Australians at War Film Archive

Stephen Pontin (Steve) - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:43 **Okay so we're recording now Steve.**

Okay.

Yes. So do you want to tell us about where you were born and where you grew up?

I was born in a little place outside Melbourne called Mordialloc in 1921, actually the

01:00 18th of April 1921. My mother died in 1925 from a, I dunno, septicaemia it was called, I found out years later. But I think she must've had something gone wrong with her works, child bearing sort a thing. I had two sisters and a brother originally. I had one sister

01:30 who died at childbirth, I don't know what year that was but my eldest sister she passed away quite a few years ago, she was born in 1920. So my father probably 1919, 1920, 1921, 1922, '23, '24 sort a thing, and when my young brother died in the Sandakan death march he was, before his

02:00 twenty-first birthday, he never reached twenty-one. But that's going a bit ahead of myself. But I went to school in Richmond. We moved to Richmond from Mordialloc, we used to live in a house overlooking the old Epsom racecourse in Mordialloc, and we went to school in Richmond, moved to Richmond. I went to Cremorne Street State School, number 2084, I can still remember the number.

02:30 As a matter of fact my first rifle number I was issued with was 2084. Amazing isn't it? So let me think now. School was just normal, you know, kids barefoot days sort a thing, in the Depression. I used to have to put cardboard in my boots so I could walk around and wouldn't get wet feet, till the cardboard got saturated, then I still got wet feet anyway.

03:00 But that's things were pretty crook in those days, in the 1929,'30, '31. I left school when I was eleven and went to work on farms around Victoria. I went to work at a place, Labertouche just out of Longwarry. I was workin' in Longwarry on Black Friday 1939, the bushfires went through Gippsland

03:30 I was up at the back of Jindivick fighting bushfires, I was only seventeen then but I turned eighteen in April that year. It was a momentous year because the war started that same year and I joined the army that same year. Now I joined at the 14th Battalion drill hall on the corner, or that used to be on the corner of Commercial Road and Punt Road in Prahran,

04:00 right alongside the Alfred Hospital, they were a well known unit from the First World War, the 14th Battalion. The mayor of St Kilda, Captain Albert Jacka, won the first VC [Victoria Cross]. So it was a bit of tradition. Not that I wanted to join the army, I was always interested in being, joining the navy. So this day I decided to go and join up, after I'd asked

04:30 my father's permission and he said, "That's okay," and he gave me a letter. Now I was riding down to Port Melbourne, there was a stinkin' north wind, and I was riding in my pushbike into the north wind, so I got tired and as I passed the 14th Battalion drill hall I said, "Oh bugger it, I'll join the army instead." I went in and the following week I was on, on the 9th of November 1939 I was taken into the

05:00 army at the showgrounds. My first squad sergeant there was a bloke named Abdul Guest a veteran of the First [World] War, the 2/5th Battalion. He was known as Abdul the Bull Bull Amir. That's a song we used to sing about Abdul years ago. He used to drive a cable tram down Bourke Street and he was a signalman, he used to send out Morse code, dit, dit, dit, dots on his

05:30 bell clangin' down the hill in Bourke Street. Abdul Guest, he was my first squad sergeant. But I went to the 2/6th Battalion, he was in 2/5th, the Victorian Scottish as they called themselves. So that was 1939.

Okay. That's a great potted history there. But I'd like to take you back and cover a bit more about your childhood. I'm curious about your father, what did he do

06:00 **for a living?**

He was a storeman and packer at the Rosella Preserving Company in Balmain Street, Richmond. He was also the president of the fruit preservers union in, they were up in Carlton somewhere near the, they had a little office in the trades hall. But then durin' the Depression he got laid off, even though he was president of the union, he still couldn't get a job,

06:30 he was actually what they call on the dole, this is goin' back in the 1930's. Well my mother died in '25 and my father married again in 1930, in between times, I went to live with my grandmother and my maiden aunt and, Aunty Daisy, and my grandma was always Ma to me and I lived with them till Dad remarried. Then it wasn't the best of

07:00 relationships with my step-mother. I used to call her by her first name and I used to get a belt over the ear hole for bein' disrespectful, but I only knew her as Ruby in the first place, so Mum was a strange word to use to her you know. I can just remember my mother, just. Standing on the fence in the backyard talkin' to the lady, Mrs Chewins next-door, this is goin' back to 1925, I can still remember those things and I was only

07:30 four-years old. So I got many painful memories of those years.

Was that in Mordialloc?

No, this is in Richmond. We all moved to Richmond back in 1921, about six-months after I was born, so it was towards the end of 1921 we moved to Richmond.

So what can you recall about Richmond in those days?

Gosh, I can remember going into Punt Road and

08:00 wavin' the little flag as a carriage went by with the Duke of, was it the Duke of York, on it? Going to Government House. I think it was the Duke of York. This is 1927, he was here to open up parliament or something, Canberra it was one of the Royals were here anyway. So that's Richmond, cause I barrack for the Tigers, have been ever since I was,

08:30 my father barracked for the Tigers, I even had an invitation to train with the Tigers one time.

We were talking about Richmond.

Richmond, yeah.

09:00 Well I was just like any other ordinary kid, we used to, no gangs we used to play, one Wellington Street mob'd play the Davis Street mob in cricket or football, whichever was in season and we used to, in the park at Richmond, just alongside Punt Road, which they called Goshes Paddock, but I've never heard it until well after the war that it was called Goshes Paddock, it was just the park as far as we're concerned and where we all learnt to

09:30 play cricket and football. We used to have an old tip there, we used to have hide-outs and dug-outs the whole lot. Just like normal kids growing up. Until you know, things got a bit tough at home and I decided to go away and work for ten-bob a week and me keep, working for Cow Cottage, milkin' cows by hand twice a day, seven days a week.

So how did you come to get that work, how did that happen?

I went

10:00 down to what they called the labour exchange, used to be down the bottom of Flinders Street, in the Flinders Street extension and used to go there, "Any jobs in the country for a thirteen or fourteen-year old boy?" "Yes we got one for you," and they send you up by, they give you a ticket and send you by train. I used to go to Longwarry station to go to Labertouche and then the local mailman would pick me up and drop me at the farm. Old Scotland McDonald was the first bloke I

10:30 worked for, he was a mean old bugger, made ya work, really work and used to sleep on hessian, poles used to, just poles you cut out of a tree limbs, hessian stretched across it and that was it, and an old blanket to lay on. No pillow, used to have to use your own clothes and make a pillow. So I was really

11:00 toughened up before I ever joined the army sort a thing, like living rough.

So tell me about the work you did on the farm, so milking cows and…?

Milking cows, ploughing fields. A single-horse, a single-furrow plough with one horse and when I started off, he used to come out and say, "What the bloody hell are you doin', you look like you're drunk or something, you're goin' zig zag. You got to keep

11:30 a straight line when you plough." So I did learn that you put a marker at one end and a marker at the other end and you keep your eye on that mark, from that marker to that marker and let the horse go along straight and you plough a straight furrow, once you got the first furrow in, you put the horse in the furrow and then you follow, so you kept goin' straight line after straight line after straight line. Didn't take me long to learn that because I got abused the first time I

12:00 did it wrong.

And what was the soil like, was it hard soil?

Well, it was hard and dry. Do you know bowyangs, you heard of bowyangs? There's things they tie around, you've seen old farmers with their knees, below their knees tied, they used to call 'em bowyangs, and I used to wonder what's that for? I found out what it was for, it stops the dust from gettin' up under your clothes and the rest of your body cause you're walkin' in dust

12:30 all the time. No face mask or anything like that though, like they do these days if they're gettin' anything that's crook.

So it was hard work.

Yeah, for ten-bob a week it was hard for sure. Yeah, should a been ten-bob a day at least, even in those days, cause I was very easy to get on with,

13:00 I had a good appetite and I used to get abused for eatin' too much by the farmer and his wife, "Hollow bloody legs they used to say." But still if you work hard you got a eat haven't ya? To keep the energy up.

Where did you eat, did you eat in the kitchen?

Ate with the family, with the family, yeah. There was no, not when I first there, I worked for another one up at Dimboola,

13:30 in 1936, Germans they come out after the First World War as settlers, all through South Australia, through Hahndorf which is a German name, and through Horsham, Dimboola in the Wimmera. And he couldn't speak English the old man and jeez, I did work hard there. He had two sons and one was an engine driver and one worked

14:00 on the farm. Now they used to feed their cattle rough feed you know, bran, wheat and all that, so you used to have to mix it up, big concrete floor, you'd have to dampen it with water, toss it all over the whole lot of it, there was about sixty-cows you had to feed so it was a fair bit of food, then you'd have to dampen it down and toss it back. This went on for about three-hours, Sat'day and Sunday included.

14:30 Sunday was your day off, but you had to what, three-hours, you had about three-hours that was your Sunday day-off. But it was hard yakka. And they thought Adolf Hitler was a good fellow, this is goin' back to 1936, so there you are.

So they talked about Hitler to you?

Yeah, yeah. "Good man Adolf," I said, "God I," cause I didn't know much about it then, I was fifteen.

15:00 But I knew there was a Spanish Civil War gonna go on or something like that, and he was usin' his bombers in the Spanish Civil War tryin' 'em out for the big one three-years later. But there you are.

So how long had they been in Australia for, do you know?

They probably came out here about 1920-21, probably about the same year I was born, just after the war. All through that part of

15:30 the Wimmera, Horsham, Dimboola, there a lot a German families and also over the border into South Australia, you know up in the Adelaide Hills, Hahndorf, I think they have a race meeting there, or they used to have a big thing there every year, all the German families, something like a beer festival, the German beer festival, there's a big one goes on in Munich isn't it.

So

16:00 **you were young boy and you were having conversations with these other young German men about Hitler and the war. Could you see what's coming?**

Well not at that time. I was, well I wouldn't say I was naïve, but what happened on the other side of the world wasn't concerning me at the time. I was, survival with me, to get enough to eat. Even this, the Germans didn't

16:30 like to feed you. If you ate too much they'd, talkin' about eatin' too much, I worked for one place at Kooweerup, their name, I won't mention names because they might have some family still alive, but old man Daws…, I nearly said his name, the old man he was had a stroke of some sort, he lost all his money in the Depression. And

17:00 he was crook at everyone and he used to call me, "That bastard from Richmond." I used to take it all in me stride, but they put lambs fry in front a me one day and I don't like lambs fry so I didn't eat it, that was for lunch one day, the same lambs fry was put on the table for me for tea that night and I still didn't eat it, it was on the breakfast table in front a me again the next morning and I still didn't eat it,

17:30 and again at lunchtime, five times they put that same lambs fry in front for me to eat. I wouldn't eat it, but I used to go and spend what, I think it was six-pence of my hard earned money in their store with a

tin a preserved fruit, so I could subsist. But they only put it there the five times, they got the message eventually that I don't like lambs fry. I didn't like it when I was at home,

18:00 I don't like it now, I've never liked it, yuk.

So they had a store?

They had a store you could buy extras for yourself out a your ten-bob. So one week I only got about what, two and six out a me pay cause I was spending off money to feed meself to keep goin'.

Was their store in the town or was it part of the… ?

No, it was in their little shed behind the

18:30 house, that was their supply shed, you know. They had their own household goods, if the workers wantin' to buy something well, it's there to buy. So I used to go for preserved tin fruit, tinned peaches that kept me goin', I still like peaches.

Were there many other workers on that farm?

Three. Three others. Then again, I worked for another,

19:00 when the bushfires started I was working for a stud farm, Ayrshire stud farm at Longwarry North and I was the only worker there. They had one of their nephews workin' there and he had a .22 rifle, he was a little so-and-so too because they had a tank, over-head tank to feed the house thing, it'd hold about two-hundred-gallons or something like that and he kept puttin' bullets through it and springin' leaks and

19:30 they blamed me for it, I got the blame for it. And I said, "He did it. No, he did it." Cause they believed him, they wouldn't believe me and I haven't got a rifle. So I had to leave that job. That was after the '39 bushfires of course.

So can you tell me a bit about the bushfires and what it was like?

Well in those days we had what they called beaters, which was if you

20:00 didn't have a beater you could use leaves of gum trees, green leaves, cut off boughs and smother the flames. Now these beaters were made of leather, like leather big, six-inches wide and about a foot long and you used to slap the flames and it would douse it and smother them out. But you had to be very careful because the bush in 1939 was really, round Woods Point and Jindivick

20:30 and Neerim South in Gippsland yeah, it was very, very thick. But we survived it and the only thing we used to have to drink was oatmeal and water. They used to put a couple a pound of oatmeal in a big bucket and fill it up with water and stir it up and it wasn't the, it was a quite a palatable drink too, like a thirst quench you. But beating bushfires with,

21:00 well beating out bushfires with a beater is not my idea of a cup a tea because, these days I dunno, but I always did know that if you're fighting a bushfire and you're trapped you run through the flames to be where the fires been at cause nothin' there to burn. You don't run before it, you run through it and you might get a bit singed runnin' through the front, but as

21:30 soon as you get through the front, you're as good as gold. Only happened to me once, I got caught in a corner and I didn't want to go back up the hill cause the fire would a got me scramblin' up the bloody hill, so I just turned round and ran straight through it. Put your jumper over your head and ran through it and I survived. I got little bits, you could smell the hair, it got singed you know. But that

22:00 was the closest I ever got. I got much closer to being killed later on in life, yeah.

So was it a big team of people that you were fighting this fire with?

There was about twenty of us from Longwarry, just on that, you was given fronts, patrol that front stop the fire there, which we did eventually because there was nothing like a big

22:30 roaring, when a fire gets going, makes its own blast it's the heat that causes the roar, it like goes, it's not wind it's what the fire creates, it creates its own wind. You might think that sounds silly, but in Canberra last year that's exactly what happened, it was blowing a gale they said, but it wasn't it was just the heat and the flames made this vortex that, whoooosh.

23:00 I s'pose all the explosive material that's going up it creates its own blast. But nah (no), we survived, that's the main thing. Unsung heroes we might be called in those days I tell ya. No one was lookin' to be a hero but, we did, we put our best foot forward so a thing and stopped or tried to stop where we could. But then

23:30 we'd got some rain. The rain came and really saved us, but you don't know it's going to, if it's going to rain, you don't know. Hope for it to rain, well you do hope for it but you know it's not going to happen and when it does it's a great, great relief cause nothin' like water to put a fire out.

So you didn't have water to fight the fire with?

No, God, we had no tankers like they have these days, no bush tankers like that. As I say, it was all beaters, man-

24:00 power. That's why they lost a lot a people in the '39 bushfires. Houses were burnt out, Noojee was raised to the ground, Noojee, and that's not far from Moe, you know Gippsland here. Woods Point that was burnt out old gold mining town.

Yeah they were big fires weren't they? They covered a really big area.

Yeah, oh God.

So what was it like after

24:30 **the fires?**

Well that's 1939, just after that I had the run I with the Ayrshire stud farm people bosses, because of their nephew puttin' holes in their tank, so I left, I disappeared. I went back into the job in Melbourne, in Collingwood, over in, I just tryin' to think a their name. Dye-casters that was it,

25:00 repetition engineering, and then that fell in a hole, that was 1939, so I went to back to Richmond, there's a place on the corner of Swan Street and Punt Road in Richmond that's not there now, it was called Mackay's Silent Rubber Products, and I was workin' there when I joined the army. I should a stopped there cause it would a been a protected trade because we're

25:30 making automotive parts there and it would a been a protective trade but we didn't even realise what protective trade was in those days.

Had they introduced protective trades at that point, the notion of them?

No, I think they, they may have came later in 1940, but not in 1939, no. No we were the old originals.

Seems to me like you went from being this city kid…

26:00 To a bushy, yeah.

To a bushy, like overnight, and you had to pick up skills like dealing with horses and ploughing fields and…

Yeah, yeah

Yeah?

Yeah, riding horses, puttin' harnesses on horses and puttin' all the gear onto pull a plough. And after you ploughed you used to have to harrow it then you had to sled it to break up the lumps. Hard work I tell ya.

26:30 **So can you tell me a bit more about that cause that's not, it's not done that way any more is it?**

No, no. Well in 1939, it sounds a long time ago, but we were startin' to get modern, cars were startin' to take different shapes, no runnin' boards on them and all that sort a thing. But it had to be done, it's the way that they did it. A cow cocky [farmer], he couldn't afford heavy machinery like you know, buy

27:00 a McCormick tractor or something like that to pull 'em along, we did it all by a single horse plough, sleds. Do you know what a sled is? That's like a, basically a board that you stand on or walk behind. If you stand on it, it's a bit rough, you get tossed off cause it hits these lumps of clods that you're, then you'd harrow it to get all the rough stuff out of, all the weeds out of it. No, it was one job after another.

So how long did it take

27:30 **to do a paddock?**

To do it properly, a couple a days. After milking, this is that, you've got to do milking first, then when you finished you got to do milking again, this is, there's no let up, it's work, work, work and all for ten-shillings, one-dollar a week in today's money.

What were they planting in the paddocks?

Just their lucerne for their

28:00 own stock and that, lucerne, paspalum grasses and they used to put some a their own, some a their vegies in, might put onions, and if they had pigs they'd grow carrots. And when I worked for Scotland McDonald, he used to separate his milk, cream cause they had pigs and I had a hand separator, wind-up and fill up the bowl overhead and

28:30 wind up, the whey would go that way and the cream'd go that way, then you'd let the whey go rotten and feed it to the pigs, used to get, used to go like jelly if you left it there for two or three-days and the pigs used to love it. So there you are.

So out of those jobs, what did you like doing?

None of them. Actually during the winter

29:00 I didn't mind milking cows cause you could snuggle up to the cow and keep warm, and if you got your fingers too cold you could put 'em in the warm milk because it used to be separated anyway, so.

So you're literally milking by hand?

Yeah and I still got the action that you got a, that way first, the little finger always goes in first and the other ones on the way down and we used to have to strip them. These days with milking

29:30 machines, that's a thing of the past, they don't strip them.

What's...?

They just put the milking the machine under them there for a few minutes and all their milks gone and that's it, they'd put 'em away till the next time. Stripping was you had to get every last drop out of the udders. Yeah, and then you might have a cow that'd hold back all the time, they wouldn't let the milk go sort a thing and I s'pose you've got to be relaxed to do that

30:00 too.

So how did you get them to let the milk go?

Kick 'em in the udder, make 'em release. Not hard but you'd give 'em a belt with your fist or something like that.

So how many cows are we talking here, that..?

Sixty. Three of us used to do sixty cows at the Ayrshire stud farm. It's a

30:30 lot a work, twenty cows each, if you pull your weight that is. I was a little bit new and I didn't do as many as the other blokes and they used to get a bit crook on me for sort of bludging on 'em as the word goes. They'd have to do an extra two or three each out of, I only done sixteen sort a thing you know. Oh God, fun and games.

So did you have a social life?

No, no. By the time you finished

31:00 the day's work and had your meal, you were buggered, you'd have to go to bed and catch up for the next morning, up again at five-o'clock in the morning you know, not much time workin' for a cow cocky. People these days don't know how lucky they are. Don't have to go through things like that. But as I say, it didn't do me any harm, probably done me more good than harm, for you know things that were to come later on in life.

31:30 I'm just, I'm watering in the eyes a bit.

Is the light...?

No, no, no, it's just old age.

So how long all up were you out there in the country working, how many years?

From about 1933, '34 to '38, five, years, five years. And I'd

32:00 give it away and come back home, get another job or look round for another job and jobs were there but they were still hard to get a good job. But even when I come out a the army, I couldn't settle down, took me a long while to settle down. But school days, I got no regrets about my school days. Didn't have any friends out

32:30 a school days, course we moved from Richmond to East St Kilda, and then I was livin' in East St Kilda when I joined the army, then I got married in 1944 to my beautiful wife, Ida, and course that was a whirl-wind romance, we only knew each other twenty-one days and we tied the knot.

33:00 As a matter of fact we tied the knot right next door to the Churches restaurant on Richmond Hill, in a Church of England, St Stephens, pretty poetic wasn't it, that Stephen married in St Stephens? Was a Thursdee night, 25th of May, 1944. My young brother was an Empire Day baby. You know what Empire Day,

33:30 you've heard of Empire Day? 25th of May, he was born in 1924-25 I'm not too sure which, one or the other, the same year I think as my, our mother died, cause he was only an infant when he was farmed out to some other people as foster parents over in Prahran, nice people, I remember their name was Beasley, they lived in

34:00 Greville Street, Prahran, that's where the town hall's on the corner, Prahran town hall.

So did you see much of him in your childhood?

When my Dad married again in 1930, then we all lived together again. We used to sleep together in a double bed down in a sleep out down the backyard. So I've always done it rough and he did it worse than

34:30 me because he never came back from the war. Terrible.

So in 1925 when your mum died the family all…

Split up yeah.

…you all split up, so…?

My eldest sister went to a friend's of my fathers, the name Sid Hall, they lived in Davis Street, Richmond. Daisy my other sister and Ronnie my brother, they went to

35:00 Beasley's over in Prahran and we all came back together when my father married again. And my step-mother's daughter Alice, she came into the family too at that time. She's the only one that's alive now, Alice. She lives over in Perth, Tasmania. But she's very ill too, so I hear. But I have a half-sister cause my father's

35:30 second marriage to Ruby, the one we didn't get on too well with, Melba, she lives at Mornington. But all in all, we've done pretty well out of life. Apart from six-years in the army which is, you know traumatic, it's not so traumatic when you're doing it, it's only traumatic when you think back about it, how bloody stupid you were, the things you did,

36:00 and what could've happened, what didn't happen, you know, if I'd a done this, if we'd a done that. One good thing about going to school, I learnt to swim, and learning to swim saved me by about three-hours of becoming a prisoner of war in Greece. If I hadn't a swam out to the caiques that came in towards shore to pick us up, and that's

36:30 Greek fishing boats, caiques , C-A-I-Q-U-E and they couldn't come in because there was a big sandbar. Of course, I might be getting ahead of myself here but…

That's okay.

I got a get through the desert first…

That's right.

…before all this, which was a piece a cake, the desert, I tell ya the Italians and that, they didn't want to fight. Best thing you can ever see in your life is thirty-thousand

37:00 Italians marching in threes along the desert road from Bardia, a Bren gun carrier in the front and one at the back and that's it, and they're carryin' their swags, their valises, suitcases, all singin' along, the war was over for them, they were happy. You know, thirty-thousand men with two Bren guns, one each end guarding them. Sight for sore eyes, Mussolini would a been proud of

37:30 'em. God.

Okay, well we'll wind back again. That's fine going here and there, absolutely fine, as long as you don't mind me bringing you back.

No, fine.

Your dad was working in the Rosella factory?

Yeah Rosella.

That employed a lot a people; in Richmond wasn't it?

Yeah, hundreds there. I worked there meself one part a the game. Yeah. I can remember it one pay night I

38:00 was walking into the men's change room, that's down the bottom of, I think it's in Wynn Street which used to run into the Rosella and I picked up a five-pound note on the floor, a five-pound note mind you, God it was like findin' a, winning Tattslotto, and I picked it up and I looked at it, I said, "God no, I better hand it in to the boss, someone's lost five-pound," which I did. A bloke named Mr Miles was the manager or the

38:30 foreman, looked at me, "You picked it up, you didn't put it in your pocket?" "No," I said, "it's not mine," I said, "it might belong to someone who needs it more than I do." Course I needed five-pound like it, as much as anyone else. But I gave it back. I think it got back to the owner eventually, but I didn't hear about it any more.

So when were you working there at Rosella?

39:00 I worked there for about six-months, in between farm jobs. I was in what they called the box shop, they used to make their own packing cases of sawn timber, I used to hand the timber to the bloke who put it in the machine with the nails that clunked down and bind 'em all together, they didn't hammer 'em one

at a time, they had a machine that put 'em in. They were getting modern back in those days.

39:30 Yeah, in the box shop.

Was that a big department of…?

Yeah, well, yeah all the packing cases were made of that light like ply wood and makin' boxes all day long there, pretty big.

So you're dad….?

'Course that's before cartons came in, they didn't have such thing as cartons you know, for packaging in those days.

I'm interested in

40:00 **your dad's involvement in the union when he was working there.**

Yeah, well he was the president I'm sure it was the fruit preservers union, it could a been the storeman and packers, now I think back, but I'm sure it was the fruit preservers. I know a bloke by the name of Clancy was the secretary, and I'd often go into the trades hall [union headquarters], to find out because everyone was called 'brother' in those days, in the union – brother, brother this, brother that. You'd have big photos of the president on the wall, all the presidents,

40:30 and miniatures around 'em, over the years… To see if I could find one a my Dad, but I never got round to goin' into it, was always something else that happened to distract me from it. Probably not too late. Now that I've got time on me hands, I might even go to the trades hall one day this year and find out which union it was. But he used to, I had to go into town one day by train, we lived at Richmond, had a lending

41:00 library in Swan Street, Richmond, it was a milk bar lending library like a book club. For a thruppence you could get a library book and swap one over and bring the other one back, and if you pay thruppence you get another one. Well he used to get this subsistence from the Union, it was one-pound-ten, I dunno if it was every fortnight, but I had to go and pick it up this day. So they give it to me in an envelope, and I put it in me pocket, got in the train, come back to Richmond,

41:30 it's only about two-hundred yards from Richmond station to where we lived, and I haven't, it's not in me pocket, I've lost the thirty-bob, I'm in big trouble. Thirty-bob in 19.., what 1932, was big money, thirty-shillings. You could buy a side a lamb for about two and six. "You've done it, you've spent it." I said, "I haven't, I've just lost it." So we went back to the Richmond station…….

Tape 2

00:30 **So you put it in your pocket and…?**

Yeah, well I put it in me pocket, got out a the train, went home and the envelopes not there. So we get back to the Richmond station, the Richmond stationmaster, he rings up down the line the train, I told him the train I was on, the carriage. I was right behind the driver and I was sittin' facin' the way we were coming from, and they found it, sittin' on the

01:00 seat, stuck in the corner of the seat, and they relayed it back to Richmond by the next train comin' back. Do you think I wasn't relieved, I was in awful bloody trouble. Thirty, only for thirty-bob, three dollars, it's amazing what values have changed now, hey? So that was that, I was what, exonerated, I hadn't knocked it off. They didn't believe me, took a lot a

01:30 believing I tell ya.

This is your father didn't believe you?

Yeah, yeah, 'course he was probably worried about the thirty-bob, what it was gonna buy, it may a been a couple a beers he's a gonna miss out on or something like that. Cause he did like is ale, not over-excessive but he did like a beer.

So was he ever involved in any strikes at Rosella?

No, not to my knowledge anyway.

02:00 There may have had a stop work meeting or something like that but I couldn't tell you, not those days. Strikes weren't so bad in the thirties, I couldn't remember many strikes durin' the Depression. I don't think history could have many of 'em either. All these things happened since people got educated after the war I think, strikes and all that sort a thing. I can remember we,

02:30 when I went back after the war, I went back to Silent Rubber Products to work, got me job back there

again and in 1946 I had to join the ironworkers union. Now that was a Commo [Communist] union, a bloke, he was a red-hot, red-ragger, was the secretary. Anyhow they went on strike, we had to go on strike from… I was

03:00 what they call the engineering, some engineering union and we were on strike for nine-weeks, no six-weeks. Six weeks on strike then they decided, "Oh we'll go back, we're not doin' too good, so we'll go back to work." And the bosses said, "Pig's bum you'll come back to work, we're on strike." And they locked us out for nine-weeks.

03:30 It was fifteen-weeks without a job. So I had to go lookin' for another job, and I was a transport driver in the army, after Italy came into the war, when things got out a hand as far as our recruits went, for drivers and motorcycle orderlies, so

04:00 I went drivin' for W. Cross and Sons in Melbourne, round the wharves and that, you know, pickin' up stuff, deliverin' stuff, metropolitan area. Then I lasted about six-months in that, so I said, "I'll go and get a job drivin' cabs." So I went to Yellow Cabs and started drivin' a Yellow cab. Now I drove Yellow Cabs from 1948 to '52 and I can tell you some stories about drivin' Yellow Cabs around Melbourne in those days,

04:30 if you're interested that is.

Definitely interested.

Well, I got attacked driving over Princes Bridge. A bloke got in at Flinders Street station and just said South Melbourne, so you could make a U-turn over the bridge in those days, you can't do it these days there's tram things everywhere. So I made a U-turn and as we're goin' over the bridge he threw a punch at me from the back seat.

05:00 So I made a right hand turn and pulled over outside the YMCA [Young Men's Christian Association] which is on the corner of City Road and St Kilda Road, and Sturt Street, at that pointy… used to come right to a point. You probably don't remember that because it's all been changed now, anyhow, I got out the cab and I opened the door and he was undressin' himself. So I grabbed him, I've still got a sore knuckle, that knuckle's still sore from

05:30 all those years ago. I grabbed him like that and I hit him as he's comin' out, and I said, "That'll cost ya four-shillings." And I took the four-shillings out of his pocket and I said, "You're lucky I haven't called the coppers," I said, "you can't attack a man drivin' a car across a bridge in crowded traffic." But I hurt him, but he didn't report me to the police or anything. That's one story.

Why do you reckon he attacked you, any idea?

Well he was startin'

06:00 to take his clothes off, and I said, "What do you think you're doin'?" And he, "Ggrrr." I dunno if he was drunk or not but he didn't seem to be drunk. But he threw one and it just grazed me across the chin. A course that was like a red-rag to a bull to me, there's a man been six-years in the bloody army and you get in a taxi in Melbourne and a bloke's takin' a swing at ya, you know, it could caused anything if he'd a hit me. Who knows I might a had a head-on collision or something.

06:30 Cause at that time a night, even in those days, it was pretty heavy traffic across Princes Bridge, St Kilda Road. Anyhow that's one story. My half sister, Norma, got married on Derby Day 1949. Now I dunno if you know the story about the [HMAHS] Centaur, the hospital ship that was sunk by the Japanese off Mackay,

07:00 there was a bit in the paper a few months ago. Two survivors of the crew got together, one of 'em was Matty Morris, we played as kids from two and three years old up to the time we moved, my mother died, then we sort of drifted apart. Well he was one of 'em. Now on this day I met him,

07:30 Matty Morris, in a pub in Richmond, the Greyhound Hotel, he'd just had a big party and, from the survivors get-together, Centaur, and he had two niners [9-gallon beer kegs] left over. Now I'm drivin' a Yellow Cab, so. My sister didn't have any beer it was hard, beer was hard to get even in 1949, so I thought

08:00 now she wants some beer, I'll, there's a niner, "You can have 'em for three-quid each." This is Matty Morris, a survivor, he was one a the crew. I said, "Righto Matty." And I went round and picked 'em up, gave 'em the six-quid and I'm puttin' 'em in the boot, took one round to where the reception was gonna be, unloaded that for the reception and went to work on the bridge again. A bloke got on and he says, "St Kilda." So I said,

08:30 you're only goin' to St Kilda for two things if a blokes goin' in a taxi – for grog or ladies. I said, "What are you after?" He said, "I'm after some grog." And I just happened to say, "What do you want, bottles or barrels?" Just like that, he said, "Barrels?" And I said, "Yeah." He said, "I'll have a barrel." I said, "Where do you want me to drop it?" He said, "What do you mean?" I said, "It's in the boot." He said, "You're bull shittin'."

09:00 So I took him down to Port Melbourne where he wanted to go to have this party, helped 'em to tap the

keg, help 'em to drink it and charged him five-quid for it. True story and my sister got her beer, Matty got his six-quid. I dunno what happened to the empty barrels cause you used to have to take 'em back, but they probably ended up in someone's beer garden somewhere. God.

Yeah well that was…

True story.

09:30 Sly groggin' with the barrel, against the law you know. But whose gonna dob me in, the bloke I sold it to wasn't. He was quite happy yeah, gosh.

So you used to drink at the Greyhound, the one under the railway bridge?

Yeah, It's now called something else yeah.

Was that your favourite, was that your local?

That was my Dad's local. I never drank till I came back from the war. I was twenty-one before I started drinkin'

10:00 beer. I had my 20th birthday durin' the retreat in Greece, and I had my 21st birthday back in Adelaide, when I was billeted with Rechabites. They're anti-grog people and I had my first, I had three pints of South Australian beer at the pub in Balhannah in South Australia, and was I sick,

10:30 just three pints, not pots, pints. And they had a night cart called there, they didn't have sewerage and I'm on me knees bein' violently ill into a pan, can you think of anything worse than that? "What's wrong with Steve, he's ill. Must a been something he ate." Poor old Mrs Pitt,

11:00 I felt sorry, I felt sorry for her, wonderful old woman and her daughter Miss Pitt, she was an old maid. But they were lovely people, we were there for about nine weeks, billeted in private houses. They could a sent us home to our own places and paid my parents billeting fees. But no, 'course I'm digressing a bit again, getting ahead of meself. This is after I came back from the Middle East.

11:30 **Yeah. Why didn't you drink during the army, when you were in the army?**

No inclination to drink. I said to the other blokes, when we went on our first desert push, we went onto what they call 7th Army rations, we were attached to the 7th British Army and part of their doctrine was to have a tot a rum before you go into battle and twenty cigarettes a day in your issue, Beers, Honeydew or Wild

12:00 Woodbines. I used to smoke, but they used to queue up to get my tot a rum. "Pont, what do ya, whose got it?" I said, "You're first in, you can have it." But they used to drink my share a rum.

So your dad would go down the pub regularly?

Yeah, when he wasn't workin' or he'd have a couple a bottles a beer at home. He used to send me around to the pub after-hours with one and a penny to buy a bottle a beer

12:30 for one and a penny, one-shilling, what's that? Eleven-cents a bottle a beer. Used to have to ring the bell three times, then they'd come up and say, "Yes what do you want young Pontin?" "Dad wants a couple a bottles please." Give him 'is two and tuppence and you'd come back with a paper bag with .. take 'em home to the old man.

So kids were allowed to…was it illegal or…?

It probably was illegal but

13:00 a shilling was a shilling in those days, even to a publican I s'pose. Wouldn't do it now. So you can see, I haven't led a sheltered life, really cause I got no regrets about it, if I had to change anything there's not much I would change really. It's been an experience and I'm still havin' an experience.

13:30 **You know that period of your working life when you left school, you were eleven when you left school did you say?**

I was twelve actually, just turned twelve.

That's very young. So then you had seven, six years until you enlisted, of working.

Yeah.

So you were going off to the country and coming back to Melbourne.

Yeah, I had five country jobs and in-between jobs in Melbourne.

Did you always go back to the labour exchange to get work?

No, two of them

14:00 was by word of mouth, Labertouche I worked for McDonald. Then I went to another place in

Labertouche a chap named Rhodes, an Englishman, terrific bloke, terrific wife, terrific kids, had a great time there. Then he had to put me off cause he still had another man there before me. Then I went to the Ayrshire Stud Farm in Longwarry, which is next door to Labertouche. This is where I had the experience with the holes in

14:30 the tank.

Did you go rabbit shooting?

Used to go out rabbit shooting with a four-ten shot gun, a little shot gun, a four-ten and I used to knock 'em over. But rabbits, I got more rabbits here now, in this place right here than I ever seen at Labertouche. I got, my cat, you haven't met my cat, she was out there a while ago, she caught ten rabbits since, she's caught ten kittens here since the 1st of December.

15:00 She's worse than myxomatosis as far as rabbits go.

You'd shoot rabbits back then, eat them…?

Yeah, I used to eat them till they brought in myxomatosis, I've never eaten a rabbit since myxomatosis come in, cause I reckon if they're gonna poison rabbits that way and no-one's gonna convince me it's not gonna poison me the same way. But they reckon it's nothing wrong with them. But I want underground

15:30 muttons off my menu.

What about foxes?

Tell you a story about foxes. I used to go fox shooting, you've heard of Flowerdale? Up the back of Flowerdale what the hills they call the Three Sisters, I used to go along there with a 303 rifle, bangin' through the scrub and chasin' the fox up the hill, so the blokes up there with shot guns

16:00 would knock 'em off. Flowerdale.

Did you do that for a living, for the skins?

No, just for fun, weekends. No, one a my friends I spoke to on the….see one story brings onto another story.

Good.

I rang up a friend a mine, my son said, "Why don't you ring up Myra O'Neal," she lives in Burnie, Tasmania, "and go over there for a holiday?" So

16:30 I said, "I've been tryin' to contact her for twelve months, she just dropped out all of a sudden." Anyhow I know a woman down at Raymond Island, where this one comes from, or near Raymond Island, Joan Cadd and I rang her up, Myra's number, "Oh Myra died twelve months ago," that's why I hadn't been able to get onto her, she's gone. But I rang up her sister the next morning who lives in Burnie,

17:00 and she's got a, had a fox coat, it was the fox we knocked off goin' over the at Flowerdale. It's funny, one thing brings up another memory.

So you salvaged the skins.

Yeah, she had them all treated and sewn into a full length fox coat, even with the thing around your neck with the foxes head hangin' over the side, like a stole sort a thing with the fox head still lookin' at you.

17:30 God.

So who were your mates when you were growing up in Richmond?

Never really had, see mates is a funny word. It's, you had friends and acquaintances, but mates, you have very few mates in your lifetime you know. Well I've found it that way. See mates, my young brother would a been my best mate,

18:00 but he never made it. That's something I, I don't feel sorry for meself, but it hurts that I never grew up with him. The last time I seen him was I was home on final leave in March 1940, we left Port Melbourne on the 15th of April, no we left Port Melbourne on the

18:30 14th of April 1940, the second convoy to go overseas and we left the [Port Phillip] Bay and went through the heads the next day. We were camped off Rye for the night, one a the wildest nights you've ever seen in the Bay too, God the wind and rain, and I copped guard duty round the open decks. And we went through the rip the next day, through the heads and the rip,

19:00 up and down, God and I would say we had fourteen-hundred or nearly two-thousand troops onboard and I'd say thirteen thousand, whatever, thirteen hundred would be bloody seasick. It was a British troopship, the HMT Neuralia. They had two decks A and B deck, so two flights of stairs, up that way and then one up that way and

19:30 you couldn't walk and you'd slip over, you'd go arse over head, it was that much sickness and they'd all get up and go to the wrong side and they'd be gettin' back what they heaved out into the wind you know, instead a goin' down with the wind and every, it was a chain reaction. One bloke'd see that and he'd be sick, the one next… They had Lascar [Indian] seamen on it, and this old Lascar said, "You drink-a this, no get seasick," Worcestershire

20:00 sauce. So I had a couple a gulps of Worcestershire sauce and I wasn't sick. Amazing, that's a good seasickness cure, in rough seas have a couple a mouthfuls of Worcestershire sauce, settles your stomach, makes you gasp for breath too, it's a bit strong in the neck I tell ya. Yeah, Lascars.

Okay. So perhaps we'd better get to the point at which you joined up,

20:30 **yeah?**

Yeah, well.

But you just said that you were the second convoy to go to the Middle East,

Yeah,

so it was very early on in the war that you joined up. Why, why did you want to join?

Why did I join up? Well it's a question I've often asked myself. As a kid I was an avid reader of boys' books, Champions, Triumphs, Magnets and all those sort a things, Boys Own Library, used to read

21:00 stories about daring-do. I said, "I wouldn't mind trying this daring-do one day," you know, feats of daring-do. But thought back, Hitler had invaded Poland, and I thought back to the Schultzes who said he was a good bloke when I worked at Dimboola. So I

21:30 said, "Oh well, I'll join the navy." And as I said, I was going to join the navy when the bloody headwinds got me and I said, this is close enough, I'll join the army. Probably the best thing I ever done, who knows I might a been on the [HMAS] Sydney or something. It's fate isn't it? You stop at an intersection for two-seconds longer than you should've and you've missed an accident or you've

22:00 caught an accident. It's just these things are there, they're always there. So who knows, I might a been on the Sydney when she was attacked by the [HSK] Kormoran. Cause I've got a story about the Kormoran. But I'm digressing now.

No, tell us the story about the Kormoran?

Well when I, see during Crete, I was attacked by a Messerschmitt,

22:30 me one out attacked by a Messerschmitt, and he came up around a hill behind me, I'm lookin' for everything that come from that way. We had sandbags across this little defile, overlooking Suda Bay and when he come over round behind me, I was over the sandbag and it's down hill. Now where I was, was that level, when I went over the hill I was down on that level over the sandbags and I put me hand down, and that's that hand there, it's still,

23:00 it's never healed up, it's fractured the scaphoid bone, and did I abuse the bloody German pilot. So I came back from operation and I met my wife, she was the first person I met at Heidelberg when I come down to have that operation, which I've touched on before, for twenty-one days. Anyhow they made me B-class after

23:30 eight-months I was in plaster. So they sent me back to Royal Park to what they called the GDD, General Detail Depot, to be put somewhere else. So I went into see this sergeant and he's an old battalion mate a mine I knew, not a mate, but a friend a mine I knew in the Battalion, 2/6th Battalion when I joined up, I said, "I want one a those cushy jobs where I can go home every bloody night, and knock off at nine,

24:00 and start at nine o'clock and knock off at five." "Just got the job for you," he says, "Vic LFC car company." Now Vic LFC car company were up in Lonsdale Street opposite Wesley Church in Melbourne, it was the old Southern Motors garage showrooms. And part a my job was to drive these officers and civvies all round Victoria. And I had to go out to Essendon to pick up a Mr Walker, Mr Fred Walker of Kraft

24:30 Walker Cheese, you ever heard of Kraft Walker Cheese? The people who invented vegemite. And this old Fred Walker was the inventor, his idea of Vegemite. Now people say that he didn't invent it, but it's his idea and he come up with this vegetable extract, he used to show nine-millimetre films, sixteen-millimetre films around the POW [Prisoner of War] camps in Tatura, Murchison.

25:00 So I had to pick him up. Now we go away on the Monday, I'd pick him up in Essendon, in Reynolds Parade he lived, he'd load all his film cameras in and away we'd go. So we went to this place Tatura, now you've head of Warrag… not Warragul, Dhurringile, I think, it's a place just out of Tatura, it's an

25:30 old mansion where the prisoners of war off the Kormoran that sank the Sydney were ensconced, they were that was their jail sort a thing, and they used to show them films, and the Japanese that were around there too. And one a the blokes said to me, one a the Germans, I said to him "What happened? How come that you blokes'd sink a ship like the Sydney?" He said, "She come too close." And that was

26:00 a view of one of the crew of the Kormoran that sank the Sydney. So isn't it amazing hey? It comes back to that and, cause you know they never found any trace a the Sydney, not even a bit a wreckage. And I've got a letter, not a letter a, what do they call those inquiries? A senate

26:30 inquiry was going on about the Sydney a few years ago and they had this select committee or something, they call them, to find out what happened to the Sydney. So I rang this chief of the, he's a senator about my theory, I said, "Now I joined the army in '39 and I sailed for the Middle East in April 1940, and half way between Ceylon and Colombo

27:00 we lost a man overboard," I said, "He was a lieutenant." And he laughed, "Ha, ha, ho, ho," you know how some a these politicians go on as if I was bull dustin' to him. I said, "No this is fair dinkum," I said. "Now this unidentified body that you reckon's buried on Christmas Island, someone found him driftin' at sea in a dinghy," do you remember that story?

27:30 **Vaguely.**

Vaguely, do you remember it Col?

Yeah vaguely.

Yeah, well I said, now they threw a Carley float over, someone threw him over in the middle of the night, threw him overboard, I know, I don't know who did it but I, this is I knew what had happened. So they threw the float overboard, someone might've got a touch of compassion, it's the middle of the bloody night and he's half way between land, you know, a thousand-

28:00 miles each bloody way, he's got no hope. Well they never found him, but I'm just thinkin' that's that body, he probably got the Carley float, got into it and died, cause they found his body, eighteen-months, you know, "Was it emaciated?" He wouldn't tell me, I said, "Was it skeletal, was…?" you know, he didn't say anything, just laughed and never wrote back to me or never sent back to me anything about

28:30 what might've happened, how it could've happened. I didn't want to mention any names, I didn't mention the chap's name at all because he's probably still got relatives still livin' and they wouldn't want to know what the circumstances were, that he was actually, you could say he was murdered cause they threw him overboard. But he was a bit of a bastard himself. He only just got his commission too and he was in charge of the first reinforcements of the

29:00 2/6th Battalion. So if you wanted to dig in history, you could find out his name probably. But that's another spin-off of how things relate and tie into each other. I s'pose everything ties into each other if you want to go back, and wide enough. But there y'are, they never found him, they had an inquiry on the boat and

29:30 a friend a mine, who was sub-editor of [The] Truth, Quentin Tilley, he was an old battalion friend a mine in the 2/6th Battalion, he held the inquiry on the troop ship the day after it happened, so they come up with the story that he was in the officers' mess this lieutenant, got too much, got outside the mess and got into a lifeboat

30:00 and got out durin' the night to urinate, and got out the wrong side a the lifeboat. Now I dunno if you know what a British troop ship's like, the life boats are, they're like drums and cords that hold 'em, you had to cut 'em with a knife to loosen 'em. Now if he was whacked he couldn't, he was thrown over, that was their official what do you call it, inquest

30:30 into his disappearance. But I have no doubt because I was one of the crew, not crew I was one a the passengers that heard the rumours going round that they threw him overboard. There were some tough cookies in the 2/6th Division, I tell ya now. They'd been out a work for a bloody hell of a long time, durin' the Depression.

Okay we're gonna get to that,

31:00 **but something I have to ask you is, just winding back, just rewinding a little way to Fred Walker,**

Yeah,

the man with the films going round to the POW camps.

Sixteen-millimetre films, yeah.

What sort of films was he showing to them?

I don't know, I never looked at one. I always had somethin' else to do. No, I never looked, he was just showin' like, A Yank in Dutch is one, I remember that A Yank in Dutch they called it, Franchot Tone was in it, you wouldn't a known Franchot Tone either

31:30 would ya, he was a big actor in the '30s. Franchot Tone, it was A Yank in Dutch, and they changed the name, this was the un-cut version he was showin' and they changed the name, it was about a, I forget the name, but it was originally A Yank in Dutch. All that type of film.

So they weren't propaganda films?

No, no, no, Australians wouldn't know what the word meant.

32:00 They don't play hard like that, propaganda in 1944 or '45 yeah. No, propaganda was, that was all German, Goebbels, he was a propaganda man wasn't he? Old Goebbels.

No. There was a bit of propaganda coming out of Australia, you know, against the Japanese, about the Japanese.

Don't talk about them, I hate the bastards.

Well perhaps we'd better just go back to when you enlisted, you know, that moment when you had the

32:30 **head wind, you were riding your bike.**

Yeah, well I ended up at the showgrounds, I think I touched on that, Abdul Guest was my first squad man, then we get to Puckapunyal, no rifles, I was in the mortar platoon, they call them the SSS platoon, and I say, "Yeah SSS?" They said, "Yeah, shoot, shit and scatter," that was what SSS meant. Cause they used to fire a ten-pound bomb, a mortar and when it hit the ground

33:00 it'd explode that high off the ground like a lawn mower, it'd sweep everything, anything that'd stand up for about a hundred yards all the way around it. That's what SS and S, that's the army vernacular. I shouldn't probably, I shouldn't swear at the camera should I?

That's all right, you can swear at the camera, we do sometimes.

But then…

But where?

Puckapunyal.

Well let's go through

33:30 **your, you know those first, the first days of being in the army and your training. Can we just sort of walk through that, those days?**

Yeah well, I dunno if you've ever been to Puckapunyal, there's a street, one long street that way and then like an L-shape which was, it was into the camp, they called it Clink Street cause all the battalion, boobs they call 'em,

34:00 were in the front shed all the way along Clink Street, they call it Clink Street. Just someone with a sense a humour, and the parade ground was opposite that. Now we had to grub out all the stumps, clean out the whole parade ground to make it like this here, as level as that and we didn't have any rifles, so we used to have to break off bits of gum trees about the length of a rifle and train with that, didn't

34:30 have any mortars, we had a wooden mortar we used to train with, and we had the AIF [Australian Imperial Force] blokes teachin' us to slope arms, you know, with a twig sort a thing. And then we got the rifles after about a fortnight and they were packed in grease and you had to clean 'em out, and every time you went to the range to fire 'em, more grease would ooze out between the wooden housing of the barrels you know, oh

35:00 God, lovely. Went to the first rifle range, I'd never fired a 303 before, a twenty-five-yard range up the back a Puckapunyal camp, right hand, bang, and the recoil, I had a blood nose, I thought I'd shot meself. Nose was bleedin' profusely, God. That was my first experience of firin' a 303. I forgot about the recoil.

So did you know any other

35:30 **fellas there that had joined up with you, at Pucka?**

No, they were all strangers and from the first time, no, not anyone, no. We did meet, make friends, mates. Well you'd call mates, but I still think mates are hard to get, hard to find mates in the true word, mates. Yeah my brother would a been one, as I said, and there's a couple a other blokes that never made it,

36:00 they were good blokes. Was one bloke, digressing back to Crete, the day after the invasion, and we knew things were gonna get a bit sticky and this Ken Rigby his name, Ken Rigby, "Follow me, I'm a born leader of men." And we all turned round and said, "Get stuffed," never seen him again. I dunno if he ever, if he survived or not. Never seen him back in camp, he must a been taken a

36:30 POW, Ken Rigby, "Follow me, I'm a born leader of men." Got a laugh about it now.

So where had all these guys come from, the ones that you were with in Pucka, all over or…?

Victoria, New South Wales, Tassie and a couple from South Australia. The bloke I was with on the beach when I got off, I had to swim off Greece, he couldn't swim,

37:00 he said, “I’m not goin’, can’t swim.” He was taken a POW at dawn that day. This is at what, half-past-three in the mornin’ so two-hours later he was a POW. Frank Richardson, I only heard about him a couple a years ago, he just passed away someone told me. But an old mate a mine from army said, “Oh yeah, he’s just carked it,” is the word they say.

37:30 Yeah, Frank Richardson. If he’d a been with me, he’d a been back today, maybe.

Or if he’d learnt to swim.

He wouldn’t have had, wouldn’t a been a POW, and that’s the best thing I ever done when I went to school was learn to swim at the Richmond Baths, I tell ya. So gettin’ back to the evacuation of Greece.

38:00 **Well…**

The beach we were on, I think it was a place called Navplion, and we got to this point about, by train about two-o’clock in the morning, had to pull up on this little beach and there was already hundreds and hundreds of troops there, British troops. And this colonel, a full colonel with all the red tabs, he was a staff officer, from some headquarters of

38:30 some sort, walkin’ up and down the beach tellin’ us what to do and what not to do, and he had all these troops, English troops with their rifles slung, tin hats on, and packs on their back. And about three-o’clock in the mornin’ someone says, “There’s a boat,” and guess who was first into the water? The bloody British colonel with all the red bloody tabs on and all his troops followed him, all with their packs on, rifles slung,

39:00 wadin’ out, and there was a sand bar and when they waded out about ten-yards they went down about fifteen-feet a water, then it come up to about a foot a water. That’s why the caiques couldn’t come in. They all drowned, you could hear ’em splutterin’, it was just every man for himself. All I had was a tin hat and I put me cigarettes under me tin hat, I was wadin’ out and I went down into it, off went the tin hat

40:00 because the cigarettes were buggered anyway, full a sea water, and I swam out to the caique and they pulled me on board, there was about fifteen of us on it, takin’ us out to this silhouette, you could see a destroyer, just a silhouette in the dark, could just make it out. And guess what, it was the HMAS Vendetta an Aussie destroyer,

Tape 3

00:30 **…Steve. Now before we get back on the ship and you take us across the Indian Ocean and to Fremantle and so on, is there anything more about Pucka? I mean can you tell us about, for example, how you responded to that big culture change, to army life the discipline and so on?**

Well, it was not much of a change because of me living away from home workin’ on cow cockies’ farms for a few years off and on,

01:00 sort of acclimatised me to what might be gonna happen in the army you know. I can remember we had a sports meeting at Puckapunyal and I entered into the mile race, so this is good, I’m runnin’ for the company, headquarter company, and I’ve done two laps and I’m about a hundred-yards in front, this is bloody easy. The next

01:30 thing, I’m running on good as gold, God I hit a brick wall, I couldn’t, I stopped and the rest a the, I didn’t even finish the race, the rest a the field went past me. But that’s how cocky I thought I was you know, and doin’ a John Landy or something, be eight-hundred yards in front and stop and do a walk. I learnt then, a little bit there, you’ve got to pace yourself in most things you do. But then, when we left Melbourne

02:00 and went through the rip which I spoke about, our first port of call was Fremantle. Now when we got to Fremantle we had a welcoming committee because the first convoy that stopped there, they had just about wrecked Perth. They even carried a baby Austin car up the portico, the steps a the town hall and dumped it up the bloody top. So they made sure that we weren’t gonna do the same thing. So I had a beautiful woman named Mrs Wedge,

02:30 she lived in Webbs Street, Nedlands which is one like the Toorak of Perth, to what Toorak is in Melbourne, and they entertained us, had a beautiful lunch. There was beer on the table, but I didn’t drink it, I had lemonade, lemon squash and we went up on the Canning Dam. Now the Canning Dam wasn’t even finished in those days, so we went up had a look at the Canning Dam, walked across the Canning Dam, the big causeway that

03:00 holds all the water back, that’s one of the main water supplies of Perth these days, but we was there to look around it. But she was a wonderful woman, she was the wife of some big land owner up in the north, the north-west frontier. Probably up somewhere where they’re findin’ diamonds and gold now,

Hamersley or somewhere up that way, iron ore. But she was a wonderful woman. I corresponded with her a few times while

03:30 I was over in the Middle East, but when we came back those things just disappeared. I dunno, I touched on, we lost a bloke overboard across the Indian Ocean, had a big inquiry. But I still maintain that the bloke we lost overboard was the bloke they found eighteen-months later, driftin' in the Indian Ocean in a Carley raft, not off the Sydney, off the Y2 [HMS Hasty]. Then Colombo,

04:00 you wouldn't believe it, it's about forty-degrees in the shade when we hit Colombo, and we had to march up to the village green and they had pay books, like paymasters there to pay us in Indian currency. And marched up in full service dress, you know, the service dress, that khaki drill, not drill but the full service dress. God did we sweat and they had again, non-drinker, they had all these troughs of

04:30 beer packed with ice, McNabb's ale, I remember it clearly, McNabb's ale, pale ale, a course all the would-be troops they got into the, the drinkers they got into it. But we had, I think I had a couple a lumps of ice, that had to do me. Went sightseeing but there wasn't much to see in Colombo, all the natives with all their red teeth and red gums, they'd chew betel nuts and they're spittin' out this blessed

05:00 thing, coughin' blood but it's just the betel nut juice, that's their drug like a cigarette I s'pose. Then we sailed for the Red Sea, up the Red Sea to a place called El Kantara on the Suez Canal, then we got off the ship there and on the trains to Palestine, and Beit Jirja was the camp we went to our battalion, it was about

05:30 an hour and a half's drive from Jerusalem, or Tel Aviv. And 6th of June things changed, Italy come into the war. Before that we had all these tents in line, beautiful like parade ground stuff, you know, and we had to strike all the tents, camouflage 'em with mud, we were makin' mud pies and throwin' 'em all over the tent because Italy had just come into the war, and the third convoy

06:00 which left Melbourne, or left Australia I'm not sure if it was Melbourne, and they diverted 'em round the Cape of Good Hope, they wouldn't let 'em go up the Red Sea because of Italy in the war, they were in Eritrea, in British Somaliland and all those countries on the Red Sea, and they went to England and the reinforcements that were due to come to Palestine all went to

06:30 England instead. So they were short of this and that in different places, so I transferred to the 6th Div [Division] Ammo [Ammunition] Company, AASC, Australian Army Service Corps cause I went over as a motorcycle rider. I could ride a motorbike, I'd ridden without a licence in Melbourne, and I used to ride a Matchless 350 c.c. But

07:00 we went to a place called Bar… from Barce to the Beit Jirja, we had the first race meeting of that Beit Jirja camp. All the Arabs with all their stallions and all their great horses, it was a great day. Dust and bull-dust flyin' everywhere. Dust, I'm talkin' about dust, it was a dusty place. But then I contracted diphtheria and I had to go down to Gaza

07:30 to the 2/2nd AGH [Australian General Hospital], they took swabs of me and the culture came back positive. So I was there for fifty-two days at hospital at Gaza. Now they couldn't get me, you had to get three negative swabs in a row before they'd say you're right, couldn't get any negatives, so they decided to take my tonsils out, which they did under a local anaesthetic, and I felt every snip,

08:00 and I can still feel it when I think about it, and three-days after that I had a haemorrhage, they said, "We'll keep ya here for another week." Eventually after fifty-two days in hospital, I got back to the unit and that was not long before we moved up into Egypt to a place called Amiriya, and then from Amiriya up to the Libyan border to a

08:30 place called Sollum, where I first went into action on New Years Eve 1940, yeah. New Years Eve 1940 we were in action on that New Years Day. I had to take three tons of high explosive shells, the eighteen-pounders to the artillery, up Hell Fire Pass which the Italians were shelling every now and again,

09:00 there's a shell comin' over, we're goin' up sittin' on top a three-tons of high explosive. Didn't make you feel too safe, but they were bad shots anyway. They didn't get anything. Dumped off the stuff and then back for another load and this went on all the way up to Tobruk, cause we took Tobruk, that's the first push in the desert and we got up to a place called Agedabia,

09:30 about sixty-miles west of Benghazi, then we stopped because Bob Menzies had promised Churchill that he'd send some Australians to Greece to help the Greek government, and Bob Menzies bein' the royalist that he is, he would hate to have upset the bloody Brits. I could tell you a story, in later years he became Lord Warden of the Cinque Ports,

10:00 which is heraldry office held by top Scotsmen in the Royal family, and how a colonial could ever get that job, you work it out. It was a pay back for thanks for helpin' Winston Churchill out and we were not too happy troops in the 6th Divvy I tell ya, because I got a poem written here somewhere about the Isle of Crete, I dunno if you've ever heard it,

10:30 have you? "Here I sit on the Isle of Crete, Bludging on my blistered feet, Little wonder I've got the blues, With feet encased in great canoes, Living like a tribe of blacks, Except the blacks don't sit and wail throughout the night for food, It was just a month ago no more, We sailed for Greece to win the

war, We heard the news one night and portly Winston gave his views, The

11:00 RAF [Royal Air Force] he said, in Greece, Are fighting hard to give us peace, And we scratched our heads and thought, This smell was distinctly like a rort, For if in Greece the air force be, Then where the bloody hell are we? We saw the entire force one day, When the Spitfire spat the other way." It goes on like that. It ends up, "On the Isle of Crete, And now it looks like

11:30 even betting, A man will soon become a Cretan, And spend his days in blackest gloom, On Adolf Hitler's Isle of Doom." That's what Hitler called Crete, the Isle of Doom, for the Allies. But it's worth noting that whilst the battle of Crete was on, London had twenty-something days without an air raid, Operation Barbarossa was put back by Hitler a fortnight, because of the

12:00 resistance in Greece. in Crete. And that fortnight brought him into the freezing temperatures of Stalingrad and that's how they lost the bloody war, in my book, because otherwise he was still rolling on like the juggernaut as, in early 1939. But I'm digressing, we went back from…

Can we maybe just talk a bit more, cause you've covered a fair bit of time there, voyage across the Middle East

12:30 **and then push towards Tobruk, just a couple a questions Steve like, what was morale like when you actually embarked? Cause you were the second, you said the second…**

Second convoy to leave, yeah.

…convoy, so unlike the later convoys who had a more of a sense of what they were heading into, did you have any sense at all what was awaiting?

Yeah anxious to get into it, everyone was anxious to get into it, cause the common thing when war broke out, "It'll last six-months." Well six-months

13:00 had gone by and it was still goin' on and Hitler was still moving across Europe, so we knew it wouldn't last six-months. But they were anxious to get into it, really anxious. All the training, cause you never got, what's the word? You never got indoctrinated to do this and do that, it's just what you thought yourself, you knew that you was gonna be in danger. When you join the army you got to be in danger

13:30 when there's a war on, there's no other way about it. But they were all anxious to be in it. That's the 6 Divvy boys I'm talking about.

So when, you said at Pucka you'd started training on wooden rifles and bits a timber, but you finally got hold of decent real equipment, mortars and so on, right?

Yeah, yeah, got the real things. We had even before we left, we had live shoots at the range at Pucka, started a bushfire with one of 'em,

14:00 we had to put the bloody bushfire out. Old Tom Blamey was there watchin' what was going on, it was a stinkin' hot day too because it was, this is early in the, what? February it would be in 1940 and it was February can be hot, hot bloody weather in the last month of summer, and he was had his little general's baton or stick, and his horses was, you know he had these remounts that was shakin' and he kept bashin'

14:30 the shit out of it's head to make it stop still. I thought this is a nice old bloke you know, if he does that to animals what will he do to bloody troops? But I s'pose it was just an aberration that he got, the horse was getting' him down. Anyhow I had to ride a horse back to get relief for the bush fire, back to the depot which was about three-mile way, back to the lines to get more troops out there and I hadn't ridden a bloody horse for bloody

15:00 years when I was up in the farms workin' for cow cockies, and these army remounts they call 'em, God they were jogged hard, every time you hit you bloody thought you're backside's gonna go through your neck. And when I got there I could hardly walk, I took skin off the inside a me thighs, I was in a bloody mess and rode it back. And then after that we had to march back to bloody camp, so there was sweat runnin' down into your bloody blisters.

15:30 God, fun and games.

And how did you put the fires out, with the beaters that you were talking about before?

Yeah, that's all. No water equipment, no, nothing like, no backpacks pumpin' water out no. Old beaters. Experience man, how do you fight this? You just bloody beat 'em out that's all you have to do, smother, you smother the flames, that's what happens. If another spark goes up, you just smother that one too. If you got enough men, beaters'll

16:00 put a fire out, you got to have enough men though. 'Course we had thousands there at Pucka, there was no problem.

And Blamey didn't get down and help out did he?

No, no I think he was on his way back to the mess, to make a mess probably. Old Tom.

So what was in your pack? When you set sail, what was sort of army issue for you guys?

Boots, tin hat,

16:30 rucksack like haversack, backpack, universal kit bag the big one you put all your belongings in, two pair a socks, two singlets, two pair a underpants, a jumper, service dress which you wore, a giggle suit. You know what a giggle suit is? You probably heard about giggle suits.

I've heard about, yeah.

That's the ones they fit you, where they touch, khaki drill sort a thing, floppy hats, that's about it.

17:00 Plus your housewife, which is a roll of cotton, thimbles and to do your own repairs. They didn't give you housewives with two-legs, no. It would a been lovely wouldn't it?

And can you tell us about your, the farewell from Melbourne? I mean what was it like saying goodbye to family and so on?

Unreal, when we came down from Pucka, it's supposed to be a secret move and every station we went through was packed with

17:30 people, the troop train goin' through, wavin', wavin' and we anchored, as I said, we anchored of Rye on the night of the 14th, we embarked on the 14th, anchored off Rye, it was a wild and woolly night and as we're goin' out through the rip, Queenscliff pier was on our port side, and you could hear them singing, "Wish me luck as you wave me goodbye," "Goodbye Melbourne town," have you ever heard that song? "Goodbye Melbourne

18:00 town, Melbourne town goodbye, We are leaving you today for a country far away, And even though I'm without a single pound, When I make my fortune, I'll come back and spend it, in dear old Melbourne town." They were singin' that and, "Now is the Hour" the Maori's farewell, and we could hear and we were all,

18:30 even though they were sick, startin' to play the wave I was gonna say, everyone was amazed that these people were there just outside the heads watchin' us go through the rip, and it was really a rip, I tell ya. They put life lines down each side a the boat, I thought what the hell they want them for? Well when you walk on the deck, you take a step and you think you're never gonna reach 'em, you kept goin' down with it, your foot never made the deck,

19:00 that's why they had the life lines there to hang onto. Amazing.

What about….

And I told you about the Worcestershire sauce?

Yeah.

Drink the Worcestershire sauce you don't get seasick, true.

I'm not gonna forget that. What had your father thought, cause how old were you when you signed up?

Eighteen.

You weren't…

Eighteen.

So you were the right, you had to be eighteen, you had to be…?

No, twenty-one…

Twenty-one?

…was the age. I put me age up two-years, said I was born in 1919,

19:30 instead a 1921, so I was a couple a months underage, but I had me fathers permission anyway, I had a letter from him to say yeah, he has my permission to join the army.

So your father had no reservations at all about you signing up?

No, no. Well, he probably knew from my past experience of sayin' I'm goin' up the bush to work, that he's not gonna rule me sort a thing. But if I had me mind made up, he didn't want to dissuade me, no.

20:00 But he was glad to see me when I came back home two-years later for sure.

And you told us a bit about your brother. I mean at that point, what was he doing?

Well he was workin' at the same place as I was McKay's Silent Rubber Products in Richmond, when I joined up. But I dunno about how he come to join up. I know the last time I seen him I was on final leave and I had

20:30 injections and I had this vaccination on this hand and I had lumps under me arm, and he come up and said, “G’day brother,” and whacked me right on that bloody arm, oh God, I nearly died, the pain, but he wasn’t to know. But that’s the last time I seen him on that leave. Unfortunately.

Now can you tell us, you’ve told us a bit about the voyage across and Ceylon, Colombo,

Up the Red Sea.

El

21:00 **Kantara I think it was, can you tell us about sort of arriving in the Middle East there, Palestine and so on and sort of the culture shock that you might have experienced, what you made of the place and the people?**

Well the first thing we were at El Kantara the little Arab boys come round, “You white, you buy French photos, you buy French photos.” No matter where you went the Arabs were out tryin’ to sell you French photos, no matter in Alexandria, in Cairo, in Port Said or Tewfik.

21:30 “No thanks, no dirty photos, we don’t need dirty photos.” “Only ten piastres, only ten piastres,” that’s about two-bob or something ten-piastre. But that’s, nothing else, a course we went across the Sinai Desert, across the old battle grounds of World War I, the charge at Beersheba,

22:00 more or less another version of the charge of the light brigade, the Light Horse, course that was all history just glossed, not even, glossed over a little bit. So yeah, it happened a long time ago, this is now, so when you read about it you used to say what a hell of a thing it was. Then as I say, Italy come into the war, we had to strip the camp sorta thing and I transferred to the

22:30 ASC and then we went back from Benghazi to Ikingi Maryut, a staging camp, before we went over to Greece. Now I went across to Greece on a British supply ship, the [HMS] Breconshire. Now I’ve got a story about the Breconshire. She was sunk of Malta, or they tried to sink her off Malta a couple a years later, and she just managed to get

23:00 into the shoreline before it found it. Now the Breconshire was a supply ship and it had about two-and-a-half inch, three-inch steel decking on the holds, to cover the holds. We found out why, it had five-hundred tons of TNT [explosive] on it, in the holds. No wonder they didn’t want any bloody bombs goin’ down there, you’d go for a high ride all right. God.

23:30 Anyway we got to Piraeus, unloaded. Then we got up the Yugoslav boarder, this’d be about late March 1941, and the 6th of April 1941 the Germans came down through Yugoslavia, King Peter had done the dirty on ’em and turned on the Allies and let the Germans come through his country. That

24:00 started the big debacle of Greece, the evacuation, rear guard fights down, right down to the place where I got off, Navplion. As I said the destroyer I seen, in the light, dark against the dark and you could just see the shape, it was the HMAS Vendetta¸ God, what a great sight to get on there. And then we left, had to be away a certain

24:30 time, three-thirty was the latest to get so far out to sea that you had some room to manoeuvre in, in case of air attacks. Well I tell ya, we had fourteen air attacks from daylight, from dawn till we got to Crete, fourteen separate Stuka attacks, Stuka dive-bombers. Three and six at a time comin’ down with, and layin’ their eggs we used to call it, like a bloody WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK sittin’ over a nest and away they’d go. You know that

25:00 story I gave earlier, that mentions that in that, “I Remember”, that’s why I called it “I Remember”, God there’s a lot a things to remember. But we had fourteen air raids and the captain would be there and they’d swing over this way and they’d go, “Nothing comin’!” Next thing you’d get, “Yellow alert, red alert!” That means they’re attacking, yellow alert they’re approaching, red, so you’d be watchin’ again. And he’d,

25:30 again and he’d….. They carried three bombs each Stuka, one in the centre, one on each wing, a thousand-pounder and two five-hundred pounders. So they had two-thousand pounds of bloody high explosive aimed at ya, but they had to sit on top of you to hit it. But these bloody captains of these destroyers flat out doin’ twenty-seven, twenty-eight knots and heel over and the rail would be brushin’ the water, that’s the angle they’d be on

26:00 and you’d have to hold on like grim death, otherwise you’d be swept off cause all the troops were on the deck. None down below unless they were pretty crook or been wounded or something in the evacuation. God you got to hand it to those navy blokes though, they did a great job, wonderful job.

Did they manage to take out any of the Stukas?

No, I never seen one hit the water, never seen one hit the water. There guns were, the Vendetta had a captured

26:30 Italian Bofors gun and it was anchored astern in midship but no, pom-pom. Like a pom-pom, they come in that quick and they had screamers in their wings the Stukas you know, they don’t come down just in a dive, they have these sirens in their wings and they turn ’em on or let the air go through them, they pull

a flap or something and you wonna hear the scream, it's enough to drive ya up the wall,

27:00 think, what the hell's this, and they miss. But you can see the water, a bloody great explosion of water upwards, they'd missed and you could roll over that way and they'd come back again another one and you'd be over that way again. This happened fourteen times and blessed. See my turn wasn't up, our turn wasn't up in my book. But I tell ya what, I'm sittin' here today talkin' about it,

27:30 but my God, I'm a firm believer in when your ticket's up, your ticket's up. So mine hasn't been up all those years. But god luck, good grace I don't know. But a course then we get on Greece, on Crete, one blanket, one groundsheet to two men, very little bloody food, my boots had, my army boots had worn out,

28:00 and all I could get is a pair of size seven British army boots, black, so I had to cut the, I cut the toes right out so me toes were hangin' over the front so that I could walk around on bloody Crete. We had no supplies, no nothing. No air support, well they reckoned there was air support there, but we didn't see any. Cause this is what? The 25th of April I come out of Navplion, so

28:30 this is on the 26th of April, the day after Anzac Day, we land on Crete which is only about two-hundred miles as the crow flies from the Dardanelles and Gallipoli, it's that close to it, history gets close together doesn't it? So we survived. Now the unit I was in, the 6th Div ASC Ammo Company, there was a ship going back who could take half

29:00 of us, so they had a, I dunno how they did it but they picked out who they wanted to go. I wasn't picked, I had to stop. So they were gettin' rid of the chaff and takin' the silk apparently, this is their idea. That's the Australian army.

So who was deemed worthy of getting out?

I don't know, I don't know how they worked it out. But I wasn't one of the silk. I had to stop.

29:30 So there began more adventures. Now we're talkin' about the rum before, I said to my lieutenant, we were called Russell's Rifles by, incidentally, Russell Force and we were overlooking Suda Bay with this position in front of us when I seen that Messerschmitt come behind me and I went over it. So all they did was painted me wrist with iodine, she said, "It's only a sprain."

30:00 So ok, it's only a sprain. So I went up to Deany, Lieutenant Dean, I said, "Look, what about if I go down to Suda Bay to the naval base down here and look around for some bloody food, and see what's down there?" "Yeah, go, go for it." This is the 19th of May, 1941. Now I went down, it's about two-mile down, I'm dodging between house,

30:30 wall, house, wall, lookin' over your shoulder, there's bloody planes everywhere, German planes I might add, not ours, pot shottin' at everything that moved. Anyhow I get down into this naval installation and there's these three LSTs [Landing Ship Tanks] lined up, those ones that the front drops down, like a landing thing, so I go on and all I can see are these crates of pineapple, tinned pineapple

31:00 and these demijohns of rum. So in my shirt I put a half a dozen tins if pineapple down me shirt tightened up the belt, picked up a demijohn in each rum, of rum in each arm and went out back to the, back to camp, back to our position. And this Lieutenant Dean said, "What the hell you got there?" I said, "Bottles of Jamaican rum," you've seen the hillbillies how they put a jug on their shoulder

31:30 and glug glug from the side? He did that and this is OP [Overproof] rum, he took three big gulps and he bloody near killed himself, but he was a different bloke about five-minutes after I tell ya. So everyone had water bottles filled up half rum and half water, about twenty of us there on this little section. So I said, "Well that was easy. We'll go back again and I'll take a mate with me, we'll get double the…" So I went back with a

32:00 bloke named Dick Vickery, me old mate Vic, well he wasn't too happy about goin' but he came with me anyway. So get back, same procedure, dodge this, dodge that. We get onto the barge again and we run into a British bloody naval bloke with a half a hook on his, I think he was a, what do they call 'em? A sub-lieutenant or something,

32:30 "What the hell ya think you're doin' here?" I said, "We're after food." This is on the 19th and on the 20th the attack came and on the 21st it was all in German hands, the whole bloody kit and caboodle. So we are, I said we just want a bit a food and that, and he said, "Two storey building up there, I got a man up there with a rifle with orders to shoot anyone that comes in here." So Vic looks at me, I look at Vic, I said, "All right then,

33:00 we've got the message." We picked up two demijohns of rum each and walked out. Nothing happened. Got back to camp, so we were well fortified and I'm a non-drinker. So anyhow the next day it's on, bloody six-hundred and forty planes I counted, this is the daylight, I could hear this woo-woo-woo-woo

33:30 German planes don't drone straight out, they go a triple, woo-woo-woo, woo-woo-woo, you could hear 'em comin' and I counted six-hundred and forty, it darkened the sky, I lost count at six-hundred and forty, there were JU-52's, JU [Junkers], Stukas, Messerschmitts, Pencil Dorniers, and the gliders, some of them towing gliders that crash landed on the rocks round Suda Bay. And

34:00 it was on for young and old then cause they didn't actually drop on Suda Bay, they went about another five-mile further on to a place called Maleme which I revisited a couple a years ago and they had a re-enactment of it. Funny thing, at Maleme and at Retimo where that new memorial we were there to dedicate sort a thing, I went on my own back or with

34:30 the thirty-niners [1939 enlistment], I missed out on the official party from Canberra, I made the last forty, but I didn't make the last twenty, only twenty could go, so I had to pay me own way. And at Retimo after the dedication was over, there was a British cruiser in the harbour, or anchored just off the harbour, HMS Richmond and they were gonna have a big do on it that night,

35:00 and I said to this officer from Canberra, with all the gold braid on with the, I said, "Any chance a going to that do tonight?" He says, "No," he says, "it's full up." I said, "Well what about the captain?" I got a photo of the captain here somewhere, I said, "I'll go and ask him." He said, "I wouldn't." I said, "Why not?" He said, "I tell ya he's full up," I said, "Now if I tell him I barrack for Richmond, do

35:30 you think I've got a bloody chance to get on?" He said, "In a pig's eye." So I didn't get on, but I just thought I barrack for Richmond in the AFL [Australian Football League] he might a said, "Well yeah son, come on," but I never got a chance to tell him. So that was the, digressing again. But then we had to, orders to come is to evacuate, we're

36:00 pulling out to Sfakia, Sfakia on the south side of the island. Now Crete's about sixty-five ks [kilometres] wide at that part, from Suda Bay to Sfakia would be what forty-five, fifty ks gradually goin' up and then ten ks goin' straight down you know and that's sharp an axe head, well it took us a day and two nights to finally get to the end of it, I won't go into all the detail about,

36:30 I s'pose I should. About a Messerschmitt comin' down the bloody valley and we're not allowed to shoot at it because it'll draw the crows as they say, you'll only get us all bloody killed, and we're sittin' up on these mountains and the Messerschmitts comin', we could look straight down into the cockpit as he's comin' through and he's goin' left right, left right, lookin', don't move, don't fire a shot. Then we get to the other end of this bloody, little valley and then

37:00 the Pencil Dorniers come in, they're got belly guns in 'em that point straight down and they're up and down strafing and strafing and strafing, and they're comin' down like in a dive, strafing' then they start to come up, right in the line of fire we are and as he starts to go up, he had to get up high too, and they stopped firin'. So the bullets never got to our area. We used to work it out

37:30 machine gun bullets land every six feet, now if you've been attacked how do you lay, horizontal or vertical to lessen the odds of gettin' hit? If you're six-foot six long and you lay vertically, you get shot in the arse or you get shot in the head. If you lay vertical you've got a chance of every six feet, that's rough estimate and that's what we did. If you was caught out in the open you had to go down that way.

38:00 I was at a little village before Sfakia, this is in daylight, its on the next afternoon, about three, three o'clock in the afternoon, these Dorniers comin' across and they're, we know they're loaded, we're watchin'. They dropped three bombs each and you could see them coming, you could see the bombs leave the plane and you're sayin' now, "How far, are we under or we

38:30 in it?" And you see 'em comin' and you scream as you… and they land fifty-yards away from ya but you still scream, not because you were frightened but if the detonation would get your eardrums, if you exhaled and screamed out loudly, it wouldn't affect you and they landed fifty-yards away. So I'm fifty-yards closer to eternity than I thought.

39:00 But this happened not once, but several times. As I've always said, how have you survived, I said it's just the luck a the draw, I've got nothin' to do with it. I'm not in the right place at the wrong time or something like that. But then Sfakia, middle of the night we come racin' down, well not the middle of the night, it was about three-o'clock in the mornin' the same, bout the same time as we got off

39:30 Greece at Navplion and we're running at the end we're running in single file down this tortuous bloody mountain, in the dark, pitch black, when I say pitch black you could see a little bit of where you're gonna put your feet and onto these LSTs and out to another destroyer and this one was the HMS Hasty, you know the H-Class destroyers the British navy, there was [HMS] Hereward, [HMS] Hero,

40:00 Hasty, [HMS] Havelock, all historical names, and the Hasty was sunk off Benghazi about two-years later in the war, the one that got me off Crete, and we had nine air raids from there to Alex [Alexandria] in Egypt. And with us was the HMAS Perth in the same convoy. We had a yellow alert

40:30 and then a red alert and there's one plane, one plane, you could just see a little glint in the sky, it dropped one bomb and hit the Perth dead and midship. The only thing that happened was the Perth getting' hit, nine soldiers were killed and six sailors killed, it hit in the, what they call the mess deck. But how's that for the odds? One Italian bloody plane

41:00 it was a Savoia dropping one bomb and hittin' dead ship, that's what you call precision bombing, or was it just pure arse hey? Then we get to Alex, welcomed with open arms, no one to say you're back to Palestine and they put me on light duties for three-months when I got back to the unit in Palestine. They'd already been, the ones that got off Crete earlier

41:30 by selection, they were already there havin' a whoopee time. Then we were there till 1941, about November 1941, then we moved up to Syria at the end of the Syrian campaign, to help out up in Syria and I can remember Christmas Eve 1941 I was at a place called Baalbek in…..

Tape 4

00:31 **Okay Steve, let's go back a little bit. You've talked about the sort of campaign in Libya, also about Greece but we sort of glossed over it a bit, we spent most of the time on Crete. Is it okay if we go back and talk a little bit more about some of the details of those campaigns?**

Yeah, on Greece you mean?

Well even before that, in North Africa.

Yeah, well.

You went from the, from mortars

01:00 **to the ammo…**

Ammunition company.

Ammunition company.

ASC yeah. 6 Div Ammo Company.

Now, and you also had diphtheria you said and you were in hospital 52-days, that was after you joined the ammo company?

Yeah.

Yep. Okay. Just wondering if you can take us back to that period and give us a bit more detail about, like that first trip into, you were talking to Halfaya Pass?

That's at Sollum, yeah.

Sollum, which is the first time you saw

01:30 **action,**

Yeah, yeah,

and what that was like for someone who, this is your first experience of action as it were?

Well, I didn't have the Jimmy Brits put it that way, but you know it's serious when you hear, see explosions left and right, you know something's aiming at you. But you've just got to keep goin' there's no pullin' back, you just can't turn around and go back, you got to keep goin' forward, that's

02:00 inherent I think in every soldier, that you don't jib it, you got to keep goin' and whatever's gonna happen is gonna happen. So soldiers are fatalists in my book, any serviceman air force, navy, they're all got to be fatalist, if you're not a fatalist, I don't think you got any bloody hope because if it happens it happens and it's simple as that. But

02:30 we didn't stay there too long after we unloaded, we straight back down the pass again and back for another load. But this didn't happen very often because the Italians didn't want to fight, they were dug-in in places at Sollum and Bardia and Tobruk but they wilted. Now when we got into Tobruk, had these caves just close to the Med on the sea front

03:00 and they were built half round, concreted all the way, half round and the floor's concrete, like a half an igloo sort a thing, and we walked in there and found the ammunition, these belts of ten, these clips of ten and rifles and fleas, oh you should a, the whole floor moved and we're goin' out

03:30 stampin' our bloody feet to get rid of all the bloody lice, they were rotten with lice and we tried the ammunition in the rifles and about one in every five wouldn't fire, the clips. So no wonder they give it away. It's ridiculous that you expect bloody men to fight for their lives and you pull the trigger, nothing happens. Terrible. But that was just

04:00 outside Tobruk.

So you were supply infantry, artillery, mortars, the works were you?

Yeah, the whole lot yeah. Later on they made us an independent company, independent meaning that you supplied the whole lot, petrol, food, composite company of the whole three. But at that time, you had ammo company, petrol company and supply column which do all the supply work.

04:30 But then they, the composite companies did the lot together on their own bat which was much more sensible.

So what sort of ammunition were you taking up, what was…?

Mainly twenty-five pounder, eighteen-pounder artillery shells. Rarely did I cart small arms ammunition. Then I graduated from that to a water truck. Now I

05:00 was attached to the Headquarter Company, no A-Company of the 2/8th Battalion, at a place called Tocra, not Tocra, yeah Tocra just up on the escarpment before Benghazi, this is where Menzies got off his plane comin' back or going, I'm not sure which if he was comin' back or goin' to England, or comin' back to Australia and addressed the troops and they hooted him, told him to get off the bloody stand. This is

05:30 8th Battalion, 2/8th Battalion, Blood and Bandages mob they call 'em. White over Red, Blood and Bandages hence, and that's before we went back to, on the way to Greece. But they didn't like Bob Menzies I tell ya.

Why not?

Because he'd committed the troops to bloody Greece, on a forlorn expedition, it was doomed to failure in the first place, even the generals told him it was doomed to failure.

06:00 "No, I'm the prime minister, you'll do what I say," I think.

So what was, as there was that push sort of westwards along North Africa there, was there a sense of like the war was…?

The 6th Divvy that was great, until we had to stop and pull back and then the 7th Divvy took over, but good God we only were in Greece a week, we heard on the news and they're fightin' round

06:30 Tobruk again and they're pushed back the Sidi Barrani in Egypt, the Germans had come into it, they hadn't been there until that time and that's when Tobruk became Tobruk, surrounded by the enemy, Rommel couldn't take it. But that's 9th Divvy story. Most a the 9th Divvy were 6 Divvy blokes who went round to England

07:00 that couldn't, you know, didn't make up for the reinforcements which is the reason I transferred to the Army Service Corps, as a motor bike rider. I did eventually get to ride a motor bike, one we captured in the bloody desert, a Gilera. You ever heard of a Gilera? Italian motor bike, a twist-grip throttle. Not the twist-grip we would call, you know the ratchet one, advanced by notches, like the old bloody tourin' cars

07:30 used to on the steerin' wheel. Advance it up.

Yeah sounds like there was a lot of scavenging going on there, like even the artillery units didn't have guns until they got there, using the Italian guns?

No, well that was a debacle in Crete, all the heavy equipment had to be left behind or drained the sumps out and raced, put a rock on the accelerator peddle and let it run till the motor

08:00 ceased up, so the Germans couldn't use 'em or tip 'em over a mountain side and they crashed down to the bottom, so they couldn't be used against us. In Crete we had nothing, even the artillery pieces. They said they had two tanks in Crete, I never saw one. They may have been there, but it might a been like that Spitfire that spat the other way. They were there but we didn't see 'em. I seen a dog fight. A short nosed British Blenheim

08:30 fighter bomber and a Messerschmitt, it lasted about thirty-seconds, down went the Blenheim, seen a cloud a smoke come up over the horizon. They had no hope those poor buggers. Yet they were there tryin'. God you're lucky. The more I think about it over the years, how I always say, "Gosh I wish I could win Tattslotto,"

09:00 you know, win a lot a money, but God I'm still alive. That's luck, don't need much more than that do you?

You must've felt particularly vulnerable, I know you said you just have to be fatalistic and when you're number's up you're number's up, but supplying twenty-five pounders, a truck full of ammo, you know?

High explosive. There's still, you knew it was there but it didn't phase you.

09:30 It had to be a lucky hit. You got to prime things first in the nose of the, because I s'pose if it hit one a the noses, a shell hit one a the noses the whole lot would be detonated, I don't know, it never happened, could've. Now like in the mortar bombin', I was in the mortars, you used to unscrew the safety piece up the top before it became lethal when it hit the ground. So I dunno. I wasn't in the

10:00 artillery so I don't know the workings of the bombs, but we used to cart 'em up, the primary charges and the explosives.

So would you have anything to do, would you drop them off at headquarters there and, or did you have much to do with the artillery-men at all?

No, just drop it at their dropping point so they could use 'em and beat a hasty retreat before you got shot at yourself, like you was pretty safe. You know what they called the artillery in the army don't you? Nine-mile snipers.

10:30 Which is not derogatory but they were a long way from the front. But in the desert they weren't that far from the front, they were pretty close to it actually.

So were you present when any of the Italian soldiers surrendered?

No I never seen any of 'em surrender, I just seen 'em marching in three abreast about two-mile long with a Bren gun carrier front and back,

11:00 amazing. No I didn't take any prisoners, I didn't shoot any prisoners, not in the desert anyway. I dunno if I shot anyone in the bloody, in the Battle of Greece or Crete either, but you wouldn't know. Things are that chaotic and when you got to keep your head down and you can't look up, it is really chaotic because we

11:30 had no air support at all. When you think the Germans had a thousand bloody planes in the attack. But then we get up to Syria…

Well let's can we, we haven't really talked much about Greece either, so maybe you can spend a little bit of time, you sort of got us there then brought us back to Navplion?

Coming down to Navplion, yeah.

Yeah, so maybe just tell us about that.

Down through Larissa, now Mount Olympus

12:00 when your going north through Greece, Mount Olympus is on your right near Salonika which is getting over towards Turkey, part of Turkey and Russia, on the left as you get higher or go further north you got the Albanian border and the Greeks were fighting the Albanians there and doin' pretty well too, even though they had no bloody equipment to what we had, like the old-fashioned bloody

12:30 wonder busses sort a thing, but they had the will to keep goin'. But we came down through Larissa which is in a valley, the main town of Larissa, we got strafed by bloody bombers there. One of our mates Angus May, was killed there, when I say mates, I'm talkin' about friends in the army, cause I still have a thing about real mates you know, and he

13:00 was split from his backside to his back of his neck, opened him up like a fillet a fish and he had a bottle a whiskey on his bloody hip, I dunno where he got it from, but that wasn't bloody touched it was still in his hip pocket. Angus May, he was our first casualty in Greece and that happened just outside Larissa which is one of the main supply towns which the Germans

13:30 were always goin' for those towns first, soften everyone up. But we had an anti-aircraft gun on a ute, which was hopeless. When you got to keep your head down cause let's face it, you're there to fight but not to commit suicide. If you're gonna be attacked by half a dozen bloody planes you just can't, you gotta protect yourself and I don't mean

14:00 gettin' out of the, well we did stop the truck and get out and into the side of the road because it was only suicide if you kept on bloody goin' along the road. But I never seen a truck hit, never seen a truck hit.

So the guns wouldn't be manned during the raid?

No, yeah they'd be manned but they were like a, what? A pea-shooter against a tanker, sort a thing, that's the effect you'd have. It's no good bein' a bloody

14:30 dead hero, is it? What's the sayin'? I'd rather be a live coward than a dead hero. But cowardice never come into it. You'd have the shits for sure, you'd be scared, deep down you're scared, but you can't afford to show it, you have to put the brave face on even though you, it's like a sentence, like I know how blokes who are sentenced to death

15:00 must be in their last minute. They don't show it but they got to feel it. Same as a soldier in my book. But as I say, luck comes into it, a fatalist I'm still.

So what was your specific duty then in Greece? Were you still in supplies or were you…?

Yeah in supplies but on the way out of Greece, we

15:30 had to destroy our trucks, so then we became foot soldiers without rifles sort a thing, we didn't have any rifles. You just can't take a bloody rifle. But when I was evacuated from the beach at Navplion, I was, just all I had was a tin hat and I jettisoned the rest of it, the truck and all me other gear.

16:00 Well the other gear we had was only a pack because your kit bags were still back in Alexandria, you had to leave them there before you went. This is how much they thought we were gonna do, wouldn't take your kit bag with you. Now a solider never leaves his kit bag behind with all his personal gears in it. But

we were told to leave 'em there in storage. So they didn't expect us to bloody live too long in Greece. So they knew. But then

16:30 we became Russell's Rifles in Crete and we were issued with American carbines, Springfields and issued with ten live rounds each, ten live rounds. Not enough to shoot a duck with. So morale was a little bit low in Crete I tell ya, at different times with the odds against ya, it has to be

17:00 be low when you see what's dropping out the sky. Although we weren't that close to it, we could only see 'em from a distance and let's face it, there was never ever a parachute landed again after Crete, they were decimated. The Kiwis the New Zealanders, that makes us actually the 2nd Anzacs you know, cause we fought together. But they won't

17:30 all have a bar of it, the II Anzac Corps, although Tom Blamey called us the II Anzac Corps. I was readin', I've got a book there on Tom Blamey. Did you ever hear the story about Tom?

Which one?

When they made him a field marshal? Menzies applied to the British cabinet to make him a field marshal

18:00 and they sent back, "No he's on the retired list." So Menzies wrote back and said, "I've reinstated him off the retirement list, he's back on an active list, want to make him a field marshal, give me his baton. A field marshal's baton, "No, can't do it, it's against all principals." So Menzies

18:30 wrote back and says, "What about Field Marshal Smuts, how did he become a field marshal?" They wrote back, "Yes we will accede to your wishes." And they gave Tom his baton at Heidelberg Hospital in 195-, some, I forget now, anyhow he only had it about, he was in hospital, very sick, and he had it about six-months or

19:00 something like that and he passed away. But that's the story of the baton. No field marshal cause you're only a, what do you call 'em? A colonial and what about Smut's, what's he? He was a field marshal, General Smuts.

So how long was that, the retreat in Greece? It was only a couple a weeks wasn't it that you…?

The 6th of April they attacked and I got off on the 25th of April, Anzac night,

19:30 so that's nineteen-days, pretty sudden.

And you mentioned the first, that first casualty you had, I mean how much damage was done in those nineteen-days?

God, we were in headlong retreat and we were Army Service Corps. We weren't last in action, we were first back, to get back.

20:00 See things get mixed up. Now I found myself at a old, looked like a school a first aid dressing station and I walked in there, I was not wounded or anything like that, I walked in there to see what was goin' on, see if I could give a hand and they had a chap there

20:30 he had a wound on his back, it just looked like a lot a skin taken off and they started pullin' out this bandage they had and it was a hole you could put your fist in, in under his shoulder blade, must a been exposin' his lungs. God these walkin' wounded, I seen terrible things like that. But no, I met

21:00 another artillery driver, artillery truck, they have their own limbers sort a thing as you know, and he had his skin off his bottom, this is in a hospital in Athens, and I was talkin' to him in the morning and I come back the next day, this is my twentieth birthday was the 18th of April, the same day as the prime minister of

21:30 Greece killed himself, Kory… Koryzis, I think his name was, he committed suicide. And I went back to see the bloke the next day and he's not there and I said, "What happened to him?" He said, "He died durin' the night." He had gash gangrene, and that red, skinny thing I seen was the gash gangrene cause he'd been hit by a shell and the shell'd come up underneath and took all that skin off his posterior, his buttock, it was that quick, he

22:00 was dead. I met a German officer, we captured a German officer, I didn't capture him he was in hospital gettin' treatment, he'd been shot in the groin and they were tryin' to get the bullet out and speakin' to him, he said, "Where do you come from?" I said, "I come from Melbourne." He said, "I'm gonna live in Melbourne one day." This is this Austrian Alpine troops they were. I said, "Are you?" And he told me straight out, "Yeah I'm gonna live in Melbourne." He didn't say when Hitler won the war but,

22:30 which he didn't. I thought that was amusing. But just shows you how cocky those Germans were. So that's about my experience till I got off the beach at Navplion in Greece.

Yeah, you told us about that and the English soldiers who just sank because of their kits and…?

Yeah their kits, that's true, they were yellin' out. I couldn't help 'em. It's survival of the fittest, you got

to look after yourself.

23:00 If you go draggin' someone with all that equipment on, you go down with 'em if you can't get away. But that was just plain ridiculous, this bloody red tab full colonel, not a lieut, full colonel, two pips and a crown and all the red braid, staff officer, he was first into the water. He was walkin' up and down, "When we see the boats there'll be no panic and…" no panic, straight in

23:30 cause everyone followed him and my mate Frank Richardson, I still say my mate, cause it's the term you use, he couldn't swim so he missed out, a couple of hours he was a prisoner of war. Spent the next four-years in Germany.

So it must've been absolute chaos that Navplion…?

Oh it was.

It sounds like the whole way down it was just like that.

It happened probably in several locations

24:00 Col yeah. But I re-live it, I get flash backs of these blokes goin' down, goin' under and they're so Pommified if I might say that word, they wouldn't say shit for a shillin' because that's against the rules to do it, they gladly drowned themselves without tryin' to fight to survive, that's ridiculous.

24:30 And I never move from this spot, this is what happened, oh god, and I couldn't do a thing about it. I've often thought could I have done something, then realism takes over, what could you do? You can't like a hundred and fifty-pounds of bloody equipment and the body itself, what do you, rip it off and they probably couldn't swim either. There you are, thank God for good old Cremorne Street State School

25:00 taught me how to swim. Yeah, I often think of that every time I go swimming which is not often these days.

So even in the retreat, the chain of command still held together pretty much?

Yeah, look Australians, if you loose an officer or a sergeant or a corporal, there's always another bloke able to take over, always cause that's the way they're trained.

25:30 The English were different, they'd have to have a lance corporal or something to tell 'em what to do, if you were a private. But not with us Aussies, no. You, as I said, I went in as a private and come out as a driver. So that was my promotion. I had no ambitions to be an officer or anything like that. No one told me I could be anyway, so I never worried about it.

26:00 I just did what I was told to do and that was it. I think that's fair enough if you're, seventy-months I spent in the AIF, five-years and ten-months. And no regrets, I learnt to live and I live to learn.

Just still on Greece if we can for a minute.

26:30 Yeah.

Did you what did you see of the Greek population and how they were faring? Were they able to offer you any support?

I went on, on the way up to Greece we stopped at a place called Kifissia, Kifissia barracks and we had leave into the square, the big main square in Athens is called Omonia Square, something like that Omonia, Amenia or

27:00 Omonia, and I went to the pictures there just to, and everyone was normal and you could see the aircraft flying all over Athens but Athens was declared a free city, the Germans didn't bomb it. The outskirts they did but they didn't bomb Athens. But the people were, they seemed to me they seemed okay with it, they didn't panic, there was no

27:30 signs of panic, I think they were just resigned to the fact that they were gonna be invaded and that the Allies were gonna leave.

And this is before you got up north?

Yeah.

They still knew it was just, that was fate, that was gonna…?

You know thirty-five divisions came down into and we had three divisions if that. Thirty-five bloody divisions of Germans includin' Panzers and the whole lot,

28:00 it's a little bit rough, that's a bit one sided. I know a good Aussies worth ten Germans but God, not worth twenty, that's a ratio I can't accept. But I was lucky in Greece because I didn't see much of it. I was in the position to have to come back to Athens, I had to,

28:30 I came down by train to Athens from the Yugoslav boarder, down through Larissa, to hospital cause I

had a infection, nothing serious, but put me out of action for a couple of days. Then I had to go back by train back to the unit just on the Yugoslav border. And I was speakin' to

29:00 Greek troops on the train who had come down from Albania, they were all bon homer, you know, full of they thought they were gonna knock off the Italianos, yeah, no problem. But when that King Peter of Yugoslavia decided to let the Germans come through, that was it. Not that they would've stopped him I s'pose, but diplomatically he said, "Yes it's okay. I don't want my bloody country invaded." So there it is. That

29:30 gave rise to Tito, who was left behind, the big general that got all the partisans together. That's about all I can tell you about Greece mate.

Sure.

But the other one, Crete, when I went back there in 2001 for the 60th Anniversary, I was a king, I was lorded and

30:00 I couldn't do a thing without, I couldn't buy a thing, I wasn't allowed to do this, I had to be sub, not subservient to 'em, but I had to do what they wanted me to do because they were that excited to have me there, especially the ((UNCLEAR) – non marker) who gave me that plaque. So that's in appreciation and I take that all the blokes who served in Crete. I went to the war cemetery

30:30 in Suda Bay, I got photos of, I got about a hundred and fifty photos of that trip, there's three sections there's Australian, New Zealand, British and this German, there was four sections but I think they're mixed up. In the middle of the cemetery is a monument and around the base are all these wreaths been laid for the

31:00 60th Anniversary and the biggest wreath there was red, black and yellow, 'Deutschland zu aller Zeit', 'Germany forever', and I'm standin' down at the end a the Australian section and I'm lookin' at these graves, tombstones actually, unknown, unknown, unknown, unknown, unknown. I say to my mate, this Greek

31:30 mate a mine, my mentor, Peter Kalinakis Senior, "Look at that, there's the biggest wreath in this cemetery laid by the bastards who killed these poor bastards down here. Only for them, they wouldn't be here." That got to me.

32:00 As you might realise that it's not only the unknown, it's the known, the names, go back about forty or fifty rows of 'em and there's the Germans lordin' it over the rest of them. And as I say, if it hadn't a been for the bloody Germans, those poor buggers would be there, they'd still be alive maybe you know.

32:30 So there you are mate. There's no justice sometimes is there?

Steve that I mean you've talked at great length about Crete but I'm just wondering that first month, you said you got there the day after Anzac Day, yeah?

Yeah.

Was it the 26th, and then there was a period of three or four weeks before the attack?

Yeah till the 20th of May was the big day.

Yeah. So what, I mean of course you're

33:00 **expecting that the Germans are going to advance and, what's that, what was that time like? I mean what were you doing, how were you able to prepare?**

Well we didn't prepare. They had this selection committee whatever they called it, to send someone back to, there's room on a ship goin' back to Alexandria in Egypt and we just played 2-up, 'Swy', amongst the blokes our blokes, wasn't much to eat. We're still on very hard rations.

33:30 Not even bloody bully beef and hard biscuits, didn't even had any of that. But the Greeks or the Cretans, you can't say Cretins, it's Cretans, there's a difference, but they would look after us, give us eggs. Where we were, the point we had looking, overlooking Suda Bay there was an old farm house and the woman, she was only a young bride too, she lived on her own, she about in her middle twenties, her husband had gone to

34:00 Greece to fight in Albania and she didn't know where he was and if he was coming back, and she helped us out with food and what have you, the little bits she could supply because they lived a sort of a nomadic life, the Cretans round Suda Bay, the area we were in, and every little village was on fire. The Germans no matter, only four or five houses they'd bomb it and set it on fire for, there no one

34:30 there, no military target, no nothing, just something to do. Just to blow the bloody place up.

When you went back I mean for example you spoke about the young bride that helped out with eggs and stuff, when you went back were you able to catch up, track trace down any of these people who helped you out?

You know, sixty-years is a long time. Now I didn't recognise only one place I recognised was the two-

storey building overlooking Suda Bay where he

35:00 threatened to shoot me with a bloody soldier up in the bloody window. All the rest had been built on. Like it's the Mecca of the Mediterranean, Crete now, it has more visitors there and tourists there per year than the other island in the Med. No things are changed, I didn't recognise, even the road that went up into the hinterland down into Sfakia, I didn't recognise it.

35:30 It was all, not a house on it in the corners of it, that's all changed and the farm house, I couldn't even see the farm house. I thought that must a been pulled down and something else built on it. I often wondered what happened to the poor woman that was left there without a husband. She didn't have any children, that was one good thing I s'pose that way. Then I met a chap from the Black Watch in

36:00 Crete, Jock Burnell, he came from Ayrshire in Scotland, I've still got his address here to contact and write to him and I never ever did. Never did for some unknown reason. Never got around to writin'. 2nd Battalion Black Watch and I met another sergeant,

36:30 not a sergeant a seaman on, a leading seaman on Crete from HMS Hero one a the H-class destroyers that was in the Med. McLean his name was. But I didn't do any correspondence with him, I didn't take his name, as I didn't give him my name and address cause I come off Crete with one

37:00 hand grenade, a Mills bomb, and a British sailor wanted it as a souvenir so I took out the striking pin and threw that overboard with the detonator and give him the, it's still lethal if you put it in the wrong place cause it's still full of amatol or something, but he wanted that for a souvenir so I gave it to him. That's all I had left was a Mills bomb.

Can you tell us about

37:30 **Suda Bay, where you were encamped for those few, what was the set up there?**

Well under the olive trees. Now on the day we had to leave we were in an olive grove. Now an olive grove, there's a tree there, a tree there, a tree, not lined up but they're all over the place and there was a dry creek runnin' through it, they strafed that for eight-hours the day we were in there for eight-hours, till dark and all they hit

38:00 was one man, wounded one man. They were up and down criss-crossing boom, boom, bloody machine guns, Dorniers, Messerschmitts diving down, they knew we were in there apparently, but they didn't do any damage. So at nightfall we're off down the road to get as far along in the night to the next spot and hold up for the day. This is the evacuation orders to go. We could a been retained

38:30 as rear guard troops but we were actually non-combatants, supposedly non-combatant. If you had a truck you was a non-combatant, but then when you had a rifle, you became an infantryman. But I had eight-months training before I transferred to the ASC in the infantry so I knew what was what.

So at that point I mean were you armed beyond, you said you had the grenade when you left?

Yeah.

39:00 **What other were you carrying a gun on Crete at all?**

Yeah we had ten-rounds of ammunition with a carbine, an American Springfield carbine.

When did you, I imagine they were spent fairly quickly were they?

Yeah, they were but only at aircraft. See they didn't drop any paratroopers on Suda Bay. That was about three or four-mile further on at

39:30 Maleme, the other side of Canea which is the capital where that plaque was given to me, at Canea. But then evacuate and you don't, my rifle was a Springfield, durin' the evacuation on the second day we knew we weren't goin' anywhere, so we didn't even know we were gonna get off.

40:00 So I threw the bolt over the precipice into the bloody ravine and about another ten-mile further along I threw the rifle away so they couldn't match it up. Not without orders, but just well they're not gonna get this, this is not gonna be any good to them. It wasn't any good to me, I had nothin' to fire out of it. But then as luck would have it, we came down in Indian file onto this LST and out to the

40:30 HMS Hasty, even then it wasn't over. As I said another nine bloody air raids, Stuka attacks. Same thing, same procedure.

How many of you were there I mean, were evacuated from Suda Bay and down to the coast?

Onto the, in my platoon?

Yeah?

When Rigby says, "Follow me, I'm a born leader of men." No, there was about twenty of us and I never saw Rigby again, I dunno

41:00 what happened to him.

Did anyone follow Rigby?

No. They said, “Get stuffed,” that’s all they said to him. He was a, not an idiot, but a comic. I often wondered what happened to him but I never seen him after the war, he never came back to camp at Julis, we went back to Palestine and he wasn’t there. So he must a been taken a POW unless he hid with the Cretans, I dunno.

41:30 But he may have been a born leader of men, he might’ve surprised us all. He might a survived, but I’m glad I did. ‘Course then I had to come back to Australia and serve fourteen-months in the Northern Territory waitin’ for an invasion up there. More stories. When Tom Blamey addressed a…..

Tape 5

00:30 **So we were gonna go back to Crete and just finish off that journey across the mountains on your withdrawal from Suda Bay.**

Yeah, I think I spoke about how the Germans raised everything that they could see, if there was a building they wanted to flatten it and a course we didn’t move much by day-time, under strict orders not to reveal yourself because you’d probably bring in the enemy, the strafing

01:00 planes, so they wanted as many to survive as possible in the evacuation. But coming down and sleeping between the rocks in the, you get your hip between two rocks and your shoulder and lay on your hand on a rock for a pillow when you have a little break, about ten-minutes, and you could go to sleep for ten-minutes and wake up ready to go again and we had no water, no water bottles or anything like that, no equipment

01:30 and then we come on a little trickle of water coming out of a, out the mountainside, trickle when I say, drop, drop, drop like that. And we all stopped there for about half an hour slaking our thirst as much as we could, we’d get a few drips and onto your hands then off down the mountain again. But that’s pretty well at night time so, I dunno how we found the water whether we went off the beaten track or what. There was no road, it was just a bush

02:00 track goin’ down gully by gully sort a thing. No roads to Sfakia.

So you’re travelling by night…

Yeah, pitch black. Couldn’t light, no torches, no nothin’ you couldn’t. We probably had leaders up the front Cretans, leadin’ us, showing us the way down, but even then the next day, the ones that couldn’t get off they were taken POWs, or they got into the hinterlands of Crete again they were in it

02:30 already but then they were roaming around for weeks and weeks and weeks on end before they were recaptured. Now during the occupation of Crete, seven hundred and fifty-two people, men women and children were executed for harbouring the enemy, which is Allied soldiers, so they did it hard the Cretans. I think I mentioned about the

03:00 woman I met in Crete, Sofia Fukanou, she was thirty-two at the time of the invasion and the Germans taking over and she harboured three Australians. Now when I found out this, when I came back, I got in touch with my federal member, Peter McGauran, he’s the minister for science or something as well as, portfolio, member for Gippsland

03:30 he got in touch with Bruce Scott who was the DVA [Department of Veterans’ Affairs] minister then, but they said they couldn’t do anything about it because they couldn’t write letters to everyone and thank them for what happened durin’ the war. Well that didn’t suit me, they changed the DVA to Dana Vale became the minister, Dana Vale, so I got in touch with Peter McGauran again and told him he had to do something about it, that I wanted a letter drafted and I don’t

04:00 mean a roneo letter, something from the government to say to Sofia thanks for what you did. Eventually they did and that was a pride in place on her wall of her little thousand year home she lived in, in Canea. And her son Peter, my mentor and his son which is her grandson, told me that when they went back there a couple a months before

04:30 she passed away in November, and it was a pride in place on her wall she wanted all her friends to come and look at it, the letter from the Australian government. That’s just something else I thought had to be done, to thank Sofia for what she went through. Then they did and it was personalised, it wasn’t just a normal screed you know, blah, blah, blah, but it mentioned her by name.

05:00 ‘And the Australian government thanks you very deeply,’ sort a thing. I haven’t seen a copy of it. Peter was gonna take a photo of it and send it to me, but I think he forgot. But next time he goes back I’ll ask him to take a photograph of it and bring it to me. So that’s just another little ending story of what happened in Crete.

So Peter is her son?

Yeah, grandson.

Grandson.

His father is Peter Kalamakis, and the son's Peter

05:30 Kalamakis. He's a Melbourne architect who lives in Mentone, 111 Beach Road, Mentone right on the water front. Corner of Warrigal Road, you know Warrigal Road? Where it hits the beach, he lives right on that corner on the south, it'd be the south-west, no south-east corner of Warrigal Road and Beach Road. It's a big two-level place, he's an architect. Course he designed

06:00 it himself and he's the president of the Australian Greek Memorial Committee, he was the president and I was the vice president or vice chairman to him when we built that monument I showed you, you think you've seen it in Birdwood Avenue. So that's my, we had a good party after that at the Greek consulate which my dear wife attended too, and we met the

06:30 Greek consul, I gave him a copy of the poem I'd written, I'll give you a copy before you go, you can keep as a souvenir for yourself, it's just called "A Cretan Memory," that's…

Do you recall it, can you recite it?

I got a think about it. I can remember it like I can remember the 'Isle of Crete', the other one I didn't write.

07:00 "On this little isle deep in the Aegean Sea, The bones of many…" no I'll…

Okay, later…

…catch up with it later on.

Yeah, have a look at it because it'd be good to record you reciting it.

Well it is hanging on the war museum in Canea, now that's spelt C-H-A-N-I [A] [during the war it was usually spelled Canea on Allied maps and documents], and it's pronounced 'Hun-ya', which is the main city on the island of

07:30 Crete and it's in the Australian section of the war against the Nazis in Crete and it's there in, as I sent it over in a gold, green and gold bordered photo, I didn't put the Australian coat of arms on it, but I got VX-3972 underneath it, they'll know its an Australian when they see that, and in Greek, it's what it says in Greek,

08:00 it's translated into Greek from the English. So that's hangin' on the wall in the museum. My little contribution to the war museum.

Can you talk a bit more about Sofia?

Yeah, Sofia.

Sofia.

I got some photos of her I can show you, lovely woman, couldn't speak much English but when I left Crete to come back home she kissed the back of my hand,

08:30 excuse me, that's touching to me.

Well that kind of kindness in a time where it's so rare, in a place where it's so rare…

Especially when they were bein' arrested, mis, mal-treated, murdered or shot as spies sort at thing for assistin' the enemy, you know for

09:00 feeding someone whose down on their luck. It's like just someone here shooting a hobo or something like that. They didn't ask us to come there, they didn't ask the Germans either but they just went there. Power hungry. But all people in Crete are like that, to Australians, oh God. If you go to Crete and say you're an Australian you

09:30 can't do anything wrong. They do welcome you with open arms. So that's about it as far as memories of Crete goes.

Okay.

But there's some poignant memories and some, not many funny ones, but there's a few different things happened like that Rigby, follow me I'm a born leader of men.

10:00 Typical Australian bull-dust I s'pose he was, he would a made a good con-artist.

How were you surviving during the day on that trip down to, where was it, Scafia?

Sfakia, S-F-A-K-I-A

Sfakia yeah, that's right.

Yeah, Sfakia yeah. Well we didn't eat but we had a bloody good meal when we got on the ship, on the destroyer.

10:30 When we got on the destroyer comin' out of Greece on the Vendetta we sat down to roast lamb, unheard of in the army. Navy though, plenty a food in the navy, a doctor onboard the whole lot. So they didn't do too bad the navy blokes. A little bit better than the army fellas. Roast lamb, God. Would a been a luxury. You could have roast bully beef if you put it

11:00 over an open fire in the dixie, let it stew in it's own fat you now. Bully beef was only meat and fat, gristle. Reminds me of another story talkin' about that, when we took Tobruk, we got in amongst the Italian provisional place and they had bully beef, like they didn't call it bully beef, conservia, from Argentine, the best of Argentine beef in tins.

11:30 It was beautiful, it made Swift's bully beef look like second rate. So we always used to pig out on that.

It was Swifts bully beef, was Swift the company?

Yeah, Swifts meat, yeah.

Didn't know that.

American firm. Even William Angliss here, you heard of William Angliss butchers? They made bully beef over their place in Footscray, just over the Maribyrnong River there, amongst all the smells of Footscray.

12:00 See you should know that area shouldn't you?

I know I'm just thinking this. I think you can still smell it actually, the smell of bully beef?

Yeah, it was only the skins that used to smell, the skin stores I think anyway. Although I did go through Angliss' one day and with a chap from the army, and they were hosing off certain ingredients on the meat line cause those things they only eat bad meat, they don't eat good meat.

What do you

12:30 **mean?**

Those things the flies drop. You know that don't you?

Yeah.

Because there's a...

They need the bacteria.

...lot a stories that if you put on a suppurating wound, if you put maggots on it they eat the diseased flesh and leave the good stuff alone and it cleans up the spot. Even surgeons use it in some hospitals. Did you know that?

13:00 **I've heard stories like that. I didn't know whether I really believed them.**

I wouldn't like to try it myself either, just the thought of those crawly things makes you sick.

How many men ended up being rescued by the Vendetta?

I would say there'd be a hundred and fifty on board. They wouldn't want to have many more because there was no room to move on the destroyer. About a hundred and fifty and she was there for about an

13:30 hour waiting to pick up, I dunno how many got on after I got on but there would a been more, but I was whisked down below decks to dry off, to get al rid of, I was been in the water and those nights are cold of a night in Greece too, like they are out here in this country, especially in Longford, cold nights.

So was the Vendetta

14:00 **waiting for you? Did the Vendetta know that you were coming?**

Yeah, they were, well I dunno the full score, there were certain beaches and certain destroyers had to be off those beaches at a certain time and leave by a certain time. But I just happened to pick the one the Vendetta was on, just by sheer coincidence, nothing, no plan that we were there on that beach. But it was by design that the Vendetta was on that strip of beach waiting to take off. Doing a mini-

14:30 Dunkirk as the saying, used to say. At least we didn't, we got dumped on Crete not on Egypt that was our main point of discontent. We thought we were goin' to Egypt instead we went to Crete and had to go through it all again.

You actually thought you were going to Egypt.

Yeah, yeah, no one mentioned Crete when we got onboard. But after all the attacks, we were on the water about five-

15:00 hours, it's takes five-hours to steam from Navplion to Suda Bay and when the last air raid disappeared because, I dunno why they disappeared probably ran out a fuel they had to go back to Scarpanto, was part of the Rhodes Islands which they had already seized and had their planes operating from there, it was only a half hours hop between Rhodes and Crete, so that's why we had these continuous air raids.

15:30 But as I say, I survived.

So you sailed directly from Crete, I know you had the air raids on the trip to Syria.

From Crete to Alexandria,

Alex.

in Egypt, yeah. And then from Egypt by train back to Palestine, put on light duties for three-months then up to Syria.

16:00 Christmas Eve 1941 it was a momentous year '41, it was all the action from January to December. On Christmas Eve we were in the Bekaa Valley in Syria which is, Baalbek is the main city in it and there's Raz Baalbek which is a smaller version. There used to be a

16:30 French garrison town and we were in French barracks in Baalbek. You've heard of the ruins of Baalbek, it used to be one of the seven wonders of the world? Well we went through the ruins of Baalbek but that's digressing a bit. Now on Christmas Eve it was freezing and we had braziers in each of these what do you call 'em? Like billets with six beds

17:00 on each side of each room hold a dozen soldiers and a big pot belly stove, we had that goin' full bore, it was red hot. We used to went to bed with our great coats, all we took off was our boots, it was that cold and we woke up the next mornin' and went out side and there was three-foot a snow outside. It was what you call a real white Christmas and we'd forgotten, or hadn't forgotten, we were told to drain our radiators out, so

17:30 every truck had a iced up radiators, you had to pour hot water through 'em to get 'em to melt so you could start the motors up, otherwise you would've blown up the engines. But that's how cold it was before snow. It was, I didn't see any action in, we were there sort of mopping up. But we would take all the Arabs out on road works and all they could sing out was, "Yala, yala, yala," you know, "What's that

18:00 mean?" "Faster, faster, faster." They're all standin' up in the truck swayin' from side to side, takin' 'em from one job to another fixin' up the roads and repairing the roads. Got up as far as Damascus in Syria. Put me in mind a Ali Baba and his Forty Thieves I think they, didn't they, something around Damascus, historical again. But then we got word we were coming back home to Australia.

18:30 **Had you recovered by then, you know, after your…?**

Yeah well three-months of light duty you know mainly kitchen fatigue that's light duty, peelin' spuds and doin' all that sort a thing. But you didn't get any guard work, no guard sort a thing, no guard duty. But yeah, I suffered in, I had groin trouble. That's all that climbing over mountains that did it, so they said we'll give ya a rest for a couple a months so, I don't think I did

19:00 the three-months, it was about two-months I was back pretty active again. Well I played football and had a few games of footy and all that sort a thing. Yep.

Well I guess if you could play footy you must've been okay.

Must've been all right, yeah.

So then you came back to Australia.

Yeah. Well we came down, that's a photo you, one of 'em, about seven or eight of us

19:30 takin' at Palestine, at a place called Julis on the way back, staging camp. So we went from Julis down to the Suez Canal to a place called Jenifer was a big British base camp on the Suez Canal, I've got a photo, I've got a program of what was on at the, in the local theatre, "Hold that Co-ed" was one of 'em and Carey Grant and some other

20:00 I've got the souvenir somewhere. So we were staged there for two-nights and then we went down to Suez the next day and boarded the, what they call RMS, Royal Mail Steamer, RMS Andes, A-N-D-E-S, after the South American mountain range. The Church of the Holy Sepulchre is where Christ's tomb

20:30 is and the big rock that rolled away on it's own accord, it'd take about fifty-men to move was still there and you go into the tomb, you've got to bend down to get in underneath and as soon as you do you can smell the incense and there's a bloke sittin' there sayin' "baksheesh, baksheesh, baksheesh," you got to pay money. That's goin' back in 1940. But I did go along all stations of the cross

21:00 from the Church of the Mary of Zion is where Christ was entombed, where he was crowned with the crown of thorns and down in the dungeons is the games they used to, these little Indians, it's like you know cherry bombs? You've heard of cherry bombs – kids used to throw cherries into a little hole? Well these are little indentations in the granite blocks where they used to sit and throw

21:30 little bits of pebbles or something into these. If they went into the hole you'd win sort a thing. This is where the guards used to play while JC [Jesus Christ] was awaiting to be crucified. This is the Church of Mary of Zion and that was when you went the stations of the cross, to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre which is built on Calvary and they got lights under the ground where you can

22:00 see the rock, of the Rock of Calvary and it's all flood lit underneath and all the jewels in this above the ground is from all parts of the world, from England there was a solid gold heart with a giant red ruby in the middle of it. They were worth millions and millions of pounds back when I was there in those days. So that was, I'm not irreligious and I'm not religious if you know what I mean, I take it or leave it.

22:30 But it was an experience, and to go to the wailing wall where over the centuries you can see the indentations of the foreheads of rubbing up on the wall, how it's gone convex, concave instead of convex the opposite, and over the years all these indentations in the wall which is another like granite.

23:00 Amazing how many foreheads have done that over the years, over the centuries. But that's an experience in itself.

So coming from Crete and Greece and all of that experience to this place of very spiritual place, did you feel that?

Jerusalem?

Yeah?

No, I didn't feel any spiritualism no, no. I had a,

23:30 I had seen films of, I remember seein' a film called The King of Kings with Christ carrying his cross along the Via Della Rosa in films and Mathias the wandering Jew, you've heard of Mathias the wandering Jew? He lived like Moses about nine-hundred years or something and every time he tried to commit suicide his dagger would fall to pieces before it struck him.

24:00 That's myth or fact, I don't know. But that's the story of it, this is what we were told anyway. But it was quite interesting cause I had to go to Sundee school when I was a kid, every Sunday I was made to go to Sunday school by my maiden aunt and my grandmother. So I wasn't irreligious that way, I knew what religion was about.

24:30 But that's the Holy City and the old city of Jerusalem, the streets are about as wide as from here to there, all sorts of shops and with meat and flies hangin' up on the wall. You wonder how they were sanitised. I have got a photograph of myself somewhere taken in Jerusalem, dressed as an Arab with my hand on the dagger ready to, doin' a Rudolf Valentino act.

25:00 But that's the Holy City. Tel Aviv was all Jewish, mainly Jewish. Jaffa is next door to Tel Aviv, it's actually you could say it is Tel Aviv, well Jaffa's Jaffa and Tel Aviv's Jaffa too. But one was Arab and one was Jewish. But they used to get along together. I went to a picture theatre, as you know I didn't drink, went to the pictures, come out got lost,

25:30 missed the bus back to Beit Jirja the camp, was taken by the provos [Provosts – Military Police], locked up, me shoes and socks taken off me and sent back to camp the next day and charged with bein' AWL [Absent Without Leave] overnight and they gave me fourteen-days ((UNCLEAR) – last) detention barracks Jerusalem for that and I only missed the bus. Like an idiot I give meself up, I went and said I missed the bus, I could a thumbed a ride back to Beit Jirja probably. But I did fourteen-days at the double in Jerusalem

26:00 which was the most feared detention barracks in Palestine, run by screws. They called screws there too but, all staff sergeants.

Australian?

Yeah.

And the Australian provos?

Yes, and the boss was one of the worst, he was Captain James Courtney, I'll never forget his name. He brought all the prisoners back on a, what they call a prison ship and

26:30 they rioted somewhere along the, across the Indian Ocean somewhere, which was all hush-hush and you'll probably never hear about, probably never will hear about it because it was probably one a those stories never to be released. But insubordination on a prison ship.

Prisoners as in which prisoners, POWs?

No, as miscreants, AWLs and all that, and incorrigible fellows which we had a few of in the army.

27:00 I was mixed up with all them, they would a been criminals in the civvy world too. Can't weed 'em out.

So why did you get such a harsh punishment do you think?

I don't know. He had to make an example he told me, old Colonel Loveridge, "We got to make an example, give this man fourteen-days Jerusalem." Well he give me fourteen-days but it was that full I only did eleven-days because I had to do three-days in my local boob back in

27:30 Beit Jirja camp. But that's another experience. I was a criminal for eleven-days.

So how bad was it?

Everything at the double, used to have to shave with cold water, stand to your, you had to stand to your cell door and they'd open up the cell doors, everybody out and you stand in front of a little box where you had your razor, no water, no lather, just shave

28:00 cold, shave your beard off, you had to do it in one-minute, the order come out, "Back into your cells," and if you hadn't done it in that time, you spent the rest of the day making pebbles out a big rocks into little rocks, hittin' one stone against another, chippin' 'em. That's discipline. Torture too. True.

28:30 I'll never forget Jerusalem.

Did you have to do that, did you have to do the pebbles?

Well you had to do it whether you was bad or not, there's nothin' else to do in the place, and you had guards watching you all the time and out in the open, but it was all caged in wire, you couldn't jump the wall or do anything like that and that was in the old city of Jerusalem. Not far from the Hotel Fast. David's Gate

29:00 is the entrance to that area of the old city of Jerusalem. You've probably heard of David's Gate in biblical times. Still there, well it was there in 1940.

So what were the crimes that these people had committed?

Probably AWL, permanently AWL or tryin' to desert or SIWs or something like that. Self inflicted wounds, that is.

29:30 **Murders?**

I never heard of any. I can remember one of our, I s'pose I can mention his name, he came back from the desert and he'd had a Beretta automatic he'd purloined or stolen or found from some Italian officer and he held up a gari in Alexandria for his money, his name was Beatty, we called him

30:00 Earl after Earl Beatty was a naval bloke back in many wars ago, and he apparently shot the driver, didn't kill him, but he was found, court-martialled and found guilty and sentenced to three-years in a British prison in Aden, which is in Yemen, the capital of Yemen, Aden just at the end of the Red Sea on the Indian Ocean.

30:30 So I don't know whatever, what happened to him. Did he survive or what? But he took it on his to be a bandit, so, but he didn't do Jerusalem and Aden, I s'pose the temperature there's round about forty-degrees nearly every day, he'd be doin' it hard there without air-conditioning I'll tell ya.

And what about the other three days that you did in…?

In the local?

Yeah.

Easy.

31:00 Just lay in your bed, read a book or something. Get up and have a meal, go to sleep, but for three-days that gets a bit boring too, in the local boob you know. We had one bloke in the local boob when I was in there someone smuggled some Arak into him, Arak's a pretty potent spirit and he went off his head, went berserk, tried to smash his way out with his fists through the walls. That's what Arak does, that's

31:30 the stuff goes like, tastes like aniseed and when you put water in it, it goes like milk. Don't ever try it, it's potent.

Was that available there?

No, well the Arab's used to drink it, so this mate of his that got some and said hey, this'll help you out, help you to pas the time. I dunno how much he gave him but he went off his rocker. He ended up in Jerusalem too. So there you are.

It's pretty severe

32:00 **punishment isn't it?**

Yeah, just as well I didn't drink, I might a done the same thing.

How much did you have to do with the Arabs, I mean how much contact? Did you have friendships?

No, no, well you couldn't. They used to sit around in communes in their villages and they'd have all the

food on the floor, they sit cross legged on the floor and they'd all pitch in

32:30 with their fingers whatever they wanted. Say half a dozen sittin' around and they had a little bowl of water they washed their fingers and grabbed it again. They didn't eat civilised like we do with a knife and fork or anything like that. But that was in the villages in Palestine. But that was their culture, that was their way of life, different to us. So you had to respect 'em, to a certain extent even if you didn't agree

33:00 with it, you had to say well that's the way they wanna do it so who are we to judge them.

What about scheming, schemes and scams, scamming?

Well, when we was in Syria I was on guard duty, now this is at three-o'clock in the afternoon, and everyone invited someone was doin' something, playin' sport and I was patrolling the lines and I seen this Arab come out of one of the tents

33:30 cause you had your rifle and you had five rounds of live ammunition in the butt or in the, not in the butt, in the holder that used to hold ten so you used to put five in and one up the spout, and I yelled out "Halt!" you know, stop, and you had to sing out three times to be legal, I said, "Halt, halt, halt," and he kept on goin' so I fired a shot over his head and he was off up the track and over all the rocky

34:00 ground, barefoot too, and disappeared into the distance. And everyone come round and, "What's goin' on?" I said, "I just seen that bloke comin' out a that tent there," but he didn't have anything and I think I must a surprised him, but he wasn't supposed to be there.

So pilfering, there was as bit of pilfering?

Yeah, I frightened the livin' daylights out of him I think because he took off like, he would a won the Stawell Gift [sprint race]. Yeah.

34:30 But Syria, that was in Syria. But now did we get to when we come back on the Andes, we came back alone. She could do twenty-seven knots, the Andes a very fast ship, now submarines couldn't keep up with that pace and they couldn't a zig and a zag, they had no hope of torpedoing it, so we came back on our own as far

35:00 as Colombo where we didn't get any leave like we did going over. Then when we left Colombo they said we're going to Java. That's lovely we're gonna head for the islands and join up with the island war. Then two-days later the furphy came out Java's off, we're headin' for Fremantle. You should've heard the roar, they would've heard it in Fremantle, the whole ship erupted,

35:30 put it over the PA [Public Address system] and sure enough we came back to Fremantle. But we came all the way across from Suez on our own and coming down our Red Sea, a beautiful sight, we left at dusk and we were going down the Red Sea a hospital ship came past us, all lit up Red Crosses all lit up on the side, all the superstructure alight, was the [KPM] Oranje a Dutch Hospital ship, famous one durin'

36:00 the war, O-R-A-N-J-E, Oranje and she was headin' back with the wounded back to Australia. That's the last we seen of her goin' down the Red Sea but she got back all right. Wonderful sight at night to see a hospital ship goin' past you. Everyone wishin' they were on board.

Well most of you probably needed to be onboard I guess, by that stage.

Yeah, yeah.

So you had no convoy, you had no

36:30 **escort?**

No.

Did you see any enemy at all during that trip?

No, had no they had radar, not radar, asdic or something, to sonar, they had sonar on the ship, it was a modern ship, a royal mail steamer, she was built for the South American run and it had a lot of air-conditioning in it, like vents and it was freezing goin' across the Indian Ocean, we all froze, it wasn't a pleasant trip at all. But it was fast.

37:00 Only took us about what ten or twelve-days to go across the Indian Ocean, that's doin' some knots, night and day.

And what was…?

We went to Fremantle and as soon as we got there, pulled into, we didn't get leave, we let off some Western Australians and everyone was sayin' "You'll be sorry, you'll be sorry." "Why, what's this you'll be sorry?" "The Yanks have got all your women." Cause the Yanks were in Melbourne and all around the place, and we went to

37:30 Outer Harbour in South Australia where we unloaded. That's why I lived with the Rechabites for eleven-

weeks, the non-drinkers.

But you didn't know that the Yanks, you must've known the Yanks were in Australia, did you?

We knew that Guadalcanal was on and that's where they come from but everyone's bein' smart, "You'll be sorry, all the sheilas are gone, the Yanks a got 'em all." This is in Fremantle when we pulled up in the harbour.

Had you had any mail during the time

38:00 **you were away?**

Very intermittent. We were on the move a bit and some letters I s'pose were written never got to us, like parcels that were sent but never got to you. I dunno whether they went astray or someone said, I'll have it, he doesn't want it. The postal service wasn't too bad though. But there was a lot of stuff that went astray. I know my step-mother had written to me a few times, but

38:30 I never got the letters, they just disappeared.

And what point did you know that your brother had joined up?

I well, I was in Syria still in Syria when I got a letter from home that he had enlisted in the 8th Divvy. Now I if I'd a been back in Australia I could a claimed him, you can claim younger brothers into your own unit

39:00 but I was too far away, I couldn't claim him and by that time he's only in the army about, I got his records there, about four-months and he was a prisoner of war, taken in Singapore, then transferred to Changi jail and then from Changi to Borneo. If he'd a gone to Burma he may have been alive today. But he went to Borneo, they went some to

39:30 Burma to build the railway line, some to A-Force and B-Force to Borneo and that was the finish of him. Never round his body, yet they told me he died of cerebral malaria and the date, the 26th of June, 1945. No way, how could they know that? They never found his body. He was workin' probably on one a the tracks that day, marchin'

40:00 to Geraldton on the west coast. But no, only, you know two and a half thousand started off, none survived, only six who had escaped survived and I think the last one a those died two or three-years ago, Botterill, a bloke by the name of Botterill. I've got the books there of Sandakan, the reason for the cover-up.

40:30 The Australian government covered up.

So did those, you know what you've read and what you've been able to find out help to fill in his experience…

Yeah, it filled in a few blanks.

A few blanks…

But I still can't reconcile the fact that, I got his discharge not his dis…, his signing up papers and it's got marked on it, 'A bit on the small side'. But they still took him, it's marked, needs building up, so they better, I'll show it to you later on and that was it. That was in when he just joined up, so that was his sign up papers. Now whether he got his permission from Dad or not, I don't know. I never asked Dad that cause, excuse me, my Dad died in '48, I think he died of a broken heart too cause

41:30 he must've been under a strain with me away and young Ronnie a POW, cause I remember him writin' me a letter when I was up in Queensland, this was well after I come back, after I done the territory, he said, "Looks like you're the only hope there to carry on the family name." That's probably why I married my wife twenty one-days after I met her, I didn't want her to get away. That's……

Tape 6

00:30 Shorty and Lofty had been attacked and there's tracer bullets goin' off in all directions and Shorty says to his mate, "C'mon let's go." He said, "No way." He says, "Why not?" He say's, "I'm colour blind, I can't see what's comin'." It's a joke, he's colour blind. Things like that did happen I s'pose but whether that's true or not, I dunno. Could you imagine a bloke

01:00 sayin' I'm not gonna move from here cause I'm colour blind I can't see the bullets comin'. It's only every third one that's a tracer anyway. Don't see the others.

What about humour, was humour a part of your life?

Yeah, you had to make your own humour like jokes, tell dirty jokes you know, most jokes in the army are about sex which you don't have, what you'd like to do. But

01:30 nothing too serious. But concert parties, we used to have a concert party every now and again, go to the sixteen-millimetre film show and see new releases before they even got onto the studio or the theatres round Australia. But I couldn't tell ya the name of them now. The only one I remember is, "A Yank in Dutch" and that was another name, I think I mentioned that. They called it something

02:00 else.

What about brothels?

My first experience at a brothel was at, you probably heard of Sister Street, have you?

Yeah I have.

In Alexandria, it's a well known brothel area in Egypt, I went to this brothel and I couldn't do anything for laughin', I thought it was that humorous, this is just before we went over to Greece.

02:30 So I didn't partake of any a the ladies favours at all. I just went down to a barber's down in, at Ali Square and had a hair cut. I used to part my hair in the middle then, it was the fashion in the 1930's to part your, the late '30's to part your hair in the middle. So I went and had a haircut instead.

Why did you find the brothel funny, what was funny about it?

03:00 Haggling for prices and all that sort a thing you know, cause can I speak freely?

Speak freely.

When you talk about crumpet, the Poms call it crumpet, that used to kill me too, I said, "You eat crumpets." He said, "What are you talkin' about? So what." I had to laugh, yeah. I didn't know it was called crumpet, I thought crumpets were something you put under the gas ring and toasted.

It's code.

03:30 **So had you, were you a virgin or had you had any experiences?**

No, I had the usual dreams of a boy growing up, but yeah didn't, you didn't think so much about sex whilst you were in action, that was the furtherest thing from your mind, nothing like that no. No, I was true till I married my wife in 1944.

04:00 Yeah, I can say that without fear or favour. God bless her. I hope she's with God anyway, no other place she should be. So that was my, apart from when I was drivin' cabs and they wanted to use your cab for a short time stint or something like that, used to make me

04:30 laugh too, especially drivin' down Fitzroy Street, St Kilda, they'd say, "Pull up here there's a woman in the doorway," and she'd come over and start haggling for price, that used to kill me and she said, "What's wrong with you driver?" I said, "Nothing, I got a cold." I thought she might've given me a back-hander for laughin' at her.

So you just, you liked that for the sport, the sport of haggling? You like to haggle?

No, I don't like to do that. I mean love's love

05:00 whichever way it comes in I s'pose, but that's a profession to them, I didn't look down on it. But I just thought it was humorous. I wouldn't say I'd been celibate all me life, I had an affair when I was married, that's the first time and the last time.

05:30 So I s'pose to grow up you got to try everything once, or so someone told me years ago. The one you never had is the one you never want cause you've never had it. Does that sound sensible?

Yeah, I think I can get my head around that.

But.....

Go on.

No, after you.

I was gonna change the subject slightly, is that all right?

Yeah.

I'm

06:00 **just wondering if you had war, any of the war artists or, actually what made me think of it was Alex Gurney, was he around, he did 'Bluey and Curly'?**

A war artist, you mean?

Yeah, he wrote the comic strip...

Bluey and Curly?

Bluey and Curly.

Yeah.

Did you ever come across him?

No, no.

Was he around the Middle East?

I never came across, the only Sadie Page a female impersonator with the 6 Div concert party, that's the only

06:30 person of notoriety that I ever come across if I might say, Sadie was a homosexual I would imagine, that's why he used to dress up in drag all the time. But he played a female impersonator, perfect with the voice, the actions the Minchin's gait, the whole lot, used to have us in stitches when we seen the concert party. Yeah. There was a song brought out about 'Old Blamey's Boys', "6 Divvy Boys

07:00 fighting for liberty, victory, democracy. Hitler we warn, we're the AIF reborn, like gold old Gunga Din, we can take it on the chin, because we're old Blamey's Boys." Tom used to love that song. Old Tom Blamey. He used to run brothels in Little Lonsdale Street when he was chief of police in Victoria.

When was that?

07:30 **When was he chief of police?**

In the thirties, early thirties, '32, Chief of police. Chief commissioner they call 'em these days. Yeah. Then he retired and they brought him out a retirement when the war broke out and put him in charge of the 6 Divvy. So he's no angel old Tom, although he was a veteran of the First World War.

08:00 **So how did you know about that, that he ran brothels?**

Common knowledge in the army. Old Blamey chief of police, used to run the brothels in Lonsdale Street, it's the same Tom. I met his wife, Olga, Lady Blamey, Olga Blamey, she used to work for the Red Cross, she come to see me in hospital when I was up in Queensland before I came down to Heidelberg to have an operation.

08:30 That's another thing, I came from the Northern Territory, I spent fourteen-months in the Northern Territory after we came back from the Middle East, and they called us 12th Australian Division. Now we never had twelve Australian divisions, this was to confuse the Japs that we had twelve divisions, we only had four. The 12th Division, so they carried on, one, two, three, four, five was the First World War, six, seven, eight and nine was the

09:00 Second World War and it had an armoured division which never saw action outside Australia I don't think, they spent most a the war in central Australia or northern Western Australia. But divisions is just a number. We were at Adelaide River for twelve-months. Noonamah for about four-months, three or four-

09:30 months, and we had air raids, we were attacked when we were at Noonamah because there was two strip dromes on the north south highway which was unnamed, it's the road down headin' straight south called Strauss and Livingstone, Spitfires and P-40s. The Yanks were there and the Aussies had the Spitfires and they were gettin' air raids

10:00 every week, and there was Hughes field just opposite, when I say opposite about two-k's down the track on the other side of the highway, which was Hughes field, where the bombers used to take off from, they got bombed several times. Then down further at Coomalie Creek was the P-38's, they called 'em Lightnings, Whispering Death, they were camped there, they got bombed by the Japs.

10:30 You know there was about ninety-odd air raids over northern Australia in the, after the 19th of February when Darwin was first blitzed. There used to be a joke, was you in Darwin on the 19th? No, I was there on the 20th , I didn't shoot through. Used to be a standing joke, yeah. But then they found them all parts of the world headin' down to South Australia along the

11:00 way. Air force, navy blokes, army blokes, all panickin', shot through. Yeah, actually call that desertion under fire. But I dunno if anything ever came of it. They probably rounded 'em all up and got 'em back into gear again. That's, little things like that you never hear about it. You might hear about it in your line of work, sometime, but I was there on the 20th, not the 19th.

I haven't heard that

11:30 **expression, but I've heard about people shooting through.**

Shooting through.

Yeah.

Well I s'pose you know, all of a sudden everything's nice and cosy, it's probably like the cyclone that hit

there a few years ago, cyclone whatever the name of it was.

Tracy.

Tracy that's the one, Cyclone Tracy. Everything's calm then all of a sudden boom, everything erupts, you're bein' attacked. Similar to that. Although they did know Tracy was comin' didn't they?

12:00 They didn't know the Japs were comin'.

Okay. Where are we?

Well we're in the Northern Territory.

Yeah, do you want to get back to the chronology?

Yeah, well we came back from Darwin to Brisbane on a troop ship, the rock 'n' roll boat,

12:30 what was the name of it? Duntroon, named after the military college in, near Canberra. It was the Duntroon, the MV Duntroon and she used to roll like that, made everyone sick, wasn't stable at all. We came round, down the coast down past the Barrier Reef to Brisbane and then by train on our first leave for fourteen-months. Now when we came back

13:00 from the Middle East to Adelaide we only had seven-days leave at home. After living in private homes for eleven-weeks, which I s'pose they thought that's leave anyway. We were still doin' parades and that but we weren't regimented like we were if you were out in the open somewhere in the camp. So we.. got to get me thoughts straight again.

We were

13:30 **in Fremantle, you arrived in Fremantle. That's actually where we...**

Yeah, but then we went to Outer Harbour, that's when we went to the private homes, when I went with the Rechabites.

In Adelaide. Well can we just go back to your arrival in Fremantle though after what, how many, how long had you been away? Two....?

Not quite two-years. I was one month, no three-weeks off two-years overseas. We left on the

14:00 15th of April, well they class it as the 14th of April when we left Port Melbourne and I was back at, it was in May back at Outer Harbour, Adelaide, some time in May, April, no in March, one month the other way. So I missed out on bein' two-years overseas by about three-weeks. I've got it in me records there somewhere. But that's instead of wearin' three service stripes I could only wear two.

14:30 And they said, "No you didn't do, you did thirteen-days less or something, you can't wear it." So all right, I only wore two. Cause they used to put service stripes on your right arm , or left arm, little inverted ones on your sleeve, one for overseas and one for every year. So I only got one for goin' away and one for one-year sort a thing, the first one. I should a been wearin' three. But that's

15:00 neither here nor there. I reckon I should a got a medal for goin' into Suda Bay twice, but that lieutenant didn't recommend me for any gongs, he was too busy drinkin' the bloody rum. Forgot about it, the rum was sweeter than me. When you look at it you know, I reckon he should a said, "Well at least this blokes worth an MID [Mentioned in Despatches]," or something. But no, no. So as they said I went in as

15:30 a private and come out as a driver.

They just don't recognise bravery and courage when it's under their nose.

Or stupidity maybe, I dunno. To do something silly you got to, there's got to be something lacking.

Well yeah, but I guess what I'm realising is how much initiative people had...

Yeah.

...in the war? I mean you had to didn't you, to survive?

Yeah.

Plus it was that those

16:00 **circumstances brought it out.**

That's where my working on farms before the war initiative came, that stood me in great stead whilst I was in the army, for sure. It even carried me through doin' eleven-days in bloody Jerusalem, the thought, it can only get better, can't get any bloody worse.

So how do you mean initiative helped you out there?

16:30 Well to think for yourself, to act for yourself, to look after you, number one first, bugger anyone else you

know, and you got to survive, that's the will, the will to win, that's built and it's inherent in everybody is to survival. It's in me now, my wife is gone but I'm going to survive a few years longer yet, my psyche tells me I'm not up to it,

17:00 I'm up to it, but I'm not due yet. I think I've got another ten-years at least, that's my psyche. Whether that's right or wrong, time only will tell.

So was that something you were conscious of when, you know in Greece, in Crete, when you were pushed to your absolute limit?

Invincible. I thought I, I don't think there's one made for me, that was in my mind. I'd gone through

17:30 the desert which was a pushover, pardon the pun, but it was a pushover as far as we were concerned against the Italians, only a few shells goin' off around you on Halfaya Pass, that part. I know you can't be invincible, but you can be a supreme egotist and say it's not gonna happen to me, and maybe if you think strong enough, it won't happen to you. I don't know. I'm not a psychiatrist

18:00 but I'm sure that has something, your state of mind has something to do with it.

Well reading what you wrote about Crete, the number of times you say, I thought, you know, you had a point where you had three bombs…

A cat's nine lives.

…coming straight for you and you were sitting under a tree and you said this is it, this is got to be it…

Yeah, yeah.

…and it wasn't.

It wasn't.

There were situations like that over and over again that you survived.

It comes

18:30 a bit blasé doesn't it? Its not gonna happen, it hasn't happened. So you know, you got to go on and on and on and if it does happen you don't know about it, you won't know about it. There's a philosophy there that if you get hit fatally, that's strange, that door hasn't been open in twenty-years. Is that someone bangin' the doors?

No, it's

19:00 **this bedroom door.**

It's the breeze. I keep sayin' that, but I got faith in my psyche.

There were a couple of situations there in Crete, like the one when you were under the tree and there was some other situation… and you had every German bomber…

I had this Dornier comin'

19:30 across.

…there, was there.

Firin' it's belly gun and it's still firin' and I'm dead in line with it, I'm covered up with rocks but I'm dead in line with it and nothin' over your head to stop anything comin' at you, and as he pulled up the firin' stopped, he had to pull up to get over the top a the mountain and his belly gun stopped firing. If he'd a kept on goin' for another two-seconds, I might a been hit. That was what makes me think

20:00 it's not to be. A nanosecond longer on the trigger, it couldn't a been curtains. But you could see the bullets hittin' you could see 'em comin' and you can't get up and run, you're bound in by rocks, you're hidin' amongst rocks. If you expose yourself, someone else'll want to come after you. But those, they were a pretty deadly weapon these machine guns in the belly of a Pencil

20:30 Dornier, a bomber. Yeah broom, broom, broom, you could hear 'em comin' and they look so majestic until you see what they're layin', when it drops out a their belly. No, I still shudder when I hear, watch films of Stukas in war films, divin' down with the screamers in their wings, I know what it's like, yeah I get the shivers.

And what was…?

21:00 **Sorry.**

Yeah, go on.

What was the situation with the tree, that was a Messerschmitt was it?

It was a big tree, it was, God it had a girth on it about I s'pose it'd be about thirty-foot round, and it was a big tree and they, you never hide under trees. Well, I dunno about that but I was under the tree but I was, wasn't huggin' the bowl of it, I was under it more for cover so they couldn't see me and huggin' the ground and you

21:30 could look up and you could see the bombs coming, that's, you dunno whether, you can say, God it's only gonna, no, it's gonna go that way, it's gonna miss, it's gonna go over, over-shoot, sort a thing. Well they were tryin' to hit the tree or not, I don't know, they were tryin' to hit a house alongside me and they missed. But there was only the one plane that dropped the, well it was actually three planes but in my line, there was only the one. The others were spread out

22:00 each side of him and they dropped their eggs there, but they were not gonna go anywhere near me. So you count the seconds and you count the odds. Yes or no, and then it goes through your mind, I'm laying horizontally is that right, instead of laying vertically. But that's only for machine guns, but it goes through your mind too, are you in the right possy? And

22:30 then you scream, only because of the detonation which can puncture your eardrums.

So how does screaming help that?

You're expelling air and you're screaming at the top of your voice, your vocal cords are extended and it counteracts the concussion of an explosion into your eardrums. Cause if a bomb lands alongside ya, if it doesn't kill you with fragments, the bloody detonation could kill

23:00 ya, the concussion can kill ya, fracture your eardrums, spill ya, make your brains jelly. Gone through it all, told by experts that's what you do. Cause I say, not because I was so-and-so frightened but I was, deep down I was, but there's nothing you can do about it, it's just you see them coming you just got a pray for that it misses. It's terrible I know. Same thing

23:30 in the ships. They swing over and they're gonna miss, swing over again they're gonna miss. I say, they should a all been VC [Victoria Cross] winners those destroyer captains.

They used, just to digress for a moment, they manoeuvred the ships like that?

Yeah, yeah. Hard to port or hard to starboard and as I say, you was on a forty five-degree angle,

24:00 if you didn't hang on you'd be into the water and the Mediterranean not so bloody pretty place to be I tell ya, in the middle of a war. It's again, I just read a book about the Mediterranean, war, the Battle of Cape Matapan, off Crete. Two and a half-thousand Germans were going to attack Crete till the navy got amongst 'em, this is the day after the first invasion on the 21st of May and they,

24:30 not one survived. They had Greek caiques and little steamers and little yachts and the whole lot, the Germans were on their way to land in Crete, headin' for Suda Bay I would imagine, but the navy stopped 'em. Good old Cunningham. He was the naval chief of the Mediterranean fleet. You should be talkin' to some a those sailors that was on the [HMAS] Perth, cause

25:00 the Perth ended up going down in the Battle of Sunda Straits, yeah.

I think you said before that there was one casualty on Crete in the olive grove?

Yeah, out of eight-hundred odd men, and they strafed us for eight-hours, only one man was wounded.

But what about on the journey

25:30 **south to...**

To Sfakia?

Sfakia?

We were under cover, only moved at night and they patrolled, as I said we were lookin' over on these Messerschmitts comin' up the valley and they couldn't see us and we didn't expose ourselves to them by silly, it takes one an awfully good shot with a rifle to shoot down a Messerschmitt, you've got to hit something vital which, at the speed their goin' about

26:00 three hundred and fifty-k's or miles an hour, not k's miles an hour, to hit a vital spot you got to aim about, what five-yards in front of the plane and by the time the bullet gets there, it maybe…

26:30 **So there were no deaths, no casualties during...?**

Not in my area no, not where I was at, there was a lot of 'em taken POWs at the finish. Cause they didn't make it down, round the tortuous mountain track down to the beach to the LST, what I call landing

27:00 craft, I think they called 'em LSTs or something. But no they're very good to see, especially when you see those nice little destroyers, the what's got plenty a speed.

There's something you've just said in passing about who you regard as a mate.

Yeah, yeah.

So what

27:30 **can you say about mateship and, you know? You were in absolutely serious life threatening situations, with other soldiers?**

Yeah well don't get me wrong, now good army mates you don't say they're acquaintances, they're friends. But a mate in the truest sense of the word, you only have one or two in your lifetime probably and one's probably your wife,

28:00 and then you got another best friend. But I know where you're coming from but there's mateship, camaraderie and all that. But to be a mate deep down, you got to trust, put your life in his hands. Now some a my acquaintances, I wouldn't of put my life in their hands because I thought they were unstable that way,

28:30 that they would panic, only had to hear them talk and what we should do and what we're not gonna do, and what's orders and all that sort a thing. But I did have a couple of mates, but not in the true sense as I say, but they were close. One of 'em became a POW Frank Richardson and the other one, well I

29:00 wouldn't a said he was a born leader of men, but he used to make us laugh, Rigby. Yeah, my mate Rigby yeah. But I met a lot a nice people friends over the years, unfortunately they've all departed this common vale at present. Whether I meet up with 'em in another place, who knows.

29:30 No one's ever come back to tell us that they've met, have they? But I look on my army career as part of living. As I said, I went away as a callow youth and come back a man. I think I said that at the end of that story. True I did come back a man. With a lot a memories

30:00 good and bad. Good ones when you had a bit a fun went on leave, played a football match, played a cricket match whatever was in vogue. It's amazing how a ball can come, or a piece of wood could come out from anywhere to have a hit of cricket. At a whim, here, here's a bat, here's a ball, even though it's only a tennis ball. Ingenuity that's Australianism.

30:30 You don't get that in other services, other countries services I should say. But you do get it in the navy, air force, army. I was proud to wear khaki for seventy-months. It didn't do me any harm, or not really any harm only this busted wrist. But I'm gettin' recompensed for that by the government.

31:00 I've got an erratic heartbeat, I suffer from post-stress disorder, and I'm sittin' here tellin' you this. But the psychiatrist told me that anyway. So who knows whose right? I don't feel different, I don't act different, I never

31:30 settle down since I got out the army. Took me one job I had for seventeen years and then I was self-employed for ten-years till I retired. I've been a member of the RSL [Returned and Services League] sixty-years next July 14th. I don't think I'll get a telegram from the Queen but I want to get one from McLaughlan that took Bruce Ruxton's place, Victorian

32:00 president who I met at the dedication of the Greek War Memorial and I told him, I said, "I want to see you in about twelve-months time." He said, "Yeah, what for?" I said, "I'm sixty-years up." He just looked at me. The lord mayor of Melbourne was with him too, John So, nice bloke, have you ever met him? Very nice man for an oriental.

32:30 There's my cat, Littley. This is my bosom companion. Come here and join the party, c'mon.

Hello.

Littley. C'mon. She sleeps with me.

She's gorgeous.

She's rising twelve, she'll be twelve next December. She's sleeps with me.

She's a talker,

Yeah, she talks to me like that,

33:00 every time I go away and come back home, jeez she's on me like a rash. It's great you know to have that rapport with an animal. They're not so dumb after all, are they?

No, I've got two like her. One of them talks a lot.

Yeah, yeah, but she's beautiful. My son said, "What are you gonna do with her when you leave here?" I said, "Take her with me." Cause my daughter-in-law is allergic to cats, she gets runny noses and watery eyes,

33:30 but I think it's only mind over matter. I'll take Littley with me anyway. I won't go and live with 'em, that'll nark 'em. Now we're getting back to the tours of close.

Yeah, following on from that idea about ingenuity, and how those extreme situations seem to… you've either got it or you

34:00 **haven't I guess in those situations.**

You mean you panic or you don't panic?

Yeah, you sort of use your noose. So you got yourself off Crete, you didn't end up a POW, do you think ingenuity had anything to do with that for you?

Yes, my ability to swim and to dodge all the drowning blokes who could a been dragging me under too. But I couldn't help them

34:30 which is sad when I think back on it. At the time I didn't think so, it was sad, it was survival, get on that bloody boat and get off. I don't want to be a prisoner of war. As it turned out, my mate was two-hours later. The Germans attacked and took him while he was still on the beach.

So he was behind you was he?

He said, "I can't swim."

Oh gee.

35:00 Yeah, can't swim, I said, "I'm sorry mate, it's every man for himself." You heard what that bloke who was first in said, "Don't panic." I'm panickin' I'm in, I went, shook him by the hand and said, "All the best," cause I thought he would move on, maybe get onto a small boat somewhere else. But no, he was taken two-hours later. So we didn't miss by much.

And there were no boats,

35:30 **there were no little boats?**

No. There's only that one, one Greek caique. As a matter of fact, when I got on the boat and there was about twelve of us on it, they went round and took all the drachmas of everyone, "Give us all the money you got, the Greek money." And what I had, you know, about a thousand drachmas which is only about a quid or something like that, and gave it all to the Greek, the two Greeks manning the caique.

36:00 It wasn't gonna be any good to us, we thought we were goin' back to Egypt. But we were still in the land of Greek spending on Crete, drachmas were the currency on Crete. But anyhow, they would a done something with it, only be what twenty-quid at the most. About twenty-quid. So we did the right thing by them. See that's ingenuity. Who would think in desperate situations you'd say well give us a tarp or a mast? I'll

36:30 give it to these poor buggers helpin' us out. That's Australian ingenuity. They didn't ask for it, we just collected and gave and no one demurred about it, they didn't say "bulldust," you know, give 'em all you got. I could a done with it playin' two-up on Crete. We were payin' Owens you know, toss a coin

37:00 I had one bloke show me his pay book, he had four hundred-pounds Australian in his pay book, and I had him up for four hundred thousands drachmas which is about two hundred-quid.

From two-up,

Yeah.

on Crete?

On Crete, I spun nine-heads in a row, nearly broke the ring. Only usin' two coins, nine heads straight, then I let him get out, double-up, double-up when I lost I spun

37:30 another one for half price. Tails he won, then I backed tails the next one and someone had it and we were square, just like that. Not knowing if we'd get off or not. Money was nothing. But he did show me his pay book. He was our unit butcher, Dave Dick his name was and his brother had a shop in Hampton where I lived for thirty-six years after the war.

38:00 Butcher shop in Hampton Street, Hampton.

What was he doing there, it doesn't sound like…?

A butcher?

No, I just mean he was the unit butcher?

Yeah, he used to cut up the meat for the troops, like for the cooks to cook us meals.

But you didn't have many cooked meals on Crete.

No, no, but all he could do then was open a tin a bully beef.

38:30 No, well that was the extras, they had nothin' to do. We didn't have any bully beef either by the way, not on Crete. We had dog biscuits, you had to soak 'em for twenty-four hours to make an impression on 'em.

Were there goats around or cows or…?

Well, they had some goats and some asses, donkeys, mules or whatever you like to call 'em. But they didn't have much though,

39:00 you couldn't rob the locals of their living even though it was only sort of barter trade you know, the different villages would swap this for that and they'd all get on that way in the old barter system because there were very few shops. There were a few what they call, not cantinas they call 'em,

39:30 I'll think of the name of it in a minute. They're like a little cafés, I've got photos of 'em in Canea,

Taverns?

Taverns, tavernas.

Tavernas.

Tavernas, that's the one. Yeah, Tavernas, and they'd everything you cooked for your eggs were always cooked in olive oil, they were pretty greasy by the time we'd finished eatin' in the tavernas, all the olive oil used to go down

40:00 well. Didn't do us any harm. So when I went back to Crete in 2001 I didn't have anything cooked in olive oil strangely.

So there were tavernas operating while you were there?

Yeah, yeah. Well in a little village there may be one or two tavernas for the local pop, used to get together and have their thick, black coffee that you could

40:30 chew it, it's mud. Have you seen those? It's yucky I could never drink it. I said you've got to eat it, you can't drink it you've got to eat it. Nothin' worse than chewin' on yucky mud and they don't have milk with it or anything like that, they drink it neat. So did you want to know anything more about…

Tape 7

00:30 Northern Territory yeah.

Yeah. So yeah let's start.

Yeah we had seven-days leave after being overseas for nearly two-years and billeted with Pitts in Balhannah which is in the Adelaide Hills not far from Onkaparinga, you know the great eastern steeple chase they have at Onkaparinga? We used to exercise round the race course there at Woodside. That's where I first met me

01:00 first Yanks, they were in the bar with money all over the place buyin' up whiskey and beer chasers or, was it beer and then whiskey chasers they used to drink. Used to go mad. But I had to go to hospital. I played tennis and I didn't have any sandshoes, so I wore two pair a thick socks on as asphalt court, I blistered me feet playin' tennis. So I spent a couple a days in the hospital down at

01:30 Adelaide where I met, who did I meet there? Dean Tozenan was a champion bike rider before the war, you probably wouldn't have heard of him. Used to ride in the Melbourne to Warrnambool bike ride, nice fella Dean Tozenan. So then we got leave to Melbourne, seven-days. My father was overjoyed to see me, he actually broke down in tears on Spencer Street station

02:00 when he was there to meet the train, cause we'd written to 'em and let him know I was on me way home. But apart from that, it was a very small homecoming you know we didn't have any parties and I had started to drink beer in Adelaide and I had those three pints and was violently ill. So it was one good thing I had a couple a beers with Dad. That was the

02:30 end of it. Then back to Adelaide and then back to Terowie a place in Adelaide where the narrow gauge met the wider gauge, from Terowie you used to go by the Ghan route to Alice Springs that's as far as the railway went and then we went across country to Noonamah was our final stopping place and that was an unmake track,

03:00 it was just a surveyed track but it was only a track it wound here and there, just dirt and water and mud, all the way across central Australia. That's before the built the north south highway, the Stuart Highway I think it's called. So we had a lot a fun gettin' up there and when I first see my first true Aboriginal, black as the ace of spades with a grey back, but that was all the flies on him.

03:30 Walkin' round with just a, what do you call it? A thingo to cover his privates that's all he had, like a loin cloth and he had a probably his son with him a young lad of about nine or ten. But they just stood and watched us go past, they didn't say anything and he's the only Aboriginal I ever seen in the Northern Territory. It's amazing. Then we got to Noonamah, that's where the railway line crossed the road at

Noonamah, in between

04:00 the two strip dromes, Pell, not Pell, Strauss and Livingstone. Pell field was down at Adelaide River where we moved to a couple a months later. I was in ASC headquarters then as a despatch rider or motorcycle orderly cause you can't be a despatch rider unless you're in the signals. Others are motorcycle orderlies. A Don R is a despatch rider in a signal mob. So I got that

04:30 told to me and I used to ride from Adelaide River to Darwin twice a week on the motor bike, deliverin' despatches, Noonamah on the way then up to Darwin. And we went out on manoeuvres in probably about July August 1942 to a place called Rum Jungle, no one had ever heard a that till then, that we were out there on manoeuvres and this is where they first

05:00 struck uranium, the yellow kind, the Rum Jungle, amazing. We were walkin' over all that lethal stuff underneath us. Didn't know a thing about it. And then we went on manoeuvres as I say, for a week out bivouacking, I became ill and had to go to hospital for some stomach upset, they put it down to neuralgia which I knew it was more than

05:30 that because I passed something out that wasn't excreta from my stomach, bowels, they measured me up with this and that and gave me this stuff to drink and checked me there and checked me there, discharged me after five-days, said it was only neuralgia. But it had to be something else. What it was, I don't know. Something that I'd eaten that didn't agree with me. If I'd a known, I was workin' out in Rum Jungle, I might a

06:00 said its uranium poisoning or something like that. Cause I dunno how far into the ground uranium was, very close to it apparently. So it might've been radioactive ground we were toiling in. That's a thought that's occurred to me many years later, when I heard about Rum Jungle. Then we, we were there for fourteen-months altogether. I played football against the air force

06:30 where my sprained wrist played up again, they x-rayed it and no nothing wrong with it, just painted it with iodine again. So we went back via the Duntroon when we went home on leave again for a fortnight round to Brisbane on the Duntroon from Darwin, by hospital, no not by hospital train, by troop

07:00 train down to Melbourne and had to change at Albury onto a different gauge of line. We got home for a fortnight, had a good time, went to a few parties and then back by troop train back to Queensland to a place called Yungaburra just out of Lake Eacham, and we were camped at Wongabel, which is a bit further out of Yungaburra again.

07:30 We were there for what six-months and I was playing football again, hurt me wrist again so they x-rayed it again and low and behold, they found an old un-united fracture that had happened in Crete. So that was the beginning of the end of the war for me because they sent me down to, from Tolga up in the Tablelands via hospital ship from Townsville to Sydney

08:00 and by hospital train from Sydney to Melbourne and where they operated on me. The first woman I met when I went into the hospital was my wife-to-be. Twenty-one days after I met her we married and that was on the 25th of May, 1944. My eldest son Graham was born in May 19, the year later May, the 7th of May, '45.

08:30 Then Ian was born in December '46. Only had the two boys. Good mother, good wife and I was still in the army and I got these postings, as I said, from a friend of mine who was saying you go there, you go there and I said I wanted a cushy job, he sent me to Vic LFC Car Company where I met the

09:00 Vegemite man, Fred Walker.

So what was your job with the car company?

Chauffer, driver, yeah. Just driving 'em around where they wanted to go. I took him, pay masters and I used to take another Major McClusky on the rice paddy's inspection where the POWs were working. I used to leave Melbourne on a Monday and arrive back on a Friday night, or Friday afternoon back in Melbourne. We used to go Kyneton first and then from Kyneton

09:30 to Kerang, stop at Kerang over night, from Kerang go to Swan Hill, stop there overnight, then we'd go unmade roads on the other side a the boarder in these days, from Swan Hill over the river to Deniliquin, through all the towns there, down to Finley and Berrigan, well we used to stop at Deni [Deniliquin] overnight, that'd be on the Wednesdee night, we'd go to Berrigan, Finley and Shepparton,

10:00 down to Shepparton on that Thursday, stop at Shepparton on the Thursdee night, back to King Lake West in that next day, and back home to Melbourne on the Fridee afternoon. That was a week's work and I could go home as soon as I put the car back into the depot and have the weekend off. Start at work again on Monday. So it was a pretty good job I'd had at the time. Not that I, didn't think I deserved it but

10:30 it wasn't a bad war for me then and I did that until VE [Victory in Europe] day and then VJ [Victory over Japan] day. I was in Melbourne at the Melbourne town hall picking up the army band who had been playing at the town hall in the lower town hall, I was in the car back when the news came through that the war was over, VJ day had happened, Victory Pacific and I drove out, I had a

11:00 utility, an army ute, and they all went mad, they stood over the ute, they bloody crushed the bonnet, they stood on the ute roof, they did everything, everyone screamin' for joy. Every woman that went past us wanted to plant a kiss on your cheek, we didn't mind that. Put me reminder of when we marched through Melbourne the first time before we went away that we were cheered by thousands and thousands, tens of thousands of people, the 1st

11:30 AIF marched through Melbourne in the Second World War prior to embarking. But we stopped at the showgrounds that night, not the showgrounds, the what, up in Carlton, what's the big hall that, not, they got the new museum behind it now,

Exhibition…?

Exhibition buildings yeah, we all camped in there, locked in you couldn't get out.

12:00 And then we came back to Melbourne again the 2/6th Battalion the chief of general staff died, a Lieutenant General Squires and our battalion the 2/6th was selected to be the battalion to do the slow march at his funeral, so he came down to Batman Avenue where there was an army depot signals and artillery ,

12:30 stopped there overnight, we were out on Harcourt Parade and Batman Avenue learning to do the dead march, which is boom, boom, stiff legged like the goose step, we did that for about two and a half hours for the next day it was the funeral and as the paper said at the time, "They looked like guardsmen the way they carried themselves at the funeral service." We marched,

13:00 slow marched from Princes Bridge to St Kilda junction, it's a long way, its about three-mile, and stood at attention at the junction when the cortège came past, I think it was headin' for Brighton cemetery or somewhere like that, down that way. So there you are, that's…

Yeah sure.

…not, opposite to lieutenants,

13:30 captains and brigadiers, they go the opposite way. Brigadier's minor, major-generals a little bit higher, lieutenant-generals a bit higher again and general is higher, and then field-marshal is above that again, in case you didn't know.

It's good to have clarification. Can we go back to the Northern Territory?

Yeah.

You were there for fourteen-months.

Yeah.

What was in that, you were a motor-bike orderly you said, or despatch rider as such?

Yeah.

14:00 **What sort of, what messages or what would you be carrying with you?**

I wouldn't know cause they were sealed orders and you take 'em to the signals officer and give it to him, it'd be something to do with battalion or corps, or something. But you wouldn't know, you'd wait and no reply and away you'd go back to your own base again. But we did that from Noonamah when we first got there which wasn't so bad, it was only twenty-mile from Darwin, but when you got to Adelaide River you were seventy-six mile

14:30 from Darwin and a corrugated road, that's what put me in hospital with all this stomach upsets. If I'd a driven for another six-months I might've left all my insides up in the Northern Territory. But I went back onto the utilities then and goin' to get the rations for the different mobs, takin' prisoners down to Brocks Creek too, for their misdemeanours. Brocks Creek was a detention barracks in the Northern Territory.

15:00 They used to find gold there after the war. So I might a been walkin' over gold mines when I was takin' these prisoners down there. They weren't too happy about bein' escorted down there by me, but I was only doin' my job.

What the prisoners from, were taken where…?

From, no this is prisoners who had misdemeanoured in their units. No, not foreigners, no.

Yeah, not POWs.

Not POWs, no. Just they were prisoners because they were gonna do time in the detention

15:30 barracks.

Like you had done in Jerusalem.

What I had done in Jerusalem yeah, I could feel empathy with 'em because I knew what they were goin'

through. But anyhow that's it, that's life. 'You win a few and you lose a few and you get murdered', as the saying goes, but crucified be more the word, you get crucified and do time for something you reported as missin' the bus, as simple as that. I often thought about appealing it all these

16:00 years later but they said you'd have no hope, all your witnesses'd be dead. Which is true, they are too. So there you are. I got a stain on my character.

Would that have had any bearing on your potential for promotion?

No, no. It was I got me pay book somewhere and it's entered in it, confined to, you know fined so many days. They fined me fourteen-days pay

16:30 and I think they put it down as fifteen instead a fourteen, so they owe me five-bob, touched me for five and sixpence exchange money, proficiency pay.

That'd be worth a bit with inflation, so.

Yeah, I don't think it works under five-shillings, it's got a be ten-bob or over or something. It just a machinery thought that goes through, money thought. How would you be if you did attack 'em and say you owe me five-bob for you touched me back in 1940,

17:00 they'd laugh at you wouldn't they.

So how did it with the motor-bike stuff, how did that differ from what in Intelligence section would a been doing? I mean you said you had different titles, but was it actually the same work?

You were transferring messages sealed, and you couldn't read them, or you dare not read them because you, it could a been official secrets or something, it could a been in those days,

17:30 there was people who probably of Japanese origin extraction in the Northern Territory might be sendin' messages to the Japs. That's my cat back in. C'mon Littley. C'mon. c'mon girl.

Here she comes.

C'mon, c'mon. Come up here.

She can sit in for the interview.

C'mon mate. C'mon, the people won't hurt you, they're

18:00 friends. C'mon girl.

Okay sorry.

You might have your photo taken now.

Look at those claws. She's got her claws out. Yeah, they're for me.

But she pulls 'em in, she won't hurt me. It's all right mate.

Just comin' to say hi.

Go and have a sticky nose. Yes, I'm sorry bout that, but that's my wonderful pet. She's nearly human. A pity she can't

18:30 speak. Where were you? In the Northern Territory.

So we were in the Northern Territory.

These despatches you dare not open them up and no-one'd ever tell ya, they'd say, "Okay sign for it." And they'd take it over and you'd go back and say, "There's the signature for it." And they'd put that away in a file somewhere. All rather mundane you know, just day to day proposition.

19:00 **The air raids in Darwin went on for some time, there were first ones, but they kept going for a number of months?**

Yeah, at least another ninety-eight air raids on the Northern Territory after the 19th of December and I did get a job, now you've heard of the flying doctor service? Doctor Fenton, have you ever heard of him? Well we had an S. Sup. O, a senior supply officer, and his name was Perry, Wick Perry.

19:30 They organised a shoot, he was in the air force, the flying doctor, at Groote Island which is just off the coast of the Northern Territory, a wild turkey hunt, so they shot about sixty turkeys and bought 'em back to Adelaide River and put 'em in the cool store. So I was at ASC headquarters and I was detailed with another bloke to go down to the cool stores

20:00 and pluck all these turkeys. Now when something's been half frozen and it's rigor-mortis has set in, it's a little bit hard to get feathers off, pickin' 'em off one by one. So we're in dire straights, we can't do it, there was no hot water to pour over 'em and soften them, so we said we'll skin 'em. So we skun the whole bloody lot and when they cooked 'em everything shrivelled up for the officers mess. Never heard

any complaints about it.

20:30 We just couldn't pluck 'em, so we skun 'em. True story.

What about with, sorry go on.

No, go on. What about…?

I was gonna say with the prisoners that you were transporting down you said, you know…

Down to Brocks Creek, yeah.

Brocks Creek was it, you could empathise with them, did you get chatting to a lot a these fellas or was there not much opportunity?

No, well they were in the back of the ute like in a cage thing and I was in the front with one of the provos, cause the provos used to take 'em down

21:00 there and lock 'em and then I'd drive them, drive the provos back to Adelaide River or wherever they had to go to. No, I didn't converse with them much but they were only minor, it might be ten days CB [Confined to Barracks] for bein' two-hours late doin' something or refusing to obey a lawful command or something like that. That type of thing. Or bein' away without leave. That's about it, there was nothing serious, there was no murders or attacks or anything.

21:30 They used to drink jungle juice. Have you ever tried to drink, you wouldn't a tried the jungle juice, I never tried it. It was made of boot polish, kerosene, methylated spirits and something else and they used to put, currents and sultanas in it to make 'em active. Then they'd set it all alight with a match and the metho would burn up, then they'd smother it, then that concoction they mix with lolly water, lemonade, and have

22:00 a cocktail.

No thanks.

I reckon some of 'em would've had ulcers when they got out a the army for sure, burnt ulcers. That's true too, they used to make Jungle Juice they called it. You heard of jungle juice?

Yeah, yeah I've heard about that. I never got the recipe down like that.

Yeah.

But now I know. You started drinking in Adelaide, you had the three pints and you were sort of cactus but

22:30 **did you sort of drink a bit more regularly after that?**

Only when we got rationed, we used to get a two bottles a week and I used to go for the Abbots lager, two bottles of Abbots lager a week. But in the hot weather up there you assimilate very quick. But you wouldn't drink it all at once, you'd wait, one night you might have half a dozen bottles with half a dozen blokes and have a bit of a yarn you know, after sundown

23:00 and then hit the sack and you used to have mosquito nets, everyone had mosquito nets cause if you didn't have 'em, I woke up one night and I thought I was bein' kidnapped because they were bloody near carryin' me away, these giant mozzies, I hadn't put the net around me. God did I get bitten and from then on I made sure I tucked that net in around the be every night and if you had your arm up against the net you'd get bitten again, you had to keep

23:30 yourself tucked in and they were giant mozzies. I used to be on guard duty at Adelaide River outside ASC headquarters and you'd be standing there and there was a light, like a Tilley light, not electric light a Tilley light, a Tilley lamp, that orange or that whitish glare something like that, and you'd be goin' boonk, boonk squashin' 'em, and there was blood spurtin' out everywhere and by the time you finished you'd say, "Jesus I've been

24:00 cut." This is mozzies, fully loaded up with blood serum. I was givin' 'em blood transfusions and probably animals and others too. So if you got bitten by 'em, you didn't know what you was gonna get. I never suffered from malaria or anything because I didn't go to the islands, I missed out on the islands when I had to go down to Heidelberg to have my operation. But my unit went up there and they all suffered from malaria.

24:30 **Where did the unit go to exactly?**

To Lae, they were biscuit bombers they called 'em then, the composite company and they're dropping supplies. They go up in the old D-3s the Douglas, the back-bone of the American army, DC-3s and dropped rations out by parachute to different areas which was hard to get at and this is

25:00 right up till the end of the war they were doin' that and they come back in '45. They went up there in '44 and come back in nearly a year later when the war finished. That was the VJ day or VP day, whichever you like to call it.

So if not for the wrist, you might, you'd a probably been up there yourself?

I would a been, if I hadn't a been, I was made B2, so they couldn't take me away, B-Class which was a good thing as far as

25:30 I was concerned cause I didn't want to go to the bloody islands either, not you know, seein' blokes that come back and they were like scarecrows some of 'em and they were yellow, full of Atebrin.

So when the unit did come back in '45, did you catch up with the guys you used to work with?

No, no, I'd transferred, I'd been transferred into the Vic LFC Car Company then. Don't put your claw, hey.

26:00 Thank you girl, nicely, nicely.

She's behaving now.

Yeah.

Did you ever get into Darwin the town itself?

Yeah, well I did, I went in there at least once a week for six-months takin' messages and the Don Hotel, that was one of the pubs that got wrecked in the first raid, half the Don Hotel we had down in

26:30 Adelaide River as our quarters, our mess tent, mess hut and the whole lot. We souvenired what was left up there and took it down to Adelaide River. Ta, ta mate, you're a bit sharp with the claws. Yeah, so that's every day to Darwin. There was nothing in Darwin, very little. It had Vesty's meatworks there, that was just rust, rusted out. He was a big

27:00 British cattle baron of the Northern Territory, Vesty, Lord Vesty. But no they made millions out of the Northern Territory before the war and probably after the war too. They were out near Fanny Bay which where the boob was, the prison was at Fanny Bay too. See I know a lot about prisons I knew where they were but I didn't go to Fanny Bay, no not, I'd learnt my lesson in Jerusalem.

27:30 **Were there any raids or at least sort of threats on...?**

Yeah, at night, mainly at night at dusk or during the night and they used to have the Yank fighters up with night vision and we used to listen onto the local channel, we could tune in on the radio and pick up the Yanks talkin' to each other. Japanese you know so many degrees left or so many degrees right, look out there's someone on your tail and all that sort a thing. They were a fair way away, you couldn't hear

28:00 any machine gun fire and that. But they were up there keepin' watch over the skies over Darwin. But even then as I say, they got through and I'm sure that I read it there was ninety-eight air raids after the 19th of February raid on Darwin. So that's a fair bit of activity.

So where were you camped for most of that time in the Northern Territory?

Noonamah

28:30 which is about twenty-k's, twenty-mile south of Darwin where the railway line used to cross the road and about another fifty-odd miles down the road at Adelaide River.

And what were the, what were conditions like there?

Humid, you could have a, at Adelaide River, it had the pipe, the water line that ran for about fifty-miles down the top a the road above the surface, and at three-o'clock in the mornin' you could have a hot shower.

29:00 Just turn on the cold tap and you got hot water comin' out all the time. That's how hot it used to be, it used to last all through the night. Then it'd boil up again the next day, and then cool down very gradually overnight. So you always had hot water, hot showers and they told me it's still above the road the water line to Adelaide River. I haven't been up that way ever, but it'd be a good trip there now

29:30 wouldn't it? Up there Stuart Highway, with that big mad speedway as they call it, there's no speed limit in the Northern Territory, or there was none till that bloke got killed a few years ago, that tourist or something or racing car driver wasn't it? They had a smash doin' about a hundred and eighty, two-hundred k's an hour? Do you remember it?

Yeah, I don't remember no, not that.

They may a put a speed limit on it then.

30:00 She's still wants to come up and sit on my knee.

Yeah, but a bit camera shy.

But she's got used to it there sittin' under the chair.

Yeah, yeah.

Yeah, so that was the Northern Territory more or less for fourteen-months. Working and listening, I used to listen to the Japanese broadcasters from Jakarta as they called it, they used to read out POWs names, hopin' to hear my brothers name but I never ever heard of it.

30:30 But he was there.

You told us about coming home and your father meeting you at Spencer Street,

Yeah.

Had he had any news of your brother at that time?

No, only that he was missing believed POW, missing in action. That was 1942 when I come home. So he'd this was in about April, March, I came home for leave, seven-days

31:00 leave in I think it was June and he'd been a POW in December the previous year, so that was in must a been '41 and didn't know where he was, we didn't find out that he was B-Force that went to Borneo. So the Japanese must a got, let that information out. But as I say, they never found his body, so no one knows what

31:30 happened to him. It's only surmising that he died of cerebral malaria, probably died from a bullet in the brain, that's what the Japs did on that death march. I got a couple a books there one by Lynette Silver's the latest one, he gets a mention only his name in the VX-62247 and the age he was, they said he was twenty-one when he died but he put his age up like I did,

32:00 unfortunately that didn't do any good for him.

So after the Northern Territory you said you came on hospital boat around to Brisbane is that right? What was the, do you remember the name of the boat, the ship?

Yes that was the [HMAHS] Manunda hospital ship, Manunda. You've heard about that?

Yep.

She was in Darwin Harbour on the 19th and got scarred in the bombing. But she

32:30 took us from Townsville, around down to Sydney.

Again, what were the conditions like onboard the ship and how were you treated?

Great, great. The well we were on deck savouring the pleasure of driving of a night time with all the lights on and the cook underneath, there was a scuttle sort a thing, and there's a cook there makin' drinks and he made me an egg flip, the first time I've ever had an egg flip in me life,

33:00 and I went to bed that night and had a wet dream, so that was an egg flip did to me. True. I'd never had one before that. But when you're only what, I was then twenty, in '42 I was twenty-one, '43, no I come round in the hospital ship in '44,

33:30 so I was twenty-three and that's when I, as I say, come down and met my bride-to-be at Heidelberg.

So she was pretty much the first woman you'd set eyes on in Heidelberg?

In Heidelberg, she was. As she said, "You'll get nothin' to eat here, it's too bloody late, the kitchen's closed." So we got a cuppa tea and, well I never drank tea but, we got a sandwich sort a thing, you

34:00 know, something to take on. I never drank tea cause the army cured me of drinkin' tea. They used to stew it, keep it boilin' for hours and nothin' worse than boiled tea. It's all right mate, you can sit down with me. She's gone, cottoned onto you Colin [interviewer].

Yeah she likes me, normally cats don't take a shine to me. So how long had Ida been working at Heidelberg?

Only about ten-months.

34:30 Well I dunno how long she'd been because we got married in May and she became pregnant in August, and then she went till she had to say I'm pregnant and they had to discharge her. So he was born, the war was still on when Graham was born in 1945, he was born the 7th of May, '45. So I had everything

35:00 calculated out, it wasn't a forced marriage or anything like that, it was twelve-months between her conceiving and him, being born, and it was about sixteen-months between Ian and him bein' born, you know, from Graham. His birthday's December 19. So sixteen months, I did it all by the book Col.

I'll take your word for it Steve.

35:30 **No, no the dates bear that out. That's, yep fair enough. So what sort of a ceremony was it, the wedding ceremony?**

All army, my sister was a bridesmaid, a friend of mine from Heidelberg Allan Trevina, not Trevina, Truellen, Truellen he was the best man and his name's on the marriage certificate. But after that when I

went from Heidelberg to Ballarat con [convalescent] camp

36:00 to, I was there for about, between Heidelberg and Ballarat for about eight-months before I finally went to the GDD [General Details Depot] at Royal Park and then ended up in Vic LFC Car Company. The wrist was still in plaster all that time.

So what work did they have to do on it?

Bone graft, what they call a radial bone graft. They had to chip it, there's the radial bone there and they had to chip it down into this, it's like a fulcrum, this is what your wrist, twists on

36:30 it was in three pieces. Well it's still in three pieces but they're all fused together by arthritis. That's why that lump's there all the time, but you look at it, not one day's gone past in my life since it happened that I haven't felt this bloody wrist I tell ya. And I've knocked it and had it sprained and its come up like a balloon, I've been back in hospital to x-ray it again, is there any further damage, but no, wrap it up and bandage it up.

37:00 She'll come good. I used to punch the hell out of this wrist so that I hurt it, then when it was dying down the normal pain didn't seem so bad, true. That's the way it used to get ya. Ian my youngest son that just left, he used to massage it for me, and it'd bloody hurt while he's massaging, that's all right and then when he stopped the pain would subside that was normal pain which

37:30 wasn't as acute as the pain he was tryin' to help me with. Sounds sadistic doesn't it?

If it works. Were you given pain, were you taking pain killers or…?

No, no never took a pain killer in my life. They did give me morphine they day they, the night they operated on me, or the day they operated on it to assuage the pain that was there, once, that's I had a needle that's all. But I never believed in takin' pain killers. So I got used to living with it. You do get used to pain after

38:00 a while, you can, shrug it off. But it wasn't a great pain but it was just a little, like a tooth ache nag at you all the time. Still does every now and again if I knock it or if I twist the wrong way. Especially if she scratches me.

Sounds like that was quite a tricky operation, I think we've actually interviewed someone who was involved in the bone grafting operations?

Yeah, well that's it was,

38:30 the old name for it was navicular then the new name came out scaphoid, footballers get it very often when they land awkwardly on their wrist. Well I went over a sand bank down about another four-feet further down to what I was, the level I was on and I put me hand down to break the fall and that's when, boong.

39:00 **So how long in Heidelberg?**

Off and on eight-months.

And Ballarat?

Ballarat, Heidelberg eight-months.

Right.

In plaster, yeah.

So why back and forth? I mean, why?

39:30 Con camp then back to open up the plaster to x-ray it again, no hadn't take, had to replaster it, back to con camp. This month after month for about seven or eight times.

So you're only getting to see your wife, you'd go come to Heidelberg and catch up with the missus and then?

Yeah, yeah, we used to meet at my parents. I came down and I'd get a night's leave or a day leave, not a night. You had to be back in camp, back in the hospital every night too. So over my parent's place who lived in

40:00 East St Kilda. So that was a chance to produce or reproduce, marital values, congenial rights whatever they like to call it. Yeah.

And tell us about Ballarat because you obviously spent a fair bit of time there?

Cold, it snowed when I was there. Snowed at Ballarat. We used to sit in the huts,

40:30 they had huts like they did in the, Nissan Hut, had a fire, a brazier in the middle on the floor, we used to stoke it up with wood and it used to be red and we used to sit around that ear bashin' and you go to, you still go to bed with your, you wouldn't put your pyjamas on, you didn't have bloody pyjamas but you'd go

with your long strides on, underpants the whole lot and a jumper on and a couple a blankets and it's still cold.

41:00 So I got used to livin' with the cold. Reminded me of me days in the cow cockies when I used to have to cuddle up to the bloody cows to keep warm, especially up in Dimboola.

Tape 8

00:30 **Okay so tell us a bit more, just sort of paint a picture for us of what Ballarat was like during your time there?**

Well, we used to go into Ballarat and have a few beers, cause nothing else to do, you'd get leave everyday sort a thing but you had to be back in camp at a certain time before midnight, every night, and they had trams in Ballarat running up night trams and they had what they called Cheer Up huts, where you could go and get a meal

01:00 for next to nothing, you'd go to the pub and have a beer. We used to go to a pub in, I forget the name of the street, it was called the Plough and Harrow anyway, and every time you went into the Plough and Harrow, you were school, you bought three beers, the fourth beer the publican would buy, just out of goodness of his heart. So we spent many hours in that pub. No drinking to excess because

01:30 you had to pace yourself out. But just havin' a game of darts or something like that. Good pub. I think it was in, the name of the street is just about on the tip of my tongue, you know Lydiard Street, Ballarat, which is the famous hotel is in it, the old brick building, I'll

02:00 think a the name of that, that's Lydiard Street anyway, and it runs opposite to that, to the pub with the Plough and Harrow in it. Nope I can't remember it no, but it'll come later on.

That's all right. So I get a sense Ballarat, you had the Americans there as well if I'm not, I not sure if they were there so much then?

I never seen a Yank in Ballarat.

No.

But I know girls were pregnant

02:30 to Yanks in Ballarat. They were a little bit promiscuous, the girls in Ballarat, so I heard, I never experienced it, after all I was only just newly married. I had enough to satisfy me when I went home on leave.

So eventually you got the all-clear with the wrist, yeah?

Yeah, they took the plaster off and said that it still hasn't knitted the bone, but there's signs of it uniting,

03:00 so we'll just take it easy and that's where I went to the GDD and, you know, became a driver for several other people in the state. Paymasters and Vegemite makers and POW inspections camps yeah, Major McClusky.

And what, you told us about the, you'd go up sort of Swan Hill and Deniliquin back, King Lake and all that, what was the purpose

03:30 **of those trips again?**

They used to have the rice paddies up in the Riverina, the rice paddies are still there and they used to have POWs looking after the rice paddies, so he would go and inspect their condition and when we got back to King Lake West, they had Italians there who were out in the forest felling trees, loggers, POWs

04:00 under supervision all the time. They had their own canteen, the whole lot there, you could buy Cooee cigarettes, I think it was, forty in a pack, for six-pence. But that's all they, let the Italians smoke Cooee cigarettes, nothin' like the top a the, Clubman or anything like that, it was State Express or Cooee. Cheap and nasty it was.

And these were POWs who'd come, who'd been brought over from the desert?

From the Middle East yeah,

04:30 from the desert yeah, Italiano. Germans up in Tatura, Japanese alongside them up in Tatura and Italians in the rice paddies and Japanese in the rice paddies cause they had a big break out in Cowra as you know, durin' the war, but they still had Japanese workin' on the rice paddies around the Riverina. They were probably not as bad as the ones

05:00 tried to break out of Cowra.

So did you get to see them personally? Did you see how they were being treated and all that?

Yeah, they offered me a meal in Japanese in the kitchen, no way would I eat anything cooked by a Japanese, I just actually, I didn't ignore them, I just turned round, "No understand," and walked out. I wouldn't eat there, no. That's because I knew they had my brother and he, I didn't know he wasn't coming home

05:30 but that was enough to put me off the Japs. So there you are.

And you said you drove, was it Frank Walker, the Vegemite…

Fred Walker.

Fred Walker, sorry, did you have a conversation with him?

Several, several, yeah.

What would you talk about?

Different things, where I'd served, you know what I had done in the army cause I used to wear my Africa Star ribbon on my service dress. As a matter of

06:00 fact that Africa Star someone dug it out the other day, it's a bit dilapidated and bloody worn now, but it's still around somewhere. I used to wear that and which you know that I served in the Middle East, and he used to ask me about the war and my family and what I did, used to tell him the stories about workin' for cow cockies and he used to tell me about Kraft Walker Cheese Company cause it was known as the Kraft Walker Cheese Company.

06:30 Now it's just the Kraft Cheese Company, but he was one of the main founders of it and he lived, I know the street he lived and I could take you to the house in Reynolds Parade, Essendon. Old Fred Walker. But I didn't like him showin' pictures to Japs that's all. I didn't mind the others, the Germans even though they'd sunk the Sydney that was their job.

07:00 But as I say, I didn't know that the Japs had murdered my brother but I'd heard stories about their bestiality from POWs and from what they did do in New Guinea. When I left the Battalion we had a, 2/6th Battalion, they served in New Guinea also, I didn't, they had a big strapping six foot two man, Jim Parkes, he played football with Carlton,

07:30 Jim Parkes, the Japs captured him somewhere in the Owen Stanleys, Sattelberg Ridge or something in an action, and they decapitated him and threw his head back into the line, that's the sort of animals they were.

On that subject of the enemy as it were, I mean you talked about the Italians and how they seemed to rejoice when they were taken prisoner cause it was like thank God it's over,

08:00 **I guess with the Germans your only experience was pilots in Messerschmitts, and that sort of thing,**

And the Austrian Alpine troop bloke, the lieutenant that I struck in Greece in Athens in hospital and he said, "I'm gonna live in Melbourne after the war." But he didn't say which war, whether he's gonna win it or not, he didn't mention that.

He was leaving that open?

I think he was cocky and sayin' Hitler's gonna do the lot.

So what was your opinion of the Germans as soldiers? I mean were they…?

08:30 Well I don't know.

Well even their, I mean you were confronted with the air force, I mean?

Yeah, they were merciless put it that way. But I don't think, I know Australians who were POWs I met them since, I knew them before they were taken POW and none of 'em ever have heard it said they were ill treated. They were strict, stern, and most Australians worked on farms throughout

09:00 Germany and they got on well with the farmers in the country. There were occasions where they were put into high security prisons like, what's that one where they had Hess for years? Spandau yeah, some of them went there because they were trying to escape all the time, this is during the war not after, or well before Hess was

09:30 put there by the Allies after the war, cause he flew a Messerschmitt over Scotland and jumped out to give himself up to try and talk England into doin' something or other. Another story.

When you came back, look I'm thinking not so much the Northern Territory, but when you came back Heidelberg Ballarat and were people, did people show an interest in what you'd done, did people want to ask you, were they inquisitive?

Not really. Unless you went to a

10:00 party at your own friends or something and even then they didn't quiz you too much. They just knew that you was a returned serviceman and they accepted what you'd done you had to do, they didn't press for any information. Didn't no, no one ever come up to me and said you're a so-and-so, although we were, when we did enlist in the army before we went away, we were called by the Communists,

10:30 Blameys five-bob a day murders, you've heard of that expression? It's quite right, in 1939 early 1949, Blamey's five-bob a day murders cause five-bob was a caser in the idiom of those days, five-shillings a caser. You've heard that?

What is a caser, where does that come from?

Five-shillings, a caser. A spin is a ten-pound note. A sane was

11:00 ten-shilling note, a fiddly-did a quid, you know a quid, a zac, sixpence, a tray, thruppence, all that. A deener was a shilling. A swy was two-bob.

Hence two-up, I see?

Yeah, swy.

So how long were you chauffeuring before the war ended yeah?

Before I was discharged? Well

11:30 I'd say the last eight-months of the war. I think the war ended in August, August 15th or something 1945, about eight or ten-months, which was quite an experience, I got to see a lot a Victoria which I've never been back to see King Lake or, I've been to Flowerdale after the foxes and all that sort a thing, but that's not far from King Lake, in fact

12:00 you have to go through King Lake West to get to Flowerdale, up through Whittlesea. But no, I've got good memories of the POW camps because it was interestin' to me because the bloke I was taking around was interesting, Fred Walker of Kraft Walker Cheese Company, and he told

12:30 me that he was on a, workin' on a project, a new taste he said, a new taste. But actually they had invented it I think in the 1920's or something, even in 1944 they were, or '45 they were still experimenting with it. Cause the Poms had Marmite, so they wanted Vegemite, a vegie extract and they call it Vegemite, but marmite is made of

13:00 bullocks blood or something like that, totally different thing altogether.

So what was his position in the army?

He was an honorary film projector for the POWs. It was an honorary thing he used to do with the blessing of the armed services. They'd allow him into the camps and show the POWs films. Now whether they were in Japanese or German or not I don't know, but I think they were all

13:30 English titles because he wouldn't a been able to you know subtitle them or something I don't know.

So it was more of a sort of a humanitarian thing?

Yeah, and who'd wanna show Japs humanitarian traits, I wouldn't. I still hate 'em. And I know you got to live with 'em, my first truck I bought had to be a Japanese one, that's the only one I could afford, it was a Toyota truck, van.

14:00 Long wheel base van, to earn a living. So your inhibitions about Japanese soon disappear when you got to get a living out of one of their products. But then in Queensland everything you see up there, or it was when I was there last, as I said a long while ago, things were in Japanese signs in Surfers Paradise in Japanese, what's the world coming to?

14:30 I'm not the only one who won't have a bar of the Japs. They were bastards. They were utter, utter cads, I'll put it more distinctly. Who'd wanna bayonet someone while they're yellin' for mercy enough and they just collapse with exhaustion and malnutrition? I s'pose they were doin' 'em a favour by killing them, put 'em out of their misery.

15:00 But that happened, over two-thousand times in Borneo, terrible.

So did your family get any sort of closure when it came to your brother?

No, you know about four or five years ago they gave the parents of prisoners of war twenty-five thousand dollars each, as a

15:30 recompense to their loss of their loved one. Now my mother died in '25, how could they recompense her, my father died in 1948 and then twenty, forty-years, fifty-years down the track they're gonna give him, he couldn't get twenty-five thousand bucks either. I reckon as I was the next of kin I should a got it, but they said no, you can't get it either. But I was the only surviving member of the family.

16:00 Male that is.

Is that from Japan or Australia?

Australia yeah, all the POWs got twenty five thousand, it's only about three or four-years ago, cash in hand, they thought it was great. I would a thought it was great too, twenty-five thousand four-years ago would a been handy for me, might a even saved my wife's life, I might've you know although she never told me she had this thing put inside her.

16:30 Unfortunate. Then discharge came along. I elected to get out, there was a plan five-year service with three-years service and two-years overseas they allowed me the two-years overseas all but thirteen-days, I could get out straight away, so I opted straight out. Went to GGD, went up before

17:00 medical board, they said, looked at my records and they said, "Shake hands," and I'd shake hands, have a look at me hand and the chairman of the board whose a little bloke Colonel Spoiers, he's a doctor, Spoiers, S-P-O-I-E-R-S something like that, said, "We'll give him a little one," so they discharged me with a 10-per cent disability which was five-shillings a week, ten-shillings a fortnight. That would go on

17:30 for life. That was in 1945 and it took me till 2001 to get to a hundred per cent. Long time.

And what does it take to be able to, to get up to that hundred per cent?

Well, you got to be ill, you got to have flashbacks, you got to have mental stress, I mightn't show mental stress but I have got mental stress I know, I know what I think about I go

18:00 off. My wife used to drive me to drink, and as I said, I was a teetotaller. I'd get down the RSL club and I wouldn't come home till all hours of the night sort a thing, half stung, go to work the next day and do the same thing the next night. Not talking about the war but tryin' to forget about it. So I probably upset her a bit that way, but I still loved her. But

18:30 yeah that's what stress does to you, that's what memories do to you. I'm older and wiser now. I'm, as I say, eighty-four, as far as the services go, but they still write me as the same age, I'm eighty-two, put me birth, you're eighty-two you can't get this cause you're too old or your too young. Don't like to be called too young at eighty-two, they reckon that's a compliment.

19:00 **So those sorts of problems your talking about with the drink and all that was that something that happened sort of immediately, was that really directly post-war or?**

Yeah, yeah, I couldn't settle down. I went back to my old job as I said, then I went driving a truck for Koss and Sons, then Mayne Nic [Nicholas], then cab driving, bus driving, truck driving again. I worked for one company for seventeen-years in Moorabbin in Melbourne

19:30 then I had to go and have an operation on this wrist again, I had what they call a bandit nerve they had to move down through here to release the pressure here on the nerve, and whilst I was in hospital they said, "You can take your long service leave." I'd been with 'em for seventeen-years, I said, "No way, no way, I'll take my long service leave when I get out a hospital, I'm on sick pay at present." And they wrote me a letter

20:00 sacking me on the spot. But I did get my pro-rata long service leave eventually. But that's good company cause I wouldn't take long service leave while I was being operated on, they sent me a letter to say your services are no longer required. They're still goin', the same firm over in

20:30 just near Mentone, not Mentone, the suburb between Dingley and Mentone. You know it?

You said Moorabbin before, but it's not that?

No, no they shifted from Moorabbin but they're still going over in this just off, you know Lower Dandenong Road? Runs up from Mentone, Warrigal Road intersection, runs into Dandenong, Scoresby, not Scoresby,

21:00 or to Southern Golf Club?

Dunno, Beaumaris or...?

Yeah, yeah, it's a bit further over than Beau.

Yeah.

I'll think of the name of it in a minute.

My world sort of ends at Beaumaris, I'm not sure, so yeah.

Yeah, Beaumaris.

So was that retirement after that or did you, you said you did your own stuff for ten-years?

Yeah, I worked, you've heard of Burgess Fine Furniture? They're all, that's from Burgess, that dining

21:30 setting's from Burgess, my bedside tables and bed head in there are from Burgess and my bedside table, I bought 'em all through Burgess and I worked and I was there number one driver for about ten-years. Then they said I couldn't sell the good will, they just employ someone else. That's when I moved

up here and I worked for my son here for a couple a years until I retired in ’86. I’ve had a varied and long

22:00 association with vehicles and open air, I couldn’t work in a factory, not after what I’ve been through.

Now you told us about the cabs, how long were you driving taxis for?

From ’48 to ’52 about five-years. Had many experiences, I’ve told you one of ’em, about the barrels, and I’ve had arguments, domestics in the back seat and someone get in and, “Follow that car,”

22:30 or “Loose that car.” I’ve torn round corners in Swanston Street against a red light, so they’d have to stop and I’d go up Bourke Street, then round into Lonsdale Street and come up behind ’em sort a thing, they didn’t know where I was. Well done driver, but no extras. No tips. So who knows what they were doing, they were ordering me to this, so I did it. Follow that car, then you could easily lose a car in front of you in traffic.

23:00 That wasn’t so bad. But to leave a car behind you and lose him is a different kettle of fish, I had to break the law to do it, that only happened twice in five-years, that did happen.

Do you know what the story was behind that?

No, no didn’t no. I thought it might a been a jealous boyfriend or a jealous husband or something else. It was a male not a female. It might’ve been his wife in the cab in front, dunno. You didn’t ask about those questions.

23:30 **Was that a, I reckon cabbying is pretty frustrating sort of, can be a pretty you know, frustrating gig being out on the roads all day, do you think that was a sort of a good career to go into straight after the war, a couple a years after the war?**

Well it was different, different. I played football with Yellow Cabs, it was the Yellow Cabs I was drivin’ for and I played, they had a team in what they called the Sat’dee morning league, I played

24:00 football then for, ’48 I played one game cause I had a crook ankle, I was playing for Hyatt in the Federal league. And then I stood out after one game and I came back in ’49, I got a trophy there Most Consistent Player YCFC [Yellow Cabs Football Club], 1949, I won it again the next year, Most Consistent Player 1950, but I think that’s disappeared over the years,

24:30 I think it was a tea set and sugar bowl or something like that. You can see, the other one’s there, the tray is engraved but it’s gone black, it’s tarnished. Just a memory. But I had some good times in Yellow Cabs. Went away end of season trip to Colac, got sick, was in bed with a temperature a hundred and three for two-days. They drove me back home, I still, in me

25:00 overcoat, never seen any. All I did, I got out a bed and seen the Melbourne to Warrnambool road race go through Camperdown. Stopped at the Camperdown Hotel where I did see, that’s the year Stan Bonney won it, he won it twice Stan Bonney, cause he was from Richmond, Richmond cycling club. That’s why I remember it I was a Richmond supporter.

Just talking about sort of coming back and

25:30 **trying to settle down, you said you could have flashbacks?**

Yeah.

What sort of things would you be seeing? What moments would you flash back to?

Blokes drowning for one, bombs headin’ towards you, you dream about that and you’d wake up falling from precipice, you’re falling, you’re falling you know you’re gonna hit the bottom then you wake up, it’s a dream. Whether that’s to do with the war or not, I don’t know. But

26:00 it’s things like that and if I see a film with war in it I hear the screams of the Stukas with the siren in their wings, I see bullets headin’ towards me and then stopping, I still see all that mentally. I see it like a picture and the stop and you breath a sigh of relief. Then I wake up, then

26:30 I can’t think what I was dreaming about, I know I was dreamin’ about something, then about a day after or two-days after it’ll hit me, I dreamt about that bloody Dornier makin’ a pass at me, the three of ’em and the one in the middle was mine, aimed at me. Yeah, you think a things like that. But that’s what I say, unscathed only for that bloody

27:00 Messerschmitt but he’s caused me more pain than he ever knew he was gonna cause. Sneakin’ up behind a man like that durin’ a war, it’s terrible.

Speaking of films have there been any films, any movies which captured the sort of experience that you went through? Any films that you think are accurate in the way they depict war?

Not really. Maybe Forty-thousand Horsemen.

27:30 But that was a different war, that was about the Light Horse from the First World War. I did see one

with Richard Burton in called Tobruk, he was an officer in Tobruk, playing the part of an Australian with his stilted British accent, I didn't hear any Australian officer talk that way, they were all more or less like I talk. No there's not, I haven't

28:00 seen that many. I've seen a few now that I've got Austar [pay TV] and I look at the History channel a lot and I see a lot of that on the History channel. It's like a magnet, I've got to go back to the History channel to see what's on. Probably, you're hungry.

So, I mean I think you kind of said you came, you started off callow,

28:30 **you came back a man?**

Yeah.

I mean can you sort of elaborate on that and how your sort of war service changed you?

Well, when you see destruction and death it does change you, it puts you've got a different perception on your own life then and as I said the back of your mind all that happened to me, now am I going to make it and that's got to

29:00 change anyone who thinks that way because it's what is it, it's something you can't, you can't put a word on it but, it's not intuition, it's not fate, I s'pose it is fate. You've got to be fatalistic to think about, and not think about and don't think about what's going to happen, it's going to

29:30 happen. You're positive in your own mind that way. My doctrine is that it won't happen if your psyche tells you it's not going to happen. I s'pose its all to do about your psyche, your lifespan, it's inbuilt into everyone. You've got psyche, it's what you think deep down, it's inside you. As I tell people

30:00 my inner core will tell me when I'm for the big jump. I'll know it well in advance. That's the way I live, I will know it. I mightn't tell anyone about it but I'll know it. Well, they'll probably guess because it will change me, I know it'll change me. It changes everyone when you're facing the reap. But until that time comes I'm

30:30 gonna enjoy myself. Not now that my wife's not here but more so, she would a wanted me to go on and enjoy myself, not to mope around. Cop it sweet in other words in the words of the vernacular. She'll be right mate.

Do you think we've learnt our lesson from

31:00 **the experiences that your generation went through with World War II?**

Different things happen now. Terrorism wasn't in it. Bestiality was there and vindictiveness was there, as far as that eastern nation were concerned, but I don't think we could ever envisage even in the Second World War the things that happen in Iraq today.

31:30 Another eighteen killed over night in another bomb explosion. That's five hundred and, over five hundred Yanks have been killed since the official cessation of it. It's something got to change. Something's got to be done but what it is, who knows. Do they drop an atom bomb on the seat of unrest which is the towns in Iraq which were loyal to

32:00 Hussein? Bit drastic maybe, but will you catch the right people? Will it stop the other killing? Who knows, it could go on forever. I wonna know who finances it all, where's the money come from? Whose making money out of it? Someone's got to be makin' money out of it. What do you think?

Along those lines yeah.

Yeah,

32:30 they got to buy the material to fire at someone, they got to buy the material to make something and let's, what is the economic situation of Iraq? Who works there? No one seems to work there so where does the money come from? They're runnin' round shootin' off guns at will, poor old Will he always gets shot at, and they got to pay for it, they don't get it for nothing. Someone's got to make it,

33:00 whose makin' money? The unsung heroes, multi-millionaires who sit in the background of corporate companies. Makes you think doesn't it?

Now Steve we've probably only got about five, ten-minutes left on tape so maybe just a couple of, we're sort of wrapping up already I guess.

Okay.

Just going back to your war service, some rather general questions but I was wondering if you can maybe

33:30 **just describe some of the characters that have left an impression with you from your, you've probably, I mean, you have as we've gone through the interview, but some of the people that, you know those characters who remain most vividly in your memory? The people who stand out to you?**

Lieutenant Dean. Old hillbilly style with a jug on his shoulder, gluggin' OP rum and nearly burnin' his throat out. I'm a born leader of men, Joe Rigby.

34:00 The colonel that gave me fourteen-days Jerusalem, Loveridge, I hate the old bastard. If he was alive today I'd call him an old bastard anyway. But he'd probably laugh it off, I'd probably laugh it off, but I'd have had the privilege of telling him what I thought of him. I couldn't do it while I was in uniform, I would a got another fourteen-days. No, that's you know, characters, good blokes, bastards

34:30 who'd rob you at the drop a your hat. But on the main, good Australian, all fair-dinkum blokes, officers, ORs [Other Ranks], navy blokes who saved me, they get a special mention in my memories, especially on the Vendetta and HMS Hasty. The blokes that escorted us

35:00 overseas, the Lascar seamen who told me to take Worcestershire sauce to stop me bein' sick and it worked, I dunno if it works on everyone but it worked on me. And that's about it, good officers, the bad officers, the bloke we lost overboard, I felt sorry for him. He has always had a special place in my memory, what a bloody awful way to go. Five-days out of Fremantle

35:30 and five-days out of Colombo, where'd he go? It's a long way to the seashore and it's a long way to the Cocos Islands too, that's the only land in-between. Terrible, terrible way to go. I still think the man they found in 1942 in a Carley raft was the bloke who was pushed overboard, Lieutenant so-and-so, I won't mention his name cause if it ever gets out, it might upset the family.

36:00 **So if he had been tossed overboard, I mean what had he done? I mean was it…?**

Well he was a bastard when he was a sergeant, he'd haul 'em up for havin' their lights on after hours and put 'em up before the colonel, he was just tryin' to make life difficult for enlisted men. You've heard the old saying, oh what a bastard or something, as the song goes…

36:30 "Might be kiss me goodnight sergeant major," but he wouldn't kiss you goodnight he'd bloody dob you into the duty officer and then you'd have to go up before the colonel and probably get CB or something like that. He was doin' things like that and uncouth at his remarks to me. You can lead a horse to water but you can't make it drink it, it's the same in the army, you can lead men into battle but you can't make them like you, if you're a

37:00 what we used to call a fair dinkum prick, simple as that. But that's what happened to him and I'm sure they got together and they said, when we get goin', he was made an officer just before, a lieutenant and in those days they gave you two pips not one, so you was a second-lieutenant not a first-lieutenant and they got to him.

37:30 No one goes into a life, and those lifeboats you got to see 'em to believe 'em, they're that taut and tight with rope, you know lanyard rope tightened underneath each bloody ketch around there, you got to undo two to get in one side on the good side, then get out and do a knot on the other side. No way. And then someone said there's a Carley float missing the next day. So

38:00 I dunno whether that ever come out in the evidence, but I think someone might've had a guilty conscience and threw the Carley float over or tossed it overboard, and if he did see it come daylight, this is pitch black at night, you know about midnight or something, still about four or five-hours to float around in the ocean before daylight. One good thing about it, there wasn't many sharks around, we didn't see many but we seen plenty of porpoises goin' across, they used to play under the front a the ship, but never seen any

38:30 sharks, not after we left Fremantle anyway. She's goin' again.

Did you have any personal run-in's with any of the officers?

No, only that Colonel Loveridge that give me fourteen-days, under me breath, what a prick, old bastard. Make an example of me. But I was naïve, I didn't say that I reported to the provo, they charged me with bein'

39:00 ackwilly [AWL] all night from the camp at Beit Jirja when I was in custody all night, so how could I be ackwilly from the camp, but I didn't have enough brains to know that. Christ I was only nineteen then. You've heard that song, 'He Was Only Nineteen'. Yeah. So then blessed relief, discharged and back to civvy street, but couldn't down for

39:30 the next ten-years into any job. Like a lot of others.

And there wasn't really that much assistance was there?

I applied for a job, it's what, the rehabilitation through before I got, or as I got discharged. I had go over H.C. Sleeves, undertakers over near the South African memorial in Albert Road,

40:00 South Melbourne, you know it runs down to the South Melbourne Football Ground, they were there, big, buried all the best people, as the woman told me, "No we only bury the best people." I said, "God, that sounds lovely doesn't it, only the best people." Don't bury paupers, just the best people. That put me off, I said, "No." So I went back to me old job workin' at Silent Rubber Products. I could a been an

undertakers assistant, but no

40:30 I reneged on it. Drivin' a car, outside job. But I lasted bout twelve-months till we got locked out and stuck out on strikes, that's when I became a cab driver and a truck driver and started all my trials and tribulations. Sly groggin', unwittingly sly groggin'.

How did that happen?

Well the nine-gallon on the back of the cab.

Oh that one.

41:00 **I thought you were saying it's more of a career.**

No, no, unwittingly sly groggin' yeah, God I'll sell ya a barrel mate, no problem. He would a been the most surprised man in Christendom.

His lucky day. So have you sort of kept up much association with the 2/6th, has there been…?

I'm on the committee of the 2/6th Battalion Association, I go to the, every general

41:30 meeting, I only went on the committee last year because I was on the vice chairman, vice president of the 39er's for last, up until 2000 for ten-years and then I give it away, the wife, to stop, more time with the wife. So I used to go down there every month, the monthly meeting and to the Battle of Crete, 20th of May, outbreak of war September the 3rd,

42:00 I still go to those.

INTERVIEW ENDS