore that. Going back to the first story when I had to go down to the battalion with these dispatches, coming back the aircraft were very heavy now these are what we call the Dorniers, we called them the flying pencil because they were a very narrow plane and as I looked up

36:30 and I've often told this story I looked up and thought, "If that so and so starts to drop his bombs now I'm in trouble." no sooner had the thought came out of my mind, down came a stick of bombs, now as I said there was no panic or fright prior to this point in time to the extent, I ran to the shell hole of a bomb that had previously landed, I got into that bomb crater

37:00 I ran round and round it like a rabbit, I was in a sheer panic, I don't know why, don't ask me, I don't know whether it was the Lord that guided me, I got out of that bomb crater and I leaped around toward the next bomb crater further down and as I dived into that, the first bomb hit and buried me, partially buried me and gave me the concussion which led to the loss of the hearing. When I got up

37:30 and recovered from which to go back to get my bike, the first bomb crater that I got out of had had a direct hit. So that's the wonders of warfare. Why did I jump out of that hole? One hole is as good as

another, don't ask me why I jumped out of that hole, I'll never know.

**Some people call it luck?**

Well, I've often told that story and I just say was it somebody telling somewhere don't stay in that hole it's

38:00 not a safe hole, I don't know. But we got back from there. Once that wave of bombers had gone, I got on my bike and went like mad to get back into the mountains, cause once you're into the mountains on the twisty road they can't do much about you, your weaving through the road. And we got back up. When I arrived back up there was another, a shell, they were shelling us by this stage. Our other

38:30 Don R came in and suddenly you could hear this shell, so I just politely got down in between two rocks and the other Don R, his name has slipped my mind at the moment, he bent over like an ostrich and he got up and went, o "Oh." and he felt his back and he had been hit with a bit of shrapnel on the backside and I went across to check if he was all right and as his pants

39:00 you'd see the whole of his buttock came down, so we popped that back in and put a wound dressing around him, where the wound was and I got a truck, drove him back to the casualty clearing station about 4 or 5 mile down the road.

**Sounds like a nasty injury?**

He was right, I saw him not so many years back, he's still alive and kicking and had a good old bruise. He took me into the toilet to show me the scar that he'll carry to his grave it, he's still alive.

39:30 **So they managed to sew it back on?**

Oh yes, yes. It was a good wound if you can call a wound a good wound. It was a flesh wound but it was in the thick part of the flesh where.....

**It could have been a lot worse?**

39:49 **End of tape**

## Tape 3

00:34 **Keith, could we take the journey from Bombay through to Bardia now, can we look at the stages involved in that journey?**

Well, that was as I said the President Doumer, the French Mediterranean Luxury Vessel it was, we travelled up to Egypt and we were stationed outside Cairo,

01:00 where we did the basic training, of foot training, forced marching in the desert sand to get the feel of the desert so we did that for about 3 or 4 weeks. The division had moved up there before we arrived then we moved across down to Alexandria and we were stationed there where we started off with our signal training and our communications skills, etc; we were brushing up on those. So that was,

01:30 we were under nightly raids then from the Italian aircraft they came nightly but not very effective.

**Did they score any direct hits?**

Not in our sector, we didn't have any worries. We were dug in, we had sandbagged all around the tents and we were fairly well protected. The main worry was the falling or re-falling down of the ack-ack shell fragments, because they fire into the air to the aircraft,

02:00 which was too high up to hit in any case. And naturally enough they'd fall down and every now and again one would pierce the tents of those that were living there. But we had our own slip trenches outside, so you didn't stop in the tent whilst an air raid was on. But that was basically what we did, we had a bit of leave there and eventually we moved up through to the Libyan border. It was New Years Eve the last time we spent there, just side

02:30 of I think it was spelt Halfaya Pass but we'd nicknamed it as Hell Fire Pass because it was under direct Italian artillery fire and it was a zigzag type of pass to get up and you had to go round through the various. The European way of instead of going around a mountain they cut up the mountains in a zigzag fashion and when you went around these zigzags it was a very tricky

03:00 point to have to do three point turns to get your vehicles around, the trucks were especially, not so much the motorbikes. And we moved up and in outside Bardia and our Headquarters were fairly well back we weren't involved in a great deal. And I wasn't involved, strangely enough the Don R wasn't being used because we laid our lines out and our Wireless

03:30 operators were in one tonne trucks and one of ours, or two of ours people, Tommy Neeman and his offsider were stationed in a Wadi and of course one of the strengths of the Italians was their radio

capabilities and they could immediately get onto somebody sending a signal and pinpoint where it was coming from. So Tom and his mate came under fire,

04:00 but stood by their position and kept sending their signals and of course subsequently the town fell and Tom and his mate got an MM [Military Medal] for that. That effort. And that was basically all we saw, we went through the battlefield and we saw the metal and the grounds and the hundreds upon hundreds of Italians that were killed by shellfire and then of course you saw as you probably know

04:30 from history films of the thousands of Italians that did not want to fight, they just gave up and they had no water, they were dying of thirst, all you could hear was "Aqua, Aqua pura", all they wanted was a drink of water, they had no stomach. There were a few there, there were the Blackshirts which were renowned for their warlike business and I think post eleven was one of their strong holds they effected a number of casualties. We still lost

05:00 people there, we lost one officer not in our brigade, and our section, but one of the other officers got killed.

**So what were you actually doing on a day-to-day basis yourself at this stage?**

Don R'ing, Don R'ing, carrying messages or... If you're not required you would be helping out on office duties, carrying, almost like a Mess Orderly in an office, Office boy if I could put it that way.

05:30 But if you weren't required to transport any dispatches you were fitted to do something else on the job.

**Were you ever aware of the nature of the messages you were carrying?**

No, no. No, it would be encrypted in many instances, unless it was a very safe passage. You wouldn't, you would probably get dispatches in plain language as they called it.

**Did you hear of any or many instance of Don R's**

06:00 **being captured ?**

No, I don't recall a Don R being captured, I know of a number being killed of course. In Crete we lost one. I ran into, again I'm jumping forward on that but there was a very bad killing field between ourselves and the 2/7th Battalion, there was a flat piece of ground where the snipers were, very savage, but if you kept on your bike and you kept moving and you kept weaving, you became a very hard target to hit.

06:30 So that was the only Don R that I knew who had been, but he didn't belong to us, he wasn't one of mine.

**Moving sideways to talk of alternative technologies, if you can call them technologies. I've heard of alternatives being carrier pigeons and dogs?**

We had gone through a training of using pigeons, in a matter of fact pigeons were bought into being in New Guinea in the 43/44 area, where you had your carrier pigeons and they were

07:00 used to send messages. Dogs, I hadn't heard of, I've never heard of a dog being used.

**Dogs were used in the Ramu Valley I think.**

Were they, well that was the 9th [7th] Division. My military history is pretty good on the Divisions.

**Why I asked what you were doing on a day to day basis, was that you said there was a period where you weren't being used and I was just wondering when you first kicked into action as far as your own activities were concerned?**

Well,

07:30 because the advance in Libya was so fast, I mean we were in Libya in January and we were out of Libya having gone a hundred mile west of Benghazi and if you look at map you will get the distance involved. Benghazi, Tobruk, Derna

08:00 another town I can't remember. Sorry Bardia, Tobruk, Derna another town and then Benghazi. Benghazi was the capital of Libya and then there was an area of a hundred mile long but that was just a small village where the British Armoured Brigade was being attacked, that was the 3rd of January to about

08:30 the 17th of April, I think when we were back in Egypt.

**Now you've just listed a whole series of locations, were you sent to each of those locations?**

Oh yes, now let me quantify that at Derna due to the loss of 1 Don R to illness, no sorry 2 Don R's went out through illness the 19th Brigade was short by 2 Don Rs and we carry 3 Don Rs to a brigade and we still had 3 Don Rs

09:00 and my role moved across to L Section and I was attached to the 19th Brigade so I moved out from the 17th Brigade seconded to the 19th Brigade to make up 2 Don Rs in each Brigade.

**Now we spoke about what kinds of vehicle you used for training. What was the vehicle that**



**you used here?**

In Australia?

**No, no the vehicle that you used once you were in Bardia? What kind of motorbike was it?**

A Norton.

09:30 Matter of fact we acquired a good Siat[?] from the Italians. The Italians had quite a lot of motorbikes but they were very basic as very as we're concern, they didn't have a twist throttle, they had a lever control throttle, very awkward to try to learn to drive, but they had a good Siat and another type of bike.

**What was the average distance that you had to travel?**

10:00 Oh well, it wouldn't be more than 5 or 6 mile. Unless you were going, occasionally when you went back to the division you might have to go a fairly long way, and you gotta bear in mind because when movement is on, many a time you would get lost.

**Why would you get lost?**

Well, they give you a map reading for a position for a unit and you get to that map reading and it's no longer there

10:30 it's gone, it's moved. Now you've gotta find somebody to get back in touch with you, you can't sort of get on to a mobile phone, and say that they're not there any more, you've gotta find out where they've moved to because if you've got dispatches you've gotta get them to them.

**So how would you find out?**

I can remember getting in touch, coming across an Artillery Unit and asking where had the Divisional Headquarters had moved to and they put me right on that occasion.

11:00 The one occasion we did lose people you'd find the line that was laid along the ground and you'd use that as a guideline.

**Now how could you describe conditions there in the Middle East?**

The desert was very bad in so far that.

11:30 You've heard of the Khamsin which is the wind that blows forty days one way and then forty days next backwards where it came from.

**Sorry, could you just repeat that?**

The Khamsin, and the Arabs say even murder is excused after doing that forty days. Well we were in the middle of one of those in

12:00 Libya. And every day you had to clean out your air cleaners on your bike, because the sand and everything got in it. We didn't have earmuffs or the only thing we had for protection was goggles nothing else.

**What about a scarf for the mouth?**

Oh you'd use a handkerchief of sort to keep the dust out but that didn't. And hence emphysema is part of that scene today. As opposed to Greece of course,

12:30 it was snow and cold and clarified air but that was a problem, and there we were more static, where we were more static and we had line communication, then we didn't need Don Rs unless there was a great wad of paperwork to go through there was nothing moving.

**So basically the conditions in the Middle East did require Don Rs far more than used?**

13:00 Oh yes we were still part of the scene, yes. Because as I said there would be material that would obviously be of a secretive nature rather than encode it and decode it which was time consuming, send in plain language by Don R.

**Were you only working by day?**

No, no night and day, and as I said our identification of our units in the night time having,

13:30 fortunately you could ride by the stars in most instances and a series along the road they'd always have these 4 gallon petrol tins in which they'd punch out the identification. Our division's emblem was the Kangaroo over the Boomerang and as a matter of fact I'll give you a little memento to both of you of our lapel pin that we wear. It's

14:00 that Kangaroo said that you were in the area belonging to the 6th Division, now if you went to go to the 2/4th Battalion it would have 2 Stroke 4 with a kangaroo, so you knew you were in the 6th Division and the 2/4th Battalion was there if it was artillery they would have an A after it on the bottom, and they

would have a little

- 14:30 hurricane lamp underneath the tin lit. And of course as you went you'd see, it couldn't be seen from the air or anything, you'd see that sign you knew you were on your way, but it wasn't an easy task.

**And how many attached to your particular unit, how many Don Rs were there?**

Three to a section. Again I'll give you a little look at a brochure that we have to show how formation

- 15:00 of the division of Signal were made up. In each section in relation to Infantry and Artillery there were 3 Don Rs, there were Wireless operators I can't recall the exact numbers and linesmen. The Wireless operators were for the communications by air, the linesmen for operation by phone and by an instrument called a Fuller phone, which was a little box that you could send out on that telephone cable in Morse,
- 15:30 information in plain language. Now unless somebody else had a Fullerphone you couldn't read the signal. Jumping ahead in New Guinea when I was doing work on the Fullerphones, you would hear the Japanese tapping in on the line, because you had the headsets on, but they couldn't read it because they didn't have the Fullerphone. But we knew they were trying, well they were tapping the line but they
- 16:00 couldn't hear anything.

**Still that must have been slightly unnerving?**

We used to use some abusive language. "Get off the ..... you yellow so and so."

**Not that they could all understand?**

Well they would have because they would have been English taught to listen in on those things, but you could use that line, but then of course what they did was cut the line.

**About 10 minutes ago you mentioned a whole series of locations**

- 16:30 **you went to in Libya, after you operated in that area where did you moved onto?**

Back to Egypt and then travelled onto Greece. We moved from Egypt, we moved back to Egypt on about the 17th of March I think and on the 1st of April we sailed on the Penlope, SS Penlope for

- 17:00 Greece. It took us two days, we were offloaded to a staging camp called Delphi, which was just outside Athens, we were there for a few days, we had a day's leave, a day and night's leave in Athens we saw the Acropolis and all the things tourist do and then we moved on up through the roads which were very narrow and we were getting in trouble because the refugees were coming down the
- 17:30 roads as we were coming up. But a little instance of that was on the last night before we reached the Yugoslav border it was wet and it was cold and sleet. And we were sleeping out and we were stopped near this little bit of a house and this Greek fellow came out and by signs invited us to come inside. Now our rations were bully beef
- 18:00 which were tins of bully beef and hard tack biscuits, that was a ration, was a tin of Bully Beef and a packet of biscuits a day, but we supplemented bits and pieces of that but that was your basic ration. When we got inside the house, we brought some tins of food to give them, that had never seen meat for ages, it was so luxurious and what did we get in return. Fresh, freshly baked bread, we hadn't seen bread
- 18:30 in ages, so you can appreciate. Now they were so pleased with us, there were two of us there, the house was 2 rooms - Living room, kitchen come dining room, come lounge room would you name it and the off room which was a big double brass bedstead and little beds all around the place. They turfed the grandmother and the grandfather out of the bed for us to sleep in and would not
- 19:00 not take no for an answer and they all slept on the floor in various places around the house while we slept in their beds, that's how much the Greeks have for us, even to this day they still respect us.

**Obviously you brought them foodstuffs that they hadn't had for a while. But why was this level of respect?**

Because we were protecting their country or trying to protect their country, I think.

**Do you think Australia should have gone to defend Greece?**

No. When

- 19:30 you read in hindsight that Churchill deliberately sent us and was frustrated because they wouldn't send the 7th Division as well as the 6th. It was another Gallipoli.

**At the time what did you feel about it?**

It was another adventure, we didn't know. You see we are officially the second ANZACS because of the New Zealand Division and the 6th Australian Division were officially formed I think on around about the 17th of April, we were known as

20:00 the ANZAC force, ANZAC Corps I'm sorry. So that's a unique thing that nobody else can lay claim to. And Blamey was in charge of that and when we go to Crete and Fryberg took over General Fryberg from the New Zealand Division.

**So there must have been a fair level of pride in that?**

Oh yes, Oh yes, I remember again jumping ahead, when we were in

20:30 from Jerusalem down to the Dead Sea, no not the dead sea, oh what's the name of, my biblical names have gone..

**The Black Sea, the Caspian Sea?**

No, no, no the little village at the bottom where you cross over to Jordan.

**The Sea of Galilee.**

Yes, the Sea of Galilee and I had to deliver a dispatch across to a New Zealand Company that was in Jordan, and I got across

21:00 in daylight over the Allenby Bridge and of course this when you go down from Jerusalem, it's almost the lowest point in the world it's right below sea level, very, very hot and it was tying up with the King of Jordan was going to inspect our troops, we were holding a parade in the bottom of this area. And I had to go to the New Zealand

21:30 unit to pass these dispatches on and of course when I got in there it was dark by this stage and they, oh no they weren't going to let me go back, by the time they had finished wining and dining me they pulled me and my bike on the back of a truck and drove my back to the Allenby Bridge, that was the hospitality and that was the camaraderie we had with our New Zealand counterparts.

**Looking at the links with the Greek people. Did you continue those links after**

22:00 **the war, was there any kind of continuity there in the post-war years?**

The Division did yes, we had a lot of associates, I didn't get involved, I'd withdrawn for some time, I don't know whether it was war experience or what, I can't put my name to it. I was concerned of course that the rejoining was the fact that I didn't want to go back in as ordinary private or a signaller or a Don R, that's why I went for my commission and received

22:30 it. They were then looking at Vietnam when Australia went to Vietnam, I said "No", I said I had a job to do, I had children here, I was married, I was paying off a house, I couldn't afford to defend anything over there.

**So moving back to this place where you were billeting with a Greek family. How many hours or days was that out of Athens?**

Oh that was only overnight,

23:00 I'd just moved in there in the evening, and it was wet and cold and by the time we set up, or tried to set up. The wireless operators were great, they had their own little truck with their own little beds in them, they were all comfy as cosy could be. And the signal office could bed down a few of the signal office people, but the old Don R's bike not very much coverage in that situation. As I said we, he made the invitation, we didn't impose

23:30 on them and when we were given the invite to come over and the warmth of the fire and we had tucker in the form of bully beef and then they had this big roll of crusty bread and we tore into this bread like it was going out of fashion. And then we moved on up to the border and really from that point until we got to Crete did I have any physical contact with the Greeks and

24:00 then in Crete we had a local farmer who use to shoot with a little tiny shotgun the local pigeons and he'd cook the pigeons and dig up the potatoes from the ground and give us a feed and he'd, it was the streams of water that ran from perpetual snow on the mountains and he'd pull out a bottle of Vino which was pretty rugged stuff, but that with a bit of hot pigeon and some baked potatoes were and that

24:30 was their life, they shared with you, they gave it to you, they didn't ask for money or anything of that nature.

**Sounds like a diet to keep you perpetually warm especially if you were so near to the snow?**

Well it wasn't so near to the snow, the snow was so high. Oh are you talking about Greece? Well Greece cause it was, you see in, was April and it was going into Spring and you were basically on the last snows in that time, but in Crete, the high ground or the mountainous

25:00 country, the snow was there fairly near all the time but it was a long way away but the water by the time it came down through these little creeks or rivers, or rivulets it was quite icy cold you used to save these bottles of wine on these bit of string and you would pull it up.

**So looking at the progression away from Athens along the road past your first nights billet, when did you see your first action in Greece?**

Up on the border, the Yugoslav border

- 25:30 as I said we woke up the following morning, we had on the front the 2/4th, the 2/8th and I think the 11th was in reserve and we had a range of battalions from the British Army on the left flank and the shelling started in morning, because the snow was down and when we looked up we could see on the top of the, where the pass was, all these German Tanks
- 26:00 and obviously the infantry was throwing fairly heavy mortar fire at us, so we pulled back from there and our other Don R had to go towards the ranges to advise them that the Brigade was withdrawing to an prepared position and ah we lost sight of him for about a week, he got lost as the rangers had got
- 26:30 lost, we didn't know where they had got to all, I can't recall the final situation of that, but we had to come back and a series of positions that were held and then we had to withdraw out from those until we got to Brallos and Brallos was our last stronghold stand where we, there was no hope, we didn't have any aircraft to protect us, we were overwhelmed with the numbers and there was no way to protect
- 27:00 us so that's where we, or they made the decision that we would withdraw from Greece and I think we were the rearguard brigade, we had to hold the rearguard, the 19th whilst the Division got back to the departure point.

**So was your section under fire, at this point?**

Yes it was.

**Were you yourself under fire?**

Shelling, Shelling and as I said in Brallos we were constantly under shell fire,

- 27:30 one of the hairiest things was when I was taking the guy that was wounded in the buttock, taking him back to the casualty clearing station. The trucks have a little trap door on the top on the passenger side to which someone was to stand up and keep an eye out for any aircraft, so that was good because if there was any aircraft you just took plans of action, we never had nothing came at us but the worrying point is when you were going back and there's nobody there to see if there was any aircraft and you're in open flat country, but on the mountain itself
- 28:00 the road is so twisty that no aircraft could line you up and fire. I mean they wouldn't waste ammunition on a singular truck or singular bike, I never came under any fire on that particular, not physical one on one sort of thing.

**Did you have fears that you would be?**

Not, I can't. It's an honest statement as I said the only time that I had a panic was at that flat piece of ground between the Brallos

- 28:30 mountain or the Bray loss mountain and the pass and the town which was on the other side, which was a mile from the foot of the pass to the township. And that's when we were getting heavily bombed, as I said if that Dornier starts to drop his so and so bombs now I think I'm in trouble. That was my first thought, calmly but when I saw them coming down I dived for trench and the panic set, the panic definitely set in
- 29:00 and I don't know why it set in, as you say one crater is as good as another to dive into.

**What form did that panic take?**

Running round the hole and butting my head into the side of it. Then getting up and running onto the next one, for why I don't know, I don't know to this day.

**What had happened to your bike in the meantime?**

It was still intact off the road, when I got back to the bike it was unscathed, I kicked it over and went for my life.

- 29:30 **Did you have any fears of sniper fire?**

You could hear them; you could hear the sniper, but you though whilst you can hear you're still going. I never got hit by a sniper, but I knew they were there because in Crete going down to the 2/7th Battalion, Colonel Walker himself was concerned with my safety because I was the only one Don R there that was getting communications and I'd lost a brigade, the brigade had gone haywire

- 30:00 and had gone everywhere and I had just run out of communications but that flat piece of ground outside Suda Bay was very rife with small arm fire.

**Sorry, could you just explain, you had lost a brigade?**

It had moved, when I got back it had gone, where it had gone to I don't know. By the time I had worked

my way back and had found out eventually caught up, actually the bike had given up and I

30:30 was on foot heading back to the South Coast of Crete.

**Now how was it that your section ended up in Crete?**

By the movement of the troop, I wouldn't know that, that would be a military decision. We had with us the 4th, 8th the remnants of the 8th, the eighth got badly knocked about and the 11th of the 19th Brigade and the 2/7th of the

31:00 17th Brigade, so we had the four battalions plus the Maoris, we had a group of Maoris there, plus New Zealanders plus British, we had a lot of British there and that was where the composite force was formed by Fryberg, who was in charge of the whole kit and caboodle. But the brigade

31:30 headquarters was under a huge walnut tree, it must have been hundreds and hundreds of years old, olive tree sorry, big, big, big olive tree. Yes it was an olive tree and when I came back, we had gone out to repair a line that's right, all the linesmen were trying to get repairs, and this other line had gone out and I'd gone out to find it, and of course walking, going along with the bike checking to see

32:00 if the line, check the line back on the thing and eventually found the break where it had been hit by a bomb and repaired the line, tested the line, everything was O.K and then by the time I got back I suppose it had been half an hour, the brigade wasn't there and it had been directly hit and we had what we called Brigade Guards, they were known as the old

32:30 and the bold because they were First World War Diggers and God knows why they wanted to join up again after the First World War, but they came back in and they were too old for combat service, so they made them the guards for the Brigade and we used to call them the Old and the Bold, the Ruthless and Toothless and the Rugged and Bugged, that's what they were known as. Unfortunately on that particular instance, when I got back to where the Brigade was, here were six graves of six of the Old and Bold that got caught up

33:00 in the bombing.

**What was the location of this headquarters?**

Just outside Suda Bay.

**Could you describe for me how you moved from Greece? Could we have a bit of a stage-by-stage description of going from Greece to Crete?**

Well we went, got down to the Port, which was, I've got the name in my history books there and we tried to destroy the

33:30 vehicles we had as much as possible, we couldn't take that, all we were armed with was what equipment we had. I had a phone and a Fullerphone, I had my sidearm, my 45 Webley and that was it plus my bit of rations and pack and then they took us by landing barge onto the Wryneck HMS it was an ack-ack ship of the British Navy and they were marvellous,

34:00 they were a marvellous crew, they looked after us and took, and made sure we got something to eat and hot drinks and things and we were, actually I was right underneath one of their darn guns below deck, and when it went off you'd think the whole ship was going to sink by the sound of this blasted ack-ack gun, but the port was full of ships and the fire power, our infantry

34:30 would be on deck with every rifle and every plane that would come within cooee, they just weren't game to come any closer because it was just a virtual wall of fire from small arms and ack-ack ships. So we got off and we sailed, I think it took us a day to get to Crete and they landed us at Suda Bay and then the Wryneck went back and it was lost I think the day after, or the following day with all hands.

**How did that feel?**

35:00 Well, we didn't know. We never knew that.

**You didn't find that out until after the war?**

Oh no, I didn't know that. As a matter of fact the only ship that I do strongly remember was the HMS York, which was sunk in Suda Bay, and it was still an active fighting ship, as an ack-ack ship because it was on the bottom of the Suda Bay harbour, it was still manned. And a little after the war experience I was up at our Central Coast 6th Division association at the Entrance at Tuggerah Lakes

35:30 and I go up there as a guest of honour when we attend from the headquarters and I went out to the toilets and there was a guy talking along side and I had given a presentation on something or other we were talking about and he said "You were on Crete" because I mentioned Crete and he said "Do you remember the HMS York?" and I said "Oh yes, we flogged quite a bit of stuff off that ship" and he said "I was one of the bloody seaman on that ship."

36:00 Can I, when I finish the interview I'll show you a figure, one of the department figures, photos of the York. So what I did, I suppose I broke the law in doing so, but I photostatted it, built it up, framed it and

sent it up to him. And he said "I sit at my bedside and look at that."

**When you say you flogged a few things off the York, what do you mean about that?**

Wires, bits of tins to make a switchboard because we had no equipment you see,

36:30 if we only had had the foresight in the days when we carry petrol. Petrol were carried in eight two four gallon containers, a rectangular oblong tin and there were two into a case, a wooden case, our officer Bill Bates and myself and a couple of others by some means or other, we broke the case and made a base

37:00 for a switchboard, the tins we cut into with tinsnips and we made little breaker switches so when you put the wire in and if you wanted somebody to talk to somebody, we would move this switch across with this little homemade breaker switch, it would have been a absolutely great think to go but of course who would of thought to keep it. But that created a switchboard until later when we got a proper 10-line switchboard from this dump where we got the motorbike.

**So what was the switchboard used for?**

37:30 To take the...the old switchboard, you've seen films where they plug in the plug, well that's a switchboard. Be it 5 line, or 10 line or 50 line to convey, you ring to me but you've gotta go through that switchboard, so they put you through, they take your line and plug it into my line and that's the switchboard, The word switch being switching lines to from one line to another.

**Now you referred to having with you a Phone and a Fullerphone, was this part of your standard equipment?**

38:00 No, not mine, it was part of the Signal's equipment. The Fullerphone was that piece of equipment unless you had a similar piece nobody could pick it up. Pick up the Morse code, well they would hear was a scratching noises but no physical Morse code signal if you listened on the phone. You could talk on it whilst you sent signals, it had a two..., now you talk about the fibre cables that send thousands of messages on the one line, but in those days

38:30 the best you could do was two on the one cable.

**What sort of equipment were you carrying with you? Presumably you were not carrying very much when you were riding the bike. But did you have some standard equipment with you?**

The pannier which would carry spare petrol, there on the side of the bike like they carry them today and in that of course you carried your dispatches and your bits and pieces. And you carried your eateries and your survival kit, etc,

39:00 a few tools, we had a tool box of such, a very basis bike - the old Norton.

**How often did you have to run repairs on the bike?**

Not a great deal, it was more for dust inhalation on like the air cleaner would need dusting. But you were required to, you had a set schedule of maintenance before you started the bike up or any vehicle there were certain things you had to do

39:30 and when you shut down of night you had to do certain things again so that kept maintaining and sure that the equipment went.

**How many gallons of spare petrol would you have?**

Ah, four. Well if you carried in both panniers, you'd have four. I think I only ever carried the one 2-gallon tin.

## **Tape 4**

00:32 **Keith, can we talk about what kind of clothing you had for the various regions?**

Well in normal attire, is your winter uniform, your khaki long trousers, a gaiter to keep the dirt from your boots and your trousers, and socks, heavy socks of course and serge, a khaki serge. Caps were, there were no such things as

01:00 helmets, in those days we used to wear a ordinary soft cloth hat cap. Goggles, gloves - gauntlets, we had gauntlets and we had a rubber coat for wet weather conditions that was all the way through Libyan and Greece, Crete campaign. I had a Greatcoat as well.

01:30 I may not have had the rubber coat; it might have been the Greatcoat in the Crete on anyway. And when we got to the Syrian campaign I was issued with a complete set of the outer garments to protect you against wet weather, which covered your boots over your boots, but it didn't have any material in the backside of the thing it was just like an apron in front, and then of course I had a double

02:00 pressed coat and there we were issued with helmets we used to wear a helmet of a sort.

**And looking at whether you carried a weapon or not. Were you carrying a weapon for self-defence?**

Webley 45, which was a World War One, a six cylinder revolver, fairly 45 it was almost half inch gun,

02:30 revolver. It was a formidable weapon, as I said if firing in anger, paratroopers whether you hit any or not I wouldn't know. In practice, we had quite a range of practice with the revolver and it created quite a solid result when you hit the target in our practice firing.

**And during your time in the Middle East and in Greece**

03:00 **and Crete did you have cause to use that revolver?**

As I said against the paratroopers it was just sheer frustration that you fired at them, whether you were successful or not I don't know.

**Now I don't think that we have dealt with the Paratroopers in any detail, can you tell us that story in a bit more detail?**

Well we were on the fringe area, unfortunately the Germans landed them in the wrong area and they landed in amongst the infantry, which

03:30 just created an absolute onslaught against them, there was no protection. As they came down they were spinning around and they were firing their guns and obviously creating some casualties but they were the worse off of the whole operation.

**Now where was this?**

This was at Maleme and also at Suda Bay just outside. Of course the whole exercise was for the paratrooper to land and secure the drome. Having secured

04:00 the drome then the planes came in with the troop carriers with gliders being towed, released and then they came in to land. And then what they did at drome at Retimo was to put drums and things to prevent anybody coming in and a lot of them came in and crash-landed and of course a lot of Germans were killed in the landing itself. Much like your D-Day operation but not on a so vast a scale.

**Were you saying that drums were placed....?**

Anything to

04:30 stop aircraft landing on the aerodrome itself, but once the paratroopers had captured the surrounding ground of course there was nothing we could do, they just cleared it up and that let it free for more troops to come in and more troops meant we ran out of ammunition and consequently we ran...

**Can you place yourself in what was happening there?**

Basically as I said my role was purely

05:00 trying to repair lines, carry dispatches and that was it.

**I think we should probably return to the chronology here and, so we've got you arriving at Suda Bay?**

That would have been of the 26th of April, the day after Anzac day.

**Could you describe your memories your visual impressions as you came into Suda Bay?**

Not really, no, it was

05:30 another landing and we just got on with our moving into a position where we were going to operate from. Then we had to set ourselves up with communications requirements for the battalion.

**What was actually there at Suda Bay?**

There was a number of ships there, of course the HMS York was sunk and in the bay. There were small villages

06:00 and we didn't see much of the communication there and as I said we were camped out in the fields away from any townships or anything of that nature. And we did in fact through our Sergeant, a chap who ended up being a half Colonel after the war, Charlie Allen; he was the Sergeant who did a lot of the communications requirements

06:30 and he connected onto the local public telegraph lines using our cable and said we were able to use them as opposed to laying out cable for communications and that kept us going, but in the shorter area where we had the cables we'd just ran those cables out of the lines, and we kept connection to them.

**Was any kind of township or settlement at Suda Bay?**

Oh yes, yes there was township of Suda Bay, there was Retimo

07:00 and there was Heraklion and all those others with were townships. I used to ride when I was going up to the battalion, I would ride through villages, as a matter a fact I, on one trip going north, I unfortunately run over a WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK as it tried to cross the road and there was much hullabaloo by the local people and of course I was concerned, I pulled up and I offered some drachmas to pay for the loss of the chicken because it was an important part

07:30 of their village lifestyle, they have their livestock there and when I came back some time later here was the WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK all clean and killed and ready to take home. Because they were waving frantically as I came back because they could hear the bike.

**They had it ready for you to take away and eat?**

They saw me coming, I thought they were worried about me running over another WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK or something, but I slowed down and they gave me the WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK to take back.

**Ok. Can we just sort of stick with the chronology**

08:00 **of what happened, so you arrived at Suda Bay, the local telegraph were employed, what happened then in terms of movement?**

Well again, it's very hard to think back all those years as I said my movement was on the road between the brigade, the signal office and the battalions carrying the dispatches as required to the various locations you didn't get

08:30 a feel for topography knowing who was where other than the fact that you were going to the 2/8th Battalion or you were going to the 2/7th Battalion or what the case might be. You got to that point you delivered the dispatches, you picked up any dispatches that needed to be returned and so you brought them back. So that was your practical role.

**Was there any sense of confusion in Crete?**

Oh yes, there was, prior to, as we

09:00 were setting up getting organized we were still coming under very heavy and intense aerial bombardment the Stukas as I said before, the Stuka dive bomber was a very frightening instrument of war only as so far as the sound of it coming down because you didn't know where the blasted thing was, all you could hear was the screech, you didn't know if it was a bomb coming down on your neck or what. And you could never get used to the sound. So that in itself was confusion but

09:30 not to the point that when they came over and the paratroopers started to land or drop and we were only on the fringe, we didn't get involved in the heavy set-up, we were on the edge of the line and those that were there didn't make it. The only thing that does recall that they dropped these cylinders along with the paratroops and

10:00 we thought it was one of these landmines they were dropping down, course we went to, out very quickly to get out of hot and then it landed and broke and it opened up and it was a canister of food, fresh cut sandwiches and all sorts of goodies to eat and the officer at the time said "Don't touch it, it might be poisoned" and we were talking through full mouths of food. "Yes Sir."

**So in other words it wasn't too bad?**

That was the paratrooper's rations coming in,

10:30 top quality food.

**Now once the paratroops landed was there any cutting of lines?**

Oh, they must have done that, we wouldn't, cause bearing in mind again we were not face, we were not responsibly, be facing the enemy as such, well they were there at a distance but not visually recognisable, perhaps you could see a German helmet, but what's underneath it, you wouldn't know.

11:00 **At what point, there was a young girl who had been shot, and you mentioned this earlier, can we just talk a bit more?**

When we were on our way back to, heading back towards the South Coast there was a New Zealand officer, a sergeant and a couple of others and there was an explosion

11:30 as I was coming through, I didn't have a bike at that time, I was walking cause the bike had given up the ghost and there was no means and I was trying to catch up to wherever my unit was and the next thing there were cries and bits and pieces and this girl was dragged up and we had an interpreter or this person had an interpreter with him this New Zealand officer and when we, they inspected, I didn't see what the results of the bombing, the

12:00 grenade were, but there were a few dead and there were some injured, and the interpreter ripped the blouse off the girl and there she was just in a skirt nothing else above that, but around her waist was



festooned with grenades and she'd obviously thrown a number of these into the thing. So the New Zealand officer said, "Shoot her." and she was shot. And she was in my mind for many many years,

12:30 many years but what would you do under the circumstances, we didn't know who was who only by the uniform and we were moving back trying to consolidate our position.

**You actually saw this shooting happen did you?**

I was there, I shot, I helped shoot. That was the thing that I couldn't get out of my mind. Because we saw our people get shot and killed or

13:00 grenaded and killed and wounded.

**So she had thrown a grenade or several grenades into Australian troops had she?**

No, what the troops were they could have been a mixture of Australian and New Zealand, we are not too sure. My memory not quite that retained.

**What did you actually see of the damage she had inflicted?**

Those that were wounded and killed. Just off the roadway where it would be like going from here down to where the

13:30 road begins at our place, it was a bit of a drop off the road and she must have just got the grenades and thrown them. The interpreter, had we not had the interpreter she may not have been killed, but the interpreter in his words, she deliberately wanted to kill these people.

**Through the interpreter, did she give a reason?**

Can't remember, because she's talking Greek

14:00 and we're talking English and the Greek is talking very quickly in his conversion to the New Zealand Officer. Cause I remember the New Zealand officer was really stressed out at the time. And we just shot her.

**How many people shot her?**

Four. Sergeant, two other guys and myself.

**Was this after some discussion and consideration?**

Very quickly, very

14:30 quickly.

**Did you ever find out more about the background of the story?**

Nup, no it happened and of course we were trying to get back, when we got back, the British were holding a line as we went through that and as I was coming through towards the pass all the refugees were on the road trying to get out of the road as well.

15:00 The truck was pulled up and on the truck was my unit, part of my unit and I ran up and went to climb on the truck and whoever it was pulled his revolver out and pointed at me and said "Get off the truck or I'll shoot you" and Charlie Allen said "No, no he's one of our, he's one of ours" and he let me climb on the truck. I don't know who the officer was, I don't know, it wasn't my officer, it wasn't Bill Bates but it might have been one of the Brigade people and that's

15:30 how the situation was, nobody knew what was going on and everybody who didn't have a unit to belong to at that time.

**This incident at the truck, was this around the same time as the shooting of the girl?**

No, no this was later on. This was 24 hours later, no I'm telling a lie, that would have been in the morning and this would have in the late afternoon.

**How was it that you weren't recognised?**

The guy that pointed the rifle

16:00 wouldn't have known me because it must have been a brigade officer because he wouldn't have known me.

**But were you not in uniform?**

Oh yes, yes but I didn't belong to that particular unit as far as he was concerned and if people weren't repulsed you would have everybody and his dog trying to clamber on the truck to get away.

**Keith, I'll just suggest that you take your hand from the, under the cord there. Because the cords**

16:30 **probably making a bit of a noise.**

Oh sorry,

**So you mentioned that not long before the shooting of this girl that your bike had given up the ghost, what had happened there?**

Oh run out of petrol, no petrol available, we were only on an open and empty road, there was no spare petrol, nothing there, so I just dumped the bike and picked up what bits and pieces I had and kept going.

**Did you retrieve the bike afterwards?**

17:00 No, we left that on the way out to go through the lines, because we had a general idea where our troops were and that's when as I said we went through the British lines and eventually caught up with this truck, who I recognised as our signal people and I, and they were pulled up and I ran up and went to climb on and this is when this incident took place, but of course Charlie Allen knew who I was and of course I got on board

17:30 the truck and then went back and it was just a case sitting there waiting when we got to the end of the evacuation point, we had to wait there until we were told to go down in single file down the cliff side. We had to go through all these refugees who were trying to get off and they were abusing us and they absolutely reeked of garlic, these Greek people I couldn't eat garlic for years after and they were throwing stones

18:00 at us and we were warned not to retaliate or take a stance in any shape or form and we got down to the waters edge and then waited there and onto the barge and the barge took us out to the ship and we got on board the ship and they took us back to Alex.

**Why were these people hurling abuse at you?**

Because they couldn't get off the island, we were marching past them and they'd been waiting, we were jumping the queue in other words in

18:30 their eyes.

**So that was your evacuation for Crete? Now at this point I think you had not eaten or drank for 3 or 4 days?**

No, it was 2 days without, 2 or 3 days without food and the last 24 hours without water.

**Now we've sort of leapt ahead a bit here from dealing with your**

19:00 **arrival at Suda Bay and then suddenly to the evacuation. Can you give us some details on what had happened between those two events?**

Well as I said we set up the communication office, which was our switchboard, we scoured and scrounged to get bit and pieces to get the lines going and the communication going, I acquired a bike from a Military pound, which was the BSA bike and I was using that to run the dispatches

19:30 through to the battalions up at Heraklion and down through to Suda Bay and Maleme and those places. Its a very difficult thing for a Don R to explain in detail because you're a loner, you're like a postman if I can put it that way but you haven't got a given route, you might say ok well your going from your headquarters, which

20:00 is in Church street in Parramatta and you've got to get to Baulkham Hills, now there a lot of hazards to get through to that point in time but you get there, you do your job and then you come back to Parramatta. The only contact you have are those that you left and to those who you arrive at, your conversation took place with them, "How are things going? Everything all right?" And then the officer say "These have gotta go, make sure you get through with these, they're important etc etc."

20:30 You loaded those into your satchel, back on your bike and away you went. But as I said in the meantime you weren't purely a Don R or a dispatcher rider, if a line gave out you supplemented by helping out to repair the lines.

21:00 **How often did you do that kinda work?**

Oh every now and again if there were no dispatches going out and there was a line gone out you would take up a roll and do a repair line.

**Now all right so we've got to that point, can we take it through to the events of the embarkation, because I think we've probably still got a couple of steps missing there?**

Well as I said other then when the bike gave out and walking back and caught up with the New Zealander and this instance of the grenades and from there leaving them and coming back on my own, I was on my own, no other member of my unit was with

21:30 me, walking through and I remember one of the British troops ask me for my Greatcoat, "Well we're all going to hold the line and your going to get off" and I said "How do you know that?" "Well" he said "I'm

going to be taken as prisoner of war". I said "I'm not going to give you my Greatcoat, I might become a POW [Prisoner of War]", so I didn't surrender the Greatcoat to him, whether I did the right thing or not I don't know, but I wasn't going to surrender that. And as I went on a little bit further and of course

22:00 there were civilians as well as a mixture of troops trying to find or to get off or do something but there was no organise there until such time as I came across this truck waiting to move through and in the truck was the remnants bearing in mind that our section is normally 32 strong: 2 officers and 30 other ranks, we were 31 strong when we left Egypt for Greece our OC [Officer Commanding]

22:30 Triple A [Anti aircraft artillery] had gone to a school and sort of left Bill Bates in charge. Of those 31, 6 of us, they got us.

#### **What had happened to the remainder?**

Taken prisoner of War, Bill Bates was taken prisoner, 4 others I know were killed, I've got their names, I've got them all on record there, Killed in Action.

23:00 So when we got back and I have to jump the gun there the section which I never really was part of having been transferred half way through the Libyan campaign, was not a section as I knew it and K Section of the 17th Brigade was still an intact section with the exception of one Don R light, which allowed me the right to get back into that section, so I was back home and that's

23:31 the importance of belonging, so I didn't.

#### **Did you often feel lonely as a Don R?**

Oh you had your lonely moments; I mean you travelled the road for a long time, a lot of hours on your own. But you made friends, you were always welcome, you always got a cup of tea, a feed somewhere you were never left out of the lurch.

#### **Did you make**

24:00 **any friends who remained friends throughout the war?**

Yes, still.

#### **Who would some of those friends be?**

Well there's, as I mentioned Tommy Neeman who got the MM in Bardia, I write to everyone four times a year and send them a Christmas letter, newsletter, all the association whether I knew them or not, but I get personal letters, I've a file in there with hundreds of letters they write back to say hello,

24:30 a chap by the name of Williams who was in K Section with me he wrote back, he just couldn't make Anzac day this year from Victoria. Trying to think of the guy up in the mountains, my memory is going on me but he comes into Anzac day every year I organise the Anzac day reunions, we're only getting a handful now they're slowly slipping, they're too old or they're too sick.

25:00 One of our officers Hank Findlay, he was due to come in and he had a fall and couldn't make it, but they're the sad parts that you have, but there's a telephone to keep in touch with them.

#### **Looking back to the experience of Greece and Crete, could you give me an idea of the relative lengths of time you spent in both places?**

Well from Greece, April 3rd to April 25th, Crete

25:30 April 26th to May 17th I think, I've got the files in there I can easily whack the dates out.

#### **When would the heaviest fighting you encountered have been?**

In ...

#### **In say Crete for instance?**

Well Crete was where I physically saw the enemy at close distance being the paratroopers. But that was as close as I'd ever come to them.

26:00 **Could you describe, give us a visual impression walk us through what you actually saw with those paratroopers coming down?**

Well, we weren't aware there were going to be paratroopers of course suddenly out of the blue, you see our main threat was aircrafts it was the Dorniers, Stukas and the Messerschmitts and all these that were strafing us and doing all sorts of worrying things. It was

26:30 suddenly when we see these things, and the mushrooms of parachutes coming down that we realized what was starting to happen and then as I said we were only on the fringe of that area, so we didn't get terribly heavily involved but the battalion up at Retimo it was the one that really, they landed right in the midst of the battalion and they just got annihilated I mean you may know the military history,

27:00 that Hitler never ever mounted another airborne attack, he intended to do the same with Malta.

**You've mentioned the battalion at Retimo, could you explain that a little more?**

Well that one of the holding positions we were against, there was a small Aerodrome there and one of our battalions was dispersed there and in their attack obviously that was one of their dropping zones. But their intelligence didn't obviously tell them that it was heavily fortified.

**If we can stay with**

27:30 **this experience of yours seeing the paratroopers coming down. What happened to them when they landed?**

They were dead and if they weren't dead they were shot dead. There were no prisoners of war. Not by me but the infantry was there. I never other than the girl killed anybody in cold blood.

**How many of these paratroopers approximately would there have been?**

In our instance,

28:00 as I said at the fringe area. Are you talking about the total scene?

**I'm talking about yours?**

Probably 20 or 30 and that's a hazard.... that's a very wild guess? That's within our area but further across you could see others dropping but away far away from us.

**And this was the closest to the enemy you got on Crete?**

That's right yes, other than under sniper

28:30 fire, but then again different set of circumstances.

**And what would your most fearful time either in Greece or Crete?**

Well the bombing in at Brallos on the flat there when I didn't know which way to turn, which turned out the loss of the hearing.

**Could we just talk about that a little more because you spoke about that in general terms before? But just once again to get more visual impression of what happened.**

Well

29:00 coming down from Brigade headquarters which was at the top of the Brallos Pass down the windy road unto the township, which was one mile distance across the, a flat. It was called the mad mile. A dead straight piece of road and there were a lot of British Troops with artillery, anti aircraft equipment and stuff of that nature and they were off the sides of the roads and setting up to make defensive positions against aircraft attacks.

29:30 In the township, one of our battalions, I can't recall which exact battalion it was - it will be in our Military history - was holding the fort there I got to and delivered the dispatch and was on the way back, and of course with the motorbike you don't hear too well, I mean your head's going around like a pivot on a stick to make sure that nobodies coming at you particularly on this what we call the Mad Mile, this dead straight

30:00 piece of road, anyway I got halfway down maybe a bit over halfway down and suddenly there's a string of these aircraft coming down, very low, so I got off the bike and I was looking and there was artillery there firing madly away at everything, I don't know whether there was any aircraft shot or not, I don't recall, but at that point in time I look at that Dornier aircraft heading straight towards us, maybe

30:30 five hundred feet above us. And I thought if he starts to drop his bombs we're in trouble, that was the mental thought that went, and the mental thought no sooner came into my mind and down came the bloody bombs, a string of them. And that's when I raced to the hole, the bomb crater that was on the side of the road off from where the bike was, got into that hole, don't ask me, I can't

31:00 tell you to this day, why I just ran around that hole butting my head into the side and then it sounds extraordinary when your thinking of time and motion how can a bloke fall into a hole, run around a circle and get up and run into the next hole in the time it takes bombs to fall from an aircraft approximately 500 feet, it may have been higher I don't know, but I ran to the next crater which might have been 50 yards away and as I dived

31:30 into that the first bomb hit, maybe the second bomb hit, I don't know but whichever one hit it erupted the dirt and half buried me and gave me a hell of a headache and we, I came back to my senses, I hadn't been knocked out completely but I came back and the buzzing in my head was driving me up the wall, this rotten headache and I got up and went back towards where the bike was and the crater I had got into had had another direct hit.

32:00 And I thought to myself "Why did I get out? What made me get out of that one?" One hole is as good as another. That was my one moment of panic in that particular phase of the war. But the bike wasn't

touched.

**The fact that you did survive that event, can you relate that to fate or divine protection?**

Divine protection, I'm a religious man these days. I was brought up very

32:30 close to religion; my mother was very strict in her church teachings. We were taught to say our prayers every night at bed. Here where we live here, we used to attend Holy Trinity up the road here and then we went to St Luke's down at Northmead and the change of circumstances by the way they, in which they pass the message across or give us the message. I used to be the

33:00 Sunday School Bus Driver for St Luke's, I used to pick up all the kids and deliver them home after Sunday School each morning so I was involved in the church and I was also one of the elders of the church and treasurer doing the work for them.

**Just going back to this event in Greece and you said divine protection, why do you think you survived apart from divine protection, can you elaborate on that any more?**

What else could you say?

33:30 I mean well is it like winning a lottery, I don't know, I really don't know Graham that you can say that yes I got out of that hole I was lucky that time, wasn't I. I mean I've walk amongst those that have been killed and I can always remember seeing the first of the deaths of our own 2/8th Battalion lying in a row

34:00 and the only thing you saw was their boots and you recognised them because they were brown and their white over red colour patches, four blokes they were covered with their ground sheets. You looked at it and you thought poor unlucky buggers, but you never thought of yourself being killed, I never thought I'd ever get killed.

**When you thought to yourself poor unlucky buggers, did you feel a tremendous**

34:30 **sense of loss?**

Not really, I don't think not at the time. I felt sorry but not, they weren't an .... You see calamities are where they occur aren't they? If suddenly we had a disaster in the house it's a disaster, but a disaster overseas is remote and consequently the 2/8th guys were remote from me because they weren't my unit but if one of my mates and I physically saw him killed

35:00 that would probably create a relationship with remorse and concern.

**Did you see one of your mates killed?**

No, I saw them wounded. Fellow by the name of McKewin got wounded but he survived, until the last day of war then he got killed on the day war ended.

**Were you nearby at the time?**

No, no I was away, I was up in the Torricelli Mountains and he was down off the coast.

**So**

35:30 **when you saw these bodies of the 2nd 8th where was that?**

In Libya somewhere along the line. It was after one of the battles and they were recovered as we recovered our dead and laid them out for proper identification and subsequent burial.

36:00 **Now moving from Crete you then return to Alexandria, can you tell us about the ship that you travelled on to go back to Alexandria?**

The ship, yeah I've got the name but I can't tell you off the top of my head. It's recorded there in my memories, when I've got it there. It was a Royal Navy ship.

**Can you give us your memories of that journey and how you might have felt at that time? I mean you must have felt very lucky to**

36:30 **have survived.**

Well that's true, I must admit that when we go off the following, it was dark of course and we went down below and of course we hadn't eaten as you know as I told you and we hadn't drank and when we got down below the navy had set out some biscuits and some cheeses and water and I filled my water bottle and despite all the warnings

37:00 that you have, you shouldn't gulp your water, I downed that bottle of water, the cheeses were the big round cheese that the navy used to be issued with and the biscuits were, they could be used for tiles on a bathroom they used to be that hard, so I sat there and got a great hunk of cheese, munched the biscuits and the cheese and drank some more water and suddenly my stomach came up like a woman in her eighth month pregnancy and I couldn't breath and I was trying to get up on deck to

37:30 get some air and there was a big Maori on the side of the ship and he got me and he hit me right on the

solar plexus because he knew what I had done and that bought the whole lot of the food up but I gormandised myself because of the, instead of using common sense. But I was right after that.

**How long did the journey take from Crete to Alex?**

One day, but all the auxiliary ladies were there to welcome us back and give us cover comforts and things of that nature

38:00 but there's a reaction to that I just recalled in pastimes to other people when we were on the train and we going back to the camps for re-kitting etc you know the slats on the old trains, wooden slats to keep the sun out, some silly so and so had run his finger down that and it just sounded like a machine gun, there wasn't one person standing in that carriage, they were all flattened down onto the deck.

38:30 An immediate reaction, I don't remember what happened to the bloke that ran his finger down. I don't think he did it deliberately. The noise was a simulation of a machine gun and we all just automatically dropped to the ground.

**You must have been quite shaken after this departure from Crete?**

I suppose I was, we were washed out. I mean I've got photos there of my mother and myself before I left and when I came back the age had taken

39:00 over, started to show.

**When you arrived down at Alexandria what happened then?**

Well as I said we went back to the camp and we were being re-kitted and we were getting let down, we weren't doing anything, and that's when I made the application to, I made enquires and found out the 17th was a Don R short and I'd like to go back, they wanted me to stay with L Section, but I said "No thanks", I'd rather be, because Charlie Allen went on further,

39:30 he was moved to other sections, I would have had nobody in there other than maybe two or three that I wasn't really close friends with, but all the mates that I had were in the 17th Brigade and you know I've written to them over the year and I've sent their wives sympathy cards when they've passed on so I had that association with those blokes, well a total 6 division signals, they're all part of our family, but your own

40:00 family within that family is your own section, which is what those, the Clive Menhams and the Darby Munroes and the Tommy Neemans are all there, there still fresh in your minds, you don't look at what they are today, you always remember what they were yesterday.

## Tape 5

00:33 **Keith, could we talk about how the name Don R came about?**

We, it's brought about by World War One where we use Phonetics to spell a word out, for argument sake if we the say the word "and" it would be "a n d" but we would say Able Nancy Dog now in the old original phonetics, the alphabet

01:00 started with Ack for A, Beer for B, Charlie for C and Don for D and so on, so the word Don defined the word as a dispatch rider abbreviated down to the word Don R or DR which would be a D oblique stroke R but we called it Don R.

**And in what war had the word originated?**

I think it was from the First World War.

**Now just picking up the chronology of your story,**

01:30 **we've got your arriving in Alexandria and you were starting to talk about the auxiliary women and how they were looking after returning troops. Can you give us a bit more detail on that?**

We, as we came down off the ship, there they were there with the tables, and they had the comforts for the troops, balaclava's and scarfs and of course they had hot food and cups of tea etc. These were the British women I should imagine, the residents of Egypt

02:00 and they were there to welcome us back and give us some creature comforts.

**And once you had actually left the wharf precinct, what happened then?**

Then we moved back to the camp, which was shortly away from Alexandria and we were re-kitted there and had rest and recreation for a couple of days. I just can't remember the time frame from that span of my life. But it was just having an easy time

02:30 and we got a few days leave in Alexandria and probably if memory serves me correctly I might have got drunk one or two times.

**Can you give us any more specific memories or R and R [Rest and Recreation] in Alexandria?**

Oh, we'd go out and see movies, one of things about Egyptian movies were that you had a table and a chair and they used to serve drinks while you watched the films, English speaking film of course.

03:00 And you were allowed to smoke; you could smoke in the theatre, a very relaxed atmosphere. That was one of the pleasures that we had from going on leave. And of course the Baths, going into a hotel and having a huge bath to soak in and clean all the dirt out.

**Oh this was a communal bath was it?**

No, no just a conventional bathroom within a hotel.

**Were any of the men availing themselves to the local women in anyway?**

03:30 I think the houses of ill repute were well and truly in vogue, in all cities. I mean that was part of the life of the military, I guess.

**Do you remember any talks from the medial officers on how to take precautions?**

Yes, we had a very strict rule on anybody involving themselves in intercourse, and they put in, in Syria I can remember

04:00 there was a brothel outside Damascus which was licensed or a registered brothel and the medical officers used to inspect these girls once a week to ensure that they didn't have any disease. And any other brothels that the troops went to were out of bounds as far as they were concerned. And of course if anybody contracted VD [Venereal Disease] they were considered to be a self-inflicted wound and were punished accordingly.

**And when you say they were licensed**

04:30 **and registered, this with the Military authorities.**

Military authorities, yes

**Were there different styles for brothel for officers and other ranks?**

I don't remember that at all?

**We heard, tell of that in a couple of places actually?**

I know in India there was class conscious brothels, of course if you had the money you could use it, I don't think it was distinguishable at all whether you were an officer or otherwise. If you had the money they were accepted. But I don't think any privates would have had the money to

05:00 avail themselves to places of that nature.

**It must have been a wonderful unwinding experience to go on leave after what you've been through?**

Well we always looked on leave as a break away to get into the bars and have a few drinks and relax down. My memories of leave in long term was Tel Aviv in Palestine, we had a beach front there, we had a little café,

05:30 as a matter of fact it was on the news where there was a terrorist bombing just recently on the water front and I said to June my wife that that was the area where we use to go and have a drink and a meal where they, the terrorist just went in a, blew up something, suicide bomber.

**That's a bit sobering? While we are on the subject of R and R could you tell us a bit more about leave in Tel Aviv, if you've got fairly strong memories of going there?**

Well me met up, we actually the

06:00 Jewish families are very, very hospitable, and if you went into a shop the natural thing was that you bargained to buy something, if you wanted any article you never accepted the price they asked for you haggled until such time that we both came to an agreeable price that we would pay out. And my mate Don Middles and myself were always together and we went to this particular shop to do some shopping and there were two girls

06:30 there, Paula and Ester, they were two daughters of the person that owned the house, of the shop and they invited us to stay with them for the weekend, that was the hospitality they extended. We didn't keep company with these girls, they weren't partners in social activities but they were there to make our life a little bit more easier in terms of enjoying life rather than being a soldier sticking up at a bar and drinking for a want,

07:00 not necessarily with the flies but with your mates. And that was an enjoyable way of experiencing life. So we had many times on the beaches and we had picnics and go down to the local bathes and go

swimming and in the evenings of course you'd go out to the Kibbutz's and have their omelettes that they a marvellous way of cooking up all these eggs and having meals. Communal type service.

**Any possibilities of romance with these women?**

07:30 No, we just found them to be good friends you know, there for enjoyment time. There was no amorous feelings between, both Don and I were quite happy with their company. Of course their mother and father were there hovering on the background I should imagine to make sure there was nothing, the extent of that, because they were fairly strict religious belief and the Jewish families didn't integrate with other than other people of the same faith.

**These were girls of your age I presume?**

Yes, yes

08:00 around about our age.

**Now from Alexandria and from the desert camp you then moved to Palestine?**

That's correct, yes.

**Could we have some more detail on what happened in Palestine?**

We were just into routine training, doing guard duties, doing Don R runs through the area. Going into Tel Aviv on leave as I just mentioned. And that happened prior

08:30 to us going into the Syrian campaign.

**So at this point we go to Syria. How did you actually travel to Syria?**

By bike, as a convoy. It was our responsibility to control the convoy as it moved along the road. There would be 3 Don Rs, one would be in the middle, one would be in the front, one would be half way down the convoy and the other one would be in the rear. And as we came to a fork of a road

09:00 or we had to take a turn that Don R would direct the traffic in the way that we had to go, as the second Don R came up he would then take-up to the head of the lead and as the convoy moved through the rear Don R would move into the centre and the one that was at the head would then fall into the back and so you rotated you Don Rs through that system of guiding the convoy to the desired place they were going to.

**And how long did that particular journey take?**

09:30 I couldn't remember now. It was into, oh no it was a matter of hours, I should imagine but we were moved into a, what we call a Wadi or deep ravine and set up the brigade headquarters was set up there. And the escarpment was above where they were making the onslaught of the town of Damour. The attack of Damour.

**So that was already happening when you arrived? Was it?**

10:00 The British has set themselves up and the French were holding up and we hadn't taken Damour at that time, we were setting up to go in and behind us we had the British artillery, they had a 6 inch Howitzer which was a fairly heavy gun and as they fired the shell climbed up over the escarpment and of course you could hear it whistling across as it went through,

10:30 the unfortunate part of that is that the French who in World War One had a 75 mil artillery piece and they were renowned for accuracy and the quickness in which they could locate where that enemy shelling was coming from and of course once the Howitzer started to fire it was in a short space of time that the French retaliated and we happen to be in the middle and we weren't too happy about that. So Brigade headquarter discreetly moved a little to one side

11:00 to get out of the line of fire.

**How long after you arrived did that happen?**

Again I couldn't, couple of days maybe.

**It was a couple of days, but that was the first sign of action that you saw?**

No, I happen, I was posted to the Brigade Commander as his personal dispatcher right at the time. And my responsibility was when there was every a conference or a

11:30 situation to occur I would be with Brigadier Savige and his officers and they then would be doing any dispatches or hand written notes, would come back to be delivered back to the division. They didn't commit themselves to wireless for security purposes but I can always remember on the attack of Damour the battalion officers, the battalion commanders or Lieutenant Colonels were giving

12:00 their interpretation of how they would make the attack on Damour and a thing that always has stuck in my mind, as Savage heard these various reports he then said to his officer, "Gentlemen, I think perhaps if we do it this way we can save a lot of lives." And that to me was a point where this man was not



thinking of frontal assaults and mess attacks on people.

12:30 But there was no great; there was loss of life of course but not to the extent that perhaps it could have been.

**Can you give us a bit of a description of Brigadier Savage himself?**

Oh, a fairly remote man, I didn't have any close contact with him other than saluting him and calling him Sir of course, receiving the dispatches through his aid or through his captain. And ah he didn't ignore you, he wasn't above speaking to the troops.

13:00 **And by the sounds of it a humanitarian?**

Oh definitely so. Definitely so, yes.

**So to work out the chronology of events in Syria, you arrived, you arrived at the camp; you were attached to Brigadier Savage...**

17th Brigade.

**17th Brigade. Now at one point yesterday you said you wanted to go back to your own unit.**

Well that was it. That was my unit the K Section Signals, which was a unit, allotted

13:30 to the 17th Brigade for the purpose of communications.

**So can we take just even major point by major point actions as it involved you or activities as they involved you in Syria, we've spoken about it, or we've spoken about going back to your own unit and your work with Savage, what else was happening at that time?**

Well only the just the normal, the attack on Damour and of course then the collapse of the Vichy

14:00 French they didn't hold out for any length of time and we just kept moving forward.

**So could you give us your memories of the attack of Damour?**

Not really, I didn't get to the involvement of being in there at the sharp end to use a phrase, just basically running dispatches and that was about the sum total.

**Did you come under fire at all during this time?**

No, no I don't recall any heavy

14:30 attacks on our own personal selves. No I think the French weren't very, I mean the force that they were opposed to was overwhelming as far as the French were concerned, and they weren't going to commit themselves. I don't think they had the whole heart to, they were resentful. I remember in the later part after the collapse of Syria when we were taking over all their equipment and things, they did certain things, which created problems. Trying to run us off the road when we were on

15:00 the motorbikes, one of our linesmen Jim Hammond he came back all scratched and broken skin and what have you and it was brought about by one the Vichy French driving a truck and as he came towards Jim on his bike he swerved across the road to push him off the road. Jim did go off the road, but it was rather amusing the story after when you hear, because Jim in his imitable way as he rolled off the bike,

15:30 he wasn't injured to the extent but he pulled out his Webley and he just took a shot to hit the driver in revenge but he hit the front tyre and the Frenchman, looked back and saw Jim lying there, thought he'd been done with, saw that he'd a flat tyre and presumed that his tyre had blown out so he preceded to repair his tyre, so Jim sneaked up and hit him on the head with the butt of his pistol, shot out his other tyres and went on his way. Now the

16:00 funny part of this is, 3 or 4 hours later when Jim was coming back here was the Frenchman just putting the last of the tyres back on after repairing them, Jim hit him on the head again and shot his tyres again. Then when he got back to Tripoli he got into trouble because that was our truck now, and he was damaging that vehicle.

**That is a great story.**

But that was the way it was. And when we used to drive, as we drove along the road you saw these Vichy French driving these trucks back,

16:30 you'd have your pistol pointed out in front of you over the bike pointed directly at the windscreen to make sure that if he was going to make any change of direction on his route you'd let fly with your revolver.

**So they were in no doubt?**

Oh yes they kept to their side of the road and we kept to ours.

**Were any of the Vichy French taken prisoner?**

They all capitulated.

**They all capitulated, but were any of them herded into camps?**

I couldn't tell you that, I wouldn't

17:00 know.

**Did you encounter any German POW's at this point?**

Only at, when we were coming back to go back to Ceylon we passed the prisoner of war camps in Egypt, they were very riotous, screaming out abuse and all giving their Heil Hitler salutes and they were very aggressive people.

**This was as you drove past them?**

As we were coming back, they were, they'd

17:30 been prisoners for quite some time. That was before the El Alamein campaign of course.

**Were these very large encampments?**

Oh yes, quite large yes. I think that I've got a couple of photos in there of the camps. They were just a series of huts and things and barbwire.

**Now you've told us a fairly funny story, what other instances of humour stand out during your time in the Middle East?**

Oh the things, the things you've done. I think I mentioned the episode in Syria of the learning how to or being taught how to get off a bike.

18:00 Finding a frantic poor old signalman on the railway crossing telling him there's a train coming with a, waving a red flag and just automatically get off the bike and the bike went under the rail guard and the bike and it was on the other side of the line and I stood off this side and watched the train go between the two of us. I mean it was proved that training does work out.

**We spoke to a veteran the other day who said the kind of thing that usually gets overlooked in histories,**

18:30 **in official histories and oral histories is the fact that among the men there was a lot of humour, a lot of jokes told.**

Yes, we had you know with our lifestyles you didn't bore down on the old stories even in the Anzac days reunions you never talked of the hardships and the unhappy times that we had. It was always, "Do you remember this George?" Or, "I can hardly remember when that happened." and so you'd talk

19:00 the stories through, remember the stories that happened. Actually that fellow that I spoke to you about yesterday that had his buttock knocked up with the shrapnel from the bombing, I had met up with him years and years later at the RSL [Returned and Services League] and he said, "Do you remember me?" And I couldn't remember him because as I said I hadn't had a close association with the 19th Brigade but when he brought it out, he took me out to the toilet and showed me where the scars on his backside, so it was good to know that had come

19:30 about. But that was before I was in the official position of President of our Association.

**Now at one point in Libya you got a mascot, a dog. Can you tell us about that?**

I think it came about. We got, acquired this little bitser dog, don't know what he was called, a little Mexican type dog, we called him Sparkplug, he was a small little black dog,

20:00 and he belonged to the Italians. And the funny story of this was of course at the same time the Brigade guards which were all World War One veterans who were guarding the Brigade acquired two large Alsatians dogs belonging to the Italians and at one stage, little sparkplug who was a female came on heat and the only place you could put her was up on a high

20:30 shelf with these two huge Alsatisans wanting to consummate the mateship with this poor little tiny sparkplug who was a little bold dog as far as she was concerned. She wanted a dog, it didn't matter what size. But we kept her away from that. But it was a shame because we had her for all the way through Greece, well the 17th Brigade did of course, and they didn't go on to Crete, they came back and into Syria we went through Syria the photo that I had showed

21:00 her taken in Syria and we carried her all the way back through to Melbourne and it was there unfortunately that the powers to be, because it was an imported dog thought she might have rabies despite all the needles we had and the documentation, they took her away from us and had her destroyed. It was a very sad thing.

**Yes, I imagine so having formed such a bond and having**

- 21:30 **had this dog go through so much in much more extreme circumstances than simply returning to Melbourne.**
- Exactly yeah.
- So we've got the fall of Damour. Once Damour had fallen what happened as far as you were concerned?**
- It's a little bit confusing. I was allotted out to a British unit and I can't remember the name of this unit at the time. To
- 22:00 help out on their Don R work. It was an engineer firm responsible for repairing roads and bridges and things and I was attached to them for about two weeks. Now you've got to remember that in Australia we're fairly good eaters or were in those days and you had three meals a day. The British had four meals a day;
- 22:30 they have Breakfast, Lunch, Tea and Dinner but the combined four meals wouldn't even equate for what we got for our three meals and we were always very hungry, because they were a smaller sized people than us. I can always remember when by teatime, which was four o'clock in the afternoon, saying "When are we
- 23:00 going to get a decent sized feed here, the small bowls of food that you get?" And he said "Wait till you get to supper, lad it's a big meal" and you got an extra round of bread with that one. So that was their rations, they didn't eat terribly well. But that was my allotment and I was there for about two weeks before I rejoined the unit and we were moved on to just outside Tripoli, a little fishing village called El Mina where we set up the Brigade headquarters.
- And at that point,**
- 23:30 **what sort of activities were you involved in?**
- Oh delivering, because the Battalions were spread through the area of Syria, one of them was up on the Turkish border about 100 mile away and our responsibility was to run the dispatches up and back because we wouldn't have the capabilities of communications, the sheer weight of paperwork, this was a lot of mundane work of course, rationing, numbers,
- 24:00 sick personnel, routine type of paperwork that the Don R would carry.
- Now can you give us a bit of a potted description of Almena?**
- Just a little fishing village, just outside Tripoli. It had a small hospital there. Basically Syrian natives and it was a restful place. We had a camp there, a couple of photos
- 24:30 that show our living standards. We were quite comfortable there.
- And can you talk about the attitude of the Syrian people?**
- All those, of those races be they Arabs of Egypt, or the Syrians or the Palestinians were very subservant to anything we did, they weren't the
- 25:00 aggressive people that they are today.
- Because I heard from a couple of other people, that the Syrians were very proud people and quite watchful particularly when it came to Australian Soldiers presenting a threat to their women perhaps.**
- Never heard of that.
- Never heard of anything like that?**
- None of our unit was involved in any association. I mean we used to go to their cafes
- 25:30 and have meals there. Now you've struck a, I very rarely see, you'd see the women there but it never registered to be involved with them.
- It was just a attitudinal thing with the men were always watchful always keeping an eye out.**
- Well that's the nature of the Islamic type of race isn't it?
- 26:00 **I suppose so in a way. Otherwise you found them fairly acquiescent and eager to help out and eager to please.**
- Oh, yes they were amicable in their attitude.
- So for how long were you at this fishing village?**
- Again, time defeats my memory in relation to that. We stayed there and then we went over the mountain called Mon Repose [?] which
- 26:30 had perpetual snow on it to Aleppo which of course is quite a historical area with the ruins of Belbecme

[?] and from there we went to a camp outside Damascus. And we were stationed at that camp for it was going through to December 41 because I remember we spent Christmas in that area. And that's when we ran in, we had heavy snow, it was very cold in that area.

27:00 **And what was the Brigade doing at that point?**

Occupying and just doing its normal work, your know I didn't get involved. We weren't training as such, we were just occupying the ground.

**So it was a gradual move across to occupy ground, which had been held by the Germans and by the French?**

By the Vichy French.

**And did you encounter Vichy French all the way through?**

No, no they were all gone. They'd been finished up. We were just there

27:30 as a.... We used to get leave in Damascus, they had the Turkish Baths there, and they were an experience in its own right to go in and be absolutely pampered. You'd go in one side, you'd take your clothes off, they'd give you a towel to wrap around yourself and after the whole event you would come out and your clothes would be washed and ironed and pressed and starched and your boots would be cleaned and polished all for a few drachma,

28:00 piastres I'm sorry.

**That's fantastic; you must give me their address. That's superb. And Turkish bath, what sort of other places were you heading along to?**

Again the baths, the bazaars, we had a women there that had no arms and she used to sew with her feet, I can always remember watching this little girl sew clothes and she used to use

28:30 her toes to manipulate this sewing machine, when I say hand operated it would be foot operated in that respect. It was one of these little things that you turned with the wheel. And she was fascinating to watch.

**Just to get back to the attitudes of locals, were the welcoming of the allied troops?**

Well I think they could see the, we were money in spending, it was like any bazaar type thing although of course you had money they wanted money and because you were paid in the local currency.

29:00 **So there were never any kinda sticky situations with pockets of resistance to people?**

I never ran into any never personally myself.

**I simply ask the question because we've spoken to a couple of other people with experiences of Syria and Damascus who every now and again thought no we shouldn't have walked down that alleyway, it didn't feel good.**

Well I don't think, we would of have had due respect to dark alleys and things of that nature.

29:30 I mean, most of us always went in pairs, companionship more than protection. But I don't think we would ever just venture into dark areas that we weren't too sure about.

**So once you'd been to Damascus, what was the next step?**

We then moved back of course. This was when Japan entered the war and we were moved back to

30:00 outside, we went down to the Sea of Galilee and we went through Jerusalem and down there and we at the Allenby Bridge we camped on that flat piece of ground for about 2 or 3 weeks. Again time defeats my memory. We had official parades there for King of Jordan and then I told you the story of meeting up with the New Zealand

30:30 people in Jordan who well and truly looked after me. Once that was done we came back and did a convoy from across the Sinai Desert back to the Suez Canal where we were boarded on a troop ship and sailed to Ceylon.

**How much had you heard about what was happening in the Pacific with the Japanese?**

Well we knew

31:00 that the Japanese had attacked but again my memory fails me to remember specifically what was involved, what was an infamous attack on Pearl Harbour or was it, what it was we didn't know, all we knew was Japan making threats and coming down and of course then we heard of the fact the, they were approaching down onto towards Singapore and that was stilted information that was coming through. And

31:30 then there was a sense that they were sending us then to Ceylon in case the attack was to take Ceylon out.

**I just wonder if in the various headquarters and camps and so forth that you were staged in along the way that whether there was a regular troops newspaper or newsletter that came out?**

We did have a couple of local papers and I did have records of some them, but I think I lost them in the space of time. Where the local paper, we would produce a paper

32:00 of our own right with bits and pieces, but as I said my memory's now faded, failed me on the specifics of any of that type of material.

**I suppose the point of the question was. Where were you getting most of your information at this stage on the progress of the war?**

Probably word of mouth.

**Would those local newspapers have contained any news?**

We would never have bought the local newspapers because we weren't in available sources to get to them you see.

**No, the kinds of newspapers that**

32:30 **were available in the camps, I was just wondering how informative they were in terms of the big picture of the war.**

No, I honestly couldn't recall.

**So during this gradual movement back were you aware that you were going to be sent back towards Australia?**

No, we knew that we were going back and we heard of course that we were going back to Australia and then when we landed at Ceylon we were, originally the plan was to send us in to Rangoon under

33:00 Churchill's orders but of course Curtin said no, he wanted his troops, Australian troops back in Australia to defend Australia. And that's as I understand and bearing in mind I was just a lowly soldier not anywhere up near the top. The political side of that particular argument was never made known to us but hindsight after the war when we read through

33:30 that Churchill was very concerned the only reason he demanded, he held out our release, he demand that we kept one division that's why the 9th Division was kept back and they were the spearhead for the attack on El Alamein. And of course they got the glory of that, and well deserved too.

**What ship did you travel back to Australia on?**

Could not tell you now, I've lost all memory of that particular.... It was a typical troop ship,

34:00 no; no it was a naval ship because we were slung in hammocks. It was the first time I'd ever slept in a hammock and thoroughly comfortable with it to. But I couldn't tell you the name of it now.

**Now I think once you got to Ceylon, you had a flare up of haemorrhoids, didn't you?**

Yes well of course, in the tropics with the constant wet weather and sitting on bikes without any protection on the

34:30 bottom I was feeling very uncomfortable in that area. And I didn't know what was the matter and I went to the medical officer and he examined me and he said, "Oh, you've got piles." and his idea of a cure was to sit on boiling water and let the steam disperse the pile. But it didn't have a great deal of success. It wasn't until many, many

35:00 years after the war when I was operated on that I was finally cleared of that rather embarrassing problem.

**So this was an occupational hazard?**

Obviously so, yes because as I said the saddle of the bike in wet weather was just wet and you sat on it you didn't gave thought to it and it was an obvious means of producing that particular complaint.

**Now I think you said when we were discussing this off camera yesterday**

35:30 **that there was something else added to the water?**

No

**Wasn't it kero or some other?**

No, no that was his reports, "Just sit on it." I remember because it was a Saturday Night when I went and saw him because he was going off to some social function and he was more concern with getting on to his social function then to help me with my cure but, whether or not it relieve or ease, I'm not too sure. I know that they subsided

36:00 and over time they came back and subsided. Until after the war I was getting regular treatment with Carbolic Acid injections through the local medical office in those day.

**I'd heard that quite a lot of army Truck drivers had the same problem.**

We probably, you see you're sitting down you see you're not... and bad when I say bad food I mean not ideal food with fresh vegetables and things to help your fibrous diet.

36:30 **Now, were there a succession of ships on which you travelled on back to Australia?**

From Egypt to Ceylon there was one troop ship then that was a Navel Ship I'm pretty sure from memory but of the ship we travelled from Ceylon back to Australia to Melbourne that was a straight out ship of some description which was converted to a troop ship, we just slept in bunks

37:00 on that, it was an English ship. Because there was that many troops on board the ship that the meals were just constantly served all the time, you had a ticket to get your lunch or your dinner or your breakfast and when the time came for your allocation you got into the queue and then that was served. Meals were never stopped being prepared and cooked and served. Apart from the night, there would have been break between the late last meal and the first meal of the morning.

37:30 **Were you being fed a little better aboard the ships?**

Not really, no there was very, very small portions of food. As a matter of fact on about the last day prior landing at Melbourne we'd be in the queue and we'd be finding out what's on the menu and back down the line came tripe and onions and the bloke in front of me and the bloke behind went a bit green because they just didn't like it. So I grabbed their tickets and the first time I had three servings of tripe and onion which made that

38:00 a normal serving because I did like tripe and onions, but they were very small serves by our Australian standards.

**What sort of other food was available on those transport ships?**

Rice with sultanas, stew was a popular - veal stew, meat and vegetable stew, dehydrated vegetables, I might add no fresh vegetables as such.

**Doesn't sound very energising?**

But I mean it was, you see we didn't have,

38:30 were still thinking in those years even our home cooking was a meat and three vegetables. There were no exotics foods, as we know today with influence of European and Asian eating.

**No particular thoughts of nutrition either?**

No, no I don't think so. Potatoes, pumpkin, peas or bean and a chop or a piece of steak or a stew or whatever.

**Once the ship arrived in Melbourne, what happened**

39:00 **then?**

Well, we were discharged. We went to a camp to Seymour I think it was, this was one of our disappointing times because our kit bags had come by separate ship, this is our duffel bag to use another phase where all our good were concerned and these had been rifled by the people who were responsible for them and they'd stolen quite a lot of our stuff out of our kit bags. I can't remember what I'd

39:30 lost, but I know others lost lots of souvenirs they had acquired over the time.

**What sort of people are we talking about?**

They would have been army personnel that were responsible of taking care of these kit bags. But that was a rather low point in our life when things that we had acquired over small mementos and things that we'd acquired over time.

**That must have been quite a shock actually?**

Well it was disappointing to say the least. I mean the language wasn't too

40:00 polite in referring to what these people were. But from that point we were then given leave to our respective states, came home and I met up back with Mum of course at that time...

**Actually, Can I just stop you there because we're almost right to the end of the tape so well pick....**

## Tape 6

- 00:32 **Keith you referred to souvenirs that were stolen, what sort of souvenirs are we talking about?**
- Oh, we had, I had acquired bits and pieces, a couple of shells, we had taken the gunpowder and the explosives out of it for safety to make sure it wasn't going to blow up in our face, we had the technology to do that. Others had souvenirs from shops, like silk scarves
- 01:00 and things you know personal nature things of that. I couldn't identify any elaborate form of what each member took. I had various little things, as a matter of fact I still have a couple somewhere that were brought back from the war.
- One thing just before we move completely away from the Middle East, you referred in passing your memories of the German POW's.**
- 01:30 **What was your view of the Germans generally?**
- Those prisoners of war were mainly taken on the Libyan campaign and I don't think any of them came out of Greece or Crete, we wouldn't have brought any prisoners back from there.
- But how did you regard the Germans as an enemy?**
- Well, of course, we never knew of their atrocities under the
- 02:00 death camps that they were running; we had no idea of that. They were just another lot of soldiers that were screeching, we had more sympathy for the poor old Italians who wanted to get on with life and not be involved in aggressiveness.
- But what of, putting yourself into the context of the war itself. Were you feelings towards the Germans fairly neutral**
- 02:30 **or did you have feelings of hate or antipathy towards them?**
- No, there was a... they were in behind the barbwire and that was it they used to scream abuse at us from behind the barbwire and we'd give them the fingers up and say "Well, good on you mate, you know you're there, we're here."
- You mentioned when you were talking about these prisoners you said that they were a fairly aggressive lot.**
- Yes they were still, because they were in captivity,
- 03:00 there was nothing they could do and I suppose they'd vent their anger at us, this was the way they could get at us, as we passed by.
- Just bringing us back on the way to Australia, do you have any specific memories of Ceylon?**
- Only in so far that in there was a problem with fifth columnist in Ceylon unbeknown to us and I'd never become involved. There was a case where they were
- 03:30 stringing wire across the road to decapitate anybody on a bike that went through. And we limited ourselves to daylight motorbike riding. In nighttime we would be in vehicles. This was before the advent of the jeep as far as we knew them. The roads there are very narrow and they have a tree,
- 04:00 I can't think of the name of it but it exudes a wax like a candle wax. And I can always remember going around one corner and as I came round of course this tree was on that particular corner and the road was just like a bit of glass and of course the bike went straight from under me. And as it went from under me, there was a cobra coming across the road and so I don't know who got the biggest fright, the cobra or myself as we tried to get out of each other's
- 04:30 road. But that was the type of terrain that was had to put up with. And of course the constant rain, you were forever riding bikes in wet weather and it was there that I contracted Dengue Fever, which is a similarity to malaria I presume, I don't know. I'd never had malaria before but I developed this dengue fever and it was a pretty savage. Now I find out it was more severe than malaria, it could kill you quicker
- 05:00 than that. But they took me into hospital at Colombo and I spent four or five days there under recuperation, medication and then having come out of hospital then sent us up to the highlands to recuperate.
- What were the symptoms of Dengue Fever?**
- Burning sensation, dizziness, very sick, very weak, very
- 05:30 very weak.
- And apart from the recuperation how did they treat you?**

I don't know what the medication was, I can't recall that. I know that I was in there and we were given medication. I know very vividly from New Guinea the affects of malaria, because I was hit by malaria in Milne Bay and then I had reoccurring malaria for quite a number of years after the war. But we were on,

- 06:00 you'd get on liquid quinine and that's the only medicine that the army gave you a lolly after taking it. It's the most violent medicine you could taste and in a sense it made you deaf. And you know with one good ear left I wasn't too happy because the liquid quinine muffled your hearing and you used to have to take this three times a day, they'd stand in front of you to make sure you'd take it. Now quinine of course was in short supply and they
- 06:30 used to take a quinine tablet to suppress any attacks by the anopheles mosquito and so then they brought about this tablet they called Atebrin and you used to take those everyday and as you went on parade, the officer would walk with the Sergeant, the tablet would go into your mouth and he'd make sure you swallowed that tablet. Because the causality rate from malaria was one of the heaviest
- 07:00 problems that they had. They were threatening that they were going to call it a self-inflicted wound, because they weren't taking their Atebrin. But you only had to look at a soldier of those days and if he wasn't as yellow as the Japanese he wasn't taking his Atebrin. And we looked more yellow than they did.

**Just staying with Ceylon for a moment, for how long were you there?**

About 3 months I think approximately.

**Were you attached to any**

- 07:30 **particular headquarters?**

Yes still with the 17th Brigade. From the point in Palestine, after Crete that was my unit right through till the end of the war.

**Where was their headquarters in Ceylon?**

A little area called Fort Galle. It was a Dutch. Because the Ceylonese were taken or occupied by the Dutch people and they held that land for quite a couple of hundred

- 08:00 years.

**And this was an old and probably a fairly ornate Fort?**

Oh yes, a lovely old place. Again the Ceylonese people were very very hospitable to us, to look after us, to take us out for meals and of course the tea. The tea plantations were renowned there.

**It must have been quite an idyllic place actually?**

It was, it was. We did training and we were in the fields doing field exercises

- 08:30 in the field. Again we were starting to get into learn about jungle warfare or not myself but it was more in infantry because I was still road bound with the motorbike.

**Was there any specific training for you knowing that you'd be going into more tropical conditions?**

Not at that time, no.

**So the 17th Brigades prime purpose in being in Ceylon was for training?**

I should imagine it would have been for a defensive position.

**Defensive position?**

- 09:00 That's my thoughts of it. And I wasn't aware that it was a desire that the division be sent up to attack the Japanese from the Rangoon area, but that of course was knocked on the head by our own as I understand by our own Prime Minister of the day.

**I wonder if that was still being sorted out while you were there?**

Possibly could have been.

**Now you mentioned wire stretched**

- 09:30 **across the road. Did you ever lose any friends?**

No, no we'd heard of this method of attack, but I never heard of any, whether it might have been a rumour for that point but it was something that made us very wary of travelling, you always used to keep your eyes very much peeled because it was typically jungle, Ceylon or Sri Lanka it's now called.

**Did you have any or much interaction with the local people there?**

Yes, yes we were looked after as



10:00 far as... they were very friendly and Dutch Burghers, which were the results of the inter-marriages between the Ceylonese and the Dutch.

**That was the actual term for a mixed race, A Dutch Burgher?**

A Dutch Burgher, yeah.

**And can you describe the highlands for us?**

All tea plantations run and controlled by the British Tea People. Lipton's tea was one of course. And

10:30 they had these plantations and all these tea pickers used to go out in the morning, in the early hours of the morning. And they start to pick the tea, and the tea buds would then be laid in racks to dry and then the old women of the families, who were beyond the capabilities of picking tea, at a speed required, they'd sit in amongst all this tea and pick out the little stalks that

11:00 had gone white. So if ever when you're having a cup of tea you see a little white stalk, it's one that's escaped the people that sorted these twigs away from the leaf itself. I think today now it would be all modern machinery that would do it, I don't know whether they use the hand picked tea.

**That's right, the Ceylon tea pack used to feature, women with sari's idyllically picking.**

That was a true picture.

**And what sort of place**

11:30 **did you stay when you went up for recuperation?**

Well it was a camp called Deterlargwa, it was a British camp and from there we were allowed to go leave and of course the English planters extended invitations for those that were recuperating to come and stay at their place and their wives incidentally had been sent back to England for safety, for the logical point of argument. And they were on their own, but of course

12:00 they had all their servants, and when you ... the lifestyle was unbelievably to our way of thinking, we were never subject to that style. But you'd be woken up in the morning with a cup of tea by the local person who was responsible for your preparation. Your clothes from the night before would have been washed and ironed and all the things were done, you boots were clean and you would

12:30 after your cup of tea there would be a hot bath drawn for you to have a bath. You'd then go out, this would be in the early hours of the morning, you'd go out and watch with the workers starting and you'd come back and you'd have some breakfast then you'd go out and go around the plantation and the drying areas and inspect those with the person, the planter, the plantation owner, the plantation manager. Then you'd come back for lunch,

13:00 you'd have a leisurely lunch and then you'd have you siesta for two or three hours, you'd laid down and then again you'd be woken up to have tiffin or tea as they called it. And then from there you would probably retire down to the club to have a game of billiards. Very very idyllic life they lived. Then the local village where we went out, I bought a pair of shoes, where you sat on a little stool and the local inhabitant,

13:30 put your foot on a piece of paper and drew your foot and in the evening you came back and there was your shoes all handmade for you.

**And this all happened to you?**

Yes I bought, I had that pair of shoes for years after, I mean we never wore shoes, we had boots but the fact it was only a small amount of money to buy a pair of shoes, handmade shoes.

**Sounds lovely, I mean it just sounds a very, very pleasant experience.**

Then of course once we were better, back to the fold I went,

14:00 to the coastal waters.

**On average how many days would you spend with a planter?**

There was only one planter there; I suppose we spent a week in total.

**So you went up for the recuperation?**

I think we spent about a week or so I just can't remember that Ian.

**And you stayed with the one planter?**

Yes, yes only the one. I mean there were other planters who had other people who were recuperating. But that was their

14:30 means of helping the war effort, if I could put it that way.

**What sort of people were the planters themselves?**

Young English, I think those were from England who may and I use the word may had not been up to the expectations of their parents and were sent to the colonies to improve their lot.

**I think the term remittance man springs to mind.**

Could be somewhat similar.

**15:00 There were 3 months in Ceylon, and now to bring us back on to the chronology, you brought us back to Australia and you went to Seymour. How long did you spend in Seymour?**

Just a matter of days, before we went on leave. And then came back, and that's my first awareness of Parramatta actually because we were camped out at Wallgrove which is just out halfway between Parramatta and

15:30 Penrith. And that was a staging camp and we stayed there, and we had leave here in Parramatta. Of an evening we'd come in and go to the local dances and I can always remember because in those days St John's church had these huts so we could get a cup of tea and a sandwich or a biscuits the town hall just across the road used to have dance and things, progressive barn dances and old time dancing

16:00 and then we'd get the train back to Wallgrove and the bus would take us out to the camp. From there time, I can't recall the distance with the time factor and then we went by train up to Brisbane and we were stationed outside Brisbane at the racecourse and that was when the big Brisbane fights occurred with the Americans when the eruption against the Yanks.

**Do you have any specific memories of those events?**

16:30 Yes, I was very much, not involved to the point of, but there was one of our fellows had been stabbed, no one of our chaps, but an Australian soldier, the Yanks were held in high esteem by our troops because they hadn't been blooded and we were all, we'd gone from typical uniform to khaki but to, created a camouflage what they did was they dyed,

17:00 they made a vat of green dye and we had to knot the sleeves and the legs of the trousers and dip those, let them boil in the dye and when they came out they were a mottled looking sort of messy uniform and it was for the purpose of camouflage. And we were wearing these and people had never seen it before and didn't know what we were and who we were and of course we had already seen action in the Middle East and we were very resentful being

17:30 made scapegoats to their mind that they didn't know that we'd already been there. Because you couldn't, we never discussed it so we got into quite a few fights in Brisbane.

**Were these mottled green uniforms a bit of a mess in appearance?**

Oh they didn't look like anything, it was shocking. It was just a long sleeve shirt and long trousers and there was no pressing or such as that, you just wore them as part of your scene.

**So what was the effect?**

A very

18:00 untidy effect, I'm afraid.

**So that must have been quite a contrast to the American uniforms?**

Yes, well they were still in that immaculate way, their straight out khaki colour, their ties and all the bits and pieces that went with it?

**Now this conflict with the Americans, there was one phase of it that was referred to as the Battle of Brisbane, did you see any of this happen?**

Yes, again if I can cast

18:30 your mind and let you think back. When we were in the Middle East as I said, I think I mentioned this yesterday, we were on 5 shillings a day and the poor old British Tommy was on a shilling a day, now the reverse took place when we came back to Australia, our 5 shillings a day and the Americans were on 25 shillings a day in the equation through there. So their money was well and truly outweighing our particular thing. A particular

19:00 instance prior to going up to Brisbane when we were in Sydney was the barmaids would look after the yanks and in the Australia hotel in Sydney the Marble Bar there was a couple of my mates, Tubby Allen was one, who kept asking the barmaid for a beer, but she was giving preference to these yanks that were in the bar. So Tubby

19:30 in his frustration grabbed one of the beers from the Americans side there and threw it in the barmaid's face, and told her what to do with her beer and herself and of course that was on for young and old. So the police were eventually called in and Tubby and his mates were marched off. After the explanation of

what happened they were released and without any charges being made.

**Was there a massive punch up?**

Oh it was on for young and old, I believe, I wasn't there but. As a matter of fact I wrote the story up in

20:00 one of my newsletters on a later date. But that was the style of thing. When we were on leave in Brisbane there was three of us - Charlie Cousins, myself and one other, we were sitting at the bar in these motley type uniforms and there was a couple of yanks alongside of us talking about various things and of course the American was you know in the states, "We have this

20:30 and we have that." He had determined that we were not Johnny-come-lately soldiers and but he was just boasting about, "We have what you lot didn't have." " Really?" we said, "No, that's not true." he said, "The only thing we don't have that you've got is the Sydney Harbour Bridge." and I can remember Arthur Cousins saying, "If you could suck as hard as you blow you'd have that over there too." And of course that was on for a fight straight away. And again, we

21:00 got ousted out of more bars than you can poke a stick at, because we used to get into fights. But we were quite willing to have a fight.

**So that provoked a fight?**

Oh yes

**What happened, can you describe what happened?**

It was just a fist up, and a punch up until we got thrown out of the Pub. And we went away and licked our wounds and found another pub.

**So how many Americans did you take on?**

There was half a dozen or so. See there was a dislike for the yanks; we couldn't get decent cigarettes,

21:30 going to stage up when we got to Milne Bay we were on hard tack rations. They had great big stacks of tinned fruits, pears and peaches and our Sergeant and myself and a corporal got in, we had jeeps then and a trailer and we went down and while we engaged the guard who was guarding these dumps and he was the

22:00 best god dam rifle shot in the States, he could take anything on at a hundred yards, we were quietly lifting off cases of peaches and pears and apricots around the back while we engaged him in conversation. But they, and it was Australian food that was where the resentment was. They were getting the best of our stuff while we were sitting on hard tack rations. So that was, we never had that great love for the allies as they were referred to. I mean I'm not taking it away that they didn't help.

22:30 And a major help in solving and producing an end to the war.

**So you referred to that one particular punch up in the bar in Brisbane, how many other dusts up were you involved in?**

Oh, that was the only one I got involved in, in a physical ...

**Were the provos [Military Police] called?**

Oh yeah, both sides. The provos from our side and the American MP's [Military Police] as they called themselves then. They came in but we didn't ...You didn't get yourselves involved

23:00 with the MP's they were..

**What they came in and broke up the fight?**

Can't remember exactly. It was a melee and whistles were blowing and we just disappeared into the sidelines and became onlookers.

**For how long did you remain in Brisbane?**

We were only there a few weeks and then we went on board ship of course. We were loaded onto one of the troops ships and taken up to Milne Bay.

**All right, well we've missed a stage**

23:30 **here and that is reunion with your family with your mother.**

Oh yes when I came back we were given leave and my mum lived at Manly then, well we were still living at Manly, Belgrave Street and I stayed with mum and people across the road, we used to go to various, young girl I used to not keep company with, it was just a friend from the flat across the passageway, it was a duplex type of flat. Four flats

24:00 I think: 2 on the ground floor and 2 on the first floor. I can't even think of her name now. She and I went to a couple of balls or dances in Sydney and we went on, mum and I went on leave up to Katoomba. Oh I remember mum had found a long lost relative of our family, she was a

24:30 family by the name of Weeks, they lived out at Granville and we went out to meet them and they took us..... As a matter of fact after the war when my mother had died I lived with their daughter Rose. Who married a chap by the name of Bill Laird and he and I were great mates for many years.

**So you shared a house with them at one stage?**

Well I lived with them; I boarded with them at one point

25:00 as a single person. It was from there that I met up with June of course with my job in the buses and eventually married and of course bought this bit of land and we built our house.

**Now you must have noticed a few changes in Sydney by the time you got back?**

I didn't really. No there was no great structural change - Sydney was Sydney.

**No I'm talking about mood, wartime mood.**

Oh yes everybody had that; there was a greyness

25:30 about the place I think from memory, not the bright colours that we had. A greyness probably clothing etc, austerity bringing in more the flamboyant clothes, you know...

**Austerity got rid of the flamboyant clothing?**

Well yes, we were restricted then to ration coupons and things of that nature.

**I think men wore austerity suits as well?**

I don't remember to

26:00 the extent, to us we were in uniform?

**Was there an anxiety in Sydney about fears of an invasion?**

I don't recall, I mean. When was the Harbour attack?

**The harbours attack was May 42.**

Yes well must have been. Yes because mum was living at Manly and she used to go across on the ferry on the occasion that attack took place.

26:30 And we used to go across, always went by ferry.

**What date did you return to Sydney?**

Well 1942.

**And it was after the submarine raid?**

It must have been, yes it must have been by the time I got on leave.

**You say the greyness of the place, were there black outs, were windows blacked out?**

Oh yes, I think they were in blackouts? As I said it's a bit

27:00 vague in my memory as to what Sydney was about.

**So the colour of Sydney had been banished in a way?**

It was not what I remember as I left on the first occasion. But then again you had a, probably a head full of things that weren't there before too. Unbeknown you had them hidden, covered over by other events.

**So you were suddenly seeing life through new eyes.**

Probably so yes.

27:30 **Or different eyes.**

**So back to embarkation for Milne Bay. What kind of ship? What was the ship that you actually sailed on?**

Again I couldn't tell you that in terms of the name of the ship. I've never recorded those. A troop ship obviously and we went to Milne Bay, where we were discharged by lighter I think we went down through, you know

28:00 a big water berth. And that was just prior to the Bismarck, not the Bismarck, the Coral Sea Battle, but the Japs were making very heavy raids in the area. The Militia had repulsed an amount of attack, when we got there there was nothing much more we could do. Because the Kokoda Trail battle had been

28:30 on the way to be pushing the Japanese back to the north and the threat to Milne Bay was no longer with

the Coral Sea Battle being taken on and dealt with. But the next threat of course was the Japanese were coming through this previously unknown trail to us called the Black Cat Trail and we'd got reports on that.

### **The Black Cat Trail?**

The Black Cat Trail.

### **What was the Black Cat Trail?**

It was

29:00 just a trail, a native track, a trail that crossed the mountain through from the coast to Wau. Which was built because of the high deposits of Gold that were found there in the Bulolo Gold Fields and they'd set that up as a means of getting the gold in and out. They'd flown all the equipment in there. The dredgers were cut into sections and flown in by aircraft. It was only accessible

29:30 by aircraft, but the Japanese had found this trail and of course that particular aerodrome which was close to Moresby now that they couldn't enter it through the Kokoda Trail they would have captured Wau and in taking Wau it would have given them a jump off place to concentrate bombing on Morseyby and subsequent attacks, we feel towards Australia.

### **Now by the time you arrived at Milne Bay obviously the Milne Bay invasion had happened,**

30:00 There was no invasion.

### **Sorry the battle... The Milne Bay battle. The Australian troops had to go ashore and secure Milne Bay.**

Well they were already there. Yes, we purely came in after the Militia battalions were there. And the Americans, there were American troops there as well.

### **So it was well and truly secured at that point?**

Yep

### **So you arrived at Milne Bay, where did you**

30:30 **move to from there?**

That's where I first went down with malaria. Prior we were on the ready to move on the ship back to Port Moresby and the idea was then to move the Brigade by air into Wau. And I went down with malaria and of course I was in the hospital. By the time I came out and then came back I was in caught up with what we call the rear guard

31:00 you always, you never sent a unit in tact anywhere you'd have an advance guard to set up the establishment, then your main body and then the rear guard to pick up the bits and pieces. So by the time I got back to Moresby having overcome the malaria about 7 days or whatever the time factor was. I was in, caught up with the rear guard and then things were getting desperate because the Japanese were starting to attack

31:30 Wau and we needed to get troops in there but the big problem was, though we had superior air cover the clouds prevented the aircraft from coming in to land on the Wau airstrip. And they'd take off loaded with troops, the DC3 and there would just be a blanket of cloud there and they'd come back and they'd go again. Fortunately on the one day the clouds opened up and

32:00 in we went now as we were landing and getting out of the aircraft the snipers were hitting some troops who were getting put back onto the aircraft to be flown back as wounded troops. So that's how close the Japanese had gotten to take Wau.

### **Were you under sniper fire yourself?**

Oh yes as we came out they were firing on the planes as we came out. Cause I can always remember one instance where the pilot as he's brought his plane up to the top where the hanger was,

32:30 it was a civilian hanger and he was pivoting his plane around 180 degrees turn around to take off again a sniper had obviously, had hit him through the windshield and I don't think he was, he wasn't wounded fatally, it caused him to deflect and he

33:00 cut around and his wing tip cut into the fuselage of another DC3 that was there and took the pilot's leg off half way down and I can remember vividly seeing this pilot being carted off that....2 damaged aircraft then, one with wing damaged and the other with a nose cap where the pilot sat with the one leg missing or part of his leg missing and they were then loaded onto another plane and of course the other planes were just

33:30 pushed to one side out of the road and they flew back to bring more troops in. For about 3 days we had a very hairy experience. Everybody including signals were on front line stand to every time to make sure the Japs didn't come in.

**Were the Australians that were getting off the plane firing defensive fire?**

Oh we were taking up defensive positions straight away. The infantry was involved. But my role of course having,

34:00 rejoining the unit again was to get up to the headquarters which was just across a little bit of a gully and picking up with them there.

**It was quite a dramatic arrival in Wau?**

Yes it was. But I recommend you read that article on the "Battle for Wau" by Sherlock. The Sherlock who was responsible on saving Wau.

**At what point does this Sherlock story kick**

34:30 **in? Do you want to talk about this now or should we include it a little later in the narrative?**

Well, the details of his action are set down; I mean I wasn't there as he was coming in. He was a platoon commander of the 2/6th Battalion and they repulsed, they held the enemy in stages of advancing too quickly and in the meantime calling for help.

35:00 Now Blamey, sorry Moten who was our Brigadier, Brigadier Moten was endeavouring to get more troops up which included the 2/7th Battalion and once they got in they were able to consolidate but of course we were running out of ammunition as I understand, bearing in mind I wasn't present at that point, but Sherlock's platoon had suffered casualties, but it had also

35:30 had suffered more severe casualties on the Japanese and attacked and counter attacked and in the end they'd run out of ammunition and they were taken to a piece of ground and turned around and here were the Japanese doing a jump up and down dance with victory because they'd won the high ground, but Sherlock that frustrated him so he just got every man to fix their

36:00 bayonets and they made a bayonet charge on them and they were so amazed apparently at the audacity of a man to come back with nothing to offer, they fled and of course that saved the day for Wau.

**What happened to Sherlock?**

That evening when he was coming back and retreating over the creek he got shot in the back by a Japanese, unfortunately killed. But that man, we always felt that he deserved the Victoria Cross.

36:30 **What was Sherlock's full name?**

It's in the record, but I just can't tell you without referring to it but it's in the file you can add to it.

**What rank was he?**

Captain.

**Did you actually meet him?**

No, I didn't know him at all personally.

**That's quite a significant story. So once you arrived at the airfield in Wau you had to make your way to Brigade Headquarters, and when you arrived at the headquarters what did you find**

37:00 **there?**

We were in communications operating well. Everything was going there, there was no.... The ground was all, it was high ground, mountainous country and of course not the jungle as we know it but there was kunai. Kunai grass which grows to probably nine foot high and that was a bit of a problem area in relation to travelling through that part of ground. The hospital

37:30 was down the track at this point, of course bikes weren't part of our scene, jeeps were issued in place of bikes and I had to get to hospital to deliver some dispatches through the ground and that was fairly unnerving experience because you're driving along a road with this high 9 foot kunai on each side, and I knew where to go and how to get there by the map, I hadn't been there before but you were always a bit concerned that the snipers would

38:00 be at you, but I never got touched. I got to the hospital and delivered the dispatches and came back, but by that stage of course the Japanese had been repulsed. The untidy situation of Wau and your history tells you this. We were fortunate we were able to bring in two artillery pieces from the 2/3rd Field Regiment and they set themselves up at the top of the Wau aerodrome and

38:30 heading eastward I think it would have been, outside the township of Wau was an area they called the slaughter yards which was where they used to slaughter the animals for consumption and the Japanese for some unknown reason came in in their mass and they settled in the slaughter yards to have

39:00 their midday meal. They sat down to have their rice and their things and our forward observation officer had pinpointed this particular piece of ground as a ranging site and of course when they observed the Japanese they engaged them with the artillery fire and just annihilated the entire mass. And when we

drove through there later my OC [Officer Commanding] Scott,

39:30 Trapper Scott as we called him he was a captain of the section. Everywhere there was bodies by the dozens and dozens and dozens and it was all sort of waterlogged there and they had to corduroy the track, that means that they put logs in line so that you rode over them and the Japs were just lying to the side. All bloated by this stage of course with the heat of the day and they had burials.

40:00 **So the Japanese were buried?**

Obviously, they would have been bulldozed in a common grave I should imagine. As we had our casualties we used to go out of an evening and we'd be asked to go and attend a funeral of those that were our own troops and we'd have a padre there and we'd have the bodies sewn in their blankets and lay them to rest and the burial service said over them. But as far as the Japanese were concerned

40:30 there was just no concern for them at all.

## Tape 7

00:32 **So Keith can you give me a description of Wau as you remember it?**

Insofar that it was a settlement with this aerodrome, which was on the steep slope, the high side being occupied by the hangers and at the low side there was the Bulolo River which flowed down to Bulolo and then the high mountain range

01:00 behind that. Now the terrain allowed aircraft had to come down at a steep decent down through the range to flatten and then land on the Wau strip and because it was on a hill, allowed the plane to pull up fairly quickly. In reverse when the plane took off because it went downhill it could speed up more rapidly then the average and then again climb out away steeply away from the mountain range.

01:30 So that was the terrain, so the surrounding ground was as I said before kunai grass, tall kunai grass, 6,7,8 foot high, little bits of settlement on the river why, they were all abandoned of course the New Guinea European people had been moved out. There were no natives there as we knew them at that particular point except for the ANGAU [Australian New Guinea Administrative Unit]

02:00 people who had control of them, they were using them as carriers for our equipment and our food etc. And basically that was it; we were living in the houses that had been previously occupied by the local people that had lived there. And we stayed there until such time as we moved on from there; oh of course we were just living under shelter under our own one-man pup tents to keep

02:30 the rain... I mean you could set the clock by the rain in the afternoon, would come down pretty regularly, about 3 or 4 hours and then it would stop and then it would be fine in the morning and then it would start to rain again. But that was the terrain in the high mountainous country and the conditions in which we moved forward on.

**So you mentioned that you'd contracted malaria, I was just wondering if there were other**

03:00 **illnesses that you contracted. I believe skin diseases were quite prominent in New Guinea.**

Beri Beri was a prevalent one. I never contracted it fortunately, but I do know of some of our mates and one of the painful operations or ways to cure it was. When then got to the hospital the sisters used to have to go with a needle and prick the skin of the area until they found

03:30 where the dead flesh and the live flesh came to being and then they would mark that with a texta or a pen, marker pen and then they'd treat accordingly and each day they would go through that. I believe it wasn't a very pleasant experience getting these punctures with skins all the time.

**And I imagine because of the climate that there were other skin conditions, rashes etc?**

Yes, you used

04:00 liberally amount of powder to keep yourself dry as, dry as possible. Underneath the arms and in between the legs of that nature. But in many instances of course you were running, walking through water, your boots were perpetually wet, your feet were perpetually wet but I personally seemed to survive and I don't recall any of our own unit people suffering and with any damage to the feet or being constantly wet.

04:30 **Was it around this time that there was the incident with the Japanese soldier who was charging towards you, and you?**

That was an area when I was on what we call a staging area where I was responsible to ensure the line was kept in tact on the way through. If there was a break, because we would assume that a branch would have fallen down

05:00 and snapped the line and the lines then would normally lay on the ground and that line would break and

we would walk towards, following the line along, we found the break and then repaired it. Now if the line was forward of our position towards the forwarding elements we would call up and get infantry to support us as we went through. To my recollection and it's a little bit vague at this point,

- 05:30 but walking through we did run into an ambush, to what extent the volume is I can't quite recall, all I know was that there was a Japanese in my at the front of me coming towards me and he had a rifle and bayonet. Now obviously the rifle must have jammed or he didn't have any ammunition because as he lunged I was then in place of the Webley 45 pistol that I was armed
- 06:00 with an Owen Sub Machine carbine, that was my new weapon of defence. And that was loaded and ready to fire and as he came towards me of course I just let the whole burst of the magazine at him and he fell. He was dead obviously before he hit the ground, but as he came towards me he just scratched the side of my neck, not a deep scratch but a scratch enough to draw a little bit of blood. Much the same
- 06:30 as you would do when you were bleeding but I never gave it a thought and the patrol who had stopped with those who had made the attack on us and we repaired the line and we went about our business and it wasn't until two or three days later that the infection set in and of course the neck swelled up and swelled up and I became very ill. It was then that I was relieved from that post, brought back and the doctors saw the seriousness of it and they organised

- 07:00 the natives to carry me out on a stretcher. That took three days to get me from that position back to the Wau hospital, where they operated on me and then I was taken back to the Moresby Base Hospital where I was further treated and subsequently recovered, able to rejoin my unit.

**So he must have gotten very close to you. Well he obviously, did he get close?**

I should imagine,

- 07:30 well he would have been, yes I suppose it would have been more than a couple or three feet at the most. But I think, it's hard to visualize now the fact that I could see for years the face, well I didn't know in my mental time but I could see that face coming towards me and of course it was a natural reaction to fire and defend and he as I said, the momentum of his movement
- 08:00 carried him still forward, the bullets didn't stop his body from moving forward. But as he had as I said the magazine of an Owen Submachine Gun carbine carries 32 9 mm bullets and the whole magazine was emptied out.

**That mustn't have been a pretty sight after?**

Well I didn't even bother looking at him; we just got on with our job.

- 08:30 **Well it sounds to me and correct me if I'm wrong but at that moment your training really kicked in?**

Well obviously if you did your training it takes part of it and you do it unconsciously.

**And so you mentioned from there you did get ill from the injury? From the gash on the neck from the bayonet, so can you describe**

- 09:00 **the infection that took hold?**

It was, I was sick, I can't quite be clearly remembering what, but I was sick and I didn't feel well and I thought in reality it was the malaria coming onto me again. Perhaps it felt to me the same symptoms but when I got back to the, and I talking from that place where I looked after the lines and that break area would have been about 3

- 09:30 to 4 hours walk and I got back and the medical officer in the brigade examined me and he realised that it was worst than he could do anything with. So he then organized the natives to, you have 12 natives allotted to one stretcher and they carry you in teams of four and of course you're on a very rough track and
- 10:00 they're very, they smelt to high heaven, but they were very gentle and they wouldn't. And they carrying some Japanese prisoners who had been wounded back and it was important to us according to the things that I'd heard that you had to, they needed to get information from these Japanese as to military movements etc, but having been wounded they needed to be carted back but these local natives were not happy with this and they'd cart
- 10:30 them back but whilst the guards that were travelling with these people as they went back towards the base, when then stopped to have a rest instead of lowering them gently they just moved out to one side and bang down went the poor old Jap and consequently they didn't last the distance because being wounded and then subject to that sort of treatment they died of their, the results of that. Or maybe one of two got through I couldn't,
- 11:00 you know, I'm just another person on a stretcher but I did know that there were a lot of protest particularly the guards going crook at the natives because they didn't lower them down gently at that point.



**So you spent 3 days with the natives on a stretcher, what were they like?**

I said smelly.

**Did you talk facts with them? Did you talk to them? Could they speak English?**

Well you couldn't really, though in pidgin English. You spoke in pidgin English.

11:30 There was no long-term conversation. They were wiry men but I was 6 foot 2 at the time and I was fairly solid in my build, so I would have been no lightweight and of course in addition to my self they would carry my pack and my other personal gear.

12:00 I didn't carry any arms back; they held my arms at Brigade Headquarters.

**So what actually was the operation they did on you when you arrived at the hospital?**

Well just as I said I went into the operating theatre and I can always remember that I had to count from 100 backwards and I can remember counting 100, 99, 98, 97, 96 and then he said "C'mon mate it's all over,

12:30 it's all over." I remember the fear of worrying about the pain. But and that was it so they operated on and they opened up and whatever the problem was it had been fixed, but of course it was, must have been more disastrous then what they thought it was, so they sent me back to Moresby. And I can't recall even the time, I know I was there with a number of our others mates, Owen McKewin, one of my...

13:00 this fellow who unfortunately got killed on the last day of war he'd got wounded by shrapnel in Wau and he was still recuperating because they had to do a skin graft on him. And they did what was called a pinch graft. They pinch a bit of flesh out of one part of the body and stick it in another and he ended up like a little checkerboard. But that was a bit of a painful operation, but Owen used to be quite brave about the whole thing. But he and I were

13:30 in the hospital together at the time.

**So how long were you in hospital for at that?**

As I said a couple of week's maybe, It's hard to remember now.

**And then you arrived back at your unit, and where were you sent to then?**

Well then we moved our way back down to Salamaua until such time as that campaign finished. And we then got on the American,

14:00 they called them LCI's, Landing Craft Infantry, small ships and we were taken back to one of the major ports I'm not too sure now and then onto Ovestland and back to Sydney or back to Brisbane. We came back on an American Troop ship to Brisbane and then we were given leave and sent on up to oh sorry from Brisbane we came up to the Tablelands,

14:30 sorry I'm telling lies again. To Cairns, it was to Cairns we landed and from Cairns we went up to the Tablelands where the Camps had already been laid out and we settle ourselves in there and we were given leave and worked our way back.

**So just going back to your work as a signaller on Wau, like that must have been you know obviously quite different work from your work**

15:00 **as a rider and as a dispatcher. Did you like your signalling work?**

Well you had a jeep in those days, see there were no bikes as such and we still used the role of Don R going around to the various locations and I was always, mostly then because it was a jeep people would travel with me, our OC Captain Scott, would accompany me on various trips and things.

15:30 Or one of the sergeants would want to go somewhere, so we were almost a taxi service as well as a delivery of dispatches service. But that occurred whilst we were in areas where vehicular traffic could move, but after that we were all on foot. And I remained on foot for that campaign and subsequently on the last campaign which was the...

16:00 no I'm sorry on the, Aitape, Wewak I did a short stint of time on the jeep whilst on the coast but then we went into the highlands of the Torricelli Mountains I was again on foot.

**Now for the record could you and this might seem like a really obvious question to you. Could you actually describe the jeep that you used to drive in?**

A little four-wheel vehicle. You could lower

16:30 the windscreen, it lowered down, it had a hood that you could lift the hood or lower the hood, it ... you could have in a series of gears, you could have it in low range gear in rear wheel drive or high range in rear wheel drive or you could have it in low and high range in four wheel drive. It was a very versatile vehicle, very versatile vehicle.

**Did you enjoy riding?**

Oh yeah, it was a great

17:00 experience yes.

**Ok we're back in Cairns now, tell me a bit about the training that you underwent up in Cairns?**

On the Tablelands?

**Sorry on the Atherton Tableland?**

We did our, again we did our manoeuvres up there and we did marching through the jungle areas that we

17:30 had, there was Lake Mareeba I think and there was another couple of patches where we had special boots made for us with cleats on the soles to prevent us from slipping. And we went on routine marches for those type of operations. I also had the role of being a Don R within the division of course and had to ride from the Tablelands down through to Cairns and come back and in those days of course the, I think it was called the Barrier Highway was only a one way traffic you had

18:00 to get, be at, get there a certain time to, so would get in the flow of the traffic. The road was very narrow and very, very windy and but I used to do that twice a week that Don R run from Cairns down. And that's of course the American Headquarters was down there and then we did our invasion training and again we were, I was back on bikes then, but then we were going back into the jeeps and

18:30 we had to waterproof our jeeps and all we had the intake and the exhaust were pipes up above our heads and the landing craft put us outside of Trinity Beach and we drove into the water and all you could see were two heads and these two pipes sticking up and you'd drive onto the sand and climb up into the thing. And that was our invasion training and which apparently at that time we didn't know we were training to do the invasion of Aitape.

19:00 And the funny part of it was that all that training and all that waterproofing of the spark plugs and all the other bits and pieces to ensure the motor didn't conk out whilst you were going in off the landing craft, when we did eventually land off Aitape the LCI dropped us out of the front part of the ship and we drove onto dry sand.

**Was there**

19:30 **a bit of a chuckle at that time?**

All the effort we put into it for nothing. It wasn't an invasion as such because the Yanks were already there so we weren't involved in an invasion landing as such.

**So what did you use to waterproof the spark plugs and the engine?**

Oh there was a pasty type of material that you just wrapped around. It was grease and wrapped it

20:00 around with waterproof material to prevent the distributor points and the plugs from getting any moisture in them.

**So was there anything else about the training on the Tablelands that you can recall?**

We had after the training we would have barbecues and the beer of course was, one of the

20:30 problems with beer from Cairns which was the local brewery, there was one of the heaviest alcohol contents in Australia. And now they used to travel, no I know they wouldn't travel to Cairns they used to send it up by train from Cairns and we would get our allocation which would be a keg of beer and we had our mugs or what we had we called them a Lady Blamey, I don't know whether you've every heard of the word a Lady Blamey, but it was a bottle,

21:00 a beer bottle which we took the top part of it off by means of a heated wire and we made a handle so it became a pot and the reason we did this was because Lady Blamey was so disgusted to see Australian Troops drinking out of bottles that she asked that something be done and somebody came up with this idea and hence we got, we used to make these ourselves. A lot of people put etchings onto them and made their name, put their name onto them and they were

21:30 known as our Lady Blameys. And you would get into a circle and you would go round and you'd get your little mug of beer from this keg on the bar of the mess and you'd wander around having your go and if you went around until such time that the harden group of those that could still stand on their feet were there at the bar without having to go around any further until we drank all the beer out.

**So I'm just having a little bit of trouble visualizing the Lady Blamey, can you describe to me exactly what it was with the piece of wire?**

22:00 You know a beer bottle if you take from the neck down, a third of the length of the bottle and you wrap a piece of wire around that which in this instance we used to use Signal Wire saturated in petrol and then set fire to it. The heat would cause the wire to heat up and create a fracture on the glass and that

would cleanly cut that section of the top part or the

- 22:30 one third down from the neck of the bottle down. You'd take that part off and then get a file and file the edges so you didn't cut your lips and any shape or form. And then with a bit of wire just created a little handle that you'd wire around the side of the glass itself. Some just used it without the use of the handle but I had one with a handle on it.

**So what did you actually think of Lady Blamey's suggestion?**

Well it was a more sociable

- 23:00 way of drinking I suppose, I mean we didn't ... I didn't drink to the extent that I had to drink out of a beer bottle but I mean you couldn't carry a glass because it was too fragile, whereas the bottle glass was quite a solid glass which would take a fair amount of punishment. But no we were quite happy to drink out of them. It was just a nickname that came into being.

**And was Lady Blamey, General Blamey's wife?**

- 23:30 That's right, yes.

**What did you think of General Blamey around this time?**

Well he was our General and we ...soldiers don't query that lot, far up the line, we were a long way from that. He was there. I think the only decent we had was in the Middle East, when Menzies came across and we were given strict instructions that there was to be no Boogie or Cat calling or anything of that nature.

- 24:00 Of course the Prime Minister hadn't had a good reputation for having got the nickname "Pig Iron Bob" for selling all the scrap iron to Japan at that time. And he wasn't held in high popularity in the Armed Service. But I didn't have any particular likes or dislikes for the General. He was another soldier as far as I was concerned.

**So you left the Atherton Tablelands.**

- 24:30 **Where did you go from there?**

Well that was then the, after the Trinity invasion training and the completion of our training. We were then moved into land at Aitape and it was a campaign, the Aitape/Wewak which was really now looking back on History, not a requirement because the Americans had landed and was leaving only isolated pocket of the Japanese who had no rations,

- 25:00 were starving they were starting to eat their own. They didn't really pose the big threat they were prior to that, but the powers to be said that we would relieve the Americans they were moving on further north through another battle area. So then we made two attacks, the 16th and 19th Brigades

- 25:30 moved along the coast towards Wewak and the 17th Brigade we moved up into the high ground which was known as the Torricelli Mountains and again, we always maintain that we did it worse than the 16th who did the Kokoda Trail, they only had one go at the mountains, we had two goes which was the Battle of the Ridges which was at the Kokoda Trail and also the Torricelli Mountains which was a similar sort of terrain.

- 26:00 But having got up there all we were doing was really mopping up. Setting up night camps for Japanese who were giving themselves up, one by one, a lot of them were next for the cooking pot, according to the interpreters they were being singled out and there was evidence of troops being eaten.

**Evidence, what sort of evidence?**

Buttocks were cut off the bodies

- 26:30 and they'd been used for eating.

**Did you witness this yourself?**

What them eating it. No, no I'd never particularly seen a body mutilated in such a manner.

**So you mentioned before that you know with the hindsight of history that this was unnecessary the Wewak campaign. Is that how you feel yourself?**

I felt that there were better ways

- 27:00 than to waste the thousands of lives we lost in that campaign. And we hold it very close to us because in recent times they had a big Tsunami up there if you may recall in your history and the natives lost some 2000 in this Tidal Wave that came in. Now our division was instrumental in raising \$10,000 dollars to help the relief of that

- 27:30 area, because we were associated with it. We had quite a big amount of publicity in the money we raised for that. And my little unit we raised \$500 in our own right of the total and so we were quite proud of the total Division's effort.

**So what was your impression of the Japanese as an enemy?**

28:00 I didn't have any feeling for them at all. None at all.

**Did you respect them as an enemy?**

No. No, I had no, not being a front line soldier per say as being responsible to attack them and kill them and do that. But

28:30 stepping back from that situation, we still have people today, and I know a number personally or one in particular who absolutely hates the Japanese. Now I don't hate the Japanese today, I don't particularly respect them because they don't recognise the things that they did wrong. Even today in their teachings, they don't teach anything about their military history and their demise

29:00 nor their way in which they treated our troops and other troops in the prisoner of war situation. But when you look at war in total, we say that they were no worse or lesser worse or lesser, what's another word I'm trying to use? Or not as barbaric as that as the Germans

29:30 with the Jewish situation. I mean they were cruel but they didn't go out with mass murder to that extent, I mean there were isolated cases of beheading etc as part of their traditional thing, perhaps the reason that I can't come to grips with them is because they weren't Christian whereas the Germans people are Christians in the main. I couldn't come to an understanding

30:00 to that.... I didn't have, I don't disrespect the Japanese but I wouldn't make a point of going to their country to see what they do in life.

**You've mentioned several times your Christianity and the importance of your faith throughout your whole life through your schooling, to your war life to your post war life, and I was just wondering like you know**

30:30 **during your war life would you ever consult a padre about, confide in him any problems that you might be having, or make use of the religious men in the army at any point?**

I don't recall having to seek solace from a priest or a padre as we

31:00 call our minister, I did have high respect for the Salvation Army because no matter where you went you'd always find the Sallies there with their little do drop in and hop in's and all the other to have your cup of very weak coffee, but it was a hot drink of coffee as such and the Sallies [Salvation Army] were there to make sure that you were given a biscuit and a bit of liquid refreshment to help you on your way.

31:30 All that, I remember that strongly in Syria and more particularly so in New Guinea, you'd come along, of course they had these little stops all the way along a track. And you would climb a hill of 2 or 3 thousand feet and you'd really out of breathe and your really done it and at the top of the hill there's a "G'day mate, come and have a cup of coffee" and that was a Sally there in his role, so they did a marvellous job and that's why I always stick a few bob in their till and I

32:00 always support them in their appeals here in Australia.

**Because apparently some of the Sallies really got in a quite, they were right in the thick of it, they got into really obscure places?**

I wouldn't be surprised, yeah. I mean everywhere that I went there was always a Sallie there somewhere to help you on your way with a bit of refreshment or of course one of the things you suffered with was blisters on your heels in particular. When you were walking and your feet were wet,

32:30 your socks were wet and you only had a given number of socks and you had to put on wet socks the following day. And one of things you would do before you got to your Regimental Aid post or RAP's as you called it R A P's they'd trim the skin off the affected blister and then make you do a highland fling by pouring Metho on it but until such time that your skin toughen up

33:00 you had to go through that ordeal. But that was one of the areas they suckered us and cared for us in addition to given us that welcome drink of coffee and biscuit.

**Its such a simple thing and yet it seems to have been very important to morale?**

It was, it was.

**I'm also wondering about how important mateship was to you?**

Oh very much so. The fellow I was trying to remember yesterday, Ian Johnson

33:30 who lives now up in the mountains he's there still close by. Most of our, whereas infantry battalions were confined to the state, such as the 2/1st, 2/2nd and 2/3rd Battalions are New South Wales based and the bulk of their reinforcements were all from New South Wales. And the 5th, 6th and 7th were all from Victoria so consequently they had the Victorian there, but signals were a

34:00 cosmopolitan race in the sense of they came from every state. West Australia, South Australia, Victoria,

Tasmania, New South Wales and Queensland and we all came together. So in my writings today as the President of the Association we cover, the bulk of them come from the two main states of Victoria and New South Wales but we still have quite a number in Queensland, we have 1

- 34:30 in South Australian and I think we still have about half a dozen in West Australia. So we can't have the gatherings as those of the battalions have because of that spread of their domiciling areas and we rely on those, I do by letter or by occasional phone call. We have a fellow up at, just outside Taree,
- 35:00 a chap by the name of Jim McSweeney he's been a, he came to us, he was a Don R that came to us at the later stage, or joined us at Wau as a reinforcement and he was a great mate we always kept together. Owen McKewin, this I mentioned to you before, he was a close mate he was a linesman with the section and unfortunately he was killed on the last day of war. I wasn't there when it happened, and I knew...
- 35:30 He was a fellow that was a baker by trade and he again joined us in Wau as a reinforcement and he was married with two little kids and he had moved into Cairns and he had set himself with some pies, he was a pastry cook and he made a series of pies, with every penny he had in his pocket. And he set himself up as a pie store outside the school thinking this is where I'll sell pies.
- 36:00 Did not sell one pie, now he's a man, civilian at that time, last penny spent on this enterprise, a wife and two kids and house that he's got to pay rent on. He was very destitute, so he thought I'll, he'll wheel down so he went down to the pub which was opposite the open air theatre, Cairns has changed today because when I went up there I deliberately went round to revisit these places. But he stood outside the pub there and at interval
- 36:30 everybody comes across to have a beer before the pub close down and within a matter of five minutes all his pies were gone. So that set him up being a business as being a pie man outside the hotel at Cairns, he set his pies up and he and I, we were great mates we used to have lots of yarns together and bits and pieces.

**Now you're mentioning that the 17th Brigade was from all**

- 37:00 **over the shop?**

Towards the end, with the reinforcements of course many were drawn from other states. Ideally when they first were formed the 16th Brigade using that as a starting point, was the first Brigade to be formed in November, of 1939 and we still hold a memorial service out at Ingleburn where the camp is or was.

- 37:30 They gathered there and we have a Western Desert Day in February to celebrate the first attacks in January because we're too close to Christmas to hold it. But that area was totally New South Wales as was Victoria and they didn't start off until April the following year and by the time they got in, by that stage of course the 16th Brigade were already embarked and overseas in Palestine doing their training at that stage,
- 38:00 but as casualties occurred for argument sake we lost the entire 2/7th Battalion in Crete through taken as prisoners of war, our 2/8th Battalion was badly mauled in Greece, my own section, in L Section where we were 31 strong when we went over to Greece, was 6 remaining when we came back, so people that came in, obviously would be all
- 38:30 from other states.

**The reason why I wanted to ask you that, because I believe that there was a lot of competition amongst the divisions. Can you talk a bit about that?**

Oh yeah, well they had their sports, particularly up on the Tablelands; we were having our sports days and playing football. I was being a bit tall... I was Victorian born as I explained to you in the beginning and I was a Australian Rules player at school.

- 39:00 I used to play quite well, and I enjoyed the game and of course in the K Section that I belonged to the predominant amount of people there almost in total was New South Welshmen and the Brigade was very strong, with a lot of New South Welshmen too at this point in time because of the reinforcements coming in with the loss of troops prior to that. They were coming from other states and in the main they were coming from New
- 39:30 South Wales because it was the heaviest population. And I can remember this time, "How about coming in and having a game of football?" and I said "I'd love to." And they said, "What position do you play?" I said "I play the ruck." "The ruck, what's the ruck?" "The ruck!" "No." he said, "We're talking Rugby, Rugby League." and I said, "I don't know." He said, "You're a big, you'll make a good lock man." and I said, "All right,
- 40:00 I'll have a go." five minutes later I was back off. That a madman's game until now I know what it's like and I follow it. I don't play it, I've never played it. But by the Australian Rules standard those days it was a very good game.

## Tape 8

00:32 **So Keith we were talking about the rivalry between the different divisions, particularly in the Atherton Tableland, when the 6th, 7th and 9th Division were all camped together. Can you talk a bit more about that rivalry?**

Well in so far that we were very proud of our own operations, I don't recall other than

01:00 the instance of going to a camp or going to a town at least and not having any transport, thumbing a lift and this truck pulling up and of course they would check who you are you see and we were identified by our colour patches and each colour patch the shape designates the division you belonged to and the 6th Division was an oblong division. And these particular truckloads of people they were 9th which they

01:30 had a tea colour patch and the driver had a look at me and said "Oh no, you're wearing the wrong washing mate. Well you can keep walking." So I got another lift later on down the, another truck came by and picked me up. But that was the type of rivalry that we wouldn't give ground to them and perhaps they wouldn't give ground to us. But that was the only instance that I recall that where it came into being. I don't recall any upheavals. We were kept separate; it was one of these things, which you had to ...

02:00 we were in our own camp, our own areas and our own cars and in the various towns that we went of leave we didn't create any problems I don't think.

**So there were no heated fights?**

I don't think so I think we were more amicable between ourselves than we were between that and the American Force.

**It's interesting to hear that there was this internal rivalry**

02:30 **between...**

Well the word rivalry was more, I can't think of another word that you'd use. It was competition like today's football matches you know the different teams are keen to .... that they're better than the other one and so we go on.

**Now you mentioned during the tape change that you had changing of the guard competitions at Atherton amongst the different divisions. Can you tell me about that?**

03:00 They would ... within the Brigades of say the 6th Division you've got nine battalions, now they would have elimination tests, that the Battalion would pick out the best of their troops to do a changing of the guard and then against another Battalion and the better of the two would then move on to challenge another on until such time, the best Battalion

03:30 of those nine Battalions in the Division would be recognised as the best and they would get a prize of perhaps a keg of beer or whatever the case may be, I couldn't even recall what that would have been. But that was to keep the morale up and keep the traditions going. And of course we then had the big Quonset Hut theatres and we used to go and watch the films and it was there we saw how the Battle of El Alamein took place with all the gunfire and things. We were getting the publicity then

04:00 that hadn't been occurring before because of censorships and the strict control on releasing of any information. And then MacArthur was always in the fore, he was always, MacArthur's way of communicate was American Forces with some allied troops. Never gave credit to the Australians. I, interesting part of my way of thinking of Australian History -

04:30 Australians were the first to push the enemy back from 1939, which was the advance in Libya. Australians were the first to push the Japanese back on the Kododa Trail, there were no Americans there. I mean I'm not taking it away that the Americans didn't do a marvellous job and that we would never have survived without them but it was we who broke the spirit of the Japanese, they weren't the invincibles that we thought they were,

05:00 or what people thought they were, and they were pushed back. And we pushed them back on the Kokoda Trail, we pushed them back at Wau and the story of Sherlock proves that they weren't invincible.

**So what was the general opinion amongst the Australian Troops towards MacArthur's?**

Well we didn't have an opinion in those days. We weren't concerned really, we just. You know I'm talking in hindsight of what we used to hear,

05:30 you never hear of credit given where credit was due. Take today's War in Iraq, Americans and their allies, I think they used the word. Australia did get an odd mention. It's nature.

**It's their nature. So thanks for telling us more about**

06:00 **Atherton and what went on there. Just going back to Wewak. Can you describe, I've got a**

**general sense of your know that it was obviously tropical and that you know the weather and the conditions that you were under. I was wondering if you could be a bit more specific about you know the weather conditions in Wewak.**

Well Wewak itself of course I was not involved in until the war ended because I was on the Torricelli

06:30 Mountains, which was the high mountainous country, again it was continuously wet in the evenings and though we had good shelter as I said the enemy force wasn't that bad that we couldn't set ourselves up. We still had strict control as far as any light outside the area of operations for the radio for communications or the line communications. But there was no

07:00 real discomfort as we knew it in the first campaign, where we slept wet, where in this particular instance we had our tents and we could sleep fairly dry. It was up there that we heard of course, I think it was up in the Torricelli's that we heard that the European War had ended and there was not a great deal of .... oh well, so what

07:30 it's gone. When we heard, it came across at night the news that Japan had capitulated everybody went mad and the padre he was running around with a jug or cordial and we were all drinking to thank goodness the War had ended. And we were up there away from everybody and everything and very isolated so there wasn't a great deal of work to be done,

08:00 it was just purely, we'd get reports for the natives that there was a Japanese group foraging through their gardens and they were taking their women and would we help, so we would go out on patrols occasionally. I'd go out as an assistant and then the wire for communications and we'd get into a village, there would be nothing there. The natives would have scared these

08:30 Japanese away, obviously they weren't in a very fit state to support. So we'd stay there and they'd look after us, they'd feed us with yams and taros and something with no salt in it which was very unpalatable, but still it was food. But they were very friendly they didn't like the Japanese, of course none of the natives did.

**So how did news of the War End get through to your?**

By radio, by radio. We had then

09:00 a receiving radio that could receive signals all over the world. And we use to listen to a German station prior to the Victory in Europe, VE Day. And they were playing music, beautiful classical music that we listened to. The Japanese radio used to send out

09:30 propaganda messages with no meaning for whatsoever, but it was very nice to listen to the German radio on this world band radio we had as a receiver. It wasn't other than for... we didn't pick up signals as far as communications were concerned.

**So you, when you found out the news you got drunk on Cordial did you?**

Yes

**Can you remember what flavour the cordial**

10:00 **was?**

I couldn't tell you that, I know it was just a cordial, because we weren't given any liquor at all whilst we were in action up on the highlands, we got that when we went back down to the beach. We were allocated a bottle of beer a week, that was your allocation, and when we eventually got back of course your allocation was compiled

10:30 of whatever number of bottles you were entitled to but we didn't get, oh sorry it was two bottles a week for those who were on the beach, but when we got back we only got one a week, so whatever number of weeks we were there we were entitled to that amount of beer. But one bottle of beer and we were silly as ducks because we hadn't had a drink at all. And one of the wasteful things we used to do during the war of course as you can appreciate it, in the tropics, we were right on the beach we had tents that were only a matter of a few yards

11:00 away from the water's edge and we would dig a hole in the sand, put our beer in there and pour petrol over it and that would, petrol would chill the beer down. Nobody smoked near it of course.

**So, you mentioned a couple of times your friend, I believe his name was Owen?**

Owen McKewin.

**Who actually died the day the war ended?**

I only heard of this in the end because he was a reinforcement,

11:30 he joined in the Wau campaign. These people, we would discharge because of our points, we earnt so many points for the campaigns we were in and the number of day we had served and we were the first to be discharged and the others who had joined later they hadn't accumulated sufficient points to receive discharge.

## **Was it, from the sounds of it, it sound like the war end was**

12:00 **a, primarily a happy occasion, I'm wondering if it was bitter sweet?**

Well, when we were flown back from the Torricellis down to the coast. I'd been moved to the aerodrome, I was using the base as communications and they were landing the DC3 and then flying us out, so we came down there and

12:30 I went back to the other elements of our signals that were there and we were there for a few days until such time as we were escorted back out. Because the interesting part was that years and years later in 1960, working for my company at Unilever, I was on the export market and travelled back through that area and doing some research for the company in terms

13:00 of Marketing opportunities and I went to the headland in Wewak and the little hut that I said I looked back along the beach and the reminiscing then came back of those years. And of course in the tropics when the sun goes down it's daylight one minute and dark the next, there's no twilight as such, and I had to go back in to the hotel. Now the hotels in those areas are the dining room, the bar, a lounge room of such

13:30 and all your living quarters, are little huts all in a round and the reception area is in the main building. So I had to meet with this government official who was having tea with me and I went and joined him and we were sitting there and we had a beer and I was listening to some music on the piping system, and I happen to say "You know it's a funny thing were sitting in a bar in a pub where I finished the war

14:00 after five years, I'm drinking a Sushi Japanese beer, I'm cooled by a Japanese fan and I'm listening to pipe music on Japanese equipment", I said "What the hell did we fight a war for? So we won the war, but lost the trade." That was the thought that went through my mind.

## **Was there much of a delay**

14:30 **in your return to Australia after the War had finished?**

No, once we were on the boat, it was just a matter of days we got on the ship. Funny enough I'm very vague on where ... I'm sure we landed at Brisbane and then from Brisbane we went by train back down to Sydney and we were discharged in Sydney, because I can remember the police were standing at the end of the queue when we were handed our civilian gear and hat

15:00 and what have you and this fellow said "You look like a fine young upstanding man, How about the police force?" And I said "I've just done 5 years of regimentation, no thanks I'm not interested." They were obviously looking for recruits to join.

## **Can you describe your homecoming?**

Not a very happy one, because I had no mother. I had lost my mum in 42, 43. Rose Laird, my cousin and Bill

15:29 of course they took me into their house. But I had nobody to welcome me when I came in except they had made sure their home was my home. So when I was discharged I went back and stayed with them, I had my own room. They hadn't had any children at the time. Bill, her husband, Bill Laird he wanted to start up in a

16:00 trucking business and I had a few pounds in my reserve and so he needed the deposit for the truck to buy so we used my money for the deposit and went into partnership and we were then carting wheat up in the, into Dubbo from the wheat farmers. But I was so riddled with malaria; I couldn't even tie a bootlace up so my

16:30 input as far as a working partner was absolutely hopeless. Anyway we came back from there and eventually survive that and we had the truck and Bill got the contract to carry cement and sand for the Merrylands TAFE [College of Technical and Further Education], it was the school in those days, so we'd drive down to Liverpool in the day and we'd load up with river sand

17:00 and bring that back and in the night we'd drive down to Berrima and pick up a load of cement and bring that back. So one week I would do sand and the next week I would do cement and we'd turn about and again it was too much. So then the people said "The best thing you can do", the Repat [Repatriation] people said, "Would be get a light job where you're not involved in physical work." And I applied; I went to the Parramatta Bus

17:30 Company and they didn't want to put me on as a driver, they had all the drivers they wanted but they said, "We'll give you a test to see if you're any good as a conductor." Selling the tickets to the travellers, so that's where I stayed as a conductor for a short space of time and then became a bus driver, then left there and became a taxi driver, driving taxis at night whilst I built the

18:00 house in the day time, then went back to the bus company after the house was built, because it was a regular pay whereas taxi driver was based on the amount of work you did and eventually left there and got a job within Lyneham's Ice-cream company as a driver, they had a vacancy for a representative and I made application



- 18:30 for it and was given that job. I had to buy a little car, which was a ten-horse power Prefect. My wife and I were of course married then with children and I started with them in 1964 and in 1954 and in 1960 Unilever bought the company out and I went with them still as a representative and they
- 19:00 made me an Account Executive to go look at the export market of New Guinea, The British Solomon Islands, the New Hebrides and right through there and I used to travel 6 weeks at a time and out of a suitcase around those island doing the work. Then Unilever formed their own Export Company which was already in existence but they brought into being their Ice creams as well, so I was out of a job in that direction. So I then went into the grocery business and it was my responsibility
- 19:30 to look after the negotiations with the chains, with Woolworths and Coles for their promotional activities with our products. And I was responsible for New South Wales and Queensland and it became a little bit too much for both states, so I reverted back to New South Wales Sales Manager for the grocery trade. Until such time as the health conditions caught up with me and they gave me the opportunity
- 20:00 to resign or retire earlier than I normally would, I was still about 6 years off from retirement years. I was on our maximum job salary, I couldn't acquire any more in the position I was on and I couldn't see myself going up any further stairs until, with the amount of time I was away. So they release me quite amicably, we had quite a good financial package, I didn't miss out on that,
- 20:30 and retired. It took a long while to settle down, after working at one hundred and ten percent to doing nothing, but I gradually settled myself in and over the years I've, my wife and I have enjoyed life. We've had our obligatory trip to Europe and went up through to Scotland to my mother's birth place and looked around there and went across to Europe, to Paris and we've been up to Singapore a couple of times.
- 21:00 We were going on a round trip to Japan on the Fairstar when it broke down on the China Sea and we were evacuated into Vietnam and the ship had to be towed back into there and so they, and that was an episode after the war that was an interesting thing. And that's about it.

**And how many children did you have?**

We had five, five children, four boys and a girl. Our eldest boy is in his fifties,

- 21:30 fifty-three, he's now a QC [Queen's Counsel] with the... he's working currently with the Federal Government, Our daughter who's fifty-one, she's a school teacher with a Church of England school or an Anglican school, our second son, Bob or Robert he is a lay preacher and works for the New South Wales Bible Society,
- 22:00 our next son Glen, he's a detective in the New South Wales Police Force and our youngest son Timothy is a supervisor with an Australian Colour Coater which do colour bond fencing material and roofing etc. So everybody's quite well versed, they're married with the exception of Cathy who is separated or divorced now
- 22:30 but they've produced 17 grandchildren and we have 3 great grandchildren and another one coming along.

**You've done very well. Now I'm just wondering, to just go into a bit more depth about the effect of the war on your post war life and how it did affect you in later years?**

It

- 23:00 was there obviously, we drank too much, a lot of us drank too much, it threatened marriages, it threatened our own marriage. Going back into the army wasn't quite what my wife had anticipated, what would be married life. I did it maybe selfishly to gain that commission
- 23:30 that I received, but I could have gone on but we had two, there was a fellow along with me who was my sergeant at one stage and now he's a major general. Now I could of gone on from captain to major and if I had sat for the exams and eventually gone... but the social side of it becomes too heavily involved and you can't support a family on that lifestyle. So
- 24:00 that's why I resigned my commission and concentrated on my work within Unilever and that of course paid the dividends that allowed us to not be by any stretch the richest people in the suburb but we're comfortable, we have a superannuation, the government looks after me through the war services for the injuries I received and we get a little pension from the Government, so we're independent
- 24:30 of requiring anything...that mean that allows us to keep bread and butter on the table and anybody that comes in there's always a meal welcome for them.

**Now tell, you've touched on this a little bit, but I'd like you to into more detail. Were you able to confide and discuss your wartime experience with say June your wife?**

Not really,

- 25:00 we never talked about the war, I suppose perhaps we did. It think when I was courting June, I've just

gotta think back. I'd acquired a motorbike, naturally enough, it was a means of transport and we had gone across to Manly for a trip on one day, this was when she was my fiancée and

25:30 I got an attack of malaria. Now I had to get back with June on the back of the bike from Manly to Kellyville where she resided. And I wasn't too well because the malaria was taking over; anyway it was a relapse which occurs in lessening degrees at that time. Now when I was there lying on the couch in the living room area, that's off the kitchen, Ray

26:00 her brother came in and I can't remember how the thing occurred, but he either clapped his hands or made a bang of such a loud noise that I ended up climbing underneath the lounge, so that's the reaction of... and I got really mad, because of what he did, but he didn't realise at that time that what he did...to him it looked like a joke but to me it was a natural reaction

26:30 to what to do if something happened in its own little conflict. So they're the things that occurred.

**So has been, like you've slowing been releasing your memories and information to June and your family?**

Well in so far that we talk about it, they've wanted me to write the memories down. I had written one for one of the sons who was doing a school project

27:00 and he got the prize for that in so far that. And he said, "Grandfather, I never knew you were wounded." we never told them. So one of the things I've promised myself to do is to write these things that I've talked to you about, put it on paper and create a little booklet form for them. And have that as their heritage as far as their

27:30 grandfather did something. We have an emblem as I told you before, the kangaroo and the boomerang, and we called that I go to return, that was our emblem in the 6th Division and I've formed an emblemation of that in our 6th Division Association and we call what we do today to keep the school of education, the little book I gave you on Neville Blundall,

28:00 that book we send out to every high school in New South Wales. A number of the books to each for their libraries, a little insight into the upcoming generations that is one soldier's simplistic efforts of what he did in that particular battle, for which he won his military medal. And our role in the monies that we receive and the monies we raise go to further

28:30 educating the younger generations that Gallipoli is not the only thing that we should be remembering.

**Do you still dream about the war?**

Not any more, not until last night thank you very much. No I had a bad night last night.

**Sorry about that.**

No they're, they're obviously under the surface and they'll always be there, but that's part and parcel of your life. But they had been

29:00 settled down for quite a long time. The Japanese one is of no worry now, that was the one that used to have me waking up not knowing why I was waking up yelling my head off. But once I found out what it was that's gone. But the other episode is one that...I don't know how to...I don't think you can put in to bed completely, it will always be there.

29:30 We all think back to our various episodes of our life, even from very small childhood you can recall events that happened and I think that it's just one of these things. It's not a thing that you constantly bring to mind. For argument sake when I left the bus company to work for Linams Icecream Company you remember my telling. For years

30:00 and years and years I kept applying back to get a job as a bus driver now I was a State Sales Manager for Unilever which is a big position in the Company, but I had this, probably this fear of security or whatever, I don't know, in your background and I would wake up and I'd say to June, "You know I've been trying to get back on that bloody bus to drive it again in my dreams", but it was one of these things. So that in itself I said this.... they

30:30 fade in time, but your episodes or your interviews of yesterday unfortunately brought that a bit to the fore. And it did upset me I must admit, I didn't realise, I didn't think that it would. I read the article of the letter and the things that may have or could do and I thought I'm quite happy with that. I hadn't spoken of it for quite along time and so speaking about it has revived that memory and that scene again

31:00 but anyway we're going to put it to bed again.

**It's surprising how memories can still affect you; something from my childhood even can still affect me.**

We're all the like the Big Fat Greek Wedding, we're all fruit aren't we?

**Yeah, now I'm also wondering you've mentioned briefly how other**

31:30 **mates who you served with coped with their wartime experience and you've mentioned it briefly yourself the fact that a lot of you relied on alcohol as a way to dull the memories I suppose. Could you sort of speak in general terms about how other people coped with their wartime experience?**

It would be a bit difficult to speak in that area, because each man to his

32:00 own. Ian Johnson for argument sake who lives up at the mountains. Ian never married, he's been a bachelor all his life, he's now eighty-four I think. Ian was one of the heavies of the Bank of New South Wales now the Westpac and he travelled all over

32:31 the state. I use to run into him occasionally. But he said to me "OK, I had guys when we used to have Anzac Day in the early days and came across from West Australia, Jim Hammond and a guy that was a Gold Miner, he got a lot of gold out of Wau. It's good being a gold miner; you know where to look and how to get there and

33:00 he smuggled this gold back into Australia". Now I shouldn't have mentioned his name, but gold from New Guinea is as different to Gold from Australia as chalk is from cheese and he in his gold mining operations in Australia blended a bit of this New Guinea gold in every now and again, but he came across and visited us on

33:30 Anzac Day, been here, we've had a number stop here and stop over. Anybody from interstate we've always got a bed for them. But no, I've never, we never talk about the hard times, it was the funny times, Do you remember when...you know. The time was when Don Middles and I were sharing a slip trench and we,

34:00 suddenly there was a great clap of thunder, and I can remember saying "Oh Lord, is that rain?" And Don said "No, no it's gunfire from ours I think; we're not going to get wet." So that's the reality of situations of such.

**Now how important is Anzac Day to you?**

It's fairly important in so

34:30 far that I'm responsible for organising the reunion, the march is taken care of because. We have a banner and the, our lad Timothy he for the last 10 years at least to my knowledge has always carried that banner. Very proudly so and he's well liked by all those who attend.

35:00 And up until 2 years ago, I had marched, I had missed earlier marches because of certain conditions but last year I couldn't march and I got a wheelchair and Bob my son pushed me around in the wheelchair because I could have gone in a Taxi but I didn't feel that was the way to do it. Being president of my unit I didn't think I

35:30 was in a situation to do that. I would rather lead my unit through the march. So Bob pushed me ahead of my unit, but just behind Timothy. So I've got two boys representing me. But I wasn't comfortable with that, so I think no not this year, so I think that was my last march and I wrote in my newsletter accordingly. When we were down at the march off point and I was down seeing

36:00 those who were marching that wouldn't be at the reunion having a yarn with them and we were going to go up to the end of the march and watch them come through with Tim and gather the Banner and whatever, Bill Jenkins the secretary of the 6th Division and the President of the 2/3rd Battalion, said "Keith, come up with us on the Land Rover, where General Murchison is going to lead our division." Oh great so that lifted my spirits right up, so we were sitting up

36:30 there and I was going to be there with the General in the front along side the driver and Bill on one side and myself on the other. And just before the march was to take off, our section of the march, the blasted Land Rover broke down, the gear stick gave out and they couldn't do anything about it. So Allan Murchison, General Murchison he got out and he marched because I saw him, I've got him on tape marching and heading up the 6th Division and they put

37:00 myself into a little white cover over vehicle so I still went round with our unit or our division as a passenger, I wasn't with a Taxi type of thing, but next year I'm hoping that the blasted Land Rover doesn't break down and I get back up on it. I'll be pleased then because I'm still proud to be part of that march even though I can't physically do it on foot.

37:30 **And what does it mean to you to march?**

To respect those of us that are still here, that are not too well, and not travelling too well and of course naturally for those 38 members of our own signals that were killed or died in the cause of the War?

**Do you feel that it's an important day for younger generations to be a part of and witness?**

38:00 If it's feasibly possible, Yes, I think that they should, I think there should be more education towards that. Gallipoli is very well to say yes that was the birthplace of our nation in a sense, if you can say that so many lives were uselessly put to death people will see, uselessly put to death for something that didn't prove anything. You could argue

38:30 backwards and forwards on that. But it created the spirit, that spirit that has never left us. No other country has the comradeship that the Australia has. I don't care what they say there, no American nor Britain that has that factor that we have, we have that something within us that's not been able to be copied. And therefore we should be passing on more and more information.

39:00 The Kokoda Trail, I think is one the most important parts, where it saved Australia, we were never threatened in the First World War but had not that nor the Wau campaign been successful. And it was written into the books of the Japanese to take out all the Aborigines to send

39:30 the white male under castration to work and to populate the country by impregnating all the Australian women. That was part of their scene, so it needs to be told that this was the country that was defended by our own troops and was successful at it.

40:00 **Keith we're actually coming to the end of the interview now, we're running out of tape.**

I sound like a soapbox operator, don't I?

**Hey you're allowed to be, it's your interview. Is there anything else you would like to say in summary?**

Well its been a hard two days or two sessions, it's brought some heartache in recalling certain things, but if it is something

40:30 that does go onto the future generations and they see this and see part of whatever comes out of it, does make them realise that they are here, today because of what, we, not myself but people like me did in those periods of conflict.

**Well Keith, Graeme and I would really like to thank you for your honesty and**

41:00 **we hope that today hasn't been as hard as yesterday?**

No, it's much, much better than it was yesterday.

**We feel really privileged to hear your story and we'd like to thank you for your honesty and your wonderful story telling, thank you very much.**

I hope that it's been of benefit to you.

**It's been wonderful. Thank you.**

41:23 **End of tape**