Australians at War Film Archive

Alfred Jones (Murray, Bambino) - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:43 **Okay, Murray, could you tell us about your life, a brief history of your life as we discussed before.**

I was born in the Renmark Hospital, but at the time my mother and father were sharefarming at a place called Taldra,

01:00 in those days about 18 miles from Renmark and about 20 miles from Loxton, and in those days midwifes used to come to the house to deliver babies, but unfortunately something happened and she couldn't and my father says, "Well, looks like a buggy trip through the sands right up to Renmark." Well, at that time there was no bridge at Renmark, that wasn't built until 1927 and

01:30 the punt at Paringa. That day my elder brother, who was 10 years older than me, he said to some of the boys, "My Mum is going to have another baby and I'm the fifth of the family out of seven." At any rate, this chap's father had just brought a brand new 1923 Willys Knight [car] I believe and he came over that night and he said, "No way are you going in there in a buggy," so he drove my mother

02:00 into Paringa over the punt and lucky, there was a minor flood – the Murray was in minor flood that year but it hadn't gone over the road so he got through to Renmark, but when we got to Renmark, the flood had got between Renmark and the hospital so it was a row boat job into the hospital for Mum sort of thing, so that was the beginning of my life. Well , then we went back to the

02:30 farm at Taldra, and it wasn't very long after that my father became ill, it started off as bronchitis and ended up, I don't know really what it was but he had to leave the farm and we came and lived at Paringa and then he died just after I started school in February 1929 and later on my mother moved into Renmark. We kept going to Paringa School, we liked it there, and

03:00 when the floods were on we would run down the railway line and it was only about 3 miles, it's only about a mile and a half now, I should say I suppose kilometres these days because the road has been built up along the railway line and when we did that until I got my qualifying certificate when I was 12, 11 and half

Would you like to take it from where you were 12 and a half? You were in Renmark I think.

03:30 **12 and a half?**

Going to school.

The following year, because we couldn't afford to go to high school, I had to do the QC [qualifying certificate] again and seeing we only had 1 teacher for 7 grades, I used to, after I did all my work, I used to help out with Grade 1, 2 and 3 and at the end of the year, I went out on the farms to work on the

04:00 harvest and then when the wheat farming harvest was finished, we would come back into Mum to home and to Renmark, she had a house in Renmark by then and we would work on the fruit blocks and that was my life until I was 16 and I put in the whole seeding for a farmer and when I had finished on the Saturday morning I rode my bike into

04:30 Renmark through the drift sand and went into enlist because (INAUDIBLE) came down on the Thursday before to tell me he had enlisted. So I went in and passed the medical examiner and the recruiting officers were in the next room to the doctor's place and the doctor knew me quite well, as he had brought me into the world, Dr Harris. So anyway, when I went in there, the recruiting officer was Mr Mitchell.

05:00 Unfortunately, Mr Mitchell's wife was in hospital with my mother, so he knew exactly right to the minute when I was born so he said, "Oh no, you can't join the army." So I went out very despondent and went down the street and met some of my friends and they said, "Are you going to join up?" and I said, "Yeah, but Mr Mitchell wouldn't let me." Then they said, "He's gone to tea. Mr McIntryre, a veteran who had lost his leg at Gallipoli is the recruiting officer at present." So I was back in no time, and Mr McIntryre

said, “Good boy,” and put

05:30 me through very quickly. So I was in the army. That was on June 25th I believe, 1940 and then on 2 July, 80 of us from the river including, Tom Derrick, VC DCM [Victoria Cross, Distinguished Conduct Medal] I knew very well, he came from Berri, and we went down to Adelaide in the train and were taken to Wayville Showgrounds on 5 July, I was sworn in as a member of the AIF [Australian Imperial Forces]

06:00 and we were then in the 2nd ITD – Second Infantry Training Depot and my brother was also down there and on August 9, the 2/48th Battalion was formed and that started that. We did all our training in the Parklands, South Parklands at the time, and group marches and that sort of thing up until I think

06:30 it was in October we were given pre-embarkation leave and then after we came back in 7 days, we were whisked off in a special train to Woodside where we trained for approximately 3 and half weeks, day and night, and then on November 17, it was a very, very hot day and we were loaded in,

07:00 that’s right we marched from Woodside camp down to Oakbank, didn’t go to Woodside Station because of security reasons and everybody knew, they were following us along the road. So it was 5 miles and we had our tunics, great coat, all our sea kit, everything we owned we carried. I have never forgotten that march, it was absolutely horrendous. Then we were put onto trains, taken down to outer harbour and then we were

07:30 embarked on the His Majesty’s ship the Stratheden and on the following morning on 18 November we set sail for the Australian Bight and joined the rest of the convoy had come from Melbourne and we arrived a week later in Fremantle. We stayed there for 6 days, because there was a German raider out in the Indian Ocean and our escort, the HMS Canberra and Perth

08:00 apparently went out and we had never heard the result but we did finally set sail, and a few days later we arrived in Colombo. We had a days leave there, but I had been in hospital with mumps, I had just managed to get onto the boat in time and was put in hospital but I had a days leave. Then we set sail again and we arrived on 17 December,

08:30 exactly a month after to the date that we got onto the boat, at Ismailia in the Suez Canal or Port Taufiq, then Ismailia and then finally down to El Qantara, which is on the border of Palestine and Egypt. There we were fed and put into cattle trucks, do I ever remember them, square wheels, we all said. Then we went right up into Palestine and at

09:00 about midnight we arrived at a camp called Dimra, where we were fed and bedded down. We were very hungry and very tired. We were there for I think somewhere around 3 months, we had Christmas after that and then about 3 months we did some very hard training, because Dimra was 156 miles north of El Qantara and 5 miles roughly from the sea, but there was rows and rows of drift sand, sand dunes I suppose

09:30 I could call them and you could always hear the Mediterranean and every time you went down one wadi as we called them there, you would say the next one’s got to be the sea but it seemed to take another hour before it came. We did that for months and months and trained hard and I think it was in March we started a march and ended up going by train right through to Mersa Matruh, which is on the Egypt and

10:00 Palestine, and we were there for a day and then put in trucks and then we were taken up in various stages up to the Benghazi area to guard the prisoners, the many, many thousands of Italian prisoners that the 6th division and New Zealanders had captured back in December of 1940 but that wasn’t for very long, as the German force had entered that part of the world in Africa

10:30 and we found ourselves in skirmishes and in positions that we did not have had enough troops or equipment to hold him off, so it was into trucks and back to Tobruk as fast as we could as that was the best perimeter to hold. We managed to get back there. Two of the British generals were captured and also 41 of the 2/8th Field Ambulance, who were

11:00 directed down into a valley by a German which was dressed as a British military police. The story goes that one of our officers shot him later on, but I don’t know that to confirm that but it seems pretty right. We finally made the perimeter of Tobruk in the early hours of the 9th or 10th of April, I know it was

11:30 Easter Saturday and there we dug in and that started the defence of Tobruk or the siege of Tobruk. We were then until 23 October before we were relieved. Do you want to know anything about in between that?

No. If you could continue from 23 October when you were relieved, and keep going that would be great.

12:00 We were relieved and we were back to Palestine and for a couple of months and then we were sent up to Tripoli in Lebanon and in camps there. The reason was to, in case, the 2nd Division had gone home, so this was in case the Germans landed in that area. We did hard training and just garrison work

12:30 until the end of June, I think it was the 29 June and we proceeded across the Hom Desert and down the Sinai and at that stage we didn’t know whether we were going home or whether we were going to the

desert. If we turned right when we got to the border, we were going to the desert, if we turned left we were definitely going to

13:00 Australia. We turned right. And then I think this was on 2 July when we got there and we went by truck up as far as the German and Italian forces were. There were thousands and thousands of British, French and Free French and South Africans and New Zealanders coming back to us but we were going forwards

13:30 and then on the night or the morning of 10 July without any bombardment we did a very silent rifle and bayonet attack on the Italians and we caught them in bed and took a lot of prisoners, and that was the start of the battle of Tel-el-Eisa. This was on what was called Tree 26 and I believe was called the Hill of Jesus, and apparently it is a part of, in the Bible which I have never found

14:00 but apparently is there and that started that part of that. Later on, the Germans forces realised what was going on and of course then, it was a very hard battle that went on for right through until practically into August when there was a stalemate and later on they mined us in, and we were in what was called the El Alamein Box, there

14:30 was no retreat. This went on and at that time they asked for special training because I guess they expected a lot of casualties . At this stage I was asked to go and train as an anti-tank gunner or a tank attack gunner. Somehow or other, I don't know what happened, but they had homemade hessian tanks up on the sand dunes. I never ever really did see how they worked and

15:00 they said they were doing approximately 4 miles per hour. We had 8 rounds and I was put in as the gun layer and somehow or other I managed to get 8 rounds in a cluster and they told me that was the area where the Germans had their ammunition petrol so straight away they said we are going to make you a gun layer. I didn't know what to think about it, but when they told me it was worth 1 shilling and sixpence per day and seeing I was only getting 2 shillings,

15:30 because I had allotted 3 shillings to my mother, I though this was a big rise in pay. About 75% I believe. So I accepted. Well, when the big battles started on 23 October my job was, because I was the gun layer I had to go in with rifle companies which turned out to be the same company I had been with, and go in with them and then

16:00 find a position, dig a position for the gun and that sort of thing and then defend against tanks and that sort of thing. This went on right through until the night of, late night, I don't know whether it was after midnight or not on 29 October, we were waiting for another battalion, the 23rd Battalion to take an objective and if they were successful before midnight, we were to go straight through and take the Germans'

16:30 second defence line before they could organise. The next thing we knew a shell that landed, someone said it had to hit us but I found it lobbed right along side of us and everyone along that side was killed or badly injured. I had been sitting up in the truck behind the driver and a friend of mine said, "Hey Bambi," – that was my nickname 'Baby' and 'Bambi'. They said, "Would you change posssies. I can't get my machine gun between my legs here," and I said,

17:00 "No worries." So I got up and let him get in there and then I proceeded back towards the tailgate of the truck and I had one knee down and was trying to get down when the shell landed. The bomb blast just threw me straight over the tailboard and I landed, I had a shovel on my back and I landed on that and I thought at one stage I had broken my back. It was very bad in my shoulders.

17:30 The stretcher-bearers came running over, and they said, "Are you all right?" and I said, "Yeah, you had better have a look in the truck." It was then I got to my feet and I found I had a jagged piece of shrapnel hanging out of my great coat out of my elbow. I pulled it out and didn't worry much about it. The next morning, my officer said you had better go back to casualty and get it checked out. When I got back there, there was so many killed and badly wounded and amputations taking place

18:00 I thought what am I doing here with a scratch, so I didn't worry about it anymore. I just put a shell dressing on it. Then 2 nights later on the final attack on El Alamein I was sent with another company which I didn't know what they were doing and I was quite upset about it and the old saying with the Aussies, "Don't worry, we'll look after you," so I went with them and we did an encircling movement on a bridge called Contour 25 , I found

18:30 out since and we came in behind the Germans and we thought we would surprise them, but that was where all their fire power was and when we finally did get close to them we were absolutely slaughtered. This was getting by that time very late at night or very early in the morning and when it was apparent that it was looking like daylight was about to approach I crawled over and I couldn't find

19:00 what to ask what was going on or anything, I couldn't find anybody alive, so I thought then I had better get out of here, so I went in a northwest direction and I fell in a great big bomb hole, so I thought this had better do me. Well next thing I knew at the approach of dawn there was about 6 Germans and they were looking around because I think they must have been looking at our wounded and that sort of thing, and

19:30 so I thought what will I do and they pointed towards my direction and I thought what's going on here.

So I only had, all I had was a rifle and bayonet and several rounds of ammunition but I had 2 grenades. So I took out 1 grenade and I held that in the my left hand and I pulled the other one out with my, I pulled the ring out with my teeth and I grabbed that and I let them have both of those and as far as I know I got the whole 6 Germans.

20:00 Well, then our artillery opened up and they were firing spasmodically all day on them and some of the shells were coming pretty close to me because I was only about 30 yards away from the Germans and later on there was a dog fight up between the Messerschmidts, the German Messerschmidts and the Spitfires and Hurricanes and the bullets were swimming all around me, but I managed to keep clear of that. Well, I stayed there all that during the day and then

20:30 I thought I had better get something to eat. So I took my haversack off and went to get a drink of water and I found that I had a bullet hole through my water bottle, I had no water, my haversack had been riddled and yet I never got another scratch, although I was pretty lucky. So anyway, I stayed there all day and I sort of worked out from the artillery where I was and how I'd get out. So the following night that was

21:00 all that day and all the next day I stayed there and as soon as it was dark the next day, I presume it was around 7 o'clock at night, my watch had been broken I crawled down through a marsh which was between this position and the sand dunes of the Mediterranean. I was covered in mines but I found out later they were tank mines and my weight wasn't enough to set them off. So I crawled for 2 ½ hours through the minefield and went through 2 rows of danet which

21:30 is curled up barbed wire and somewhere in the early hours of the morning, I was challenged, "What was the password?" I didn't have a clue. I knew what it was 3 nights before, so at that stage I mentioned I had an idea it was the 2/7th Field Regiment, so I mentioned a couple of chaps I knew at Renmark and also Tom Worse, a great Norwood footballer, I mentioned their names and I was allowed to go

22:00 back there. I asked them for a drink of water and I got a bit and I said, "I haven't had any sleep for 3 days, or practically none, is there anywhere I can bed down?" and they said, "Yeah, there is an old gun porter place," but they didn't tell me I had a 25 pounder each side of me. So I laid down in that and I was practically dead to the world and next minute every gun opened up. So that was the end of that. Next morning I said to them, "Can you tell me where the 2/48th is?"

22:30 and the officer looked at me and said "I'm sorry. The 2/48th were wiped out." and I thought this was a lovely feeling. Later on, I come down and they said, "I've got better news for you. There were 41 came out on one truck," and all that was left, some were walking and that was all that was left of the 2/48th Battalion. Well later on in the day they found out where they were and they were down in the old Tel-el-Eisa station and I had to cross across the Hill of Jesus

23:00 which I knew that area quite well. On the way across there I saw a motorbike in the distance and I hoped he was one of ours. It turned out to be one of dispatch riders who gave me a ride back to where the rest of my platoon were and my officer had just come back from battalion headquarters where he had listed me missing believed killed. They thought there would be no hope for me getting back. Well, after getting something to eat I laid down in a trench at two o'clock in the afternoon and I didn't wake

23:30 up until six o'clock the next morning. By this time my arm had swollen up the size of a football and I was sent back to casualty and then through to CCS [casualty clearing station] and finally back to the AGH [Australian General Hospital] at Alexandria. After some time, I was sent back to a staging camp and I arrived back at El Alamein a day before we left that was on 3 December we left El Alamein and went back

24:00 to right through Cairo in to Palestine. So that was the end of El Alamein. Following that, this was in December of course, so after Christmas we did some training for a while. We did get some leave. I think I went to Beirut, I had been to Jerusalem before so I went to Beirut. Then we were taken by trucks up to Tripoli in

24:30 stages, that's in Lebanon – a lovely little gulf barracks, three storey little gulf barracks, or two storey, I'm not sure now and from there, our job was there to garrison Lebanon and those areas because the Germans had, possibly land parachutes or submarine and land troops there and destroy the Checker Tunnel which went right through the mountains there and that was

25:00 where all the supply lines came through. We had quite a good time there really. We went up to near the Turkish border through Aleppo and up to the Cedes which is a beautiful place where there was a snow chalet there, and there was still 14ft of snow there, although it was starting to melt and we had a bit of fun trying to ski and different things. Then we came back

25:30 and then we went into the mountains, to a place called Mt Torvel and did some of the hardest training that I think I have ever done in my life. It was so hard and so high that even the mules, the Indian muleteers couldn't even get the mules up there. They were screaming in agony trying to get this load up there. We finally did manage to get up there and then we were taken back to the barracks. It was a very hard

26:00 time. After I think it was back about… I think I've got myself a little mixed up because we did that before we went to El Alamein, I should have mentioned. At this stage it was getting, this was in around

February and

26:30 and we moved across to the Hom Desert and everything was, what we thought, took away any idea that we were Australian. Everything was painted on the trucks, the steel helmets were altered, but the natives, they said, “Hi Aussie!” We still had our tan boots. All the British troops had black boots. There was no camouflage. They knew where we were.

27:00 So we finally got down to El Qantara again and we boarded a Dutch liner and we were on our way to Australia and home. That was, I just forget the date. I know we arrived in Port Melbourne on 25th February 1943, and were given leave, 21 days

27:30 leave. That was that part of that.

So back to Australia.

Yes. After 21 days leave we went up the Atherton Tablelands and did jungle training and then

28:00 off to New Guinea. That was in August and landed at Milne Bay, did some training there in front of [US] General MacArthur and [Australian] General Blamey and then later we went up and did the landing at Lae which I believe is the first amphibious landing, assault landing by Australian troops since Gallipoli. A

28:30 lot of people don’t realise that. That was on September 4th, the same day Allied troops landed in Italy. We didn’t have a lot of casualties, though it was a very hard campaign because the rivers we had had heavy rain and the rivers were coming down from the mountains and quite a few chaps, I know including one battalion, lost 28 washed out to sea. The water was

29:00 moving something like 40 kms per hour but the engineers managed to through across a, rope across and we did finally get over and for the first time we were really ever hungry. We had no food. We were eating coconuts, climbing trees to get coconuts. They couldn’t get the food up to us. We finally, after not too much skirmish, we took Lae and we were there for a little while and

29:30 at this stage 20th Brigade had landed at Finschhafen so we had to go and help them there and that started the track to the attack on Sattelberg. There were various other encounters on the way. We lost a lot of very men on that. Then on 25th November we finally captured Sattelberg. It was really a one man show and that was Sergeant Diver

30:00 Derrick who had already won the DCM in the Middle East and he practically took Sattelberg. After our officer told him not to worry about and he says, “I’ve lost too many good men and I’m not giving up now.” So he practically scaled it and took Sattelberg on his own and he was awarded the VC [Victoria Cross]. So that was the New Guinea campaign. And then after Christmas, we had some good

30:30 food sent up to us and they then decided that they would try and cut the Japs off because they were trying to get to Madang, so some of us walked through kunai grass and then some went by amphibious ducks and then we would change, and then we would go by ducks and we finally got up near Madang but we found out that we had not cut the Japs off so we came back to the Finschhafen area and then we

31:00 soon after in early February we were on our way home but I didn’t make it. I got as far as Buna, then I went down very badly with malaria and I had to come home later on and have leave all on my own. Then finally after I had seven days leave I was sent back to the tablelands and joined the battalion and we trained hard there and then it was the start of the

31:30 trip when we went to the Halmaheras, Morotai Island and the Halmaheras. From there we embarked on the HMS Manoora and we set sail for the Tarakan Island, which is a little island off of Borneo. On 1 May we landed there and without a great opposition, but we found out the Japs had retreated into the hills. They were razorback ridges

32:00 all of them. They were all named after Australian girls names like Linda, Fred and quite a lot like that and it wasn’t until they said that it where Diver Derrick VC lost his life there and I helped to carry him back and on, I have to get the date right, that was on 25th May that he was killed.

32:30 At the end of August the Jap had given, the war capitulated and later on they started a point system. For instance anybody, a married man say who had 10 children, he automatically got top points. It was called a 5-Year Plan, anybody with 5 years service. Just for a joke, I said to the audited corporal, I said,

33:00 “Hey, my Mum’s a dependant on me,” and that made me the same point system as a married man, so I didn’t think anymore of it and I was quite happy to keep going. By this stage I had made sergeant rank and I was getting pretty good money – 17 [shillings] and 9 pence a day if I remember and that was terrific money in those days. Anyway, next thing I found I was on the boat back to Australia and landed at Brisbane I think on

33:30 4 September. From there I made my way back through Victoria into South Australia and was finally demobbed on 20th September 1945. At this stage, my brother who I hadn’t mentioned this before, was taken a prisoner of war at Tel-el-Eisa on 22 July he was a Bren gun carrier driver and had broken through the

34:00 Germans lines and quite a few others and was about 1 mile behind Germans lines firing at everything they could and had got the track blown off of his carrier so they went around in circles and that night he tried to get back to our lines and was captured so he spent his days in Italy but escaped and fought in the partisan forces right through to the end of the war. So he had just arrived and had his leave

34:30 home so we met for the first time. I did not know until I got into Fremantle that he was a prisoner of war. I did not know what had happened to him. I was also greeted with the news that another brother of mine had lost his leg in New Guinea, and was seriously wounded and my younger brother was very seriously ill with a kidney problem so it wasn't a very happy home coming for me but it was okay. So that was actually my

35:00 army record.

Okay and after the war what did you do?

My brothers said to me we should go back to Renmark and I will check out what's going. We had hopes of course of getting a fruit lot but he said to me and he rang me up, at that stage I became engaged to my present wife. They were up in a town called Laura in the mid north. I went up there and he rang and said, "There's not much good coming back there." he says

35:30 "All they offer you is a pick and shovel," he says, "and you can get one of those in Siberia." Those were his very words. He wasn't very happy, so he said, "I'll do what I can do, do what you can do." Well my, my brother-in-law now, he now lives with me, he got out and he didn't know what to do, so we decided we would buy a truck under the lease lend system and we bought an International truck and we started carrying produce. In Laura there was a flax mill, a chaff

36:00 mill, a flourmill and there was plenty of produce carrying the produce from the farmers. So we did this and we worked from early morning until you know daylight until dark at night and we did that but when the harvest was finished we found that there wasn't anything to do much, you know a little bit of work here and there. There wasn't much prospect. So after a year I decided I would take on the agency of COR [Commonwealth Oil Refinery] which is now

36:30 BP [British Petroleum] of course. One of the sergeants I knew quite well, his brother was the northern area representative, Max Jacker who ended up in charge of BP. He said to me, "Well if you like to go down to town," – he gave me some people to see – "I can get you a country depot." But unfortunately all the people I went to see had got promotions or had shifted to other cities and I ended up down at Birkenhead in a dead end job

37:00 filling petrol drums and marking drums. I was even marking drums that were sent to me really because I was still in the firm. It was quite amusing. Then later on, I thought there was no future here, so later on I went and started working at General Motors Holden as a metal finisher and I was one of the seven to work on the very first Holden, the old FX Holden.

37:30 We spent 7 days working on one car, it wasn't very long, and they put me at 300 a day. I did that and then later on where my wife and I were living in Goodwich in my mother-in-law's cousin's house she got the place renovated so we could have a flat of our own and the chap that was working there, he said, "What do you do for a living?" and I told him and he said, "You seem very keen on this sort of work," 'doing work',

38:00 I'm a painter also, so I ended up getting a job with him and then later on I worked for another painter and then I felt that I was capable and went to school and different things like that, I contracted myself to the South Australian Housing Trust and I did that right up until I retired until I became 60. I had had a heart attack and I found out the rigours of it, it was too much, I could do small jobs and get enough here and there

38:30 and I got a pension and was the end of my working career.

Thank you.

Tape 2

00:41 **So Murray, going back to the very beginning, can you talk about your memories of your childhood growing up in Renmark?**

Out from Renmark,

01:00 when I was boy? See I was a bit over three when we moved into Paringa. But 2 things I can always remember. My brother and I were taking some little potties, small calves down to a paddock along this road and I got too close and one of them kicked me and my brother was a bit upset because I had

01:30 blood coming from my head. But it wasn't very bad: I remember that quite plain. Another time I remember my elder brother, he was 10 years older than I and we were in a cart, a dray actually and we had an old piebald [patched horse], I think it was skewbald, that's right red and white, and her name

was Kate, I remember that, and somehow or other we tipped over and

02:00 I got thrown out and Kate was on her back with her legs in the air and kicking madly and just missing me all the time. So my brother grabbed me, I don't know what he did but he got Kate unharnessed and got her out and somehow or other he got the wagon up, I remember that. And another time we had a horse that was a little bit savage and I went down to the stables and I was about to walk in there, and my father grabbed me,

02:30 that's the only thing I remember about my father on the farm, and he just grabbed me in time. That's about 3 things. That's about all I can remember about Taldra, really, cause as I said I was only three years old and then.

Do you remember when, how did things change when your father died?

Well, it changed very much, like we were always poor; everybody was poor in those days. The Murray Mallee, I mean they were given small farms,

03:00 you know, it was just work, my father was a woodchopper. The whole family were great axeman, the whole family of Jones were great axeman and he used to cut wood for the bakery and the pumping stations in those days were all wood fired so that was how he earned his money and he worked out in all sorts of weather and that was really what caused him to get bronchitis and then ended up, I don't know exactly, I think it might have been TB [tuberculosis] that he had and

03:30 in the end that killed him. So I remember that quite plainly. I remember we moved into this little railway cottage at Paringa which was near the pump and I remember that quite plainly.

Did you move into Paringa immediately after your father died?

No, before.

Before your dad died?

Before he died.

And when he died was he in a hospital or was he at home?

He was in Adelaide Hospital, and I just faintly remember him

04:00 walking home from the Paringa Railway Station which was about 3-400 yards from our little – from the river and I can remember that and that's really all I can remember of my father.

How did you find out that he had died? Who told you?

The Adelaide Hospital. He was in Adelaide Hospital. They rang through to the local store which was about all that in Paringa in those days.

04:30 There was just a store. There was the post office, store and that's about all there really was apart from 3-4 houses, railway cottages and a church, a Lutheran Church and a school. In fact there wasn't a school at that time, we used to go to school in the church and then they built the Paringa School and my Mum got heard about that. So that was how we heard.

So your mum then told the kids, did she?

Yes, I guess she did. I said my elder brother being 10 years older and my other brother like

05:00 being 2 years younger, then another one 2 years younger than that then there was a break of 4 years then 2, then 2 and my little sister was about 2 ½ months old when my father died, she doesn't know him at all.

So you were only 5 when your father died? 5 years old?

5 ½ really. I was born in July, this was in February ,so about 5 ½.

That's quite young to remember a lot, but do you remember a lot but

05:30 **do you remember what changed? How did it impact on your family that your dad wasn't there anymore?**

Well, I suppose it was my mother that found the impact. Well she said I've got to earn some money somehow. So we moved into Renmark and those stages there was 4 wooden lined houses, the rest was all salt bush flats – big huge salt bush things

06:00 and she bought, she started to buy one of these from the State Bank and I believe she paid that off paying 7 shillings and sixpence a month I think. I don't know what the house cost and she paid that off. Well the only thing my mother could do, she used to go and wash clothes, ironing, anything at all, 6 days a week, she was with the church on Sundays and that sort of thing and

06:30 I remember one place she worked for these was a Reagle Brothers Garage, or Reagle & Sons it was in those days, there was a father and 5 out of the 6 sons were all mechanics and wore 2 pairs of overalls

per week so she had to wash them on the old scrubbing boards and then she would stay there and do the ironing. That was always on a Monday and that was one day of the week we had to get home from school and cook the tea. She was

07:00 a marvellous provider. We always had, it was always a set thing on a Sunday. You had a roast on one Sunday and it was always corned beef the next. Roast vegetables or cooked vegetables and what was over, Monday night was hash night, always over. We always had pudding on one Sunday and a plum pudding on the other. She was a marvellous provided. Went without to see us kids and never knew what a new dress was really. And

07:30 that was practically her life.

You sound like you were a very close family.

Yes we were. A very close family, yeah.

Because if she was out working, washing and ironing and everything and I guess you kids would have had to take a lot of responsibility to look after each other.

Oh yes, we did, the eldest ones. At that stage my elder brother and my younger one started working you see, they got jobs. I think they both worked. One started

08:00 working for the Army and Navy Stores it was called in those days, they don't exist these days. And then they both ended up on milk rounds, you know getting up at 3 o'clock in the morning and milking cows and then doing the rounds. They did that for quite a while and then they seemed to drift out onto the farms and work on the farms, that sort of thing. Yes, well that was the sort of life it was, and as I said

08:30 **Did she get much support in the community being a single, being a widowed woman with 7 kids?**

The only thing you got those days, because there was no such thing as dole, there was a ration. If the people feel you were starving, you could get ration tickets but Mum was always too proud to do that, she said, "While she could still stand," stand on one leg – she had an ulcer on her leg and she did tell me years after it was a result of me being born.

09:00 It was sort of an ulcer and it used to break out and that sort of thing and she was in terrible pain and I pity her and she had a very hard life and I can tell you late how we fixed that ulcer. It wasn't until many years ago when she was staying with us for a while and anyway.

So what age were you when you went to school?

I went to school when I was would have been 5 ½ because

09:30 you could only start at the beginning of the year in February and then I went to Paringa School.

And can you talk about the school? Can you describe what the school was like?

Yes, well this new school they built, this was after the church, you know the Lutherans built the school. It was a poured concrete, I remember that, with an iron roof and we had a place on the side where we used to hang all the clothes, that was under shelter.

10:00 Had a rain water tank and then the farmers built a brush shed down the bank and that was beautiful. It was all made out of hot bushes and that was always cool and that's where we used to spend a lot of time, you know during lunch hour and that down there, cause it was very cool down there.

How many kids were at the school?

When I started there was, there had been up to 90 in the school, one teacher and then they got, I suppose you would call her a trainee teacher.

10:30 There was 2 girls I remember, I remember their names quite well but at the time I started it got down to about 70 and then one teacher Mr Jenkins. He taught me for grade 1, 2 and 3 and he had the whole school to himself and then a funny thing he moved down the line further to a place called Nangari, where my present wife was going to school, she was a farmer's daughter also and he taught her her last 4 years of school.

11:00 Well then we got this Mr Humphreys came to teach us, and I had him right through until I left the school just had the 2 teachers.

How did the teachers manage all those students?

I guess they just had to do that and they also, not only did they teach us just maths they taught us woodwork, they had to know woodwork. I always remember Mr Jenkins, he had a voice about as good as mine

11:30 and he had to teach us to sing. It didn't sound very well. I always remember his old gramophone with Man of Harlick and Danny Boy and some of those things we had to sing and he would say, "Sing louder than that," and then he would sing louder and it was a terrible noise. But then when Mr Humphreys

came, he would play the violin likes cats on a tin roof. He thought he was a good violinist but I don't think he was so he used

12:00 to, he could sing so he taught us singing so it wasn't too bad and that sort of thing, so.

What kinds of games or sports did you play?

Well, practically girls and boys had to the same. We had to do the maypole, the boys and all, so we learnt to do that. You may not know about the maypole.

Do you want to talk about it, because a lot of people won't know about it?

Well, I can remember they had this frame and they all these ribbons down and you used to dance around the maypole, but

12:30 I just can't remember too much about it really. Other than that we used to play tops, hopscotch, marbles and then the boys did kick a football and play cricket and when we got up into higher grades every Friday you had what you called the Friday test. We would get that over as quickly as we could and we had to hitchhike a ride into Renmark

13:00 and play against the Renmark teams, you know, like there was the Renmark Primary, Renmark Souths, Renmark Wests and we had to play the high school to. It was all right for me because once I got there I was home, but the others had to go back to Paringa, get their way back there and then get on their bikes or horse or whatever and go back to their farms. Apart from us and 3 or 4

13:30 others, they were all farmers' children, so that was the life of that sort of thing for sport.

Was it a good childhood?

I enjoyed it because we didn't want to go to the Renmark Primary School. We thought there was too many kids there, we enjoyed the small school. So yes I did enjoy it.

And you got your Certificate at 12 ½?

Yes. Then I had to sit for it again and I got a much better marks but we had to go

14:00 into Renmark to do our exams and I had trouble at that stage I was sitting right back at the back and I couldn't hear what this teacher was saying and when I stood up and asked him to tell him he said, "Well listen more better," so that was the end of that. At one stage I thought I can remember these words, "The natives caught their prey by means of catfalls," I think the

14:30 word was or something like that and I thought he said pitchforks and I wrote down pitchforks. I spelt it right but I lost marks. This was the sort of things we had to put up with they didn't help us at all. There were other schools which went into the main primary school so they were some of things we had to put up with.

And what did you have at school? What did you write on and what did you write with?

We had desks and we had pencils

15:00 and then we had pen and ink, the old nibs, you know the old pen and ink. Sort of things. We used to spear the flies and little things like that. I didn't play up very much, I thought I was a good boy. Those were the sort of things we did.

So what age were you when you finished your schooling?

I would have been 13 and

15:30 3 or 4 months, and then we applied, and I was allowed to leave school because in the meantime I had gone out, like in the school holidays I had gone out and worked on the farms, just worked like a man on the farms and I continued doing so right up until to that and also coming back to the fruit harvest, I did that until I enlisted.

Was it normal for children to leave school at about 13?

Well,

16:00 in the little country schools, yes. I don't know of anybody who went to high school. They just had to go and work on the farms. They were just another part of labour sort of thing.

And what kinds of things were you doing on the farm?

Well, you would be, it was always harvest time, so they reckoned I wasn't good enough to drive a strippers, those days, the old strippers, you know from 5ft up to 10 footers and what I had to do was

16:30 feed the willower which you would throw the grain that came out of the stripper up onto the willower and the willower would separate the grain, and then the chaff or cocky chaff would go up an elevator and you would have a wagon there with a hessian frame around it, and you had to keep that clear and

then take the bags of wheat off. You had a place where you put the bags on and when they were filled you had to carry them out, with a truck, a

17:00 hand truck, take them about 20-30 yards in drift sand and put them there, and that was a days work and that was as soon the wheat was strong enough, you know to reap and you would do this until pitch dark at night and then if you had time, you would sew bags and of course, in the meantime I had to get up in the morning and feed the horses, take them down to the dam for a drink and then come back and put their harness and their collars and harness on

17:30 because the bosses' son, he was felt that was my job. He just drove the strippers and that was the sort of thing I did there.

Were you going there, living there at your working place or going home every night?

Oh no, no I was near the Victorian border, I was about 14-16 miles from home at Renmark.

And what was that like living away from home at such a young age?

Well I guess it was something you had to get used to and I didn't.

18:00 About once in 6 weeks, they used to go into Renmark every Saturday because they used to sell their, make butter you see and see that and sell the eggs to people in the town to get a little bit of money to buy food, that's the way they existed and that sort of thing and then I would get a ride in with them every six weeks. I'd see my Mum a bit, that's about the only time you know, for a few hours or something. And then

18:30 the year before, the harvest of 1939, I found out my brother was working at a place back at Taldra, near, this was out from Paringa where I was working, actually 1 hour from Paringa. He came over one day and he said to me, he said, "Do you want a job? I can get you some money, you don't have to work for nothing." He said, "I can get you 15 shillings a week." He said, "I'm getting a point a

19:00 week driving a stripper [harvesting machine]. You got to do the same work you're doing." I ended up telling them the next day if they didn't pay me wages, I was going out there. So I got on my bike and I went. I went straight down to Taldra and I started working there and I did all that same sort of thing again. He was a nice man to work too, the other people weren't nice people and sort of thing. And the following year, my brother he decided he wouldn't go back there, this was in 1940

19:30 to do the seeding, so I did it all on my own and the hours were something like this: at 11 o'clock at night I would feed the horses for the last time then I would walk ½ mile to my little hut with my lantern, set the alarm for 3 o'clock. Then I would come over, I would let the horses down. We had a race going down to the dam for them there to drink and if they didn't come back I used to send

20:00 the Queensland heeler [cattle dog] down, that'd would bring them back. And while they were down there I would put their feed in the mangers. When they came back I would put their collars and hames on and then I would go and make some breakfast. And then I, by that time they had had their breakfast and I was seeding 5 miles from home. Ground that had been fallowed for the first time for many years, it was the first crop in. Then I had to put the horses in the wagon, and

20:30 sometimes I had to take out seed wheat and superphosphate. On the Sundays, that was one thing I used to do on Sundays. I'd make the seed wheat and the super into bux [?] half bags because it was terribly heavy and I was only 16 and some of the bags were 200 pounds, so you couldn't, you had to reach them up and then get onto the platform and put them into the combines, you know into the feeders for the seed to go out. So I used to do this on Sundays and any rate, do that and then sometimes

21:00 I would get out there and it would put it in and you had a job to see the furrow it was still, it wouldn't be quite light, because it was in the middle of winter you see. Then I would go until midday and then the boss would bring out a relief team and some lunch and fuel can full of tea sometimes he would do one round and then I would go until I couldn't see the furrow anymore, pitch dark at night and then go back the 5 mile and go through the same thing. Feed the horses, let them down for a drink.

21:30 And my boss was a very, he was a colt breaker, you know, to break in horses. He didn't own many horses. A lot of the horses he had were kidmans, you know they were sort of brumbies [wild], and broken in and you had to be very careful with them cause they would just paw you as quick as anything so he got me a nice big strong piece of wire with a hook on it and I used to pick up the chains with that and put that onto their, put the hooks onto their harness because they used to look at you the horses, you could see the whites of their eyes.

22:00 They meant danger, but they were good workers. So this was the sort of thing and at any rate this went on and I said on the Thursday night my brother came out, sometime at the end of June. I think it was the 23rd of June or something like that and he said, "I've just joined the army." And I said, "Why didn't you wait for me?" so anyway on the Saturday morning I said, "I'm going to finish seeding on the Saturday morning." So I did. I finished about 11 o'clock and by the time I got home and fixed up all the horses and that sort of thing

22:30 and had some lunch, I said to the boss, "I'm going into Renmark tonight and I'm going to try and join

the army." First of all I said I was going to join the navy but I found out you had to have a birth certificate to join the navy..

And you didn't have one?

No. You had to be 20 and sort of thing and so I rode my old treadley [bicycle] 18 miles through the drift sand, there was a terrible lot of drift sand up there and that sort of thing got into town and I told you about going into

23:00 the doctors and the recruiting officers and I finally got into the army.

Can you tell that story again?

Yeah, well anyway, as I said when I got in there I went to see me Mum, she was doing a job I think in a café you know, just to wash dishes and that sort of thing on a Saturday night, to get a few shillings, and I went and told her what I'm doing. She said, "Well," she said, "have you got to do it?" She said, "Ray's joined up." And

23:30 in the meantime, 2 of my brothers were rejected. "Well," she said, "all right then," She says, "But I won't sign your name." She said, "I won't stop you from going, but I won't sign." She said, "I won't have that on my conscience." So anyway as I said down I go and into Dr Harris and his nurse and she said, "What can I do for you? Which one are you of the Jones?" And I said, "Murray." So she said, "You want to see a doctor," and I said, "Yes, I want to join the army. I want to be examined."

24:00 So any way after a while Dr Harris said, "You're as fit as I don't know what," he says, "You're right." So he said, "The recruiting officer's in there." He said, "Knock on the door." So I knocked on the door and Mr Mitchell was there. I said, "Hello, Mr Mitch," and he said "Hello. How are you young Murray?" He said, "How are you going?" and then he said, "What can I do for ya?" I said, "I want to join the army, Mr Mitch," and he said, "Oh, the Salvation Army's down the 16th Street," he said. I said, "No, I want to join the AIF [Australian Imperial Force]." "No,"

24:30 he said. As I said before, Mr Mitchell's wife and my mother were in the same room at the hospital and his son and I were about a minute or so apart so he knew exactly my age, so he wouldn't let me go. So I went back onto the town and ran into a few of my friends that I had gone to school with, and knew local chaps and had all joined up and were waiting to go down and so they said, "Are you going to join up?" and I said, "Yeah, I just got knocked back. Mitchell wouldn't let me

25:00 join." And they said, "He's gone to tea. Mr McIntryre's there," and Mr McIntryre was an old Gallipoli veteran, lost a leg at Gallipoli I believe and so he said and I went in there and he said, "What can I do for you, Jonesey?" and I said, "I want to join," and he said, "Ah, good boy," so he put me through in about 2 ups and I was out of there as quick as in case Mr Mitchell came back.

What did you think you were signing up for? What did you know, what did you know about war?

Well, at the stage you know, we used to have the old crystal wireless

25:30 out on the farms and that sort of thing and we used to hear about what the Germans were doing and that and we just thought it was out duty. We didn't know what we were in for.

And you were working so hard anyway, did you think that going to the army was going to be a bit easier than the work you were doing? Or a bit of an adventure?

I never really thought about that, but to answer that question, it did come in very handy. You know

26:00 like when we got out to Tobruk, we had 1 bottle of water a day and that was reclaimed, after a while, it was reclaimed sea water, distilled sea water and you know that's all you had and it was bitterly cold at night and it was terribly hot in the day time. Now a lot of the lads that came from the city who were used to having a water bag or whatever you know when they worked just didn't know what to do. Now we knew the old trick in the

26:30 country if you take a water bag out with you out to the harvest or whatever you were doing and if you drank that water bag there was no water, you just had to make do until you came back at sunset. So we used to pick up a pebble and suck a pebble and that would keep the saliva going. It was an old trick a lot of the bike riders used and that sort of thing. We all knew about that. There was many a time when I have given a chap a sip of my valuable water and they were going off their rocker [mad] I think just about. They just couldn't understand

27:00 why they couldn't get a drink. They had to learn the hard way. So there was an advantage for some of us country people in that respect, and the same thing with food. I mean you had breakfast at 3 or 4 o'clock in the morning at harvest time and that sort of thing and you went to midday and that sort of thing and then you went until t o 7 or 8 o'clock at night when you got feed again so you know, food was something we appreciate when we got it.

27:30 **And you were working very long hours.**

Yes, I've worked 16 up to 18-20 hours a day. As I said I fed the horses at 11 o'clock and at 3 o'clock I was on my way back again. This is something that I think I found that I could do without a lot of sleep

and is the one difficulty I'm finding now. 5 hours sleep is about all I need these day, sometimes I go to sleep watching the news certainly, but is the sort of

28:00 thing that –

You've gone back to the way you used to be.

Yes, I always thought it would be lovely to just go to bed and just sleep until, you know. But I've always been the same and then when I started working I used to be up at 6 every morning and that sort of thing cause no matter where I worked in the painting game I started work at half past seven and work through until dark and that sort of thing.

Old habits die-hard, don't they?

They do, yes. I

28:30 think so, yes.

So you enlisted? Can you tell me about when you enlisted?

Well, that was the I think the date was 25th June that I enlisted in Renmark and then of course we had to wait until...my brother had gone down on a train 2 days earlier. I think there was only 1 train a week that used to take troops down. And this particular time

29:00 I think it was, not too sure it was about, 2nd July I think if I remember rightly – and a train and there was 80 of us all told this was from Barmera and, 'Barmera' or 'Barmar' as some people say it, and Berry and Renmark and then all the sidings on the old Adelaide, Karoonda, Karoonda/Renmark line. You would pick them up at various stages and there was about 80 of us came down together and as I said before one of those

29:30 who came down with me happened to be Tom Derrick, who as I said won the VC and DCM and sort of thing.

What was it like saying goodbye to your mum? She couldn't have been too happy.

No, I suppose not. You only realise now, what it must have been like for them and this is why when I had the opportunity, you know I got 5 shillings a day and I allotted, and my brother did the same, we allotted 3 shillings a day to her

30:00 and that saved her, that was a lot of money in those days, and that saved her going out all these days, working so then she found she had enough money to just go out and go into the packing sheds and cut apricots, a job she could do sitting down and that sort of thing and you know managed it. And on top of all this when I came home, I didn't have much money left and that sort of thing, it cost me 79 pounds for

30:30 an engagement, and that was a beautiful engagement ring too. And then my mother says, "I've got some money here for you." She'd saved 100 pound out of, all that time and I said, "No, I don't want it," and she said, "You take it." And I was very glad of it, really, because just without a third pay, my brother-in-law and that we just had enough to buy a brand new truck, pay cash for it. 660 pounds for a brand new 5 ton truck. You wouldn't read about it.

31:00 **Your mum was, she seemed to put her children first.**

Oh, she did, as I said she didn't know what a new dress was like, you know that sort of thing. She was really marvellous and this is why you know, we always did what we could after the war. I bought her a refrigerator and a fan and that old wooden iron house; it would be you know would get to 105-106°, and up 110°. In fact I remember in 1939

31:30 when they had a heatwave, it was 128° in Renmark and 117° in Adelaide apparently, and all the pavements were melting away. You couldn't walk down the streets of Adelaide. No body worked during, they all got up at 2 o'clock in the morning and did what they had to do on the farms and different things and hardly anyone could do any work. Birds were falling out of the sky from heat and no water.

What did the people do to keep cool?

Well,

32:00 out in the farms a lot of people had cellars you know deep down and would spend their time down there in the cellars. It was always underground and was fairly cool. This was more like Coober Pedy and that sort of thing, they lived under ground, it was a lot cooler.

Did you go swimming in the dams?

Sometimes you could, but it wasn't looked on very nicely, because the horses and cattle had to drink that. One dam where one

32:30 place I worked they had a thatched straw and they had a windmill and all the water for the house was pumped up and that because apart from rainwater there was no water laid on at all out, out in that place but the place I was at before I joined up there was water, the River Murray water was down there and they did have water laid on and they did have troughs for the animals and that sort of thing there.

It must have been a very strange sight to see birds

33:00 **falling out of the sky?**

It was yeah, it was funny. I know my grandmother, my mother's mother, she died during that heatwave and it probably was the heat that probably killed her.

Did you have fans in those days?

No, there were no fans. The first fan I bought my mother was when I came out, went back, when was it, just after I came out of the army, well after I got out of the

33:30 army I bought her a little fan. It was about an 8-inch fan, that's all you could buy. I remember when she died and she was over in Melbourne staying with my sister and I bought it home and somewhere down, it's still somewhere down in the shed somewhere. I just bought that and it was something I that I had bought her and it was sort of it reminded me of just of some little thing and she thought that was marvellous, on a little stand. She practically had to have it on your face all night to keep you cool sort of thing.

34:00 **One day there won't be anymore of those fans. So you've travelled by rail down to Adelaide. So you are picking up all the men along the railway line.**

Yes, that's right, then we were met I suppose by the RTO, the Army Transport Officer or Railway Transport Officer or whatever it was down at Adelaide Station, which stayed in Adelaide then not down in Keswick and picked up and then we were taken by trucks

34:30 down to Wayville, just down to Wayville Showgrounds and from there we were billeted in what was the old motor pavilion there, bitumen on the floor and they had straw palettes on this hard bitumen floor. It didn't worry me very much, but it was very, very cold because it was in the middle of winter, and the draught was coming through very strongly through there and it was always cold.

35:00 And that was on the 2nd July. Well then after 2 or 3 days on 5th July we were all lined up, we were told in the morning after we came back from a route march that we would be drafted that afternoon and they were going to form this 2/48th Battalion. But anybody that wanted to go, well I don't know whether you had much choice, but there was artillery and other

35:30 places to go and I remember one chap that I was quite friendly with, he decided he wanted to go into the transport and the poor devil ended up in Malaya in the 8th Division so I never did find out what happened to him. So at any rate after we came back and we were going to lunch, we had 3 or 4 old sergeants that were in the First World War so I went over there and they were talking and I said, "Excuse me sergeants, if you don't mind me butting in," I said, "We are going to be sent out to you know whatever

36:00 this afternoon," I said, "What's the best lurk?"

The best what sorry?

The best lurk, or you know the best thing to do. It's an old saying, 'the best lurk'. He said, "Infantry boy, every time. Foot sloggers." And I thought, right. So in the afternoon when we were all lined up they said, "We want so many volunteers for the 2/48th Battalion they we were going to form." It actually wasn't formed until the 9th of August, so you know it was a race to see who could get out there first. So that is how I become

36:30 in the 2/48th Battalion. But I should have mentioned that when I came down first into this infantry-training depot my brother was already settled and he was in C Company. And he said to me, "I think you had better, you had better not come the same as me." Because according to army records, which I will show you something later on, according to that we were both born in 1920, because you had to be 20 with your parents' consent

37:00 • by the way my brother signed my name, signed my mother's name, so that's how I got in. And according to that his birthday's on the 22nd of May and my birthday's on the 13th July, so according to army records we were that far apart.

It doesn't quite work.

No, it doesn't quite work, but they never did find out. So anyway I went into, there was A, B, C, D, E and F Companies in there at the present

37:30 so I went into E Company so when we did finally go out on parade and we joined the 2/48th I said right, I'm in C Company and I went into C Company and we went right through Tobruk together or right through from then on together and when we got Bren guns, which we didn't have before we didn't know what a Bren gun was – we had the old Lewis gun and Hotchkiss guns that they used in the First World War. So we got Bren guns and he learnt out of that and I learnt.

38:00 So he was the Bren gunner and I was his number 2. What I had to do, I had to load all the magazines, hand him the magazines you know when he was running out and we did this on all the attacks we went and different things.

Your mum must have been relieved that her 2 sons were together?

Well, I guess she was but I probably didn't realise how dangerous it was because in quite a few circumstances in Tobruk, we had quite a few brothers in the 2/48th

38:30 Battalion, including 4 from Broken Hill, the Hoare brothers and 4 Reids from down somewhere on the peninsula somewhere. So in cases with some of the brothers, one of the brothers were killed in some cases and that sort of thing.

So there wasn't an army policy about whether or not you could fight next to your brother?

Not as then, no. I just remember one little incident when

39:00 the first patrol we ever went on, a real patrol, and there was 20 of us from our company went and we went out to, the battalions had dug in out in front of our place and we'd done an encirclement, and come in behind them and we took them all prisoner but there was one, I don't know if it was a machine gun, but there was a lot of bullets around and I was behind a little camel bush it was about this high and I thought it looked like a pill box to me you know. It wasn't even as big as my steel helmet

39:30 and he was bizzing all around me, so my brother said, "I'm getting short of magazines," so I said, "Just wait a minute, there's somebody right onto me." I just went, there was a bit of break I rolled over and gave him the magazines and when I rolled over again the camel bush was gone. So that was good timing, I did this right through the war, it was timing.

Tape 3

00:39 **(TECHNICAL DIFFICULTY)**

01:00 **(TECHNICAL DIFFICULTY)**

01:30 **(TECHNICAL DIFFICULTY)**

02:00 **(TECHNICAL DIFFICULTY)**

02:30 **(TECHNICAL DIFFICULTY)**

03:00 **(TECHNICAL DIFFICULTY)**

03:30 **(TECHNICAL DIFFICULTY)**

04:00 **(TECHNICAL DIFFICULTY)**

04:28 **Could you tell us about training**

04:30 **in the South Parklands?**

Yes well, the South Parklands only stretches from Wayville up to South Terrace you know which is, I suppose somewhere around the old mile distance, and we just in between the paths and the lawns we just did what we call the bull ring system, you get around the ring and the old Sergeants from the First World War mainly they would instruct us on various things, like on machine guns the old Hotchkiss and

05:00 the old Lewis guns that were used in the First World War, how to load a rifle and those sort of things and we did a little bit of bayonet practice on you know dummy bags of straw and things like that. We did do a lot of route marches and that sort of thing and we would march for 50 minutes and then have 10 minutes spell. Sometimes we always managed to get near the Goodwood Hotel

05:30 in the 10-minute spell and some of the blokes were ex-barmen, so they'd jump over and help out so we could have a drink that was the sort of thing. It wasn't really, a lot of good hard training that part of things.

And the general public could see you?

The general public could see us all the time, yes yes. People walking through to Adelaide would walk straight past us on the paths that go through the parklands so yes.

06:00 **It must have been a fairly scary sight your bayonet practice for the general public.**

I guess it was, I never ever thought about that I guess. As I said occasionally we, I think on 2 occasions they took us in trucks down to Port Adelaide to what used to be the D Range where they used to hold you know all the rifle like Bisley and all those sort of championships and we

06:30 did a lot of live round practice there. That was the first time quite a lot of them had fired a rifle. Being

in the country, of course, I was always used to firing a .22 and killing rabbits and that sort of thing so. Yes.

So you were already quite familiar with firearms or just light firearms?

Just the light firearms at that stage yes.

So you were with your brother

07:00 **at this stage? Was he training with you?**

Yes.

And then you went to Woodside. How did that vary from your time at Wayville?

Well very much so. Instead of being in a motor museum, we were very lucky, there was still a lot of tents there but we were allocated to a hut and the training there was quite different. We did some tactics

07:30 there, like some people would be the goodies and some would be the baddies and there was a lot concealment and those sort of thing and we were taught how to attack and what to do and when to approach and ranges and those sort of thing and then we did night work – they called that stealth. I remember on one occasion we had to were supposed to get as close as we could to the enemy

08:00 and so I'd chosen, there was a huge pine tree this is up as I said, at Woodside what was called the old Bird in Hand Mine and I got underneath this pine tree because there was a huge shadow and being a moonlight night and I was treading very lightly because of the pine needles not to make a noise and next minute I didn't realise there was a huge bull there near me and he let out a bellow and started to paw the ground

08:30 and next thing Murray climbed, I don't think I climbed, I jumped a 5ft barbed wire fence. That was the biggest fright I think I got before I went to the war I think. Yes well this went on, you know only went on for 3 ½ weeks, as I said it was day and night, and we trained really hard and we were ready to go overseas.

Do you remember your leave before you left?

09:00 **The leave you were given. How long was that?**

Yes well we had, I think it was 7 days if my memory's right, pre-embarkation leave. Yes, we went home on the train to Renmark and saw me mother and sort of thing and some of my other brothers.

And how was your family feeling at this time?

Well, I guess they weren't very happy about it. One didn't even think to ask them that I suppose. I know my mother wasn't

09:30 that happy but I guess, when you're young like that you don't think of other people, you think of yourself more I guess.

What did you do during that time of leave?

Just spent the time at home with Mum mostly. Sometimes in the afternoon I'd just walk up into the, we were only about 2-300 yards from the main town where we lived in Renmark,

10:00 and I'd just go up and we'd meet some of the, a few of the old mates there and then come home for tea and go to bed sort of thing. Nothing much different from ordinary life.

Were you excited to go at this point? Were you waiting to get back to barracks? You were excited about that or?

I guess we were. We joined up to do a job and I guess that's what we expected you know what we should do.

10:30 I guess I was excited enough about it.

Had you been told where you were going to be sent?

Not at this stage, no. At that stage we were wearing a diving patch which was 7th Division and the same colours, blue and white, 2/48th and we didn't even know exactly where we were. Some other battalions were wearing

11:00 the oval patch like the 2/43rd Battalion from the 8th Division and they ended up in the 9th Division with us so at that stage we didn't know very much what was going on and

Do you remember what you took from home?

From home? Well, not very much, a few underclothes that's about all and you know, your toothbrush. I don't know whether I had a razor,

11:30 no we got a razor given to us, but I didn't shave in those days so.

A bit too young. Too young to shave.

Yeah.

You didn't take any personal item?

I think yes I did. I did have a photo of my mother and my sister that was about all I had as far as a personal item yes. You had to be very careful

12:00 what you carried on. I had a steel mirror, stainless steel mirror. T hat was one thing I had in my wallet, that was about all. A pencil and a bit of paper and that sort of thing. We didn't have very much at all personal stuff, no.

So you were told that you'd be catching a train from Woodside?

Yes, we were told early that morning that we were

12:30 would be having an early lunch and I think it was about 11.30 in the morning we were paraded and it was on 17th November 1940 and it was a very, very hot day, I think if I remember rightly it was close to the old century, you know 96-97° and we were lined up and we had all our gear, our tunics and everything, our great coat, our overcoats on. We had all

13:00 our equipment, gas masks, steel helmet, rifle, bayonet, haversack pack and also our sea kits and that's what we carried. They marched us all the way to Oakbank Station which I think is 4 ½ to 5 miles from there and why they didn't go to Woodside, we found out after they thought too many people would see us but as we were

13:30 going to Woodside I think everybody knew what was going on and there were people there waiting for us and people waving and you know that sort of thing and then when we finally got on the train, there was people everywhere waving to us. There wasn't much security. At that stage we have learnt since there was a lot of fifth column [sympathisers with the enemy] activity going on and one radio station in Adelaide was closed

14:00 down, because they were giving information and that was done through a certain religious sect which I don't suppose I can mention.

I don't suppose it matters now.

Well, it was the Jehovah's Witnesses. It was 500 I think, you had better make sure of that, but they were closed down for giving information about convoys and different things it was found out.

Why were they giving that information?

Well,

14:30 I guess there were some traitors amongst them, I don't really know. I guess I was too young to realise what was going on, but I guess we did have enemies within. Of course there were a lot of people that were German born and Italian born here who were put in internment camps. Some people were unlucky, because they were good Australians at that stage. So you see all the Barossa Valley

15:00 and quite a lot up on the River Murray, they are of German and Italian descent and I guess that some of them still have feelings towards Germany and that sort of thing. It's just something that we learn and here not actually an opinion of mine or anything.

With the radio station and their religious affiliation were they broadcasting this information that was not?

Well, apparently what they were, what they were, whatever codes

15:30 they were using was picked up by intelligence. This is what I have been told. I know my wife's people and who was, somebody there was on the farm and ended up a liberal candidate, Mr Archie Cameron and he ended up for one day being acting Prime Minister, he had told us this information later on that there

16:00 was someone the Government of the day did pick up so this was how I found all this out.

So then you boarded the train. I was just curious what was in your, you said you had a sea kit?

Yeah, we had like, besides our normal battle kit and haversack on our back which was everything like ground sheets and things like that, and you know like a dixie [cooking pot],

16:30 your eating material and you had your water bottle and various things that you wished to carry, which you were allowed to carry and on top of that we had this huge big sausage bags as we called them. They were sea kits. Great big long things about that long and about some size round and they were fairly heavy because you had to carry things like long underpants, something we used to wear up at Woodside but

17:00 we still had to carry the darn things. A lot of people threw them away and when we had a kit inspection they were getting passed from one to another so you hadn't lost anything because if you lost something you had to pay for it, and it wasn't very easy to pay when you were getting 2 shillings a day, so we managed to do those sort of things. Yes it was quite heavy and you had your rifle and bayonet and that sort of thing and webbing and you know you were ready to go war all bar live ammunition sort of thing.

17:30 **And so where did the train take you?**

To outer harbour, that's down the port, the port down there.

And from there?

Well, from there the next morning we embarked onto the Stratheden and the next morning we left at, I think it was somewhere around 7.30 in the morning roughly that and we went down the peninsula and then into the Australian Bight,

18:00 and we picked up the rest of the convoy, there was 2, 3 other ships - the Orion, the Strathmore and an old Polish, I think it was a Polish, an old coalburner called the Betorey and I think they had New Zealand troops on board and that thing was always breaking down. We had an escort of 2 cruisers the HMAS Perth and the HMAS Canberra

18:30 and they escorted us right to Fremantle. From there at Fremantle we thought we would be going practically the next day but apparently we were there for 6 days and we got leave because there was supposed to be a German raider out in the Indian Ocean and our escort went out to see if that was true. I've never found out

19:00 whether there really was but I happened to know a chap from Renmark that I went to school with who was on the Canberra and he told me that's why they were 4 o'clock in the morning they were going out there. Apparently whatever the result was, we were free to go and one afternoon we moved out to the anchorage about 3 miles out, and then the next morning we were on our way through the Indian Ocean and I think about 3 days later, I think it was 3 days, we arrived

19:30 at Colombo. In the meantime, I had contracted mumps because a friend of mine got left behind at Woodside, and he had it and had passed it on to me so I spent most of my time in the hospital from there to Colombo for 3 days, but I managed to get out, and get 1 days leave at Colombo and from there on we went on to Port Taufiq in the Suez Canal.

What had your ship been like in

20:00 **terms of conditions?**

The conditions on the Stratheden were absolutely disgusting, for the infantry. Infantry ever got everything worse – first in, last out as the old saying for infantry. We were in hammocks down below water level and we had mess, our mess tables were under the hammocks. Some people would be eating and other would be in their hammocks. The perspiration and the stench from the bodies, you see there was no

20:30 bathing, there was only seawater and you could get hosed down in seawater, that's all you could and the stench was something shocking. Sometimes the perspiration was dripping down onto the mess tables and it was no wonder that the mumps and those sort of thing went right through the boat. The conditions were shocking. Specialist troops like the artillery and them they were in cabins, because officers were looked after but for the other ranks, I think the conditions were the worst I've ever put up with on, you know. I suppose there are

21:00 worse probably, but they weren't good.

Did they have toilets?

Yes, they had toilets yes but they were overcrowded and I do remember at one stage there I got after I had these mumps, I got dysentery and one morning I got, at 6 o'clock in the morning I had to run down to the toilet and I was still there at 10 o'clock on the morning when the ship's inspection came and I got roared out by the

21:30 officer in charge of the boat, the captain of the boat and OC [Officer Commanding], the CO [commanding officer] of the troop ship and I just told him I couldn't get off, because, I said, "I've got dysentery," and I said, "I'm too weak to get off." And I said, "I don't know when I feel like I can get off." So I got out of that all right. Well that was the sort of conditions on that boat. We were very glad when the trip was finished.

What do you remember about Colombo? That was your first time out of Australia.

Well yes well,

22:00 I do remember before we got off the boat at Colombo, this nursing sister said to me when I told her I had this dysentery, she said, "Now if you drop a coin over the side," – because it was so clear there – she said, "then the natives will dive down and will send you up some bananas." If you put out a rope and then they send you up some bananas. She said, "Try and get some green bananas, because," she said,

22:30 “they are the best thing to cure dysentery.” And I found out it was too and so that sort of thing. So then we finally got a day’s leave and I remember having a ride in a rickshaw, you know just going around the markets. There really wasn’t that much to see really and it was very squalid and quite untidy the areas really and at 4 o’clock in the afternoon we were ushered back on the boat and the next morning we were on our way again. So I do remember that much.

23:00 **What did the other men, they must have more shore leave than you because they hadn’t had the mumps?**

No, there was just the one-day that’s all. No, I was just lucky they had cleared me of the mumps so it just turned out, fairly early that morning the doctor had a look at me and he said, “Yeah, yes you’ve got no more swelling and everything,” and he said, “I don’t think you’ll pass it on to anybody,” so I was able to go on leave so otherwise those who did have the mumps they weren’t allowed to. It

23:30 just worked out to. There was just the 1-day’s leave there that’s all. I suppose the boat refuelled, I don’t know really know what happened, you know, while we were out on the streets on leave.

And then back to the boat?

And then on our way to Suez Canal and that, I’m just trying to remember just how long that would have taken us. I think it was

24:00 somewhere around the 5th November or something like that, I’m taking a guess on this, early in November at any rate, not early in November, I should say early in December. Early in December we left Colombo it might have been the 2nd or the 3rd or something like that. And then we landed at on 15th December we pulled into Port Taufiq.

24:30 From there we came down the Suez Canal and then on 17th which was exactly a month to the day we really left on the calendar month, we got off the boat at El Qantara which is on the border of Palestine and Egypt, and then we were put into, I think we had a breakfast and then we were put into cattle trucks. They were old trucks that they used for cattle and they smelt like I don’t know what, and they rattled

25:00 something shocking. In fact, we always reckoned they had square wheels because they bumped, bump, bump, bump and I don’t remember whether, I don’t remember, I think we might have had to open a tin of bully beef but I know we arrived at midnight that night 156 miles away at a camp called Dimra, which was very close to Gaza where a lot of the First World War fought in the Light Horse there and we were given a meal

25:30 and bedded down and we were very, very tired and very, very hungry I do remember that. That was that part of that.

So you got some rest finally and the boys were happier with that?

Yes, I guess they felt a bit better with a bit of food in their tummy and a night’s sleep, well part of a night’s sleep at any rate. We were bedded down, there were tents for us, we were in tents, that’s right.

26:00 **So what happened the next day?**

I presume that’s when we really started to work, walk rather and go on route marches and as I said the Mediterranean Sea was about 5 miles away, and it consisted of about 3 miles of sand dunes, that would be higher, you would be climbing sand hills up to your, nearly up to your knees and then you would go down a

26:30 ravine or whatever you like to call them, a valley and then you would climb up another sand hill and all this time you can hear the waves of the Mediterranean and we knew if we got there we would be able to have a swim. And usually on about the 12th or 13th ravine you’d reach the sea, and it was always a relief but it was very, very hard and slogging work to do that but it was all in the process of really getting fit. And that was

27:00 the that part of getting fitness. We did other sorts of work like, I remember we were given gas masks which we had before but we were really put to test with live gas, you know like they used in the First World War, I think it was mustard or chlorine gas or something, and I did find out, it didn’t. I found that terribly hard trying keep a gas mask on, but once I took it off and felt a bit of a burning in my

27:30 nose and eyes, I quickly put it back on again because then I realised how bad it was for some of these First World War diggers who got really gassed you know, and didn’t have gas masks and got gassed, so that was a part of that. We did a lot of normal hard training of an infantry men like attack and this sort of thing, rifle bayonet and bayonet training and different things like that and I guess it was, did all the normal

28:00 things an infantry training had to do.

So you were quite aware of what the World War I diggers had gone through at that time?

Yes, well I was always very keen, I guess that was some reason why I wanted to join up. Whenever I could find a book that said anything about Gallipoli, and they were hard to get in those days, books and

that sort of thing and listened to anybody that was in the First World War, and they were a couple of the fathers of some of the

28:30 older boys at school. I know of one particular chap who had been to the Boer War and the Great War [First World War] and tried to join up again and he was the lock master at No. 5 Lock, so he told me a lot of things and so I sort of, I was always very interested to know what they went through at Gallipoli and of course, at the Western Front and the Light Horse and that sort of thing and yes.

Was you uniform sufficient

29:00 **for all this marching? Your boots, your uniform for all the climbing about sand dunes and that sort of thing. Was it adequate?**

Well, we just had the one pair of boots that just had to do us and whatever we had we had to make it do. Like as I said in Tobruk, the uniforms were too hot in the daytime but they were at nighttime we had to put our great coats on because it was so cold

29:30 but we didn't have you know camouflage suits like they had later in the jungle and what they wear today. They had the uniforms to fit the climate and that sort of thing but there was nothing, such thing as that so, yes there were days when you were very hot and there was times when you were very cold.

So how long were you in the desert training?

Training, like in Palestine?

30:00 Well, from about February, I suppose most of, wait a minute what am I talking about, December, January and then the first part of February. That's right that's when we moved up to, went by train from El Qantara or, El Qantara,

30:30 right through to Mersa Matruh which is right on the border of Egypt and Libya and there that's when our job was to we thought to go up and look after millions, well there were practically were millions of Italian prisoners sort of thing, that was our job because the 6th Division who had and the New Zealanders who had taken all those places had been sent to Greece. So that was our job to then to

31:00 garrison and to do further training to answer that.

What was your first impression of the prisoners of war?

Well, it was very easy to see that the majority of them had no lust for war, they were peace loving. The Italians were peace-loving crowds, they loved their music. I mean every second or third one carried a piano accordion or something, and they sang

31:30 and they were just happy to be taken prisoner. They had no wish to be in the war whatsoever, they were forced into it. It was just proven in our first patrol that 20 of us could take 75 prisoners and then later on our company took 500 odd prisoners. They had no wish for war really, not the Italians. That was my impression.

So did you did you get along quite well with the prisoners of war? Were you allowed to interact with them?

32:00 Not that I had very much to do with them really. I know when we were going up to Ben… you know when we got up through Tobruk and Derna and that our A Company there were stationed in Derna and they were living like lords. They had Italians as their cooks and batman and they polished their shoes and all these sorts of things and cooked for them and made their whatever,

32:30 their beds and folded their blankets and all sorts of things, but I'm afraid we didn't get that so much we went up further up to Benghazi way, or up to Madalina Pass and I think it was called Bakka and Tokka and Vaas were the 3 little towns there, in the Madalina Pass and that was when the Germans had landed further around and at that stage my brother and I were down on this slope behind a big boulder with

33:00 a Bren gun and the Germans were advancing some 500 yards a little further and we were firing at them and that sort of thing and a few bullets started whizzing around, and word came that we had to retreat because we were in no position there to hold the ground and we had hardly any tanks or anything like that so it was just getting to the trucks and go fast as we could back to Tobruk where they had a perimeter defence and that was

33:30 really what took place, I think it took about 2 days to get back.

So did you have to move these POWs [prisoners of war] in the beginning when you went to garrison that area?

No, I wasn't involved in that at all but as I said the A Company, apparently they shipped several thousand I think, I think some of them went to India, some to Canada and some to Australia but I don't know about that particular lot, but that's, there was quite

34:00 a lot, many thousands, quite a lot ended up in South Australia at the Loveday Camp I do know that, up on the river so.

So you were about to see your first action for the war and were you excited about that, or were there any nerves?

Well, no I don't think so, I think I managed fairly well. I guess was a bit lucky, my brother

34:30 I've always classed as a very good soldier, 2 years older than me and I did lean on his shoulders a little bit and he would always say, "She's right, she's right, she's apples', you know. "Nothing is wrong." He was, I learned to cope and as I said when he was taken prisoner of war, well I was already, I thought, "Well, I'm a man now. I can manage," and I just had to and I did.

So can you tell me about the engagement in a bit more detail

35:00 **before you had to retreat back to Tobruk?**

Well, it really wasn't much. We were told that the German forces had landed and we took up positions and I remember this Madalina Pass or I think it was a place called Vaas and the pass was very high. I don't know just how far down but quite a few hundred feet down and then there was planes, I can and you could see the Germans

35:30 advancing and an odd shell was landing, they were sort of sizing up the position and we fired several magazines in one afternoon and on the same afternoon they told us, well just before nightfall, that we had to get into the trucks and there were trucks lined up all over the place – captured trucks and their own trucks and Italian trucks and all sorts of things and we just climbed aboard and just you know,

36:00 went as fast as we could back to Tobruk.

In your first engagement with the Bren gun and your brother, do you think you actually hit anyone, or was it more..?

Well, we don't really know we think we could of but we're not too sure about that. I was firing my rifle in between loading magazines and that sort of thing and

36:30 **And then was it the cattle trucks that took you back to Tobruk?**

From there? No, no it was lorries, oh no there was no trains there. The train line finished at Mersa Matruh, you see.

Oh no, the cattle trucks. I thought they might have been the same cattle trucks you got before.

No, no, you mean back to Mersa Matruh. No, no. That wasn't a bad train at all as it turned out. It was probably an Egyptian passenger train. That wasn't too bad at all

37:00 that trip. We passed through Tel-el-Eisa and El Alamein didn't mean anything to us, it was just another little railway station at that stage.

So when you got back to Tobruk, who else was there?

Well, at that stage I believe the 2/43rd Battalion by land, they had come up there by land and they were in perimeter there and our brigade

37:30 and 26th Brigade and the 20th Brigade they were up Benghazi, or further around, further then what we were and we arrived in Tobruk and then we all took up positions in the various places. The Italians had built a fortress there practically. A lot of, there were a lot of concrete bunkers that they had used and there was a big tank trap that they had dug and that sort of thing, but they only had 1 line of defence so we quickly had

38:00 to dig another one and there was all this solid rock, a lot of solid rock there so it was pretty hard digging the positions. I can remember that very badly, very much so.

Where was the Bren gun of your brothers going to be? Inside the perimeter or outside?

Oh yes, we were inside. We were all inside the perimeter at this stage when we landed on this, what I do believe was Easter Saturday on that particular year, 1941,

38:30 and we were all allocated and told what was going on and where the Germans were and took up our positions and it was only a matter of a few days when the Germans started to attack us and around everywhere yeah.

What was the feeling inside Tobruk? So there were approximately 2000 men around that..?

Well, no there were divisions there. At that stage we were lucky, we had 4 brigades.

39:00 The 18th Brigade, the 2nd 9th, 10th and 12th who had been to England, you know joined up early, 1939ers and when they came back, we ended up with 4 brigade divisions, apparently the same as what they used to do in the First World War which we were very glad of, because I don't think without the extra brigade we would have ever held Tobruk. That is my opinion, but I think it is pretty common knowledge.

39:30 So we were all inside and we were allocated which posts we would occupy and that sort of thing and that's what we did.

And where were you?

By that stage lucky enough, our company for a time was reserve company. We had to dig a place which was called, we called it 'Forbes' Mound'. Captain Forbes was our OC and at this stage we had very few shovels and quite often

40:00 we were digging out rocks and that with Italian bayonets and using our steel helmets for shovels and we made this zigzag trenches and that sort of thing as we were told what to do well we had been told earlier what sort of trenches. We learnt this sort of thing in Wayville in elementary training and sort of thing and at Woodside and also at Palestine and we also had copied, we were able to see the trenches the light horse used in around Gaza

40:30 and around Bersheba and that during the First World War so we learnt a lot through that so that's that part.

Tape 4

00:39 **Murray, just go back a little bit to March 1941 and your marching through to Mersa Matruh and you meet up with the 18th Brigade from Britain, I just wondered what tales they had to tell you of what you knew of the Second World War.**

Well, at that stage they hadn't

01:00 been in the war either. What happened at Mersa Matruh was that the 2/9th Battalion and I think one company of the 2/10th the next day they were going to capture an oasis called Jerebub , I'm not too sure just how far away it was, it might have been about 150 I'm not too sure either way, so that was their mission and they knew all about it and I remember

01:30 meeting up with 2 or 3 good friends from Renmark that I knew, I hadn't seen in a long time sort of thing. And of course the next two days after we got in the trucks and that's when we moved straight through to Sidi Barrani where we stayed in barracks for the night and there was a huge, big lot of ammunition and equipment from the Italian army there,

02:00 huge lot and there was no prisoners there, I think they must have all been taken up further. And then of course, we kept moving up and we didn't really go through Tobruk. I can't honestly say that I've seen Tobruk unless the night I came out on the boat which was almost dark, I've never got really right into Tobruk. So anyway we just moved

02:30 right up into the Benghazi area and as I said, A Company went to Derna and various companies were in various places for more or less I suppose guarding prisoners but I never got to that stage where we guarded any prisoners.

Your nickname is 'Bambino'. Well that is Italian. What's the story behind that?

Yes, Italian for baby. Well, on this particular first patrol that we did

03:00 and we captured the 75 Italian prisoners and this chap was either trying to tell me something and he was saying "Bambino, bambino, bambino," and what it was, I made him put his hands up, of course, I had the bayonet at him, he wanted to get out a, which I did see later, a photo of his wife and his little baby, and they thought it was

03:30 such a joke that he was talking about this bambino that, because I was always called 'baby," or 'bambino," that I've had that nickname ever since. 'Bambi', 'Bambino'. Quite a few of the originals who are left they see me and "Hey Bambi," or "Bambino," or something like that. I know one particular bloke, he always calls me Bambino so that's how that came about. It wasn't really because I was so young originally, there were others as young as

04:00 me, in fact there was a couple that might have been a week or two younger than myself in the battalion.

So what age were you now? When this happened?

At this stage I was 17. I'd had my 17th birthday yes.

Sounds like a baby to me. And why were you pulling out the photograph? Was he scared?

Well, I think so yes. He wanted, I think it might have helped him a bit, to save him so any rate what I did get him to do because

04:30 I didn't know what some of your mates would do, I mean Australians would take anything from anybody you know I think, so I just thought, I didn't want him to lose that photo, so I got him to hide it as much

as he could. So he did, he put inside, further inside a pocket somewhere where he could hang onto it. But I thought well all these, I didn't know how many years he was going to be a prisoner of war, and I'd hate to think that he couldn't see his wife and at least, in a photo

05:00 his wife and his little child and I felt that sort of, had that sort of feeling, there was no hatred whatsoever against him. Perhaps he was firing at me before, I don't know sort of thing.

You don't seem to have any animosity towards the Italians

No, the funny thing. No, I haven't and I haven't any against the Germans, not in the Middle East. Because under Field Marshal Rommel I mean, as we know

05:30 he was not a Nazi, and the most fair minded General you would probably ever, ever get and all our prisoners were treated properly and I think it rubbed off, we treated them the same way, their prisoners of war even though we did get orders at El Alamein there was to be no prisoners, we couldn't afford the men to look after them. I don't know that this ever stuck, I don't know of anybody who shot any prisoners

06:00 of war and I would hate to think, hope to think that there was none.

That would be a difficult order to hear.

Well, it would, it was a different thing against the Japanese because you knew what treatment you were going to get from them, you get no mercy, so you took no prisoners with them.

But while you were in the Middle East there was a sense of equality between the fighting troops.

Well, yes. Well, to give you some idea in Tobruk on August 3rd

06:30 this was when the 2/43rd Battalion and our company, we were ready to help them try and retake this land, this highest piece of ground in Tobruk. It wasn't very high but it was still the highest. It was what they call Tree 209 and the ground around it was called the salient because of the part because the Germans had taken and we were trying to get it back. Well, the

07:00 2/43rd didn't, they got absolutely, a terrible lot of casualties and lucky enough for us we weren't, we didn't have to go and do it. Well, the next morning there were so many casualties that the padre hoisted a red cross flag and there was a real truce, I think it lasted for an hour. The Germans came out and picked up their wounded, and they, in fact I've got an idea some

07:30 of their doctors even came out and looked at our wounded, all the wounded were brought in. The dead were picked up and although I didn't see it personally, I didn't have my binoculars, I believe that some of Germans exchanged cigarettes with the Australians, and one hour after when everything was clear the white flag was taken down and the war continued, and that is one part of a truce I did see in Tobruk.

08:00 **It's a good description of the absurdity of war isn't it?**

That's right, yes.

One minute you're smiling at each other and then next, then you go back to your allotted positions and start shooting again.

Yes, I know I had something that happened after the war. I was contracting for the Housing Trust as a painter and my next job,

08:30 I thought, the next day I'd better go and see this chap and let him know I'm coming to do his house the next day. So I waited out there and he wasn't home and next thing, I must have nearly gone to sleep, and he knocked on the door of my utility and he said, "Yeah, do you want me?" and I said, "Yeah, I'm, can I do a bit of work in your place tomorrow. I don't want too much." I said, because it was Anzac Eve you see and I didn't want to be too late because I always went to Anzac reunions those days the night before and then before Anzac Day.

09:00 At any rate, we went inside and he said, "Well, what do you want tomorrow?" and I was working on my own so I said, "Oh, just a couple of bedrooms, if you like." It was only him and his wife so, it was a three bedroom house and I said, "Now, don't worry too much about the furniture. As long as I can get my steps around and can get to the rosette in the ceiling so I can paint that," and I said I'll roll the rest with the roller. At any rate, I get there in the morning and everything is cleaned out. He said, "I wouldn't work like that and I don't expect you to."

09:30 So at any rate, he said, "What do you like for morning tea? Coffee or tea?" and I said, "I'll have a cup of coffee thanks." And, "How do you like it? Milk?" and I said, "That will do me fine." So he produced some nice cake and sitting down and he looked at me and he said, "I'd better tell you something. I was a German soldier during the war," he said. "It wasn't my doings, I was in the Hitler Youth. I was forced into it." And I said, "Oh, I've got news for you, I was an Australian soldier. Where were you?"

10:00 'Oh,," he says, "I was at El Alamein." I said, "So was I. I thought I'd seen you before. I had you in my sights once and I said, 'Poor devil, let him go'." You know' just for a joke. So there was something that

can come out after the war as well as during the war so. And we became very good friends after that. Sort of thing I'd got out there after and he had an import license and I would always find something there for the children or something for my wife or something for myself he'd leave on the seat

10:30 of the utility. It was quite good some of it. A camera for me daughter and that sort of thing.

Who would have thought in those days in Tobruk that you would have ended up being friends with a German soldier.

Well, that's right. I've met quite a lot since and if they you know, feel the same as I do, you know forgive and forget well I feel the same. If they like to boast about what they did, then I can boast too so you take it

11:00 as it comes sort of thing.

Do you remember your first, the first time you saw the Germans? Like really saw their faces?

Oh, yes, yeah. Well, I just I don't suppose I thought too much of it, I just thought they looked a bit different to the Italians, but I suppose having seen German, elderly German people in Australia, and they had migrated, you know, into the Barossa Valley

11:30 and into Renmark and that sort of thing, I guess I knew what a German was. In those days there were commonly called "square heads," you know sort of thing which I shouldn't have mentioned I suppose and, no I really wasn't surprised.

Were they as young as the Australian troops?

Oh, yes. I think so. I don't know at what age in the desert they were conscripted but I guess they were about 16-17 on, I think so yeah.

So boys were looking

12:00 **at boys across the ..**

I think so, yes.

And can you talk a little bit about the red and blue lines of defence at Tobruk.

Well, the red line of course was the front line and the in lots of places as I said there were concrete bunkers with you know with slits through to fire with and at a lot of places, you know we found weren't adequate and in many cases you couldn't dig so we used to

12:30 build sangers, what they called sangers, an Arabic I think or Egyptian word for stones built it. So you'd build them up and then the only protection you had from the heat was if we would put an old captured Italian ground sheet up but you had not protection really apart from these limestones you know, pieces like this. I remember at this 209, this vital highest part in Tobruk,

13:00 209 there was enough room for everybody bar our section down in the bunker and we were part in the sanger and we had to improve it and when the snookers would come over, that's the dive bombers, they'd try and bomb us cause they couldn't penetrate the you know, the concrete and we had chips flying off and then the fighter'd come across and machine gun us and we would be going from one side to the other trying to dodge them

13:30 and at one stage, the first time we had ever seen a flamethrower. The Germans used flamethrowers and we were very lucky we weren't scorched alive with that so, yes that was that part. Then as I said further around the sections were called 'R' and 'S'. I just forget, I think 'S' went up to about 100 or something, the 'R' went up to 70 or something. That's just my memory, I could be wrong they were all numbered.

14:00 The only thing I do know there was an area called the 'Figtree'. I believe, I do believe that the 'Figtree' was mentioned in the Bible, it's got to be hundreds years old.

Or thousands of years old.

Or thousands, yes thousands of years old. It was called the 'Figtree' area. Well, that was another area where we there. That's the red line mainly.

So that's the red line.

Yes, because then out on the Bartier Road, was what was called the Bartier Road.

14:30 There was El Alam Road, the Bartier Road and then Palestinos , another area that we went and that sort of thing. Well, then we realised that there's not much good having a front line if you haven't got somebody behind, you know, if they break through to come and help you out so we built the blue line. Well that was practically I suppose a mile and half or something behind the red line, it always moved at night so you didn't know how far it was really.

15:00 It was changed over at night and so, they built these defences within the perimeter, between the enemy and between our front line sort of thing, the red line. That's what we called the blue line. Also the Italians had built this huge big tank trap right around the perimeter so that was, came in quite handy,

stopped quite a lot of these tanks getting through, until they found ways of, you know of putting pontoons or whatever

15:30 they put over it, steel mesh or something like that and got through.

Can you give me the wider picture of Tobruk? I think it's difficult for people who weren't there to understand exactly what the circumstance was at Tobruk, because it was very unusual. As you said, you didn't even see the city of Tobruk. So can you explain was it the city and then..

Well, it's not really a city. There were several buildings. There was port installations

16:00 from what I'm told. There was a good deep harbour. I think there was a hospital there. Our hospital was in a cave, so I'm told, I never saw that, I was lucky I never had to go out sort of things. I've got a photo in one our Tobruk to Tarakan books, but I've never taken too much notice of it. I don't think, there were a few buildings, that's about all I know of really. I

16:30 **And then the allies were around the perimeter of the township?**

Oh, yeah, yeah. Like all the, the divisional headquarters and all the base troops they were more or less in that area, towards the sea. As I said, the hospital and the dental units and whatever have there sort of thing.

And what was so vital about Tobruk?

Well, Tobruk was the last

17:00 the last deep port other than Benghazi, the lifeline to Egypt. Once they took that we had no way of feeding any army, like you couldn't get into there with ships, so it was very, very important in that respect and the Germans valued it just as much as what the British did.

So you were around the perimeter, where is the enemy?

The

17:30 enemy is outside the perimeter. Yeah.

And how long were you stuck in that situation?

Well, this went on from, we'll say the 10th or 11th of April 1941 and we were relieved on 23 October. This went on all that time and the 2/13th Battalion, unfortunately the destroyer that took us up,

18:00 although it got, had wire around the keel and we had to wait until they cleared it, you were allowed 20 minutes to load and unload and then they were off. That's all the time they could spare because then the bombers and light, because they could be seen from other part of the coastline, like down Solomon Bartier [?] way on their way to Alexandria and that was that. Well, lucky enough they cleared it and

18:30 we were allowed to get back on the gangplank and the very same night, the next night they came back both those ships were sunk, the Hotspur and the Letano]. I think Hotspur was a destroyer, I think so and Letano was, I think, a mine laying cruiser, I think and they were both sunk. So the 2/13th Battalion didn't get out until December and so at that stage an attack was made to try and relieve Tobruk altogether and try and push

19:00 the Germans and they took part in that.

So that, you're talking about your evacuation from Tobruk. Just to go back a bit what was your daily routine there? I mean, it sounds like you would have had to have kept a fairly low profile.

Well, in the front line in most places you could not put your head above the ground well up until, well from daylight

19:30 to dark, because you would get knocked off. I know at one stage in this place at Forbes' Mound where the Germans were looking straight down at us and we were issued with periscopes, you like with a mirror there and mirror up there and you'd look down one and you could see up the top without having to put your head on and apparently one day I must have mine up about that far above the barrier pipe, and it was blown to bits and pieces, so the snipers, that's how deadly there were. And

20:00 also in that particular area there was a telephone line and the Germans always had a fixed line with their Spandau machine guns down the telephone line but we got to, we worked it out every 8 minutes they were fire a burst so we used to go in and out and across this line doing that. If we changed positions or reinforcements came in or if we happened to get a hot meal brought in, a bit of hot stew or something at night they'd always

20:30 to do it during those times. The sort of things you worked out and we often think there was a bit of lull sometimes, just after dark, and we sort of think it was a bit of an armistice sort of thing too, they wanted to do what they wanted to do, relieve themselves like we had to do and that sort of things or get up and stretch you legs or something. Never seemed to be much going on, a sort of a mutual, unknowingly, a mutual agreement between the Germans

21:00 and ourselves in that respect. War can be really funny in some parts, yes.

Well, that can't have been much more comfortable than what you were. I mean you were –

No, they weren't more comfortable than what we were certainly. It wasn't too bad in the concrete bunkers, at least you knew you were safe. You could get a little bit of sleep during the day, some could but like back in this Forbes' Mound we were you just got no sleep at all really. You know

21:30 10 days was the most you could put up with it. I know my brother had to go out at one stage he got dysentery, went out for one day and then had to come back. He lost a lot of weight during that time and sort of thing and it was, food was very scarce and I know at one stage we run out matches and we had two chaps that didn't smoke in our section and I didn't smoke before I went in the war, but they issued me with cigarettes and I smoked.

22:00 I've had bronchitis every since through it. Don't smoke! Any anyway, something we had one bloke there he said, "If you don't keep a cigarette alight that will be the end of you. I couldn't stop here." He just smoked and smoked. So you, two of you would be on, listening at night so you would have your cigarette and you'd have your ground sheet over your head and as soon as it got down to the

22:30 stage where it was burning your fingers, you would wake next up and you would give him your cigarette to light and this went on for I think nearly 10 days, we managed to do that. I do remember that. And the cigarettes we were issued, they were Turkish. I think they were called 'Half Moon' or 'New Moon', or something, they were oval shaped and I swear to this day they were made from camel dung. They were terrible things to smoke. I don't know why I ever smoked for.

23:00 **What was your daily routine in that situation?**

Well, in that position the daily routine we would do this at night, we had to lay low in the daytime, you couldn't move but at the night time in some areas the Germans might be a bit further away and we did a lot of listening patrols and sometimes they turned into fighting patrols. We never let him ease up. We would be out at nights, you know through the trip wires and out and we would listen to see if, what they were

23:30 doing, if they were digging in and that sort of thing. I do remember one night it must have been Italians, they were digging in closer up and there was a piano accordion going and he had a magnificent tenor voice and he was singing O Solo Mio or whatever that one was, it's outside my area. So after a while we thought we'd had enough musi,c and gave them a few bursts and then they retaliated and we got to learn from the stars

24:00 where we were and that sort of thing. My brother and I were quite good at that, because we learnt that when we were kids up in the country, so we learnt where we were and every man for himself, back to your lines.

How much distance are we talking between the Allies' trenches or their bunkers and the enemies?

On the Bartier Road, it could be anything up to a mile and a half. At 209 your some

24:30 5-600 yards away and at some places at night they were 1000 yards away it depended on just where, what the lay of the ground of where they made their defences or attacking lines and where we made our defences sort of thing.

So it's a constant shuffling. One would shuffle up and then the next would shuffle up.

Yes, yes. You see then you'd relieve each

25:00 other like let's say one battalion or brigade or whatever would be in the blue line and then after 10 days we would go back there. Well, you changed different positions. We were just about in every position in Tobruk I don't whether it was to familiarise ourselves or what it was.

To stop the rot.

That was the sort of thing that happened.

Well, what did you do all day if you couldn't poke your head up? What did you do all day?

Well, you just laid there. You couldn't do anything you know. You had

25:30 to be alert, somebody had to be awake all day that sort of thing. Yes.

How much room did you have to move?

Well, hardly any, because you know the trenches were only about that wide and they zigzagged and that sort of thing. There was enough room to lie down because what we did we, we, they were zigzagged like that and then we'd dig one going that,

26:00 back toward and that way we could lie down but we had no cover over the top that was half the trouble.

And as you were saying when the planes came over you were jumping from one side to

another.

I do remember one time in Tobruk, this was when the Germans broke through the first time, well they were Italian tanks. They were only light tanks, but that was better, we didn't have any so it was better than nothing. And one of these light tanks

26:30 came over the slit trench to the section next to me, and when a tank goes like that the tracks goes loose and it grabbed one of the chaps, he got killed at El Alamein later on, on the shoulder tab of his overcoat and took off the 'Australia', you know the 'Australia' thing on there and dragged that right off the lapel and didn't even bruise his shoulder. Now a lot of people think that's not true, but I

27:00 can still find somebody who can verify for that. And anyway, this was when I got into strife. This tank stopped and so I thought he was a chance and my brother was trying to fire at the slits, you know where the gunner is or driver is, so I ran out and lifted up, what do you call it, the turret hole and

27:30 I threw a grenade in and threw it down but I got told off something shocking by the OC that day. He reckons I gave the Italians, the whole position away. He said, "You're too young, you do silly things," or something like that. I thought I'd done a marvellous job, I'd knocked out a tank. 17 years old. But they knew where we were, it didn't make much difference to the result of the war.

What did you think in those days? You knocked out a tank, you know it was a tank full of men.

28:00 **What did you, were you able to realise when you were that young what the implications of what'd you'd done?**

I thought I'd done a good job. I suppose I started to realise then that war was to kill or be killed. I guess I was starting to realise that. I do remember the first time an enemy plane went over. Nobody ever told me they had rear guns. So when it went over I got my rifle and aimed a shot at it and next thing I knew I had bullets whizzing all around me. I didn't know, nobody ever told me

28:30 they had, you see you're young and you don't know much. But you learn fast, you grow up very fast that's what I did find.

Were you ever scared in that period?

Oh, there are times. If anybody said he's not scared I don't think he's telling the truth or else, he's not right or something. There are moments when you're very scared. There's no two ways about that, but you mustn't let it get the better of you.

You must have got

29:00 **scared for your brother. Were you worried about something happening to him?**

Well, not knowing whether he was a prisoner of war or what. The only thing, you see they went in a different attack that morning. I wasn't anywhere near him. I knew they were going out the carriers and that night I was lucky enough, I was able to run across and see the carriers and when I got across there they said, they looked at me and I said, "Do you know where Ray is?"

29:30 And they said, "Haven't you heard?" and I said, "Heard what?" and they said, "His carrier got knocked out this morning and he was behind enemy lines to billyo knocking everything out and he got his track blown off." So any rate one of the chaps came up to me and I knew the chap very well and he said, "Murray, if the Germans didn't shoot them and I don't think they would, then he'd be a prisoner of war, because I saw them jump out of the carrier – because it probably would have gone up on fire."

30:00 So that's the only hope that I held onto until you know, I found out that when I got back out, back to Fremantle after the war that he was a prisoner of war.

What had he been doing? What was he doing at the time? Can you just talk a little more about what he was doing at the time he was captured.

What he was doing?

Yes, what Ray was doing.

Well, apparently this morning the engineers couldn't clear the land

30:30 mines to pass through for the British tanks and they absolutely refused to go through unless the where there was a path, you know clear. So a small gap, our CO he ordered the carriers out to protect, because we'd lost a section of Don Company were taken prisoners and the 2/28th Battalion they got out through the mines and then couldn't get any support and they were taken prisoners of war, they just were getting mowed down so they just

31:00 had to surrender and so they sent out the carriers and they got through and they were out doing a heck of a good job and apparently, my brother got a bit too far, well it wasn't his, well he didn't give the orders, I guess his sergeant did, and got out a bit too far. Well at this stage, I believe they were about a mile behind the line, they were shooting up everything they could see having a real wow of a time and they got their track blown off.

When you say they got their track blown off, what do you mean by that?

Well, I'm not too sure whether

31:30 they hit a mine or whether an, like 88mm, that's the German gun triple gun, like the artillery, anti-aircraft, anti tank, magnificent piece of machinery. Probably the best gun in the war. Whether they hit it or not. I've never, my brother, really doesn't know. All he knows is the next thing he's going around in circles so they had to jump out. They weren't molested then. They just jumped into a pit they

32:00 found there, a trench there and that night they got out and they thought they'd you know, get back into our lines. So my brother said to the sergeant, he said, "Well, that ridge over there is the ridge that the 2/24th Battalion was supposed to take today, this morning so they should be in there." So then they crawled and they crawled, after they walked a fair way and he said there could hear Germans and Italians. Nobody worried them.

32:30 There was people walking around. They weren't worried about the war miles behind the line. And so when they got up close they started to crawl and they could somebody walking around so. So he said it looked like the 2/24th so he stood up and next thing this voice said, "Ah Aussie, for you the war is over!" He could speak a little bit of English you see. So that was it. They were taken prisoner of war. That was it. He was sent to Italy

33:00 and then just, some time before the Italians capitulated he, they broke out and they sort of joined the partisan forces and hid themselves around and lucky enough the Italian, the northern Italian people were fine people they said. They were different to the southern people altogether and they were very friendly, they were the farming type and they housed them and looked after them and warned them when the Germans were around and all sorts of things. So then

33:30 during that time he managed to last until the American forces came through and then he ended up getting back to England and then eventually back to Australia.

There were notorious POW camps in Italy. Did he manage to avoid that did he?

Well, apparently. He was, I'm not too sure just which ones it is but he said he never had too much trouble.

34:00 He said he was always shitty and was always hungry and that sort of thing, and they kept the Italians on the go all the time you know, trying to break out and that sort of thing and they'd get threatened but he said he never had too much trouble with them so. He doesn't talk much about the prison life. I remember I found out from another chap that happened to know about it and at one stage he was up in a loft in a farmhouse

34:30 and you know where they used to put all their hay and straw and stuff, they used to call them lofts. It was about three o'clock in the morning, this Italian woman came and prodded and told him "German, German," or "Deutsch," or something like that, a patrol was near in the village so he had to swim this frozen river at three o'clock in the morning to escape. He was a good swimmer, and lucky enough on the other side, he says he doesn't know

35:00 exactly, it looked like a pine forest but it was a different type of pine that we know and he was lucky enough to get in there and sort of get a few branches of trees around him because it was freezing cold and the next morning the sun came out and he says and he dried himself and his clothes out and then he moved on a bit further. And he did that right until, you know, then they joined a band of them and managed to get through and get a bit of food. They'd steal a turnip here or there out of a field

35:30 and survived the war that way until the Americans came through and then they, at that stage I think they had captured a German vehicle, and they were coming round on this escarpment and next thing they noticed this tank in the distance with a white star on it. Because they didn't know anything about the Americans being in the war. He didn't know anything about it, and there was no propaganda out that way.

36:00 And so next thing something whizzed over the top, like a shell so they thought it was time to give themselves up and then they found out they were Americans, because the Americans couldn't understand that there were Australians in Italy sort of thing until they told them they were prisoners of war and fighting with the partisan forces. They looked after them very well but when they sent them to the British lines they came under the British you know military police and he said, they gave them a pretty hard time because they had to prove that they were

36:30 prisoners of war. They had nothing to prove, they were wearing any clothes they could. You know, half German clothes and half Italian clothes, that sort of thing because all their clothes wore out we had and so at that stage they were taken back to the Eastbourne Camp in England and just by luck this Captain Forbes I told you about, Forbes' Mound, he had been sent over to England, something to do with the repatriation.

37:00 He had become a very sick man, he won the DCM in Tobruk and that sort of thing and he saw him. So straight away he took off colour patches and gave him colour patches and that different things and that sort of thing so. And then, by that stage apparently they weren't allowed to eat big meals, but they had a cookhouse there that you could go and eat whenever you wanted. So he was terribly thin, he was

down to about eight stone. He's now about 13-14 stone,

37:30 that's the fattest I've ever seen him. So he, only because I suppose they fed him beer to drink or something like that I guess and so he put on weight. The funny thing is, he's never lost it and he always kept as fit as anything. So he always used to worry me you know, I thought that he'd suffer, and he's 82 and he's probably healthier than what I am. He's had no heart attacks or things like that. I've had a couple of them and sort of thing.

I think you two are survivors aren't you?

Yes,

38:00 so, as I've said we are the only two left out of seven in the family and there were two younger and what, three older. We're still going strong

You have a lot of stories between you, you and your brother.

Yes, I, you know, I've often told me brother I wish, his own family don't know much about what happened in the prisoner of war camp. He said, "Oh, best forgotten." You know, the only time I could get anything out of him was give him a jug of beer and

38:30 he would talk a bit. He had told me a few little things you know, but he always say, "Best forgotten," sort of thing, you know.

But he gave you the impression that he wasn't treated too badly.

No, not badly at all, that's right.

And it wasn't that difficult to escape.

Well, I don't, well I guess it wasn't easy. I think he said he was on three,

39:00 two or three parties that almost got out and you know, they were discovered or the trench caved in or something like that. He said they always kept trying, they never gave up from the time he got in there, he said, "Your number one priority is to escape, that's the Australian idea. Not to be a prisoner. If you were a prisoner of war, you were unlucky but the idea was to escape." And apparently apart from the Geneva Convention, that is a part of war but, it wasn't looked upon

39:30 that way by the enemy apparently. If you tried to escape you were, you know, you were probably shot.

He was a brave man.

Yeah, I always looked upon him as a very good soldier, my brother.

Tape 5

00:41 **Right, we finished talking about your brother who was a prisoner of war, I just wanted to go back a little in time to when you withdrew to Tobruk at night time in a convoy.**

When we?

When you withdrew to Tobruk

01:00 **in a night time convoy and you met up with a British MP [military police]. I know that was earlier on in the piece, but that story –**

Oh, yeah. Actually I didn't actually see the MP myself, this is only what we've been told, like it was a German dressed up as a British MP, a red cap as we called them and apparently, he was waving

01:30 them down into this, valley I suppose you'd call it.

Where were you coming from at this point?

We were coming from, like along the coast road, getting somewhere around Derna I believe I didn't see it actually. We were in enclosed trucks so we wouldn't have seen much and apparently he waved them down there and they went down there, and then one of our officers said,

02:00 "No, no, that's not the way. We go through the coastline that's our orders, straight through the coastline." So what I've heard after is that they realised what was going on and apparently he was shot, this is only what I've heard.

This was a German soldier impersonating a British MP?

Yeah, yeah, I sincerely hope what I've been told, by quite a lot is quite true.

Well, it's highly likely isn't it?

Yes, yes.

02:30 **And we were talking a little bit about the conditions you lived under at Tobruk. You didn't have much space, what did you talk about all day while you were in the trenches or did you have to keep very quiet?**

Well, we didn't have to keep that quiet, but I guess we were trying to get a little bit of sleep, you know those who could on days off and that sort of thing, because you know at night time you never, you didn't get much sleep at all at any stage and

03:00 I guess that was about it, I don't think we talked about anything really. Most likely it was better not to talk I mean, you know your nerves were a bit on edge and some people might get a bit snappy if you started talking too much. I don't know exactly, thought too much about that, I suppose it would have helped to pass the day.

You were probably all mentally exhausted though.

Well, yes that's right, mentally we were.

03:30 I know towards the end of the siege everybody had lost a lot of weight you know and that sort of thing and physically and mentally we were just about at the end of our tether, I think, which goes for just about every campaign we were in I think.

There must have been some fun times amongst it all. Can you talk about the story of the time you took tobacco and papers

04:00 **to a mate.**

Oh yes, yes. I think this is the one I'm talking about. The one about a chap, he only just died recently and I knew when his 21st birthday was, and I think we must have been back in the blue line because I could walk in the daytime with some sort of safety. They could see you with binoculars probably from a long way away but I don't think they were going to waste 1 shell on one person.

04:30 So he was in a different platoon at the time and so I, being a good old country boy my brother and I we always stacked plenty of tobacco, plenty of toothpaste, that sort of thing that we needed, pencil and papers and things like that so I marched over to him with 2 tins of tobacco, you know good tobacco. Champion Ruby, I remember that, Log Cabin flakes, you know it smelt beautiful and Tally Ho and Risler papers and I took over and I says

05:00 "Congratulations! You are 21 today, Matt. What would you like for a present?" and he said, "Oh, don't be funny." I said, "How would you like a nice Australian cigarette?" and he said, "Oh that would be something good." So I pulled out, we pulled out this 2 ounces of tobacco and you know, that was something because we were only just getting old rubbish we were getting there, and Turkish cigarettes and Cheznian, and so he reckons that was the best birthday present he could have for a 21st. There was another chap there

05:30 he came from up the river way too and he would just smoke all day and all night if he was allowed to, he just was a big smoker and he offered me, he said, "I haven't got any money on me," he says. "But I'll tell you what I'll give you 25 Egyptian pounds," – that's 25 shillings Australian, 1 pound – "for a tin of tobacco." And I says, "It just so happens I've got one on me, Harry," so I gave it to him. And he said, "Now, you remember, what do I owe you?" And I said, "You don't owe me anything.

06:00 For God's sake Harry," I said, "We're all mates. I don't need it. The least I smoke, the better off I am," so I gave it to him and that was all right. Many years later when the war was all finished and I went up to Loxton to a stay there and went up to Renmark to a niece's, I think it was either a niece or a nephew, my younger brother had 6 children. So to a wedding, so we went into a

06:30 club and he was a barmen, used to do that, he was a blocker but he used to do that on a Saturday afternoon to get a bit of money, a barman. So anyway he said, "I haven't forgotten that," he said and he wanted to pay me then and I said, "No." So we got a round of drinks and I gave him a pound note, 20 shillings and then he gave me handful of change and when I looked at I found I still had 20 shillings. That was his way of repaying me, we had quite a free afternoon. You know,

07:00 that was mateship and he said he never forgot that what I did for him there and that's the story of that one.

Did you make a few good mates while you were there?

Oh yeah, I had one particularly good friend and his name was Terry O'Connoll and I'm afraid he died a few years ago, he had an aneurism and we went quite a few places we went to Sydney to the 1991 Tobruk

07:30 Reunion together and that was only a few months after he had this aneurism and I carried all his gear and I'll tell you a funny story about that after. Then we went down to Mt Gambier in 1991 for the 50 years of Tobruk, went down to the turnout there, was it 60, no 50 that's right and then we used to go to the test cricket together if it was on at Adelaide Oval

08:00 and we were very good friends. We had a funny thing that happened. When we were caged up in the minefield in August/September, I think it was before the battle of El Alamein, I woke up one morning and I said just for a bit of fun I said, “Hey, Joe,” and he looked at me and he said, “What do you mean Joe?” and I said, “Oh, that’s your new nickname. What do you want for breakfast? Spaghetti you know, or

08:30 something like that?” He said, “Are you going troppo?”[crazy] So at any rate he said, “Well, if I’m Joe then you’re Tony,” so we went of like this talking like Italians for, any everyone said, “Gawd, what’s wrong with those pair,” and we kept that up for six weeks and it was real fun. I think that cemented us into real, really good mates. I had lots of good friends but he was truly my great mate, we sort of understood each other, clicked you know, that sort of thing. So that was

09:00 you know. I don’t think I had any enemies you know. I was always friendly and talkative to anybody really.

You didn’t break into O Solo Mio with him?

No, he had a good voice, unfortunately I haven’t. He did have a good voice, yeah.

You were talking about the Italians love of music, were the Australian soldiers, did they get together and sing? Was there much singing?

Not in the line, no we never did that, no.

Whistling? What were the tunes that people were listening

09:30 **to then?**

I didn’t hear anybody whistle in Tobruk, or sing in Tobruk actually.

Except for the Italians.

Oh, the Italians did. As I said they carried music around with them and that sort, you know piano accordions and they just sing, had their own little concerts back in the line that sort of thing. They are just that sort of people, they can’t help themselves really.

So the Australians, they weren’t singing, they were smoking all day.

Well I suppose that, thinking what a good feed would be like and that sort of

10:00 thing. I think probably thinking about home a lot too you know, I guess that whenever your chance was writing whatever you could write, letters and that sort of thing which was hard to get sometimes, paper and anything you would write on. We would get some paper from the Comforts Fund and YMCA [Young Men’s Christian Association] and that sort of thing, but little bits and you just wrote when you could and anything you didn’t,

10:30 wasn’t supposed to be known got cut out so we used to write and it looked like a jigsaw puzzle that sort of thing.

It would have been better than nothing.

Yeah, well I have been told that some chaps had understandings with their wives, mothers or whatever and they used to use the first and last letters of various lines and they’d get a sentence out of it you know to say where they were and that sort of thing or well or something like that.

So they developed their

11:00 **own code?**

Yes, that sort of thing. Yeah. We occasionally would get a parcel from home, would get one sent to you. At one stage I was very lucky I had a chap took over from our section as a corporal and him and his father and sons had a stores over in the York Peninsula, quite a branch of them, Braun & Son and they used to get some magnificent parcels sent to them. This one stage there,

11:30 I don’t know what happened but the tin of bully beef that I had, I should have known better, but it was blown up and I was hungry and I ate it and I got domain [?] poisoning in Tobruk and I was very ill for a while but I couldn’t go out. And, so one night he got this parcel and when he opened it up he found a tin of condensed milk so he managed to get a little bit of water and mixed it with that and then he found a tin of asparagus and he made this, and a biscuit,

12:00 there was some biscuits in there and he gave it me and I kept it down, it was the first food you know. I remember things like that, you know.

That must have tasted like a, fit for a king?

Asparagus tips. Yeah, cause we never got anything like that, sort of thing, yeah.

What kind of food were you eating at that time?

Well, bully beef and biscuits was the main thing and sometimes we had tinned, it was supposed to be

cheese, I don't know what it...it tasted a bit like cheese.

12:30 And later on they got what they called M & V, meat and vegetables, and that was greasy and you know, when it was cold that wasn't much good but occasional when the cooks could cook a hot meal and sent up at night, you know anything hot is better than cold and you know, it tasted all right. I've read stories about that people had, you know a lot of fresh meat and bread. Well, the only bread I ever come up was

13:00 one loaf and it was uneatable, it was weevils and it was mouldy and we just didn't eat it, we knew it was no good to us. And we did get a little bit of meat on one occasion because the Indian troops, I think they were Sikhs or, I think they were Sikhs, they had sheep brought up and they were kept back behind the line because as you might know they have to kill their own, they don't, won't have anything that's been delivered killed. And anyway, apparently a couple of German

13:30 shells or Italian shells landed in the middle of the sheep and there were a few skittled, so our cooks apparently grabbed them and made some stew out of them so we got a bit of that. And then on another occasion, I'm not too sure whether it was in Tobruk or Tel-el-Eisa, where a camel, I think it was Tel-el-Eisa, straddled onto the land mine and got killed, so our cook went out and we had some

14:00 camel. A bit sinewy, but it was better than nothing and then another occasion I remember in Tobruk we had a chap, I think I mentioned this morning I think I mentioned there were 4 Hoare brothers from Broken Hill. Well George Hoare he was a transport driver. Well, apparently George was one of these chaps that could do anything, rustle cattle or anything, he was a pretty wild boy,

14:30 so he well as a result of getting into the food dump that was there, I think that was the reason, he got, I think it was 14 days front line service and he was sent to us. Well the night before we had been out on one of these listening patrols and we were listening to the music and different things and went out about a 1000 yards and gave them a little bit of curry and then came home. Well, the next day we had just had 1 person on you know guard duty watching

15:00 and the rest of us were trying to get some sleep and the next thing we hear 'Bang!' and a rifle went off. We all come too pretty quickly and got to our posts and there was George crawling out, he had seen a snake and he shot it's head off and so he went out and got this snake and brought it back and he skun it and at that stage we had been getting, it was sort of concentrated methylated spirits in a tin and you could light it and you could heat, you know,

15:30 you'd be lucky if you could boil a brew with it but you know, you could get a bit of hot water and we had this issued to us. So he got some bully beef and stuff and he skun this snake and he said you know, once you cut its head off it can't bite yourself and it was absolutely beautiful. Snake mixed in bully beef and that and meat and vegetables. I always remember that you know, that was another delicacy. That was a part of what we got you know, but I think a lot

16:00 of the base troops got back further, they got better food than what we did and that sort of thing. There was a quite a good food dump there apparently, with even strawberry jam and stuff so I'm told but we never, ever tasted that. The only jam we ever got was occasional marmalade jam made in Lebanon and Syria and half the time there was leaves and all sorts of things and you didn't know what it was like, but it tasted better than nothing.

16:30 **You must have spent a lot of time dreaming about some nice fruit and some crisp vegetables?**

Oh yes. Well, that was the whole trouble. We were at the stage where we couldn't get any fresh fruit so they issued us with ascorbic acid tablets to stop scurvy and all that sort of thing. The condition we were in if we scratched ourselves you know on our legs on the trip wires and things and with the flies, there were millions and millions of flies, next thing you know you would have great big sores

17:00 all over your legs. I've still got scars from 1941, you know, on my legs through that.

You had to contend with quite a lot of difficulties and not only the flies but I guess the heat and the dust must have been..

Oh, the dust. I mean, what they call Camp C [?] and that's why our paper now is called the Camp Sea Khronicle. We get one every, about every 2 months.

The what sorry?

The Camp C Khronicle. Spelt with a 'K' for chronicle and that sort of

17:30 thing and I remember having a photo somewhere in my album and I might have said something about the telephone line but when you look at this dust storm on the one day it looks like the sea, like a rough sea and then I've got one the next day when it's a calm desert. So that was the sort of thing it was, it was absolutely you know horrendous, the conditions.

And what, it would get in your eyes? It must have been very...

Oh, yeah. You know like if you wanted to eat

18:00 something you just had to hold it straight up to your mouth and cup it otherwise you would eat, have more sand than you would, you know, bread or biscuit or whatever you were eating you know sort of

thing.

Did you ever question what the hell you were doing there?

Well no. I guess we signed on the dotted line and king or country and that was your duty and sort of, you know you did that sort of thing.

And everyone else was doing it so...

I guess so, yes, yes.

18:30 **And did you, you must have become quite close, simply because you were living in such close quarters with people.**

Yes, yes, yes. You know, that's why... I don't know of anybody which had any real arguments, you just couldn't afford to. I mean once that happened you would lose control of your own mind really, that sort of thing really. I don't know

19:00 of any, I guess there were probably some hotted moments, I don't know. Well, I do know of one I've been told since. Apparently a tin of fruit, I don't know where the fruit came from I don't remember getting any, came up. One tin for the whole platoon and this chap, I'm afraid the poor old chap is dead now, lived until he was 90 and he said what's the use of a tin between 20 odd people so he ate the lot himself and he,

19:30 that never went down well. He was hated from that day until the last I think.

He wouldn't have had a very comfortable time for the rest of his –

No, but the trouble he was the welterweight champion of the River Murray at one stage, he was a champion boxer, and I suppose he felt safe.

How did you, were there ever times, what kept you in good spirits? What kept your moral up

20:00 **in those months?**

I guess, when I come to look at it now, I guess it was thinking what might be ahead. I never, ever thought that I was going to get killed. I don't know whether anybody else did, well perhaps once in Tarakan I sort of wondered whether I was going to come back. But, no, I always felt well you know, I'm all right. I suppose everybody else thought the same thing, but of course

20:30 it didn't happen. I just always felt confident that I would survive. I guess the life I, you know my childhood life was not all cream and peaches. I was loved and all that sort of thing but I guess that did help me, hardened me a bit and the fact that I didn't have a real youth life. I suppose I went from a boy to a man in what

21:00 I had to do and that sort of thing both in work and in the war and I suppose that did harden me and make me feel much at ease.

Well, it was probably a saving grace.

Yeah.

Can you talk about the 1941 counter attack to get back to 09 and apparently there was some disagreement

21:30 **about whether that counterattack should take place or not.**

Well, that's right. Well our CO at the time, Colonel Windeyer, who ended up Judge of the High Court and Major General. A very nice man he was and great soldier. He, we were back in the blue line at the time when the Germans broke through and General Moorshead, the commander, he wanted us to attack immediately. Well there was no way, we didn't have

22:00 transport. We had to wait until the 2/10th, they were brought up until we could get their transport. By this time it was nearly dark at night and you couldn't see where you were going and he didn't think it was possible, he was a great tactician, but General Moorshead could see the you know, the ramification, what was going to happen if the Germans did break through. So he ordered us to attack. Well anyway, we started to attack and we thought there was all these tanks

22:30 and we thought, "Where in God did all these tanks come from? This is good." You know we felt terrific but somewhere along the line the tanks turned around and started to machine gun us and we saw black crosses on them, you know in the little bit of light that was left and so that wasn't very good at all.

Where were the tanks? Were you looking forwards towards the tanks or were they coming..?

Well, at that stage I don't know whether they knew

23:00 where they were either because you know, they started going back to where they had come. They had been roaming around the country, you know, I'm saying the countryside, no-man's land a bit, in between

the two red lines and blue line and next minute I think they realised that we were Australians and that's all I could think of. I've being trying to read up that, but I couldn't find much about it.

What do you remember though of

23:30 **that time?**

Well, I just remember they were going in and a friend of mine, I wasn't in the same platoon but I was pretty close, we were next door to him and we all went to ground of course when the tanks opened up because we thought maybe their guns would go over the top of us and I said, I just said to this chap, "Come on Ducky, we've got to get up again," and he never moved and he had a little bit of, I don't know to this day whether it was shrapnel, whether it was a splinter off

24:00 the limestone, it went straight through his heart and he was as dead as doornail. I do remember that and then at any rate apparently the attack didn't work out and that's why we didn't take back to the 209 or the salient so it belonged to the Germans all the time we were there because of that.

At what point in the attack was it decided that you should retreat?

I think it was somewhere around ten or eleven o'clock at night that,

24:30 there was no organisation. Nobody knew where anybody was and I think, you know orders were getting passed down from up high and all that sorts of thing and it just wasn't possible to do what they expected, because I think the Germans just broke through so quickly that the organisation, we were short of transport. We were short of everything and that was the trouble in Tobruk.

We were running on empty.

Yes, we had no tanks to counter attack and,

25:00 we had no air force. We had good artillery, that was one good thing but.

So you made this charge on 209..

Well, towards it, yeah..

Towards it and when you initially began that what do you recall seeing? What were you running towards? What could you see?

Well, you couldn't see very much at all. You could see the shadows of these tanks and that's about all you could see.

25:30 **And if you had looked to the left or right what would you have seen?**

Well, just some of our mates trying to you know, trying to move forward and that sort of thing and all wondering what's going on. I think it was probably the biggest confusion, I think, of the whole siege of Tobruk really.

So you're running forward or are you dropping?

No, no you couldn't run forward, you were just walking forward and wondering what, where the enemy were and whether there was infantry there. We didn't really know what was going on. I don't think they knew

26:00 too much, you know in the higher echelon, they didn't know what was going on either.

So when the tanks started firing, were you returning fire?

Well, it wasn't much good firing rifles at tanks. I guess the artillery might have opened up, but I'm just not too sure on that one now, but all I know is it didn't succeed.

It sounds like it was very chaotic.

It was, yes.

And was there many Australian casualties from that?

Yes, I'm not too

26:30 sure just how many lost their life that night, I haven't actually studied that one up but..

But you don't have a personal recollection, apart from the friend that you mentioned, you don't remember losing anyone else close to you?

No, I don't that night, no.

And so it wasn't long after that that you were relieved by the Polish/Czechoslovakians.

27:00 Oh, no, you see this was on the 1st of May, this was you know not very, we were there less than a month from the time we entered the perimeter of Tobruk. No, we are, that just stayed as it was, the salient and

the Germans, the enemy occupied 209, Trench 209 and that's the way it went until the big attack, the (UNCLEAR) attack on the 3rd of August when the

27:30 2/43rd tried to take it and as I just mentioned about the armistice for an hour or so and that sort of thing so in our time there we never did take the higher grounds so we were, you know they were looking down on us all the time so it was a very important part of Tobruk, 209 yeah and I might go back a little bit further than that. I might have mentioned that

28:00 there was enough room for our section, we were in sangers. I think it was about 2 nights after that we, well the 2/24th Battalion took over from us and it was 2 nights later that the Germans put this big attack on with tanks and artillery and flame throwers and the whole company that occupied that was captured and A Company of the 2/24th Battalion so there is another

28:30 close call we had, you know, our company sort of thing. I do remember that and that's when all our, I think 2nd reinforcements, instead of coming to us went and formed this, practically this A Company in the 2/24th Battalion until they got further reinforcements from Victoria and that sort of thing.

How was it decided when you should be relieved of your time

29:00 **in Tobruk? Was there a period of time in which you were supposed to be there? In Tobruk?**

Well, I got a feeling I was reading about it that I think it might have been General Blamey, I'm not too sure but the high echelon in Australia and the Prime Minister apparently realised that

29:30 we were getting towards the end of our tether both in, well in mind and energy as far as, you know, our bodies weren't taking it anymore and that sort of thing and it was under hard conditions and so much illness and that sort of thing. You know dysentery and the flies and the fleas and the chats and well anything, the scorpions. There was that many things that, huge scorpions there and all sorts of things and,

30:00 that it was time to go. There is another story too, it's quite true. Our pay sergeant and our George Driver [?] and also the postal sergeant said one night he said, "Have we got any dogs here?" and we said no because we had heard the Germans have Alsatian dogs you know, shepherd dogs. And he said, "Well something sniffed

30:30 me last night," and we said, "Are you all right George?" and he said, "It definitely was I smelt it." So next morning, he went home and told this old Light Horse Major Bull from the Lighthorse in the First World War about it and Major Bull says, "You're in trouble mate." He was a real old character he was and he says, "No fair dinkum. You come over here and you can see the tracks," and sure enough here was what looked like dog's tracks. "But," he said

31:00 'it had spots on it." "Oh," he said, "now you're in real trouble," and it was a leopard and they found out that it definitely was, there was a leopard. There were leopards in the desert, you know up there. There was a lot of gazelles and things like that, but there was definitely a leopard. Maybe the leopard has strayed a bit and was trying to get food, get the gazelles but there was something, I didn't know at all. I only found this out after we came out of Tobruk.

Probably best you didn't

31:30 **know then.**

Yeah, we might have made a pet of it.

Were there some men that did lose their minds? That they just couldn't cope with the difficulty of it?

Well, I think there was one or two self-inflicted wounds, you know, took the easy way out sort of thing.

How was that usually done?

One bloke shot his trigger finger, another one shot himself in the foot

32:00 sort of thing.

Which foot?

I don't know. I didn't ask sort of thing. Just something I've often thought, I'd sooner face the whole German army. I could not shoot myself. I wouldn't have the courage to do it, you know something must go wrong in your mind to have to do that. I know people commit suicide and they've probably have good reasons for it,

32:30 but I'm afraid I don't have the courage to do that, I'd sooner face any army than do that. It's just how different people think different ways, I guess.

It sounds like you have a strong sense of self-preservation.

I hope I have. I think I have, yes. I've always thought that you know I have pretty high concentration and that sort of thing and so

33:00 I never try to offend anybody, I always try to help people and that's the life I've, the way I've always been brought up and that's how I've brought my children up and hopefully they'll pass that on, yeah.

Was it very demoralising for you when you didn't know where your brother was?

When I had time I thought about it and I just hoped he was, you know okay and I sort of rested on the words of that one

33:30 person who said, "No, if wasn't shot he'd would definitely be a prisoner of war," and I hung to that and although I missed him you know, not that I saw him as much as I used to when he was in carrier platoon, but yes, I always hoped and thought that he would be a prisoner of war.

Were you religious at all?

Well we were brought up to go to Sunday School and church, like when my mother did

34:00 when we, that's when we came in Renmark. Well, what you did after, she said, you get your start. Mum just belonged to the Methodist Guild and that sort of thing. When we were out in the country, the only people that came around about once a month were the Church of England and when we moved to Renmark the first minister to come round and see us was the Methodist Minister. "So," Mum said, "that's good enough for me. One religion, as far as I'm concerned."

34:30 So we had that little bit of grounding and we left it at that. I guess at times you know when we had church parades and things like that it meant something to me. I don't think I'm really real religious, but I do have some sort of feeling in that respect. I'm not an atheist by any means.

You didn't send up any prayers for your brother?

Oh, I guess no. I looked up

35:00 and says, "I hope everything's okay for you," but I sort of had a lot of confidence cause I knew he was pretty confident, a good soldier and a confident soldier, so I guess I left it at that and that's how it turned out to be.

You were right. You were, can you talk about the night you were evacuated from Tobruk?

Yes, well at this stage we were like, in right back out

35:30 of the front line because at that stage we had a battalion, I think it was a full battalion, I'm not sure, of Free Czechoslovakian forces and also a Polish Karpathian Brigade. I don't think their Brigade was quite as big as ours, of Free Poles. Some of them came up into our section and I remember at this stage somebody had made a raid on the food dump, and we got

36:00 a lot of the food and when we looked at it there was tins of potatoes and so we just put a little stick on it you know, in indelible pencil "P," you know potatoes, "S," for sausages, greasy old sausages and things like that and we had a feed one day and at any rate when these Poles come and I got my bayonet out you see and I went out and started digging and they thought there was mines there, so I come up with this tin of sausages. So I cut it open

36:30 with a bayonet and put a sausage on the end of the bayonet, took a mouthful, took a piece myself and gave it to this officer and he thought this was terrific so then went and showed him all the sticks and tried to make him understand what all the initials was you know and so it wasn't too many days after that, probably 2-3 days after that that we got relieved from Tobruk, so we hope they ate all that nice food that was in there. It wasn't really all that nice, but it was better than what we'd had.

So how did you get out without being

37:00 **caught? You said earlier that the ships only had a half/20 minutes turn around.**

Well, this was earlier in the night. It was all worked on the moon a lot you know. The darker period of the moon and we were taken by trucks from there down to the port and we were loaded, they had a gang plank that went across onto the destroyers or cruisers or whatever that came on and at this stage we were told to get off in a hurry so we

37:30 got off and apparently this Hotspur which was a destroyer had got some wire around its keel and divers, the port divers went down and they freed it and then we got on again and then of course we set sail for Alexandria. This would be somewhere around eleven o'clock at night and I think it was about seven, half past seven in the morning that we pulled into Alexandria.

Was that a dangerous stretch of water?

Well, it was, because

38:00 there could have been, you know U-boats around there. Not only that the shore batteries, the big gunners that some of the Germans had, they had what they called 'Big Bertha', could fire several miles and from around Baati [?]and Salloum and Hellfire Pass and places below Tobruk, going down towards Mersa Matruh down that area, they were within their range and also in range of their dive bombers and that sort of thing.

So was it all lights out and night sailing?

38:30 Oh, yes, yes. Dark as dark and one thing I do remember the next morning is that you know, when it came daybreak, we looked out and saw this periscope and I thought, “Oh my God,” but as it turned out it was one of our submarines returning to Alexandria so that was all right and there was a funny story there too I omitted. About a month before this we got issued with what was supposed to be rum. It wouldn’t have been a mouthful each so that

39:00 the two sergeants, we didn’t have coins, so I suppose they cut a card, and our platoon sergeant won. So I was the only one who had a spare water bottle and they were, what do the call it that stuff, enamelised so we poured this in there. I said to him “That’s not rum. That’s cognac – Italian cognac. That’s cognac.” I said, “Right, when we get out we’ll all have a nip of this rum,” you know we might have been able to get some tea and put in it or something like that.

39:30 So we get on the boat and the next morning they say, “Come on Jonesy, out with the rum.” I go and get this water bottle and the bottom of it, you know we had sort of a flannelette, a flannel sort of stuff covering over the, and the bottom was eaten right out of the water bottle so there was no rum and it was all stained underneath. They reckoned I drank the rum but I didn’t, a good job I didn’t. I’ll always remember that. That was a funny part of Tobruk, probably the funniest part I

40:00 remember.

We’ll just end the tape there Murray. So had the rum eaten away at it.

Yeah!

Imagine what it would have done to your stomach.

That’s what I’ve often thought. I said, “I’ve saved your life probably.”

Oh my God. Or either that or it would have been really strong.

Tape 6

00:39 **So you’d taken the ship as far as Alexandria and what happened there? Did you disembark?**

From there we were put on trucks and taken to El Qantara, that’s like on the border of Palestine and Egypt.

01:00 From there, I can’t remember whether we went by trains or truck that time, back to, further into a camp called Dulis . It’s somewhere about the same area, you know roughly 160-170 kms away, rather miles away from El Qantara. That was from

01:30 yeah, Tobruk yeah. What did I say October and from there we did training for, in Palestine, did more training there. At this stage we got a new commander, Colonel Windeyer was made a brigadier in charge of the 20th Brigade so we got a Victorian chap from

02:00 Bendigo, I think he came from, Colonel Hammer and he said straight away “My name’s Hammer and I hit and I’m as hard as nails,” and he said, “Remember that,” and he was. He was a magnificent soldier. So we did a lot of hard training there and then.

What were you doing training? I mean were you all in physically good shape? It seems like after Tobruk you may have been a bit thin.

We weren’t in very good shape at all.

02:30 We, we rested, sort of rested for a few days and then we’ve got to get back into the training. I suppose they think there is only one way to you know, we were fed better that’s one good thing. Then we trained hard again and we got fitter. I think our bodies got better and our minds got better, you know there was no pressure on us very much. I mean there was always a chance of a German plane coming over

03:00 but not very much. Very remote. Well, then, I’m trying to think when we went up to Syria. After about, March, April, somewhere around March I think it was we moved up to Lebanon and sort of, cause the 7th Division had gone home to come back to Australia and we went up

03:30 there to garrison, more or less up there and to further our training and sort of thing. Our battalion went to Tripoli in Lebanon and we were housed in beautiful barracks, they were French army barracks, 2-storey I think they were. Beautiful condition and big parade ground and everything. I think we even had a canteen, it was very good up there sort of thing.

04:00 And from there we could go on leave nearly every night into Tripoli and we had excursions to go up to Aleppo, up near the Turkish border, to Cedes, which was a chalet up there with snow although it was

the time the snow was starting to melt a bit and there was still about 14ft of snow there and some of the chaps had learnt to ski rather,

04:30 they had a good time but I'm afraid I spent most of my time on my tail. I wasn't much good at that sort of thing. That was just a day's leave. They did start an idea they were going to make a ski section and some special troops were picked out that had some idea of it, but it didn't eventuate. They were up there for about a month I believe, or several weeks at any rate and but it didn't eventuate so

05:00 that was that. And after that, this Colonel said to us, "Well, you've got to get fitter than that," so we moved further away into an area called Mt Torvell Fairly high up, the ground was very, very rugged there and on one exercise we thought it would only last about a day and it lasted two or three days and we had to get to the top of this mountain, it wasn't

05:30 actually a mountain, but it was called mount, and the last bit was so high that the Indians had mules there carrying a lot of the gear and I can still hear those mules screaming, trying, you know they really screamed, trying to get up into those hills and the Indians were trying to push them and pull them and we were just about in the same position trying to scale this. I think if there was only one time when I ever felt like giving up was there. You know, you'd go up 3ft, and you'd fall back

06:00 4 and this sort of thing and finally I managed to get up and then to top it off, everybody was so exhausted. I don't think we'd really got over Tobruk properly, really and there was quite a altercation between the medical officer, the RMO [Regimental Medical Officer] who has final say about health of the troops and he wanted trucks to be brought up for us to go home,

06:30 but Hammer says, "No, they walk home." It was quite a few miles, you know this was back to Tripoli and in the end, we walked and those that just fell by the side, you know had sore feet, blisters and things were picked up by trucks. I do remember that. Possibly the CO was right in the end it did, was one way of making us fit and letting us know that he was in charge so.

07:00 **Did you walk the whole way back?**

I walked the whole way back, yes.

You slept well?

I think I did, yes. That's one of the hard times I do remember.

So what happened from here?

Well, you know, we did a lot of training there. We did garrison work

07:30 and that sort of thing and down near the Checker Tunnels, I mentioned this tunnel went right through the mountains and if that, if the Germans had landed say with U-Boats and had landed raiding parties or bombed it whatever well, that was the end of communications, well line of communications and transport and that type of thing from Lebanon through into Syria. So we guarded that, that was a precious jewel.

08:00 And then towards in, towards June we sort of thought there was something going on. We started to, things started to change. Our trucks were all painted. Any sign that looked like, the 9th Division sign was a platypus, that was all painted out. Anything that looked like Australia on the trucks was all painted out. We had to take off our colour patches, our Australian

08:30 badges and all different things and then we went right out wide into the Hom Desert and came out around that way instead of going straight down the coast line and trying to fool the fifth column [spies, informers] because there was, the fifth column was up that way at that time. Everybody, well you couldn't really trust anybody that lived up there at the time and the Free French,

09:00 there's still a lot of bitchy French there and then as we got going and as soon as we stopped for a smoko or a meal or something there would always be some children there, you know children from there and they would say, "Suwaita George," which means, "Gidday Aussie." They knew who we were because we still had tan boots on you see, and the British all wore black boots, so they were fooling nobody really. And from there we made our way back and then

09:30 into the Sinai Desert and this was of course, going to El Alamein and we, at that stage thought that perhaps we were going home too. The 6th and 7th Division had gone home and some of our chaps who were sort of bookmakers, they were taking money on you know which way we were going. If we went down to El Qantara, if we turned left we were going home, if we turned right we were going towards Cairo and the desert.

10:00 And of course, when we got down there we turned right. That was the desert.

What had been the odds of going home?

I did hear somebody say it was about 60/40.

So then you found that you were going to the desert, that must have been disappointing? Or was it?

Well, I guess we had got news about Pearl Harbour and all about it and what was going on in Australia and that sort of

10:30 thing and naturally we wanted to you know, get back and defend Australia. As I said, orders were orders and we had to do what we were told.

So you then turned left at the desert, and where did you go?

Well, we went through Cairo and then up as far as a place called, what was it called now, I can't remember now exactly, but it was quite

11:00 a few miles short of Tel-el-Eisa station and that's where we sort of assembled there and got organised and got trucks ready and different things like that and then we, we were bombed there by the dive bombers and had some casualties there. Then on the, I think that was somewhere around the 2nd or 3rd of July in 1942 and then

11:30 on 10th July we did an attack on Trig 26 which is called the 'Hill of Jesus," and furthermore down in Tel-el-Eisa Station. We did that without any bombardment whatsoever because they'd done a reconnaissance the night before. They had got right down into enemy lines and found they, they just, the Italians don't have sentries, they just sleep.

12:00 In fact we captured a colonel in beautiful silk pyjamas sort of thing. So we went in with just rifle and bayonets and that sort of thing, and machine guns of course, as well and captured Trig 26 and then on, because later on in the day the Germans realised what was going on, and from then on they counter attacked and it was always for a month or two

12:30 there was, we would lose ground, we'd gain ground. We were, at that stage we were out, they had more tanks than what we had, we were out gunned at that time. You know, we took a lot of ground. A lot of heroic things took place at that time. Quite a lot of people earned medals for that sort of, that. Even infantry were knocking out tanks with sticky bombs.

13:00 That's a sort of a bomb that has glycerine or something in it and you just, clamp them on the side of the tank and run like heck and get down your hole and next thing the tank blows up. So and the crew have got to get out and you clean the crew up, so they don't get away. This took on quite a lot, this went on for quite a while.

What, where there any other forces supporting the Australians at that time?

13:30 **Anybody else other than Australians at that time?**

Not just in our section. Further south there were other troops. I think perhaps the New Zealanders may have been there at that stage and the Indian troops and there was English troops further south, but we occupied all the northern section, the Mediterranean near the coast and we did all that attacking there.

So you found

14:00 **the Italians quite easy to sneak up on and do a night attack?**

Yes, yes. We did in the first place. They weren't renowned as good as the Germans soldiers by any means. I think they were a more peaceloving country than the, sort of thing, than the –

So what percentage of them became POWs and what percentage of them fought? Did most of them fight and you only got a few

14:30 **POWs?**

Oh, yes, well I mean they put up a fight to a certain extent and I suppose their troops further back like their artillery and there where they weren't you know, facing up to bayonets and things like that, they probably fought well. But there's one thing the Italian soldier didn't like, he didn't like the Australians attacking them with bayonets and on many occasions it only took a few of us could take quite a lot of prisoners. They surrendered pretty quickly when it came

15:00 to cold steel.

And did you have to use your bayonet?

On a few occasions, which I'm not very proud of.

Is that in a situation where you have no choice?

Yes, that's right, yes, yes. Sort of killed or be killed, yes.

And when you're that close why would you not use ammunition? Why use a bayonet?

Well, I suppose ammunition, you've got to reload. I mean after you have fired you've got to reload

15:30 and when you get that close and if you're overtaking a section and you're right on top of them that is the quickest thing to do. The bayonet is there for a reason.

So after you had taken some Italian POWs, the Germans heard that you were on to them and what was their next move?

Well, seeing that they realised that

16:00 they had the Australians up against them and I suppose their intelligence was pretty good too and they realised they had the same troops that they had to put up with in Tobruk. Quite a lot of these, most likely some of these units would have been in Tobruk I don't know, certainly General Rommel was and we, I guess he realised he had to get his best troops there and that's when he brought up some of his well known, you know, great troops

16:30 like the 90th Light Infantry. They were very mobile. They all carried light machine guns and they could move them quickly from one stage to the other sort of thing and we ended up at that stage, fighting mostly the German troops from then on until the real battle of El Alamein.

And were you taking heavy casualties?

Did we take heavy casualties? Yes, we did have heavy casualties because at Tel-el-Eisa

17:00 we attacked in daylight and we lost very heavy, but at El Alamein, except for the last couple of days when we were you know, more or less trying to survive this was the time when I wasn't around, when I was hiding in the bomb hole. We attacked all at night and by that we knew exactly where they were. Our planes photographed them and different, all their

17:30 positions. We knew exactly where they were ,and we did all our attacking at night because and then it's, the German can't see you, it's only spasmodic that his fire was going to hit somebody, whereas in daylight if you've got sights on you well you've got about one chance in ten of surviving. That's the reason why our casualties although we were reduced to 41 members in the whole battalion we would not have lasted the Battle of El Alamein

18:00 unless we attacked at night.

So were you down to 41 before the Battle of El Alamein?

No, at the end of El Alamein. We went into the Battle of El Alamein, I did see figures something like 536 or something like that, when we went in. We did get some reinforcements but not enough to fill the battalion. Not a thing.

Do you think the Germans had similar intelligence on your positions and were using night for similar kinds of

18:30 **retaliatory strikes?**

Well, I think yes, I think they did but we had one bit of luck at one stage we had captured a truck which had apparently got lost, of German intelligence and got too close to our line and we captured him and they had a radio station or something on board and we got a lot of their files, their codes and everything. This was just something, you know I didn't know at the time and something I have learnt

19:00 since about it you know, when you read about the story of El Alamein and that sort of thing and that did help a lot. They knew exactly what we were up against and who we were up against and that sort of thing.

What did the men know? It seems that when you've been discussing different elements that really the men on the ground are told very little. Was again the case in the Battle of El Alamein?

Yes, we don't get told much.

19:30 It's like, I think about two nights before the Battle of El Alamein started there was a conference and I don't think anybody below the rank of major was added, I mean it was from generals down to brigadiers, and then the COs and probably their adjutants of the battalions and they were in conference and they were told to tell nobody

20:00 and the day after I think the company commanders were told and they probably told their platoon commanders and it wasn't until the night before that the rank and file were told. But at this stage we did know there was something going on, because what they were doing at night, they were rigging up dummy tanks out near, made out of hessian and gun replacements, looking like guns, like artillery fairly close

20:30 to our front line. And then the night before what happened is they brought up the real guns and the real tanks and when the barrage started we had our artillery right up in front us, we had our tanks there. It was really a magnificent manoeuvre really and another thing they did they created a pipe line down the, right down the south to the Qantara depression, and

21:00 it was a dummy pipeline, they made it out of tins and all sorts of things and then for days they raced vehicles up and down all through the edge of the Sahara and made it look like we were going to attack from the south instead of the north. And for quite a while the Germans didn't know exactly, and the Italians, didn't know just where we were going to attack and that's where they had concentrated a lot of

their best troops for quite a while until they realised the Australians were attacking on the north and that's where they

21:30 ended up bringing all their good troops back there.

It seems like some quite ingenious planning.

Oh, it was, yes it was well planned yes. Because at this stage we had a new General. Alexander had taken over from Auchinleck as the supreme commander and then General Montgomery had taken over from, who did he take over from, well the other general in charge of, I think it was Auchinleck , that's right and

22:00 then Alexander took over from Wavell, General Wavell, so we had a new commander altogether and we were given strict instructions. There was to be no retreat. None whatsoever. That was it.

Can you tell me about the day the Battle of El Alamein began?

Well, at the night it started, the barrage started at 9.40 which was 20

22:30 to 10 and at a given signal, I think it was a light went up and the whole, somewhere around 900 odd guns of all 25 pounders up to big guns, even navy guns out in the sea opened up and we had bombers overhead dropping bombs. It was absolutely, out of this world, we didn't realise it. Although the Germans were throwing quite a lot back at us, we just walked in as if there was nothing there.

23:00 It gave you so much confidence you just kept walking and you know, every now and then unfortunately, someone would fall wounded or killed but it just gave you so much confidence after what we had been through in Tobruk, we just had so much confidence with all this help. You know we had more tanks than what the Germans had, we had more artillery than what he had, we had more aircraft than what he had, and good aircraft and that sort of thing and so

23:30 We went into El Alamein very confident.

And your first attack was at night?

Yes, every attack as I said until the last day when they were defending were all night attacks.

And what were the daytimes like?

The day times, actually the Germans always counterattacked in the daytime and you got very little sleep because of that and

24:00 they attacked shoulder to shoulder and it was such easy, like picking off ducks really speaking, and yeah, that's what happened during the counterattack.

And the German soldiers were more formidable than the Italians, but still they weren't any match for what you had?

Well, I think the German soldier was a good soldier, but I don't think he was a good night soldier like the Australians were,

24:30 and we probably weren't as good as the Indians. They were outstanding night fighters, because they just were so silent. They used their knives. They could just, they were uncanny, but the Australians were good night fighters too.

Did you end up having to use your bayonet there, or were you far enough away to still use small arms fire?

Oh, on some occasions. Well, you see at this stage I should have mentioned

25:00 that during this break in September when, I think they realised they were going to lose a lot of specialists like transport drivers, signallers, Bren gun drivers, machine gunners, mortar men, you know any specialist. Then they started to train several people they picked out to train as specialists to fill these gaps. Well, I was picked out

25:30 to train as a newly formed platoon that was called a 'tank attack platoon' and at this stage I did that and on one day they rigged up these hessian, look like tanks back on the sand dunes, this was well behind the line and just told us that they were moving at about 4 miles an hour and we were given 8 live

26:00 rounds, I was on a 2 pound anti-tank gun and luck be it I put a cluster of 8 right around, I judged how much movement I had, how much I had to fire in front of the moving target and just collected the whole 8 shots in a target so they, I was then told the next day I was going to be made a group 3 gunlayer and I thought,

26:30 "Oh God," you know, I didn't really know what to think about that but when they told me it was a specialist pay, you got 1 and sixpence a day extra and I thought I'm only getting 2 shillings a day, having allotted 3 shillings a day to my mother, I thought this is a rise in pay of 75%, it'll do me. When we did finally get our guns and they brought in four lease lend 37mm American guns and they were different altogether too, not so

27:00 different in calibre not so much but in, where the 2 pounder the wheels came off and you had to do a 360 traverse, with the 37mm the wheels didn't come off, you could get them off but you didn't in battle and you had to sort of swing it to get it around sort of thing, you didn't have much travel. And so I was given one of those so then, when the attacks came, my corporal said to me, "Well, seeing you're the gunlayer and you're going to be responsible for

27:30 firing at the enemy," and I was the only one in that squad that had infantry training like in Tobruk, right through Tobruk I had to go in with the leading platoon every night, not only go in and fight with them but then when we got our objective I had to go and select a place, you know to put a gun. It was a very hard job because in the little bit of moonlight you had to make

28:00 sure you had a position where the enemy couldn't get in you know, without you seeing him because there were little knolls of ground and that sort of thing. Then I had to dig like anything had to dig the gun hole and then dig positions for the crew to come in like a corporal and a Bren gunner and my number 2, that was my loader and then I had to do that and then a truck would bring as close as they could get, would bring the gun up

28:30 and the rest of the crew and by this time its getting pretty close to daylight so this was the sort of thing that I did through Tobruk, right through El Alamein, I'm sorry.

Not much sleep.

Well, no. I got very little sleep, very little sleep at all. As I said, the Germans counter attacked during the day and it was all night attacking, we were probably just about asleep at times.

How big were these guns?

29:00 The guns we had they weren't that big at all. A 2 pounder is about a 40mm today. It was good enough to knock out small tanks and perhaps the side of the bigger tanks but it was no good trying to fire them at the front of the big German tanks but you could knock out vehicles, like trucks and things like that or scout cars or anything like that with them.

29:30 But we also had, like the anti-tank regiments and they had 6 pounders. They were a new gun out, they were very good guns. They'd knock out most tanks and we had them in support.

So can you tell us about the rest of the Battle of El Alamein?

Well, as I said, on this particular time when I said about

30:00 going in Trig 29, not 209 that was in Tobruk, Trig 29, the officer that was in charge of the platoon that I went in with I asked him where did he want the gun put, and he said, "Oh, on my left flank." So we took this position and we had quite a few casualties, so I dug in and a bit later on

30:30 the next morning when a German tank came in and it got pretty close, about 600 yards of us and the tank stopped and then the German officer's binoculars came out and I realised it was too far for us to fire so we just laid low and held our fire. And nobody fired anywhere. They didn't know exactly where we were I don't think. And anyway, as I said, later on in the afternoon they counter attacked. Well, at that stage, that afternoon

31:00 one of own 25 pounders was dropping all around our gun. A piece of shrapnel went straight past my ear and went straight through the wheel of the gun and all our sand, we had sand bags on top, we had some rails they brought up with a sheet of iron and some sand bags we filled in order to stop shrapnel and they were getting shredded and sand was coming down. So that night

31:30 I went across to the see the officer and I found out he had found himself in a position that wasn't very defendable so he withdraw two up and 50 yards and we weren't told so we were sitting out there like ducks probably 250 yards out further most likely, I think today, further than anybody in the whole 8th army. So anyway,

32:00 I said to him, "Can we find out what gun it is. It's definitely a 25 pounder," I said. So he said, he got in touch back with the 2/7th Field Regiment and they were told that the only way they could work this out was by firing every gun at that range at that target and to find out which gun it was and there was no way they were going to do that so we had to put up to that, with that rather.

32:30 And I've found out since the war from the 2/7th Field Regiment that they had a fifth columnist within our ranks and they were deliberately firing on our lines, this particular gunner, and he was court martialled and someone said he was shot, I don't know. But I have found that it's official and I hope it is official, because that's what I've been told by the 2/7th Field Regiment so that was one

33:00 sticky moment. So at any rate.

Were you ever looking for traitors in your midst?

Never ever dreamed that we had any traitors. Apparently, this chap had South African blood in him and of course South Africans have got German or Dutch, you know blood in them and I think that's

33:30 probably where it came from, you know that sort of thing. This is all from what I've been told I'm not

trying to run any nation down or anything so. Well, from there that was, we were relieved the next day, next night because you couldn't stay under those conditions, you know with no sleep at all. You got relieved and then a battalion that had been in say, in reserve came up and taken over from you during the night.

34:00 Then that was, I think, on the night of the 26th I think of October and then two nights later on night of 28th or 29th I don't know what time of night it was, we were attacking another position and we went in in trucks and the 2/23rd Battalion were supposed to take this position and if they had taken it by

34:30 midnight we were going to go straight through then and try and take the German second line of defence before they could get organised but just, it didn't happen. But what happened was an 88mm gun from the Germans' shell landed right along side our truck. I know it says in our book that it was a direct hit, but it didn't, it landed right alongside the truck and everybody on one side was either, well two were killed or

35:00 died of wounds and everybody else was badly injured and quite a few paraplegics out of them and on the other side I had been sitting behind the driver, like in the back of the truck if you understand what I mean, in the corner and one of my friends said to me, he was a Bren gunner, and he said to me, "Can you change posies [positions] with me Bambi, I can't get this machine gun between my legs." So I said, "Yeah, no worries." So I

35:30 stood up and let him through and he sat down and got there and I was shuffling my way through feet trying to get back, near the tailgate where he'd come from and that's when this shell had landed you see, so I was down on one knee and I got blown over the tailgate and landed on my back with a shovel on my back and I thought I had injured my back pretty badly. I haven't been the same ever since and it wasn't until later on

36:00 that I realised that I had shrapnel hanging out, I'd also been hit.

So the force of the explosion had actually thrown you clear of the truck.

Clear of the truck, you know, quite a few feet over the tailgate.

And what are your nerves like at this stage? I can imagine that would be terrifying to be so close to mortar fire.

Yes, I guess, they were a bit shaken but

36:30 the first thing I could think about was the stretcher-bearers came running over and they said, "Are you all right?" and I said, "Don't worry about me. You had better have a look in that truck." Because I knew there had to be some severe casualties and as I say, there were too.

Could you hear?

Could I hear? No, not at that stage and I think that was probably the first start of my hearing being pretty badly. I've got hearing aids now, but I can listen, hear,

37:00 lip-read pretty well.

And the shovel in your back had done your back some permanent damage.

Well, I landed straight on it, like on the side of the shoulder and the back, right in the small of the back.

And today you can still feel that?

I do yes, if I stoop down quickly. It's something that's never been recognised by Veteran's Affairs. No record. I didn't report it.

37:30 **Well, you didn't even stay in hospital to have the shrapnel looked at properly, did you when you..**

Not at that stage no. That was on as I said the night of the 28th or 29th, I don't know what time of night it was but probably early hours of the 29th and the next day the Officer said to me, "You'd better go back to the RAP,"

38:00 –you know the Regimental Aid Post –, "to get it checked out." So I walked back there, it was a fair way back and when I got back there I could see our medical officer was very busy. There was dead laying around and there was quite a lot, there was amputations, there was people with very severe wounds and I thought, "What am I doing here with a bit of a scratch," so I just walked away and went back and put a field dressing on it.

How big was your gash at this

38:30 **point?**

It wasn't very much at all, it was only about as big as this finger, but it was fairly deep you see and I just pulled the thing out, it went right through the radial bone and that was what damaged the whole thing. You might notice if I stretch very badly I'm about 1 hand higher with this one and I can really feel that to this day sort of thing. But I've learnt to use this arm for all sorts of trades.

39:00 I can still paint with that hand and that sort of thing. I've overcome that difficulty.

So it wasn't just a little bit of shrapnel? It was quite a substantial injury.

It was a long piece. It was somewhere, it could have been nearly a foot long it just stood out from great, it went straight through my great, through my tunic, through my shirt and into my elbow, jagged piece. I suppose it was from the gun, I don't know if it was from the vehicle or what I really.

39:30 I think from the colour of it, it was a piece of shrapnel from the shell.

And it wasn't until much later that you had that looked at, but you got an infection by that point, hadn't you.

Well, you see two nights later we did this final, the night of the 31st of October, was the last big night of attack and at this stage I thought I was going in with C Company. I knew exactly what they were doing and right, it was almost

40:00 dark and someone yelled out my name and I went over and they said, "Oh, there's a change of plans you're going with Don Company," and I said, "Where are they going?" and nobody seemed to know, I couldn't find an officer to ask why, what was happening, where's my gun, what's going to happen. So in typical style some of Don Company, there were jolly good soldiers but there were some pretty wild lads amongst them and they said, "Come on Jonesy. Don't worry. Get in the truck. We'll look after you." They all knew me, well all the old members of the battalion knew me

40:30 So I got in with them and they did a different exercise altogether to the rest of the battalion. They followed another unit in and we tried to do a sort of surround, encircle this contour 25, this position.

Well, we'll talk about that when we change tapes, thanks.

Tape 7

00:45 **We were talking about your time with Don Company, and the terrible battle that you were part of with that company,**

01:00 **you end up for a few days behind enemy lines. Can you tell us about that?**

Well, we had come into this very heavy fire and went to ground, we were very close although the Germans were higher than what we were and after a few minutes there seemed to be complete silence, and so I crawled over to –

01:30 PAUSE TO FIX MICROPHONE

Sorry, Murray could you start that again.

Right so, after we got off the trucks and we made this encirclement movement and as I said, I didn't know exactly just what I was doing that night or where I was we started to advance up the rear, what we thought was the rear of the German defence line, but instead of that we had very heavy concentration

02:00 of machine guns on that position and when we got within approximately 30, 20-30 yards from there we came under very heavy intense fire. We went to the ground and there was quite a lot of fighting went on and then after some time it seemed to be silent so I crawled over the nearest chap I could see, and asked him what's going on and he was dead, and I couldn't find anybody alive

02:30 so at this stage there was just this faint sign of dawn approaching, and I thought to myself, well I have to get out of here. I couldn't find anyone alive so I ran, I don't know why, in a north west direction which was still going straight down into the middle of the marsh. I might have mentioned before at the bottom of this there was a salt marsh which tanks couldn't go over, and following that was sand dunes

03:00 and the Mediterranean Sea but. So I went in a northwest, which was half way along this ridge and half way into the marsh and I fell into a very big bomb hole. I guess it was a big aerial bomb hold and I thought, this will have to do me for a while because I couldn't see where it was going to get by daylight, and I'm going into enemy territory. So I did that and then somewhere, you know, in the early morning I just

03:30 had to peep over the parapet of this bomb hole and I saw what I thought was six Germans come out of their trenches and they were looking around, I guess looking for our dead or to see if there was anybody wounded or what and then they pointed, what I thought, pointed in my direction and I thought, well what am I going to do? Surrender? No. So I thought, well I've still got two grenades and I've got a rifle and I've got a fair

04:00 few rounds of ammunition. So I got the grenades out of my pouch. I pulled one out and put that in my

left hand and pulled the pin out, and held the pin in, like against and then I got the other one and pulled it out with my teeth and I hung on to that and so then I just them have that one and then I transferred the one from my left hand, because I couldn't throw it, remember I'm wounded in that left arm, I threw with the right and as far as I could see I

04:30 got them both right around them. So I didn't see any enemy after that, whether they were killed or wounded and got back into their trenches I don't really know. Well then, a bit later in the day there was, you know getting on towards lunchtime our artillery opened up and I was copping a bit of, you know a bit of the blast from their shells, I was fairly close to the Germans as I said. Then later in the day

05:00 there was an aerial dog fight right over the top of me with Messerschmidts, Hurricane and two Spitfires and I had a lot of bullets zimming all around me and I was lucky enough I didn't get hit with any of those. That went off all right so later in the day I thought, I realised that I was getting very thirsty and very hungry, I hadn't eaten since late that afternoon the day before, so I put my haversack off my back

05:30 and had a look at my water bottle, and I had a bullet hole right through my water bottle and my haversack looked like it had been hit with a Schmeiser machine gun, it was just riddled. All my bully beef and everything that was in the back was all just running everywhere. I had no food and only bits of lead everywhere, so I thought, I couldn't eat any of that. So I used the oil out of the bully beef to put on my rifle butt, the rifle bolt to keep that working.

06:00 So I stayed there all that night. I still didn't have any sleep all that day and all that night I had to keep alert because I could hear, I couldn't see the Germans but I could hear them. I guess they were you know, feeding, having their meal or probably relieving themselves or whatever I don't know and then the next day it was the same sort of thing, although there wasn't quite as much movement and our artillery kept, you know firing heavily at them.

06:30 And then I thought, further around to the west which was, I thought would have been an enemy ground, there was a lot of firing going on there. I didn't know at the time that our troops had gone around at that angle and it was only this contour 25 that the Germans were still holding actually. So that night I thought, well I've got to get out. I'm hungry, I'm thirsty. So I knew exactly where our artillery was. I knew where our lines were.

07:00 So I went into the salt marsh and then I realised I could see these mounds, they were all big mines. So I thought, well I've got to get out. So I crawled for about somewhere at least an hour, probably more like an hour and half. My watch was broken so it wasn't working. So and finally I came to some danet wire, that's coils of barbed wire and I managed to get through there. I tore my uniform

07:30 pretty badly getting through that and then I crawled some more and then I came to some more danet wire and the same thing happened to me there and at last, I thought, well I reckon I'm fairly clear I'll decide to walk. So I started walking and somewhere in the early hours of the morning I heard, "Halt," and it sounded very much like German to me and so he said, "What's the password?" and I said, "Blowed if I know." I didn't say that, I said something, "Buggered if I know."

08:00 I said, "I know what it was three nights ago, it was 'whistling Winnie'," Because the Germans don't sound their 'W," they say 'V," so that's why all the password were always 'W'. So he said, "Put your rifle down." I said, "I'm from the 2/48 and if you're the 7th Fuel Regiment," which I fairly knew they were, "I know three fellows from the Renmark district and there who had joined up from there and I know Tom

08:30 Gordon, State Footballer." Well, I didn't know him personally but I knew of him. And so with that, "Put your rifle and bayonet down," you know in the ground. So I went forward and with that he realised I was 2/48th and then I went back and got my rifle and bayonet and then so I said, "You wouldn't happen to have a drink of water," and I explained to him I hadn't, you know how long I'd been out there and I was wounded and that sort of thing and then I said, "Have you got any food?" and he said, "I'm afraid I haven't got any food. We're not allowed to touch, you know,

09:00 our emergency rations," and this I understood. And so I just said, "Now where can I get down and have some sleep?" and he said, "Oh there's an old gun porthole there, where the truck used to be. You can get in there." So I laid down there and I think I was just about asleep and then 'Bang!' A 25 pounder was on each side of me and they were doing 10 rounds per gun per hour harassing fire to keep the enemy from going to sleep too.

09:30 So this went until daybreak which wasn't that you know, too long after that so I said to this chap, "Have you got an officer around here?" and he said, "Yeah, our sig officer is back here." So I was taken back to see him and I asked him, "Did he know where the 2/48th Battalion?" and he said, "You're 2/48th Battalion?" He said, "I'm sorry, son, but your battalion was wiped out."

10:00 And I thought, "Oh my God." What a feeling. That was one time when I didn't know how to cope. I thought well I'm CO, I'm everybody in the 2/48th Battalion, you know. It went through my mind but not very jubilantly I can tell you. So later on he came over to me, he took a bit of interest in me then. He said, "Well, listen whatever I find out I'll let you know." So then he found out that there were 41 survivors, including walking wounded.

10:30 I said, "Do you know where they are?" and he said, "Not just at present. I know they came out in a truck." So later on I guess it was sometime just before midday he came up and told me that they were around Tel-el-Eisa Station and he said, "Do you know where that is?" and I said, "Yeah, that's the Hill of

Jesus there, and you go straight across the top of that and I'll be into it. I'll find out from there," and so I started to walk

11:00 and in the distance I saw a motorbike coming and I hoped it was one of ours, the dust coming and as it turned out he turned and came straight toward me. I waved to him, took a chance and he came over to me and it was a chap I've known right from the beginning of the war. He was one of our regimental police, not that they were, they did great work really, looked after all the communications and those sort of things and they worked as dispatch riders and he gave me a ride back and I said

11:30 'Where's my platoon?" and he says, "I think I know where they are, but they don't know where you are." He said, "Med Wright', that was my officer, "he's been to battalion headquarters and said you were missing and had to be killed by now. You know, two days and not back." So he took me straight over to him and I can remember now, although the chap is dead now he just grabbed me and swung me around, as if I was his own son and we became very, very good friends after that.

12:00 So he went to no end of trouble and went back and got me some cold food, you know there had been a meal cooked but there was some cold bully beef or stew or something over and got me a cup of cold tea. I had that and then I said, "Where can I kip down?" and he said, "That trench's not being used," so I got in there and I could practically see the fleas jumping around, but I didn't care. I got in that hole and somewhere at two and half past in the afternoon and I didn't wake up until

12:30 six o'clock the next morning. I slept straight through although there was gunfire, so they tell me. I didn't hear anything. I must have been absolutely exhausted. So with that I realised then that my arm was swollen somewhere around a football size and it was aching very badly, so he organised me to get back to the RAP. I went back there and looked at it and they swabbed it and

13:00 put on it, a patch on it and organised for an ambulance to take me back to the CCS – which was the Category Clearing Station which was some, I suppose a mile and half or something behind our lines and in there was wounded of all nationalities. Germans, South Africans, Indians, Australians, Italians, New Zealanders, South Africans, I said that,

13:30 everybody. And then this was something really funny happened there. There was no room for me in either of these tents but in the middle, they were a big marquee, but in the middle was the Orderly Room tent, where they you know, looked after their casualties. So straight away when they saw that they said, "Have you had any medication?" and I said, "No." So they gave me, what did they used to call them, brown bombers, what they used to use.

14:00 There was no penicillin then, gosh any other time I would think of these tablets. I might later on. So at any rate they gave me two of these to swallow with some water. That was all right and then about an hour later another bloke came out of the other tent and said, "Here's a couple of tablets, mate," and he said, "Take these." I nearly said the name too. So as I said he gave me two and some water and I took that

14:30 and about another two hours the other bloke came and said, "Here's two more tablets," and it wasn't long the other bloke came and said, "Here's two more tablets," and I took that. What had happened they had put me on their treatment list and in the end, I started to go real silly. I didn't know where I was or anything and I thought, or perhaps this is the wound and I put it down to. I realised that they were killing me with kindness. So when the next bloke came along I said, "Are you sure I'm supposed to have these,

15:00 four of these every hour?" and he said, "What do you mean four?" I said, "I'm getting two from that chap there and two from you," but I didn't tell him that I had about six in my tunic pocket that I'd put in there. I thought I'm not taking these, they'd kill me. So that was that and at any rate. I finally, I think it was the next day I got back to Alexandria by ambulance and I was put in the AGH there, I think it was the 2/7th AGH if I remember rightly, and I was in there for quite a few days. Well, first thing they did,

15:30 they said, "Well, you'd better go and have a shower." Well, they had these things rigged up with buckets you know, with hessian around it, and had buckets and you just pulled a string and I don't know, the water came out somehow. So I said to the bloke I said, "Oh God, its going to be hard having a shower," and he looked at me and said, "God man, when did you last have a bath. You've got half the desert." And I said, "You can't have a bath in the desert." And I kept telling him "In Tobruk when we first went there," – this sounds pretty dirty –

16:00 'We were 22 days without taking our boots off. I didn't have a shower or wash all the time I was in Tobruk in seven months." "God," he said, "Filthy!," and I said, "Well, we all smelt the same and nobody complained." You know, a lot of people don't realise this and I often think, you know sometimes I shower twice a day if I'm working in the garden or doing something. So anyway, that was that. So I got him to give me a good old scrub because I always kept my hair cut

16:30 short, I used to cut it with scissors because of the fleas and chats and different things and I didn't have to worry about it. So he gave me a good old scrub up and took me back and put me to bed in the hospital. So I was, had some treatment for several days and then they sent me back to a staging camp which was out on a, in a sandy place somewhere. I don't know how far it was away from the hospital.

How old were you?

Let me see.

17:00 I would have been 17, 18, I would have been 19, 19 then, yeah 19 years of age.

I wonder, what you saw that morning, that terrible morning when the sun starts to come up at the beginning of this whole ordeal, when the sun comes up and you look around and you can't see anyone alive. What was going through your mind?

Well,

17:30 I didn't know, you know, there must have been some of them got out. The platoon that I just attached myself to, well first of all I got myself with the two signallers. I forgot to mention this. The signallers got a message through on their phone to give to the OC of their company, and I've forgotten what the message was. I got within about 10 yards of him and saw him go,

18:00 he was killed and he was the last officer left in the whole company, he was an original member of the platoon. And then a bit further over I saw Sergeant Kibby and I went to give him the message and he was killed and he won the VC there. So the message never ever got there and one of the sigs that gave me the message was killed so, you know that sort of thing. So that's when I thought, well now I won't, I went to

18:30 ground straight away and I thought, and then I couldn't find anybody, and they were two people who were still alive at that stage, and I still couldn't find anybody but further on to the right there was somebody opened up with a, I think it was a sub-machine gun, I'm not too sure. I think it was on our side, it could have been the Germans and then everything went quiet and that's when I thought, "I've got to get out of here," and that's when I ran and ran into this, lucky enough into this bomb hole. It must have been made for me. I don't know how, whether there was more

19:00 there. That's the only one I saw, and I fell safe into it, I went straight into it, practically toppled into it.

So what were you seeing at that morning, as the sun came up, when you could see enough to make anything out, what could you see in front of you? What could you see to the left and the right of you?

Well, as I said I didn't put my head up too high, I knew where the Germans were and I couldn't see any of ours and I thought to myself, "Well now, I've

19:30 got to work things out. I've got to get out of here." At that stage I didn't know how, as I said I found I had nothing to eat. I had nothing to drink.

And what could you see as soon as the sun came up?

In the morning? Well, I couldn't see very much at all, as I said, this time the Germans had gone back in the holes and I didn't see anything apart from the dogfight up on top. I didn't see anybody.

20:00 Alone, you might sort of say.

That must have been quite frightening.

It was. But I kept talking to myself very quietly. "You mustn't panic, you've got to do, you've got to work out. You're a man now, you've got to get out of here. You've still got work to do". I drew diagrams in the mud, you see this was all slushy this bomb hole and there was what we called 'stinkwort," here. I don't know if you know what's that, a weed from up the River Murray sort of

20:30 thing and it just smelt like that and at one stage I was going to try and suck it and see if there was any moisture in it and then I thought, maybe perhaps I'd better not, and so I started drawing diagrams and when our artillery opened up I knew exactly where I was and I thought, now it was just a matter of when and how I could get out of here and that's when I started to plan and I thought, you know and I sort of kept my mind on the one thing, that I've got to get out of here.

You kept very focused.

And I might say

21:00 at that stage I did familiarise myself, thinking of all my family. I did think about you, think of all my family. My mother, then I thought of my brother and what was he doing and those sort of things then I sort of snapped out of it. I'm on my own, I've got to think of myself. I'm the bloke that's got to think about it. I do remember that much sort of thing.

So you are a 19-year-old soldier sitting in a hole. You don't know really where you are

21:30 **and then all of sudden this dogfight happens up above you. I mean, that must have been horrific but also spectacular.**

Well, it was. It was you know, like I got myself down pretty low I can tell you. I had my steel helmet on and just hoped that I didn't cop anything, but they were whizzing all around the bomb hole because it was a fairly big bomb hole. It would have been 10ft wide. This is 12 ft wide, it's got to be you

22:00 know, from there to there. So 12 ft wide and fairly deep too because its partly in the salt marshes, so its still soft there, so that's why it was so deep. I think it must have been at least a 500 pounder, could have been a 1000 pounder bomb, I don't know.

And you were watching the Messerschmidts and the Spitfires.

The Spitfires and the Hurricanes [British fighters]. I think there were two Hurricanes and one Spitfire and they had cornered this Messerschmidt, and they ended up getting him.

22:30 The last I saw of him was trailing out to sea with smoke and then I saw the Spitfire doing a victory roll. I remember that. That was, you know –

Did that hearten you a bit?

Oh, yes. Somewhat. Somewhat, yes.

So you got out miraculously and due to your own intelligence and fortitude to get out of this very difficult situation. You finally get to hospital. It must be time for them to give you a break, is it?

Well, the funny thing

23:00 was when I finally got out of hospital I found out that, cause I didn't know we had finished there, nobody knew that was the end of our campaign and then I found out from somebody that it was the last truck leaving that day from the staging camp to El Alamein, so I got myself onto that and got back to El Alamein and I reported to my officer and told him I was back and he said

23:30 'What are you doing here? You're should be still in hospital," and I said, "No, I'm all right now." At this stage the wound was almost healed and had been stitched up and that sort of thing and then he said, "Vic Nielson', he was the intelligence officer at the time, a Western Australian officer, "he wants to find out exactly you know what, a bit about where these mines fields was." And I said, "I'll go and show him," so we started trekking over there, and then I said, "There all mines there," and he said, "How far does this go? and I said, "As far as I went.b

24:00 About another 6-7-800 yards up. There're all mines right up through the salt marsh." I don't know exactly where the salt marsh finished. I really don't know to this day because I didn't get that far. So he said, "I'll take your word for it. I'm not going in there." So they wrote that day. I was very disappointed that when this book was written Tobruk to Tarakan, I was up in the country at the time and I never ever had, got a chance to have anything to say.

24:30 I've never had a story. I never got my name mentioned there or anything. I could have told stories just the same as a lot of people did in this book, but it doesn't worry me one bit.

You're telling it now.

I'm telling it now.

And it's a very good story.

Yeah.

So in 1942, you went back to El Alamein and then you were shipped back to Australia?

Well, not exactly. Well not straight

25:00 away, no. On 3rd December I think it was the 3rd, I think I got back on the 3rd and on the 5th December, I'm not too sure, but I think that is pretty right, we were all put in trucks and at this stage, right the Germans had fled. They were almost, they had pushed them back almost to Mersa Matruh at this stage and then the Australian Government plus our General Blamey, said, "That's enough for the Australian troops. They're coming home."

25:30 So we were taken back by trucks, it was on 67 miles to Alexandria actually from there. And we were taken back through Alexandria and then in through Cairo and then right back to Palestine again. I do remember a funny one on the way there to, am I taking too long?

No, of course not.

Well, anyway these Egyptians, "Want to buy paper George? Want to buy paper George?

26:00 So I thought, newspaper. So at this stage I got a little bit of money, you know from the canteen when I got back so I said, "Yeah," so I gave him some money and I said, "Keep the change," I don't know how much I gave him, so he gives me this paper and when I look at it its three months old. They're still fighting up at Knightsbridge, this is before the Battle of Tel-el-Eisa, you know when the Germans were pushing all the British forces back so he got one on me. So a bit later on we are going through the middle street of Cairo and I thought, now it's my turn.

26:30 So somebody threw a smoke bomb, you know it just makes a lot of coloured smoke, so I jumped off the truck. At this stage it was just moving and stopping and moving and stopping so I jumped off and I grabbed a big watermelon off a store and we just cut that up with our bayonets and we had some fresh

watermelon. A bit later there was 2-3 Egyptians they're having a real argument so I went up and pushed them aside and I took the fez off of one of their hats.

27:00 Apparently I shouldn't ever have done that but I had myself a fez. And I got one back on them.

You were even.

I was even, yeah.

So with your fez in hand you take the New Amsterdam to WA?

Not yet, not yet. We went back into Palestine to a camp called Bagjerzia [?],

27:30 in the same vicinity of Dilma and that sort of thing and a few days later the whole division, by this time we'd got a lot of new reinforcements you know, this is a funny thing they do. They spend all this money sending new reinforcements over. We had to go home practically a full division or a full battalion and they we were all paraded, a division parade and then General Alexander who was the officer, the General British Commander of the whole British forces at El-Alamein,

28:00 the whole 8th Army, I don't know whether, no Montgomery wasn't there and General Morsehead, the Australian General, and we were all paraded and then he gave the most stirring speech that we've ever heard and praised us and you know, without the 9th Division, victory would never have been accomplished. And special compliments were given to the 2/48th Battalion because we held

28:30 the very northern sector and we fought against the elite troops of the Germans and the 2/24th Battalion, the Victorian battalion, they did a magnificent job also. We had very heavy casualties at the end. I just don't know how many they had left, it couldn't have been a lot more than we did.

I must have felt good that you, that effort had been noticed.

That's right, and then I'm not sure

29:00 how many, how much longer it was after that, but we knew there was no right hand turning that time. We practically knew we were going home and we were taken down by, I think, I don't know whether it was by train or truck I just can't remember now and we were taken down to. Oh, I do remember this, yes. This officer of mine had the pleasure of picking out 10 people out of the battalion to act as, what they called the baggage company, or the advance party

29:30 to go to Port Taufiq and the idea was, we had to sort out all the kit bags to see if everything was in order. For instance, one little thing, we had a British officer who was in charge of the port. A dapper little captain, Sam Brown [cross chest belt], all polished up and everything and if we found anything suspicious like, we had a chain gang and we would be. Say for instance, we found, we had a list and if we found somebody who enlisted in South Australia,

30:00 like a friend of mine did from Renmark and his parents had shifted to Perth in the meantime, now we had to find his bag and put it so it would be taken off at Fremantle. This went on and on and on, you know sort of thing. So at any rate, at one stage I came across this little sea kit and I went to pick it up and I just about fell over and I thought, "What's going on here?" so I felt around it and there was something square in there and then there was something soft, so I said to the officer

30:30 about it, so he had to get this British officer, he was the only one that could open them, we weren't allowed to open them. And in it, it belonged to a VAD – that's a Voluntary Aid Detachment, and she had four bricks and butt of sand in there. Apparently, she had a stretcher up on these four bricks and she wanted to take home some Egyptian sand. We couldn't believe it. Of course it got tipped out naturally. We found bayonets, we found revolvers, you know, captured revolvers and all those sorts of things

31:00 and they were confiscated. And this sort of went on, this went on and we were there for quite a few days and we got leave and everything and it was quite good. And then the main convoy, you know like the rest of the troops came down. In the meantime, also this one day this huge ship came, and I thought it was about a mile out and we woke up one morning and found it there and I said to somebody, "Look at that ship out there," and someone produced binoculars and it was the Queen Mary.

31:30 And it wasn't a mile out it was three miles out. This officer, this British officer, he said, "Would you chaps like to go on a pontoon and go for a trip out there." "Oh, yes sir," We thought he was great then. And so we went out there and I've never seen, we went right around that boat and it looked like a mile long and these little Pommy soldiers were up on top and they looked like little ants, it was so huge, you know, we'd never seen a ship like that.

32:00 So any way we came back and the troops came off and there was this little bloke, he was about 5ft nothing, not that I'm very tall and his uniform, he had about two rolls in the cuffs of his trousers and the cuffs of his shirt was rolled up twice and he said, "Hey Dig, where do you come from?" and I said, "I come from Australia." "Of course, I know you come from Australia, what part?" I said, "South Australia." "Yeah, whereabouts?" and I said, "Adelaide." "What part of Adelaide?"

32:30 and I said, "Well actually, I don't come from Adelaide, I come from the River Murray at Renmark you see." and he said, "Do you know where Morphettville is?" and I said, "Yeah, I used to be a jockey there," and his name was Frank Bullock. Well, looking through history of racing, I found that he used to be a

jockey and he was sent over there, got called up and was conscripted. So that's another little story about that, and at any rate, we finally got on the New Amsterdam and

33:00 away we come home and at one stage we didn't know where we were because, I found out since that it was in the Maldives area, and we came across aircraft carriers and battleships and everything and they were refuelling there. It must have been a big Indian Ocean you know, refuelling spot or haven for aircraft carriers etc. So I don't know whether we refuelled or not, but we were there for a few hours and then we set sail.

33:30 Because at this stage it was very, very hot and within a few days, well several days we found it was getting colder and colder and they issued us with a blanket and we thought what's going on here. And instead of laying up on deck all night you know, we were trying to get down below somewhere and we found out when we finally did get into Port Melbourne where we had been was right down south of Tasmania between the South Pole and Tasmania because of Japanese submarines

34:00 had been sighted in Bass Strait and close as Kangaroo Island. So we finally arrived at Port Melbourne, the New Amsterdam, the Queen Mary that was in that convoy, she ended up in that convoy after she got rid of the British troops and a couple of others, I just forget the name, they went to Sydney and so we got off there.

That must have been a bit of a shock to be back

34:30 **in the homeland?**

It was, yes.

And you had some leave owing to you at that stage.

Yes, I think we got 21 days leave, much to the disgust of the 6th and 7th Division, who didn't get that much apparently.

Was your mum pretty happy to see you?

Well, she was. At this stage my brother, who had you know, who had been a prisoner of war, he had been repatriated and had some leave, and was ready to go threw the throes of, sorry

35:00 I've got it all wrong, I'm thinking about after New Guinea.

So you had three weeks leave and you caught up with your family, is that when you found out what had happened to your brother?

No, I got telegrams at Fremantle. You see, we stayed a day at Fremantle, I think it was a day and we got mail there. It was the first for about two months and I had these three telegrams to say that my brother was a prisoner of war, my other brother, my second eldest brother

35:30 was seriously wounded in New Guinea. By that time he had lost a leg and had his arms messed up sort of thing and my younger brother had had a very serious kidney complaint and wasn't expected to live, sort of thing. I wasn't very pleasant.

A lot of sad news to come home to.

Yes, that's right.

Although were you pleased to hear that that brother who had been captured in North Africa was still alive.

Yes, that's right, yes.

And then you go to

36:00 **Atherton Tablelands for jungle training?**

Yes, yes we went up to Atherton Tablelands around, what's the name of the place, around Carrye [? Karalee], I think they pronounce it, up there first and then we arrived via by the train, we got up there at one o'clock in the morning and there was just nothing there but, I don't think they call them kangaroos up there, wallaroos or something.

36:30 They were just hopping everywhere, there were trees everywhere. We had to clear some ground and put some tents up and make our own camp and then six o'clock the next morning, we were ordered to, you know it was getting pretty cold then. We had to run down in just our shorts, on around to the, what was the name of the river there, the Barren River. You know, you could see the steam coming off it and we all had to jump in and have a swim, those that could swim.

37:00 We did that every morning, it was freezing cold. We had to get tough.

And is that where you ended up with dengue fever.

No, I got dengue fever just before I went to Lae. No, I didn't get anything wrong with me up there at all. That's right, yeah. And then we trained there for quite a while. I think that was until around

37:30 August, sometime in August and then we went down to, I think I'm getting the right order, then we went down to Cairns area after this and we did some mock landing. Like we would go down by train to Townsville and then we would do some landing, you know at Cairns and that sort of thing, on Trinity Beach and those sort of things and get used to that sort of thing. And then one day

38:00 this American boat, just an ordinary you know, boat, Henry T Allen it was called. We were taken out in pontoons and we had to scale up all these nets with all our gear on up and get on that and from there we went to New Guinea and landed at Milne Bay. Of course at this stage we got a new colonel, Colonel Hammer had been made a Brigadier, we had a new Colonel Ainslie.

38:30 He was a 6th Division veteran, a brigade major. Different to the others but I still think he was a good colonel, although much different in his ways. And then we were supposed to make a camp in a coconut grove, well when you walked you just squashed in about 6 inches or 8 inch of mud and slush and coconut husk and that. We didn't take too kindly to that at all

39:00 and then he read the riot act to us. You're supposed to be famous soldiers, you're not tough. You can't put up with a bit of water and all this sort of thing. Certainly, we hadn't had any water before and so then we thought we've got to prove him different. So then they shifted us to another area and we put up a camp there, near the old aerodrome, Jackson's Field, somewhere down that way and then we did a lot of training there, in jungle training there. And then we did an exercise,

39:30 I don't know for sure to this day whether it was Goodenough Island or Normandy Island, I've got an idea it was Normandy Island.

And sorry we'll leave it there, because the tape is about to finish. You have a phenomenal memory..

Tape 8

00:45 **Can you tell us a little bit about your landing in New Guinea?**

The landing at Lae. Yeah. Well, as I said before we did this

01:00 mock battle at Normandy Island I think and from there I realised I wasn't very well and we were walking through water you know, up around our knees and over and little did I know I was going down with dengue fever and I had to get helped out of that and then was in hospital for a couple of days and then I got back to the unit and then we got on landing craft and went up and we landed

01:30 a long way north of, it would be north, no wait a minute, west, sorry west of Lae and on the other side what was the Buso River, there was a Buso and a Buret [?] and a Bu-something else and at this stage very heavy rains came and water rushed down from the mountains and the rivers were running, somebody told me, somewhere around 40-45 knots an hour,

02:00 which was very fast and we couldn't get across the river so we had no way to get across until the engineers catapulted or some means, I don't know how they did it, ropes across and secured the line somewhere so that way we managed to get across you know hand and hand across the ropes. I believe one of the battalion, the 2/28th Battalion lost quite a few washed out to sea. In

02:30 fact, one of our, I think it was our RSM was only just saved very close to, he almost drowned also. That was quite hard. They couldn't get any food up to us so we had hardly any meals, food at all we ended up scaling trees and getting coconuts and living off that.

How long was that for?

Nearly, about two days until we finally

03:00 got across the river and then counted the Japs and it wasn't such a great battle after that. We took Lae with a fair bit of ease and the 7th Division had come down through the Nadzab, through that way and in fact, they arrived at one part of Lae before we did because we were held up so much with the swollen rivers, so it wasn't a great deal and then we were able to get food in

03:30 land food so, we took some Jap prisoners.

Can you tell us about that first encounter? You say it wasn't particularly hard to overcome them, but can you tell us in even more detail.

Well, yes I forgot that I might have said before, but we found out since that this landing at Lae was the first amphibious assault by Australian troops since Gallipoli in the First World War, and I checked up on that and find find that is correct.

04:00 That is assault, (UNCLEAR) had landed amphibious but not to assault the enemy so. It was just a matter of moving from, they had little bamboo huts here and there and you know, the odd machine gun here

and there and just clear them as we went sort of thing. They weren't in very good shape, the Japs there. They were suffering from beri beri, you know lack of vitamins and that sort of thing, so they weren't in such,

04:30 it wasn't such a great battle after all really speaking.

How many POWs, do you think?

I'm not really sure how many they took. I really don't know how many was taken, I wasn't told. It would have to be studied, possibly. The Japanese don't surrender very easily, they usually take their own life, they don't surrender very easily, and I'm not too sure

05:00 how many.

Did you take any personally?

No, not myself. No.

So after this, where next?

The next campaign was further up. 20th Brigade had landed at Finschhafen and were making some progress there but apparently came onto more heavier concentration of Japs then they had expected. We were put onto

05:30 landing ships, LCI – Landing Craft Infantry, and then we were taken up. We landed at three beaches. There was Scarlet Beach, Red Beach and Green Beach I think they were. They were all coral reefs around there and unfortunately, the Americans didn't go into the right beach and they hit the bottom and dropped us, dropped the gang plank and down we went and next thing we knew we were on coral

06:00 reef. But next thing we knew we were in water above our heads and it was quite a, everybody helping each other because you could easily drown there and some people couldn't swim, and lucky enough we didn't lose any troops and we made the landing there and secured the beach head on that part and from there we started to move inland to various villages which was on the way to Sattelberg, a mountain 3,900 ft

06:30 above sea level and there was an old German missionary.

And what was at Sattelberg that you wanted? Or that the allies wanted?

I guess it was where the, the biggest concentration of Japs were. You know, en route to there like it was very heavy jungle both in trees and bamboo. I guess they had a dominating,

07:00 you know the height there, dominating and it was easy to get from there to you know, Madang and higher up into New Guinea. The only think I can think of it, about it but it was very hard there. We just fought for every little village, there were little native villages everywhere, and we had to fight for every one of them.

Did you encounter the fuzzy wuzzies [indigenous Papua New Guineans] at all?

Oh yes, they were,

07:30 without them we would never have managed. They not only brought up food but they carried out, like our wounded back, very much so and brought up ammunition and stores and they were very good. Maybe, we didn't realise how good a job they did do and when we consider what, you know, what they did at Kokoda Trail maybe they did more there

08:00 and they were more appreciated at Kokoda Trail, but were certainly did appreciate what they did for us.

Were they remunerated at all? Was there any kind of payment?

No, no, they were given some food. I don't know whether they were given money. We gave them, the boys gave them a cigarette each when they accomplished a task, whatever they did. They were very much on our side. They were anti-Japanese, well most of them were.

08:30 **And then when you reached your destination and you'd fought off the little villages along the way how, what kind of shape was the battalion in by the time you reached.**

Well, we weren't in very good shape at all because it was hard slog. There was mud all the way and you know as I said it was slog, slog through little tracks, razorback tracks and that sort of thing and the enemy was concealed in fox holes

09:00 and they had snipers up in the trees and we lost quite a lot of men including stretcher-bearers who're been killed by snipers. They disregarded the Geneva Conference, meant nothing to them, the Red Cross meant nothing to them whatsoever. So yes, we weren't in very good shape at all really.

Were the Japanese a different kind of soldier to the Germans, or the other soldiers you'd encountered?

Yes,

09:30 I, really I, sometimes I think they didn't use their brains very much, not the generals, you know of the army, maybe their generals were good planners but they would attack just in and they'd sing out, "Banzai, banzai, banzai!" and just attack you, shoulder to shoulder and you'd just mow them down and the next minute some more of them would come down the same track and you just did that. While they were very clever

10:00 in concealment and that sort of thing I don't think they were very, very clever because I don't think life meant anything to them. To die to them was to go to heaven, their heaven, not ours. That's the way I consider them.

So you weren't in great shape, and you reached the old monastery can you tell us about that? The old missionary on –

Yes, on the night

10:30 before it was taken, apparently one of our companies that was very close to taking it ran out of ammunition, food and also had a fair few wounded and so I think there was about seven of us that were back a little further volunteered to take up stretchers and take up food and ammunition and then bring back wounded. There was something I do remember there, you couldn't see,

11:00 there were razorbacks, you know it wasn't very wide. We were an odd party, I was short and one bloke was about 6ft 4, so some of them were just about leaning down to keep the stretchers straight and others were holding them on their shoulders and at this stage somebody told us to get some fireflies. They were little beetles that glowed in the night, glowflies some of them call them, and we put them on our back and we could see

11:30 where each other, where we were, following each other by that way. Something I had never heard of before, the first time I had ever heard about it so we did that. We took up as I said the ammunition and the food and stuff like that and we brought back some wounded and on the way down I had rather an unfortunate thing happen to me. I slid on something, I think it might have been a bit of the bark by a tree that had been hit by shrapnel and

12:00 my leg went from under me and I badly damaged an ankle and I just couldn't carry the stretcher anymore so the chap that was, that had an Owen gun, a sub-machine gun, there was protection because we couldn't look after ourselves, we had rifles on our shoulders but couldn't do anything about it so I took over that job and I hobbled all the way back and we finally got back with the wounded down to battalion headquarters

12:30 where the doctor was, and in the early hours of the morning I went to the doctor and he just said, "There's nothing I can do here for it, you've got to go out." And I said, "I'm not going out. There's only three left in my section and I'm staying," so with that I took my shirt off and I tore the tail of it off and I wrapped that around me ankle. Well, he bandaged me my ankle tightly and then I put my boot on

13:00 and I bandaged that very tightly and I went back and then, because the next day, the next morning Lieutenant or Sergeant Derrick as he was then, he managed to take Sattelberg and of course, we all ended up at Sattelberg and that was November the 25th if my memory is correct and we stayed there until after Christmas and then on the, I think it was the day after Christmas

13:30 that we decided we would have to go and chase the Jap stragglers and some walked, which I was a member of those who had to walk and some were taken down to the coast and put on amphibious ducks and they'd go so far and land and as soon as the other who had been walking came in they would get in the ducks and we were doing this sort of thing trying to cut the Japanese off. But in the meantime, one of these days I just found that I wasn't able to walk very

14:00 well, so I had a stick and next thing I knew I had a jeep come behind me and it was our brigadier and he wanted to know where I was wounded and I said, "Not as such sir, I badly injured my ankle," sort of thing and he said, "Well, you shouldn't be here," and I said, "Oh, I'll be all right. I'll catch up," because I had a feeling that very soon we were coming back to Australia. So anyway I continued and I did catch up to our

14:30 troops and after that he took me up to where they were and that's as far as we went. We found out that we couldn't cut off any Japs, they'd gone so that was the end of that. And then we were brought back I think by barge if I remember now, back to Finschhafen where we stayed for quite a while and then, that right

15:00 we stayed there and we got reinforcements and we were re-equipped and different things ready to go back to Australia. It was at this stage that I realised I was going down with malaria myself and we got on the boat, an old Liberty boat by the way, a terrible old thing it was. You know it was doing about three knots an hour and the Coral Sea was very, very rough at that stage

15:30 and half the time the keel was thrashing in mid-air not in the water and we weren't making very good time at all and we were all camped up on deck and raining like heck and when we were getting close to Buna, I realised I was getting ill so I got onto one of my Western Australia stretcher bearer friends and asked him to take my temperature and he said, "Good God man, you're 107." Your temperature's always fairly high in the tropics,

16:00 you know well over 100, so he poured some water over the thermometer to see whether that was, you know why it got hot and it went up higher so he went and got the doctor and he said, “This man, he’s got to go off,” so whatever communications they did with the wharf at Buna when I got there, there was a winch waiting there for me and an ambulance and I was put into you know, like a garbage winch they do, to load wheat and stuff, taken

16:30 out on that and put in that, loaded on the wharf, put into the ambulance and I was taken into the AGH at Dobodura where the air force had a liberator squadron.

I suppose at this time someone had a proper look at that ankle of yours?

I never worried about it. What I did worry about though was, I did have cerebral malaria

17:00 which they found out which is 85% fatal and for one day of my life I don’t remember anything, I just went delirious, you know went completely out to it. But after, I think I was there about a week, and I started to get better and was put on light duties in the kitchen and those sort of things and finally, I was able to get a trip back to Australia

17:30 on a decent boat in a cabin, so I did score somewhat and had good meals so.

You had to spend Christmas at the missionary. Can you tell me about that month that you spent there? What were the conditions like and morale like etc?

I guess our morale became a lot better, you know, having know that we had taken Sattelberg

18:00 after all this hard slogger and that sort of thing and we had lost a lot of good friends there and that sort of thing. We were able to play cards, we weren’t ordered to do much really. Funny thing about it, water was out problem. I do remember at one stage there, there was a huge bomb hole full of water and we didn’t realise that the aircraft had been spraying DDT [dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethane - insecticide], you know,

18:30 for the mosquitoes and various things so we just pushed the scum aside and filled our water bottles out of that. You know, we’re still alive. They talk about Agent Orange [Vietnam War era chemical defoliant] we might have just gone into that category also.

And did you bury the dead in New Guinea or were they taken home?

Oh no, no troops in the Middle East or the islands

19:00 were ever brought home. They were buried where they fell and later were exhumed and taken to a designated burial site where you know monuments and everything have been put up and war graves commissioned are now. In that war there was no, Second World War no Australian were ever brought home, not overseas, not from overseas.

19:30 **Were you ever worried about ending up somewhere like New Guinea forever, your body ending up there?**

No, I never thought I was going to get killed. I was invincible, I thought. I guess so that was the one way I looked at it. I was scared. Yes I was scared, don’t worry about that. I was scared, about what was going on and what could have happened but I never ever thought to myself

20:00 that I was going to get killed. I don’t know why but I guess that might have helped me a little bit.

Seems like aside from personal injuries, your ankle that personally and in terms of your men you didn’t have the struggle in New Guinea that you were expecting from the Japanese. What was the most trying encounter that you had with the enemy? The most difficult time you engaged them?

20:30 Well, I guess as I said on the way to Sattelberg was hard and but, the later Tarakan, near Borneo, that was when the Japanese were worse than anywhere.

Later on?

Yes, that’s a later campaign, when we came home from New Guinea.

So, after you came home, you how long did you spend,

21:00 **the ambulance took you to be treated for your malaria.**

At Dobodura, yes, I was in the AGH there, Australian General Hospital, 6th Division AGH and then I was put into a staging camp a malicious staging camp and I was looked after very well I must say that and from there I suppose, the powers to be knew what to do,

21:30 how to get me home and I ended up in the Kanimbla, the old Kanimbla which was very nice old boat and got a ride home and as I said I got a cabin and good meals and the best I was ever treated I think on a boat in my life.

What was the Kanimbla like inside?

Oh, quite good. She was like, the Kanimbla was a coastal boat. This is not the new Kanimbla, this was the old Kanimbla of course.

22:00 There is a new Kanimbla these days. And according to an old sailor that was on there she was the most comfortable ship he had ever sailed on. She was built so perfectly that although we were going into swells of 35 to 40ft and you sometimes think you would never come out of it, she used to just ride them just like, you never got any violence and you never thought you were going to get sea sick with it. It was you know, quite good. The Coral Sea can get very wild at times.

22:30 **So then you arrived back home after New Guinea.**

Yes, we arrived in Brisbane, in Moreton Bay and somehow or other the powers that be found a train for me to get back. It's marvellous how they worked these things out, something that you didn't have to do yourself. I would have probably ended up walking or hitching a ride somehow but I got down there and then finally got some leave and the only thing that disappointed me

23:00 was I was to be best man for my brother who had lost his leg he was getting married and I couldn't get home for that, so that was disappointing. I finally got home and spent I think it was ten days leave I think I had so I ended up going to back to Renmark for a holiday.

And who was there?

My mother and my sister and my younger brother and

And your older brother?

23:30 At that stage he was working on a farm up at Freeling and he got rejected from the army. He had pneumatic fever, he couldn't get in the army.

So how long did you have in Adelaide and when did you get new orders?

New orders? Well, I had ten days leave and then I came back on the train.

24:00 Went back to Wayville and from there I was put on a train that ended up back to Atherton Tablelands and somehow or other I was picked up in a truck and taken to Ravenshoe, that's where our new camp was, in the early hours of the morning, had to find where I was going and that sort of thing, it wasn't very easy. I finally got back, yes.

Were you happy to be back with the boys?

24:30 Oh yes, I was happy when I was home on leave, but it would have been nice to have leave with them and not on my own, because I didn't know anybody sort of thing, you walked down there and you didn't know any of the soldiers or anybody that was walking around. Yes it was disappointing.

So back at camp what's next for your battalion?

Well, we did a lot of training at Ravenshoe, very extensive jungle training again and

25:00 at this stage its March, April, March at any rate and we trained up until end of May and then we went down to Cairns and we did some more invasion training. I do remember there that one of the ships that was used had bullet scars all over it and was used in the landing at Normandy,

25:30 British Marines and we had British Marines on there and that was quite exciting I thought to be training with British Marines sort of thing. And we did training with them and did mock landings on Trinity Beach and Palm Beach or Palm Cove or whatever they call it these days and finally, sometime in I forget the date, sometime you know getting towards the end of August we were put on boats and we

26:00 were taken to Morotai, that's in the Halmaheras Islands and had a little bit of training there because at this stage the Americans they'd land on an island and they would just take the beach head and just leave the Japs out in the jungle to starve them out. They didn't take the full island. They did this all the time and so we still had Japs there on the islands and then we did some collapsible boat training there

26:30 which we thought would you know would be handy for the landing on Tarakan. Unfortunately, we lost a few of our, one of the boats collapsed and they went down, full pack down 80ft of water and were drowned. The whole lot of them, I remember there was quite a few of them so that was rather distressing. And then I think it was on the last day

27:00 of April we boarded the Manoora, that is the old Manoora, not the nice new Manoora, she was a coastal boat and we set sail. That was made for troop landing, it had light boats and all sorts of things and landing craft on it and everything so we made our way pretty close to the Philippines there and on the 1st of May

27:30 we landed at Tarakan Island. We didn't get too much, very much opposition on the landing because the Japs had retreated into the hills where they had quite a lot of fortifications and all the jungle was very, it was very deep jungle and all the tracks were just about razor, you know razorback tracks and we only had one brigade, our brigade, 26th Brigade that landed

28:00 there and I think they thought it was just going to be a two day show instead of that the Japs had several thousand troops more than what they expected and it was in this way that you might take one ridge, it was quite a big loss and next thing you know the Japs would double back and reoccupy the ridge you had taken and this sort of thing. This was what we had to put up with there and it was a very

28:30 very, in my opinion unnecessary campaign because they could have quite easily, you know isolated Tarakan and I think the only reason they wanted it for was because of the richness of the oil. You'd drop a, you could dig a hole there and you could find oil, down a few feet down, a bomb hole would bring up oil and I think it had something to do with the Dutch Government, you know some agreement that might have

29:00 done it. They tried to get an airstrip down there but couldn't so that was useless. So when we worked it out we had lost more troops, there was more killed in Tarakan including a lot of people that had gone from original members that had lost their lives there. They lost more troops there than we had a Tobruk. So I've always looked at it as an unnecessary war. In fact, there is a book out called A Waste War Called Tarakan.

29:30 **And when you landed, was it with Americans?**

Mountains then. No, no there was no mountains there at all.

No, no, when you landed was it with Americans?

No, Australians on Manoora. Australian Naval Personnel. That was entirely an Australian turnout that was, yeah.

And so the first time you

30:00 **managed to take Tarakan and then the Japanese doubled back on you, how many times did that happen?**

Oh, two or three that I can remember. At this stage, you see I had been trained on flamethrowers back in the Tablelands and primarily that was my job was to teach others on the flamethrower. There were quite a few things that I did

30:30 was where we had trouble was use flame throwers and I also took out patrols to mend sig wires that had been cut by the enemy, or we presume by the enemy we had no communications. They often did that, cut the wires and that sort of thing. So I did quite a bit of this during Tarakan. Then as I said on the 15th August we were told that the

31:00 war had ceased. Unfortunately, the Japanese didn't know, well not out in the field at any rate and on the 16th we were, most of us were withdrawn from the front line they just kept one company up there and we came back, further back into the near the sea. At this stage I remember Gracie Fields [singer] had arrived, and we had a

31:30 concert from her and those sort of things and different things and then later we went on the other side of the island, the south side of the island and tried to catch a lot of the Jap stragglers who were trying to get across to mainland Borneo on drums and all sorts of things, you know pontoons and things they had made and sort of thing so we got quite a few stragglers there doing that sort of thing. This is what happened

32:00 until you know, until roughly about, that was what, I've got to get this straight now, May, June, July, August, a few weeks after that it was pretty plain that the, well the war was over, the Japanese war was over, the Pacific war was over, and thinking about getting home and

32:30 this is when the Australian Government brought in what they called the 'Five Year Plan'. Troops with five-year service were given a point system. For instance, say a married man with say 10 children he would have maximum points, and then it varied down to the stage where a married man had so many points, I just forgot how many points it was and then it turned out that anybody who had a dependant, like my mother was a dependant on me,

33:00 had the same points. And just for a joke I said to the ordinance corporal one day, he had a little tent put up and he had a notice board up there and what was going on and a few things and different, a newsletter and stuff and I was reading that and he said, "Oh, you won't get home for another five years, Jonesy. Your still so young," because I was what, only 21 then I think and so I said, "Oh, I don't know,

33:30 my mother is a dependant on me," and he said, "Is that a fact?" And so because he went and looked up his records and found out that I was right, so he said, "Oh, I'll have to put your name up forward." So next thing I knew I was on two more drafts and I was home, on my way home. So that's how I got out of the army. I didn't go onto any occupation forces, like a lot of them did. Some of them went to Ambon Island and did occupation there and some of them even went to Japan and those sort of things. Sometimes I

34:00 often think should I have made a career out of it, because at that stage I was a sergeant and I was getting good money in those days, compared to what it was before but I decided I had had enough and wanted to come home so I did.

Was the flamethrower a good weapon to use?

Ah, it was a dangerous weapon to use because you were carrying 79 pound

34:30 of lethal flame on your back. Like its was high explosive high octane and it is ignited by a cartridge and its got a flame that throw out about 250 yards by something like I suppose 30 or 40 yards wide so it can be, you know if they put a bullet into that well then you just, you just fry. So it was rather a lethal weapon

35:00 to be carrying around, but I didn't mind using that.

In terms of use would you sooner have had that or a rifle?

Well, I guess I was chosen to go to this school and I thought well that's my job and I'll do it. But I still liked the rifle, I did like a rifle and I liked the Owen gun too, that was a good gun. No, I did like the

35:30 flame thrower. I felt that, I wasn't one out because later on they issued flamethrowers, you know one or two to each company up in Tarakan, because it was necessary because of the noise. See up there, you had wild pigs, you had monkeys allsorts of things running out at night and you didn't know whether it was Japs or whether it was them so in any doubt you just put a burst of this and it burnt all the foliage around, and if there was any Japs in your way, well you cleared

36:00 a bit of foliage because the jungle was so dense there you couldn't see you know, 20 yards in front of you. Sometimes you couldn't see 20ft in front of you so it was a very dense jungle, really, on Tarakan. That's up in the high, up in the mountain part of it. It's not a very big island if you look in the, you know, compared with Borneo, it's just like a little bit like this compared with a big island. I just forget the distance, it was something like a

36:30 mile and half wide by less than 5 miles long something like that.

It seems extraordinary that so much loss of life was for such a small piece of geography.

Well, that's right. As I said, not that I value one life more than the other but, well for instance, Lieutenant Diver Derrick VC DCM lost his life there. You know, he got a lot of

37:00 new reinforcements up and they were very nervous. Some of these young fellows were only in the army three weeks and were up to three weeks and no more than three months and they were drafted up into the islands. I suppose I should talk, they were only 18 year olds but at least I got my baptism of fire in a more level, a different level, you know casual and then it got worse. Well, these went up into this

37:30 you know, horrible war and I guess their nerves would be bad and he was busy walking around trying to calm them down, and he thought he was standing behind a tree but he was on the side of a tree and he got a burst of machine gun that went straight through, through the side of his body so, I think he lived for about a day, a day or something like that. But he lost his liver and all sorts of things and it was

38:00 a very sad day when I did help to carry him out.

Where did you carry him to?

Just down, out of the jungle down to where they could get a jeep up to take him back to the hospital and to Tarakan.

He was still alive at that point?

He was alive and he was directing and you know, directing what to do but he knew he was going to die because he said it was curtains for me, that was his own words and he told somebody, one of his close friends,

38:30 he had a message to give to his wife and sort of thing and yeah. That was a very sad loss.

Reflecting back on all the different campaigns that you have been involved in, was this the hardest?

It was the most nerve racking but I think, as far as casualties go

39:00 and intensity of fire, El Alamein would have to stand out as possibly, well of all battles fought by Australians in the Second World War, I would think would have to be. I mean, the casualty lists, you know, like as I say we went through 100% of our battalion through there in that campaign so.

39:30 **So what kind of transport did you take home from …**

From… I've got think what boat I came home on, now.

Not the Manoora again?

No. What did I come home from New Guinea, that's interesting, from Tarakan.

40:30 I'm not too sure if it wasn't the West Australia. Funny I can't remember that one. It's a wonder I can't. I do remember coming into Moreton Bay. I always remember the whole bay was full of, what do you call

them, man o'war, Portuguese man o'war [jellyfish] and the boat was just spreading them aside. I've never seen, it was just like duckweed.

41:00 The whole harbour was full of these Portuguese man o'war. I'll always remember that.

What are Portuguese Man O'War?

Well they are, what do they call them, they nip you, you're probably dead in 30 minutes with the poison in them.

Tape 9

00:40 **Murray, why were the Rats of Tobruk given that name?**

Well, at one stage during I don't know which part it was, somewhere around July I think in Tobruk, Germans dropped a lot of

01:00 pamphlets over and telling us that we were, "The British are using you. You are just rats. You are doomed!," and all this sort of thing. Why, I have copies of photos in here, the copy of them – I have lost the pamphlet. Telling us that we were being sacrificed by the British and the Americans are in your country having a good time and what about you and all this sort of thing and you are just living like rats,

01:30 and you will very soon be doomed sort of thing. And Lord Haw Haw [propaganda broadcaster], he was you know the British Quisling or fifth columnist and he called us the 'Rats of Tobruk' and it just stuck and we thought it was a magnificent title and have been that proud of it ever since. Instead of downgrading us, he has done us a great favour.

Well, what the Germans forgot was that rats are survivors.

They are survivors you see, that's it.

02:00 Yes, that's true, yes and survive on practically nothing don't they. Yeah.

Which is exactly what you did.

That's right, yeah.

So Murray what life did you come back to when you were discharged from the army? What life did you have back in Adelaide after the war?

Well, when I came back as I said my brother had just, the one I went away with, had just then got out of the army also so when we

02:30 demobbed he said he was going back to Renmark and of course, I became engaged to my wife now and I went up to Laura in mid north where they were and my brother said he would check out and see what was going on in Renmark and we had hoped, very hoped, very much that we could get a block you know, a fruit block, that was our aim. But we were told we weren't trained enough for it and so he said, the only work back there was pick and shovel work,

03:00 you know on the roads and things like that. He said, "Well, blow that. I can get a job like that in Siberia." That was the very words he said, in the salt mines or something. So he just said, "Well you do what you can do," he said, "and I will carry on." He said, "I'll work on the block, look for a block for a while." Then my brother Dean out here and he was in the same boat, he had just got from the paratroops. He was like a Rat of Tobruk also, then El Alamein, and then joined the paratroops when we came back from the Middle East. I did try

03:30 but was knocked back. Anyway so we sort of said, "What can we do?" So we found out we just had enough money between us with the gratuity money and the little bit of money my mother had saved for me and that sort of thing and we bought a brand new International truck and we started carrying produce. Like in Laura there was a flax mill at that stage, a flourmill, a chaff mill and a grain,

04:00 you know, a flour mill, that's a grain mill so we thought there was plenty of work carrying that and we went to an RSL meeting and got ourselves joined up into the RSL straight away, and there were quite a few returned soldiers there and they helped us and we got work. But I found out after that it was all sort of harvest work and when the winter came we were out working for farmers, doing odd jobs and the truck was in the shed which was no good.

04:30 So I thought this, at this stage I was thinking about marriage and you know in sometime, and I realised then there was no future in it and so at that stage we also had the, what was then the COR Agency at Laura, which is you know BP, Commonwealth Oil Refineries, and we took over, an old RSL block up there let us have his depot. He was doing it and didn't want to do it anymore so we had a depot in

05:00 the paddock next door to us and all the, the fuel was delivered there and all we had to do was deliver it in the truck. We were making a few shillings or pounds those days on it and that sort of thing and then

out of the blue one day the Northern Areas Representative at the time was a bloke called Matt Jacker and he said to me, “What were you in?” And I said, “Oh, I was in the 2/48th Battalion.” He said

05:30 ‘Did you know my brother Roger Jacker?” and he lost his leg, he was a Bren gun carrier, a sergeant and he lost his leg at El Alamein and got the Military Medal and I said, “Oh God, yes.” It just turns out that Roger’s number, regimental number is one after mine, so we probably touched the Bible you know, together when we were sworn in the army so and because he was very, very fond of his brother and with that he said to me after, he said, “Well, are you looking,

06:00 do you want to give it away do you?” and I said, “Yeah.” I said, “There’s no future here.” I said, “You’ve got to work 12 months a year and not 3 months of a year.” “Well,,” he said, “well I’ll write some letters.” He said, “I’ll give you the names of some people to go and see in Adelaide,” and so I came down to town and I went up to, they were in Flinders Street at the time and I went and asked for this person and they said, “He has been transferred to Melbourne.” And then I said, “Where can I contact Matt Jacker?” and they said, “Oh, he’s been

06:30 promoted, and he’s gone to Sydney and he’s 2IC of COR.” So with that I told them what it was all about and they said, “Well you can still go and work at Birkenhead.” So it just turns out that the pay sergeant, it was pay day for them down there, so I went in the car with him down to Birkenhead and saw what they were doing there and oh gee, this looks like a dead end job you know. You were filling drums and labelling drums and all sort of

07:00 things like that and washing out drums and that. In fact, at this stage I was still in the business and it was called ‘S & J L at Laura’ and I was still printing ‘S & JL at Laura’ on the drums that were supposed to be going to me and I was working there. So at any rate, I was supposed to do a probation for 3 months, so I did that and then one night we had to go out

07:30 through the headquarters before you could get outside the premises so I made sure I was last out and so to get my pay, so I spoke to the chap that was in charge there and I said, “What’s going on Mr Parker?” I said, “I’ve done my 3 months probation here.” And he said, “What do you mean 3 months probation?” I said, “I came down here,,” I said, “with 3 months probation and I was supposed to be given a country depot.” This was what I was promised and I told him all the people that I had contacted. So he said, “I’ll get on the phone right now,

08:00 they won’t be shut for another 10 minutes,” and nobody knows anything about me. So I said, “In this case I’m not staying here.” I was riding a bike from Woodville at that stage to Birkenhead and you know, it was head wind in the morning and head wind at night, it always changed around and so, then at that stage then, Cleo, my wife’s cousin, he was a superintendent at Holden, and I was boarding there before we were married and so he said, “I’ll get you a job,”

08:30 so I went down there and I learnt building motor cars and so I stayed there, I think if was for about 3 years, I think. That was that and I worked myself up to a working leading hand but then I realised that my nerves weren’t as good as I thought they were, because the constant banging and banging with metal and

09:00 as soon as the noise stopped my head used to spin and I thought it was the silence that was worrying me. So I went to see, it just so happened that my army doctor, Dr Yateman was also our doctor out at, where we were living out there so I asked him about it and he said, “No, I think you are getting a bit of reaction from the war.” He said, “Nerves are a funny thing.” He said, “There is about 38 different types of nerves,” – and he pointed

09:30 them all out to me – “not that you’re scared or anything like that, it’s reacting to your whole body you know, from what went on.” So he said, “I’d advise you to get out of that noisy job straight away,” he said. So it just turned out that we left Woodville then and we went to live at Goodwin, and my wife’s mother’s cousin had a big home there and we had divided it into 2 and we had a part of it for quite a while until I bought this block

10:00 and built and so and then the chap that was doing all the renovations one day, his father was ill and couldn’t help him so I said, “Oh, I’ll give you a hand,” one weekend he was doing some weekend work. And so he said, “What do you do for a living?” So I told him what I was doing and he said, “Oh, do you want a job?” and I thought this will do me, so I was helping him you know doing a bit of concrete work and a bit of brick work and painting and that sort of thing so I did that for quite a while

10:30 with him and then he had a nervous breakdown, I don’t know whether I gave it to him or not, so then I thought, oh well, I got a job with another chap and I stuck that out for 3 years and then I decided it was time I got out on my own, so I approached the Housing Trust and I contracted painting contract with them right until I retired in November 1983, so about 19 years, I did that.

And you had how many children in the meantime?

How many?

11:00 **How many children did you and Cleo have?**

We had 3 children, there’s Merryn], she’s 52 – she’s a schoolteacher. Has been for 31 years and then Evan, he’s the one that plays lacrosse and ended up going to America. Never done a great deal with his

life, he was quite brilliant but I don't know he just gave, sport took up over of his life I think. He was wonderful

11:30 cricketer, could have ended up anywhere in cricket life, I don't know where he was, wanted to be South Australian wicketkeeper. Well, he did represent South Australia when he was 14 as the Colts under 23 wicketkeeper. He really was a very good wicketkeeper, good cricketer but he chose lacrosse and ended up representing Australia in 3 or 4 world series and went overseas and went to university over in America and played for universities there and has really never,

12:00 as soon as he qualified for what they called the green card [permanent residency permit] over there, he's never really apart from coming home to see us, he's been there ever since, since 1978 really. Now he's in Alaska working so.

And your other one?

Little Gwen, well she's quite a bit younger. She's a bit of an afterthought I think, she's 39. She's got 2 lovely girls, those 2 girls there, Laura and Claere.

12:30 They're both named the same as the towns Laura and C-L-A-E-R-E and their now living up at Wadinga Beach, built their own home now and that sort of thing and her husband, Gwen works. She can't afford to do full time because, you know of children and that sort of thing, so she does part time, this week she is doing every day in child health, child health up

13:00 in Flinders, in mental health actually, in that department. She likes that very much. She's done a lot of psychology, worked for a lot of psychiatrists practically all her life apart from when she went over to Western Australia, when her present husband was over there, so she went over there and worked in hospitals there for a while otherwise she's worked in psychiatry and mental health all her life.

Has she ever asked you about how the war affected you?

13:30 No, I think they think I am invincible. No, I don't think they do.

Did it affect you?

I suppose it does because sometimes when I watch this you know Australians at War and other programs and I've also watched the whole well, the Five Years of War, you know the one the British made, you know everything started when German first declared war and those sort of things, I've laid awake

14:00 quite long hours and thought about it and I know one night I just didn't sleep and next thing I knew it was daylight sort of thing, and I suppose in a way it does affect.

It's a lot of memories, good and bad.

Well, yes. Yes, sort of thing. I don't break down or anything like that, I've made myself too strong for that and it's like my elder brother said to me when my mother died, well I loved my mother very much, and I

14:30 was the only one that didn't shed a tear, and he said, "I can't see why you can't." And I said, "Well the tears are not coming, I'm too hardened to do it. I'm the last one that held my mother's hand and I think she knows that I loved her," so I said, "Let it be that." So that's the way I take life. I suppose it would be different if it was one of my own. But that's something I've got to think about, yeah.

15:00 **I think your mother would know that you have shed a tear or two for her.**

Well, I have at times, yeah, sort of thing.

Finally, Murray, you have seen things that not many people in this lifetime have seen and experienced and survived. It's been an incredible life and you are an extraordinary human being. What would you say if any of your grandchildren decided

15:30 **they wanted, if there was a war, what would you tell them if they said to you, "Grandad I would like to go off to war"?**

Well, I would think I would tell them a bit about my experience. I would advise them to wait until the legal age and that sort of thing and let them make up their own mind from there. I would not attempt to stop them but just advise them what they – I mean I can't advise them what goes on in a war

16:00 today. It's a different war altogether, I mean, from what it was then.

If you had known what you knew at the end of the war, if you had that knowledge when you went in at 16 would you still have gone?

Only, I think perhaps yes, because it's what I've gained through the war, the

16:30 friendship, the mateship and things. I mean, you can't buy that in civilian life. I have on occasions, I've put myself through a lot of work since the war with youth sport. Did quite a lot. That's why I'm a life member of 2 sporting clubs as well at the Rats of Tobruk and the 2/48th Battalion. And at one stage

there, probably the greatest goal thrower Australia has ever seen,

17:00 a chap called Michael Ragger down at Brighton said to me one day, he said, “But you wouldn’t really know Murray, what team works means do you?” I said, “Michael,,” I said, “you are barking up the wrong tree. I know more about teamwork than what you will ever learn,” and then I quoted to him “Not only do you rely on the chap next to you for support, you rely on a section, a platoon, a battalion, a brigade, a division.” And I said

17:30 ‘The army, the whole army and they rely on the navy, they rely on the air force. We are a team.” And I said, “That’s how it all works. This is nothing as big as that, Michael. Don’t lecture me on teamwork whatever you do.” Very nicely, I didn’t. And he looked at me and he said, “God, I always open my mouth at the wrong time.” sort of thing. So this is what I’ve gained. Now like, the Rats of Tobruk. Money, power. I mean,

18:00 Kerry Packer [media magnate] couldn’t join. John Howard [Prime Minister] couldn’t join the Rats of Tobruk. You had to be there to be a member and we are unique and very proud, there’s not many of us left, but we are a very proud association and I’m very proud to be their vice president and doing a lot of work for them and sort of thing. That’s the sort of thing I’ve gained out of the war, mateship really. I’ve never seen a cross word, an argument

18:30 no matter, Anzac Day and someone’s got a few under the weather I’ve never seen a nasty word said to one of our mates. This is something you probably can’t say to all civilians can you. So this is what I think I’ve gained out of the war and looking at that and seeing I survived and probably gave my mother a terrible hard time and what she went through,

19:00 I probably will never know, but apart from that I’m proud of what I did and what I may have achieved.

I imagine your mother would have been very proud as well

I think she was too, yes.

It has been an honour to listen to your stories today, Murray. Thank you very much.

Thank you very much, both you and Sophie [interviewer]. Thank you.