Australians at War Film Archive

Raymond Norman (Ray) - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:44 Well I was actually born in Leichhardt Street, Leichhardt, I was born at home, 43 Leichhardt Street, Leichhardt. My Mum and Dad were just average people, Dad – I often wondered how they met

01:00 because – I was born in Leichhardt, actually Leichhardt street, 43 Leichhardt street, Leichhardt. Just to an average family. I often wondered how Mum and Dad got together, because Mum was educated, Dad didn't go to school in his life, he could read and write and I had elder brother, elder sister, a younger brother

01:30 and a younger sister who died when she was only about three days old. I remember that very well, even though I was only three. I remember the small coffin in the dining room. We were a close-knit family; Dad even though he wasn't educated, was a great organiser and he became president of the scouts in Leichhardt and as us boys

02:00 grew older, we all joined the cubs and then the scouts. My eldest brother finished up being a cub master at 1st Leichhardt I think 1st Leichhardt Scouts are the oldest continuous troop in New South Wales. They had their 21st birthday when I was still in the cubs so I'd still only be eleven when they had their 21st birthday, so they've been in there a long time.

02:30 I can remember the night that their first hall got blown down and then the one that's there still today was all done with voluntary labour with Dad and different ones of his mates used to go up of a weekend and even before work they'd go up and work. People did that in those days. Dad worked at Metters, Metters Stoves.

03:00 My grandfather come to live with us there, he was an engineer on the colliers that used to bring coal down from Newcastle to Balmain and White Bay and places like that and Pop was great, he was a terrific bloke. And we all played soccer, through the scouts, I left school at

03:30 13 and a half, during The Depression because I had a job at Griffiths Brothers Teas. They used to have the signs on the railway lines in them days, so many miles to Griffiths Brothers. They'd start at Bourke and, "A thousand mile to Griffith Brothers." And then gradually every five miles they'd have these little signs on their very big they were in them days, Griffiths Brothers Tea. Left there, actually got sacked from there,

04:00 because that scar there came from a cup that was thrown at me by the boss's nephew and when I barrelled him, the boss sacked me. There was no unfair dismissal in them days. That happened. I went from there to RB Davies, which was a sweatshop underage, I'm certain,

04:30 underage kids on working machines and one thing another. And when I left there I got – went to Metters, because Dad wasn't working at the time because after we left Leichhardt Street we bought a fish shop

05:00 in Balmain road and Mum and Dad worked that and then we bought one in Norton Street which was a real good business, until Jack Lang [premier of NSW] closed the banks, or the banks closed on Jack Lang, whichever side of politics you were on. Because Catholics in them days, Friday

05:30 was a must for fish. And people'd have a few bob in the bank, would actually draw money out and buy fish of a Friday. So you mightn't do much through the week, but you did make a quid on Friday. But when the banks closed, of course, they couldn't get that money out and we just walked out of that with nothing. That's actually

06:00 that's when I left school and got the job with Griffiths Brothers. But then I eventually went to Metters and that must have been about 1936, I suppose, '37. And they were just starting to realise that a war was coming. Everybody could see a war was coming, but of course you had [British Prime Minister Neville] Chamberlain with his peace feelers and all that sort of business.

06:30 And then Dad eventually got his job back at Metters too. Because they started to do the big fuel stoves for the army camps. And I was working at Metters until the war broke out. I remember we were training for basketball, an American had

07:00 come out for Mick Simmonds and he was trying to get basketball going in those days. And we were playing – because we played soccer together we played basketball together. And the Friday night that they moved into Poland which was the 1st of September, we were playing basketball down the old corridor in Leichhardt and of course on the 3rd of September, they – war was declared

07:30 and I think according to my discharge, it was the 5th of October when a particular mate of mine, Bernie Hakes, we went down – we went down the navy first, they didn't want us, they were calling the naval reserves and that was fair enough, because at that time, nobody knew what was going to happen. [Australian Prime Minister Robert] Menzies hadn't sort of decided whether we were

08:00 going to go away and cos, those of us that had grown up on tales from our uncles and that from the First World War, we didn't see any sense in being in the army if we weren't going to go away. But I never wanted to play soldiers before the war, but I always reckon that if I thought we were in the right, then I'd join

08:30 as soon as it started, which I did. And Bernie and I went down the navy, they didn't want us, we went over to Marrickville and artillery and we thought, ah, that's all right, a lot of big shells around, no problem. We saw snotty nosed young lieutenant that was sitting on the gun, militia lieutenant, "Oh,"

09:00 he says, "Well I don't want you blokes off the street." He says, "We've got a militia unit in camp at the present time and they'll come over as a body." They did. Sergeant major and six of the troops out of the whole unit. And we're walking out and we see, 'AASC' [Australian Army Services Corps] and we thought, "Well we can both drive, let's go for the AASC." We

09:30 walk in and an old colonel sitting behind the desk, Colonel Munro and he says, "You blokes look a bit browned off." Sort of thing and we told him what had happened. He started to laugh, he said, "Don't worry boys," he says, "they did that to me in the First World War," he says, "It happens. Do you still want to join?" We says, "Yeah." So we signed and we're in the AASC. You know. So we went into camp, 24th of October,

10:00 '39 out the old Rosebery Racecourse, Rosebery Racecourse, is not there now, it's a shopping centre I believe and they were still training the horses there, we'd been marching up one end of the straight and the horses'd be galloping down the other end of the straight and morning gallops. And we were under the grandstand there, that's the first and only

10:30 queer [homosexual] that I met in the army. A young I'd say a young country bloke, I'd just turned 20, I turned 20 on the 26th of September and I went to camp, 24th of October, but this lad from the country, he says to me the first night, "I think this bloke's having a go at me." And I says, "Oh we're pretty close, you know and blah, blah, blah." Anyway the next night there was nobody about so this

11:00 young lad from the bush he belted him and they discharged him I believe with flat feet. And they were – and it's funny, even in Germany, even though I don't doubt there was relationships, they were never open relationships and I really never struck it again in the army. Anyway from Rosebery we went up to Ingleburn and

11:30 Ingleburn of course, was just being opened, we opened the hospital there at Ingleburn and they actually sent photographers out at one stage. I should mention, while we was at Rosebery, we were just in line one day and a WO [Warrant Officer] from the AIC [Australian Instructional Corps], called Bruce, he just come down the line and he says, "I'll have you and you." And he

12:00 passed half a dozen, "I'll have you, you and you." And 70 of us, I think he pulled out and we were the transport company of the 2/1st Field Ambulance. Even though we're still proud of our ASC colour patches we were permanently attached and if people asked me what unit I served in, I normally say the 2/1st Field Ambulance because I did serve with them, most of the time and very proud to serve with them, they were a very, very good unit.

12:30 I should mention I suppose, before getting that far ahead that growing up in Leichhardt during the Depression was great. People helped one another in all sorts of ways, with food, with – if anybody got into strife, the coppers [police] knew the different ones of us that were wild and not

13:00 bad. Which is something that doesn't happen now, while they drive around in cars. But the police on the beat there knew and they'd give you a kick up the tail, no problems whatsoever, they knew our parents and they knew our parents wouldn't object. Want to take you to court, the way they do now if you touch anybody. And old Sergeant Williams probably kept a lot of us on the straight and narrow if you know, it was

13:30 it really was a great place to grow up. My sister could go to a dance or go to the pictures and walk home at 11 o'clock at night and never once be molested in any way whatsoever. Even though, it was a pretty wild old suburb, plenty of drunks, plenty of fights around the pubs of a Friday night, one thing and another but that was just part of the game I suppose. But

14:00 getting back to Ingleburn, they sent photographers out because we were the transport company, we were armed. And we had to put a guard on the hospital. But the first time they sent them out, all we had was broomsticks, we didn't even have rifles. And the bloke from The Telegraph says, "They bloody Huns'll [Germans] die laughing,"

14:30 he says, "if we take photos of this." He says, "They see you with broomsticks." It's a fact, that's what happened. And we were there from, I think we went in from Rosebery up there, in the November, we had Christmas leave and of course we left on the 10th of January, '40 in the first convoy for the Middle East.

15:00 And we stopped at Colombo, and because the boys played up a bit, when we went to Aidan, they made us pay for any damage that might be done before we got off the ship I think it cost us five shillings each or something. And of course, we signed up for five shillings a day, three shillings,

15:30 sustenance. Which, I'll tell you a bit later that's a sore point with me, the sustenance. Anyway, we left January '40 and we landed in Palestine, got off at

16:00 I can't think, I'll have to look at me book to find out. We were – I didn't think I'd ever forget anyway, we landed. And were put on trains to go to Palestine where they'd set up a series of camps. We went to Quastina, set up a dressing station, like with our unit.

16:30 And we started to train, driving in the desert, with no lights and various things like that, we saw quite a bit of the country, we did stunts out at Beersheba where the light horse made the only cavalry attack with rifle and bayonet against the Turks in the First World War. We went to Hebron, which is

17:00 mentioned quite a lot in the bible, as a matter of fact we were asked to bring a Palestinian who had been causing a bit of havoc, with the Jewish settlements, he was arrested and we brought him back to Tel Aviv in our ambulance. That was just a little thing that happened; you never know what's going

17:30 to happen. The – being Aussies, I think it was the same as the First World War, that we always got on well with the kids and they were always around the camp selling oranges and even if we were doing a stunt out the middle of the Sinai desert, they always seemed to jump up out of the ground with fresh oranges, don't ask

18:00 me how they got there, we never, ever found out how they got there, but the always seemed to be there, selling us oranges. But as I say, we – I believe the Aussies did in the First World War and we did in this world war, we made a fuss of the kids, we went into villages and one thing and another we – put us on side with the locals, because there was still a bit of strife between the Arabs and the

18:30 Englishmen with the Jewish settlers starting to get in there. But – and they did it tough because British troops tried to stop them landing, they ran their boats aground just off the beach at Tel Aviv and things like that, to get there and the

19:00 difference between the Arab farm and the Jewish farm was 500% I mean it was a – when the Jews set up a kibbutz, they put traps out the front, so cattle had to go through so they wouldn't get foot and mouth disease, their oranges were

19:30 this big, where the Arabs' oranges were that big. And I never saw such beautiful babies or infants, the older people used to look after the littlies and they used to have them in like, we'd make a dog run, with the wire netting just to stop

20:00 them crawling too far. But they were brown, they were chubby they were healthy, they were happy, it's no wonder they were able to knock the Gyppos [Egyptians] off in six days, later on, because they'd be the ones that fought in the Six Day War when it came. As I say, I'd never seen such beautiful, beautiful babies.

20:30 From Palestine, of course we went to Egypt. We went to Helwan, which was just outside Cairo, no camp had been sort of built there, we had to build a camp from scratch sort of thing. And we were there for

21:00 some time, before we moved up to Alexandria, before I went over to Egypt, I spent a bit of time in the Gaza Hospital, 2/1st AGH [Australian General Hospital], had set up a hospital at Gaza. And first off they had sand fly fever which is like malaria but it doesn't linger like malaria. You get the same sort

21:30 of symptoms but it doesn't seem to last as long. And also had my tonsils out there. At – but from Cairo, we went up to Alexandria, just outside Alexandria, Amiriya, and we set up a camp there,

22:00 the night before I was sent up there was the night before my 21st birthday. And of course we were going to have a party in Cairo. But that night the CO [Commanding Officer] called me into the tent and he says, "You're moving out with the battalion, they're moving up to Amiriya and they've got to have an ambulance with them." And so, I didn't get me 21st birthday,

22:30 I woke up the following morning. Nothing, we'd slept in the back of the ambulance that night. Not tents, no nothing. Blowing a sandstorm, I'm sitting with my offsider and my ambulance orderly, Jimmy Shane and Steve Ward and Doc Selby who I'll mention a bit later on, too, terrific bloke. He was the RMO

[Regimental Medical Officer] of the

23:00 2/1st Battalion and he came down and he says, “You look happy.” And I says, “Why wouldn’t I look bloody happy?” I says, “It’s my 21st birthday, I’m away from all me mates, it’s blowing a stinking sandstorm.” And Doc says, “I got two bottles of beer in my tent,” he says, “They’ll be warm,” he says, “but at least we can have a drink for your birthday.” And that was me 21st.

23:30 I made up for it when I turned 70, cos I had a bloody beauty. We were at Amiriya for some time and that’s when I mentioned to Angela [researcher] when I was talking to her about the VD [Venereal Disease] there was

24:00 a reasonable amount of VD. From there of course we were there for a while and we sent – and then we went up to Mersa Matruh,

24:30 and from Mersa Matruh we went to Salum which was the bottom of Hellfire Pass, we set up a RAP [Regimental Aid Post] there at the bottom of Salum, and the infantry blokes were up the top, they were up around Fort Caputso. And

25:00 we used to have to go and clear there – their RAPs every day, bring them back to our docs if they were crook, we didn’t have to take them further back to a hospital. And the Italians were, you know, they were rubbished about what they did in the – as far as fighters go. But certain ones of them fought and their

25:30 artillery was very good. Their artillery was very good. And they could pick up one vehicle and Christmas Eve, I’m going up Hellfire Pass, and all of sudden the artillery came over. And I’m thinking the stupid things you think of – I’m thinking, “Why are these good Catholic boys trying to knock me off on Christmas Eve?” Like they shouldn’t be doing things like that. And I says,

26:00 to me mate, “You know.” And I thought, well how stupid can you be, having thoughts, but that’s exactly what I thought, I thought, “They shouldn’t be doing this to me on Christmas Eve. They shouldn’t have either. But we used to clear the RAPs and as I say, bring them back to our place if they were real crook [ill], we’d take them further back.

26:30 And then of course, the 3rd of January, ’41, that was the first action. And this is a question; this is a thing that bugs me too. I have asked that question in RSL [Returned and Services League] clubs, I’ve asked the different trivia places. Everybody knows Anzac Day, nobody knows the first battle that the

27:00 2nd AIF [Australian Imperial Force] went into in the Second World War. Did you? Was the 3rd of January, 1941 at Bardia. And it’s never mentioned. And we went from Bardia to Tobruk, and up as far as Benghazi and it’s just as though the 200 odd people that got killed in that campaign,

27:30 did it for nothing, because it is never mentioned. And it is a sore point with me. If you read the book, “The 39ers.” You’ll find out that one Victorian battalion, I’m not sure whether it was the 2/6th or 2/7th, they went in against just one part against the Italians,

28:00 just one part against the Italians the first morning at Bardia with 28 and come out with 4. Now, that’s history, we hear about the Vietnam, Battle of Long Tan. I know they were overwhelmed as we were, I think the Italians were about six to one or something. 18 people they lost at Long Tan, we lost more in the Battle of Bardia which is never mentioned.

28:30 And it’s wrong. Even at Tobruk, they never mention about the taking of Tobruk, all they ever mention is about the defence of Tobruk. They never mention that we took – by the way, I got the last dozen bottles of beer out at Tobruk and I wasn’t a drinker in them days. And I bought it back to me mates, they thought it was Christmas.

29:00 Also, went in the Bank of Italy there, and come out with a cash box like that with lira. Which we used for the cooks’d say, “We can’t light a fire.” And we’d throw a bundle of notes over and say, “This..” Using it as toilet paper up in the desert. And got to Benghazi and found out we could have put it in Barclay’s Bank.

29:30 Into our bank accounts, it was all gone by then. I don’t know how much was there, I’ve often wondered. Could have bought half of Sydney when I come home. 1000 lira was worth a pound English I think at that time. And these were 10,000 lira notes, packed up in the – Tony Palmasano, one of our

30:00 blokes, he was with us when we went into the bank and he picked up a stamp collection and he says, “Well I don’t know whether it’s the manager’s or whether it’s put here for safekeeping, but I’ll take it.” He carried it right through, when he come home, he was able to sell it and put a deposit on a house. He was the only one that got anything out of the bank. We all could have had a nice little bundle when we come home.

30:30 Still, that’s by the by. Got as far as Benghazi, then of course, the powers that be decided that we’d go to Greece, so we came back from Benghazi, through one of the worst sandstorms we’d struck.

31:00 It was a shocking run back to Alexandria from there and I think we were only in Alexandria for a couple of days when we went across to Greece. Which was a complete and utter fiasco from the time we landed

till we got taken POWs [Prisoners of War].

31:30 We had no air support. We had nothing. Our unit went up, virtually to the foot of Mount Olympus at the finish we were the only vehicles on the road the day I got wounded, or it was only a scratch or just enough to put me in the hospital but the day I got wounded

32:00 ambulances were the only things that were on and they were on because some of the Jerry [German] pilots were good. They'd turn their guns off if it was an ambulance the next bloke wouldn't, so you really never, ever knew whether they were or whether they won't. And of course with no

32:30 Allied aircraft there they were coming under the telegraph wires. The strafe. And they were having a picnic. And it was a – it was nasty. And anybody that says they weren't frightened with either the Messerschmitt strafing or the Stukas bombing,

33:00 cos the Stukas used to put screamers on their wings and they also used to put screamers on their bombs and it didn't matter whether a bomb was landing five mile away, you swore blind it was going to land in the middle of your back. Not good. But as I say, I got wounded up there; I come back to a Pommy [English] casualty clearing station

33:30 and from there was sent back to Alexandria on a hospital train and that was an experience, they were cattle trucks, of course. I was in the top bunk and every time an air raid'd come over, if there was a tunnel near, the driver'd put the engine in the tunnel, but the rest of us were left outside. Or most of the train cos they couldn't fit. And to

34:00 be on a top bunk when those blokes were coming down strafing, wasn't real good. But it happened. Went to the Pommy hospital in Alexandria. Was there for a while, had a visit by some of the Aussie nurses from the 2/5th AGH [Australian General Hospital]. One young nurse wasn't much older than

34:30 me, "Anybody from Sydney?" I says, "Yeah." She says, "Don't you think the entrance to this place is like the Trocadero?" I says, "Jeez Sis, you've got a good imagination." I went dancing at the Trocadero a lot but I can't put in this – anyway they give us what little bit of money they had between the Aussies that were there because the Greek money was no good to them.

35:00 And they got back to Egypt as luck would have it, they didn't get taken even though the 2/5th AGH got taken more or less as the body because they had patients in and they stayed with the patients. I was in the hospital and all of sudden this Pommy WO come in and he said,

35:30 "Anybody for the Kiwi – New Zealand – convalescent depot?" And I thought, well Kiwis'll be better than to be with the Poms so I says, "Yeah." And as I'm walking out I met a particular mate from the unit. Who had been sent back crook, Rick should have never, ever been in the army he'd been a patrol officer up in New Guinea and was lousy

36:00 with malaria. And he only happened to know the doctor that let him in, it was a doctor that he knew up in New Guinea it was the only reason he was passed medically fit to come but a good bloke. And as I'll tell you a bit later, good bloke to be taken prisoner with. Rick was a scrounger from way back. And we went out the con depot, we were there for, I don't

36:30 know, some time. All of a sudden, one night this Kiwi major come in, I often wonder whether he was a Kiwi major or whether he was a Jerry major, because they had, had Jerries in British Aussie uniform MPs [Military Police] directing traffic the wrong way, I believe. I didn't know about that at the time, but this is what the boys tell me later.

37:00 Anyway, he says, "Get on the vehicles." This is late at night and everything's all hush, hush and all of a sudden he set fire to the Q-store [Quartermaster's store] and you could see the blaze all over Athens, anyway we went down the coast, we pulled into the little bay there, the ships were supposed to be there, but we'd

37:30 gone 20 ks [kilometres] or something too far down the coast, we missed that lot. So we went under the olive trees and we were there for five days, waiting for more ships to come in. The Jerries knew where we were because they'd come over strafing each day, among the olive trees. I didn't eat olives for years after I come home,

38:00 and all of sudden we hear the ship in, and we march down the beach, we got as far as the water when the order come, "All convalescent depot patients to one side." And we moved to one side and a unit of Tommy engineers come down, they put them aboard the ship. The ship went away and

38:30 that was the only ship we saw. So the following morning we went – we got in the ambulance again and we went down the coast, we finally went over the bridge at the Corinth Canal and we thought, "Oh we're far enough down, we're pretty safe here." And all of a sudden the plane's come over

39:00 originally Messerschmitts strafing, so of course we all got out of the vehicles and the only shelter we had was with you know, vineyard grapevines about this high and just the dirt up – and we were laying alongside them and they come over in from memory,

39:30 three lots of four strafing. And their paratroopers landed behind them and they had big swastika flags. And as they moved up and rounded us up just like sheep, they shifted the flag and they'd just come behind the flags. So it got from four lots of threes, to three lots of fours. And that's the way they come and just where we were, just the other side of the

40:00 Corinth Canal, evidently was the southern commander where the paratroops decided to land. And we just happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. Anyway, as I say, they rounded us up like sheep. And put us all in a circle and we thought, "Oh this is it." Cos we'd heard so much, they didn't take prisoners, they didn't do this. But the young

40:30 Hauptman who was in charge of this particular lot of paratroopers, had just finished five years at Oxford, spoke better English than most of us Aussies did and turned out to be quite a good bloke. He just had us going out, picking up parachutes so as he could bring them in, fold them up. And then we went to a little churchyard and as I say, I'd met up with Rick Bert, who'd been a patrol officer in New Guinea and this little church was right on the edge of a bay and there was three fishing smacks in the bay. And Rick says, "If we can get down there," he says, "And we go thatta way, it'll eventually lead you toward Crete." Right. Got about 15 or 20 blokes, Aussies that we talked to and says, "Yeah, well this is our chance." Just on dusk, this Hauptman called us on parade and he said –

Tape 2

00:39 As I say he lines up parade, he says, "Three boats in the bay," he says, "Any one could possibly get you Crete or Egypt," he says, "I have armed guards on board

01:00 so let nobody be heroes cos I don't want to shoot anybody." This shows you the stupidity of war. Like, even under the Nazis, you got good people. They were the same as us. This is what I try to tell school kids when I was president of the Concord RSL, I used to go round to schools, the

01:30 utter stupidity of war. Absolute stupidity of war. Anyway, he also, the following morning, he asked anybody who was sick, or had been wounded, and because my leg had had no treatment, was starting to go a bit yucky, so I went and we went down into the town of Corinth.

02:00 And here I met a – or we met, a most remarkable old lady. I believe she'd been a nurse in the First World War and stayed there and married a Greek. And when the prisoners started come down, she rounded up four or five

02:30 New Zealand doctors. Taken over a hotel, which was right on the waterfront and went to the Jerry town major, and says she'd set up a hospital for the prisoners. And there again, he agreed that it could happen. And so all went down there and we were being treated by the Kiwi doctors and just up

03:00 the street in the town of Corinth, was the Greek hospital, now the girls used to work there all night, the sisters used to work there all night. And used to come and look after our blokes during the day. So I have a very soft spot for the Greek people. And I believe this woman, who I sorry to say, never ever knew her name, I believe she got an

03:30 OBE [Officer of the Order of the British Empire] after the war. For what she did on that particular thing. But if you ever imagine an English gentlewoman, she was one. You know. Absolutely. Anyway, I was there for a while and with a bit of treatment the leg started to get good. Finally the Jerry doctor come around and says, "All right, you go to up to the camp."

04:00 Well, I went up the camp and it was shocker. Even though the boys had been on it four or five days while I was in hospital. The Italian prisoners had been up there and they'd used the basement as toilets and the whole bit. And anyway, we sort of cleaned it up eventually. But dysentery did go through the camp

04:30 and of course you weren't supposed to leave your billets of a night, so if you got real crook, you just took the risk in sleeping outside, near the toilet and hoping that the Jerry guard didn't come around and that particular. So anyway, second or third day after I was there – oh I must say, before I left the hospital,

05:00 one of our padres has come in and he'd had cigarettes so he give all the blokes that were going back to the camp a few cigarettes. About the second or third day I was there, I saw coming in to camp, our CSM [Company Sergeant Major]. From our transport company. Vince Gocher. Vince was a digger from the First World War. About five foot six,

05:30 and a real fighting cock sparra' Vince was. Terrific bloke. Good CSM, good soldier, good bloke. And he told me the story like, after we sort of got together that he saw this English truck coming down the road, he'd been on the loose for three days, he saw this English truck coming down

06:00 the road so he come out and "hoyed" it , but it was being driven by a German, so picked him up and brought him back to camp. And I sung out to Vince, "Got any smokes mate?" "No." He says. "Haven't

had a smoke for days." I says, "I got some." When the brought new prisoners in they used to keep them segregated so as they could interrogate them. Whether Greeks

06:30 had been looking after them and things like that. And this Jerry started to yell, well I didn't know what he was yelling out and I just kept walking over to Vince and evidently he was yelling for me to stay away because Vince hadn't been interrogated and blah, blah, blah. But I just kept on walking. And was going to hand Vince the cigarettes. And this bloke come up and belted me over the head with a rifle butt.

07:00 And Vince used to say after the war, "I knew you were stupid, Ray," he said, "But when you got up the second time, I thought, you were really were stupid," he says, "When you got up the fifth time, I knew you was bloody stupid." Repat [Department of Repatriation] never recognised that as a war disability for a lot of years, they reckon I probably got hurt as much playing sport before the war, but because I couldn't

07:30 hit back it was all psychosomatic, it didn't give me pains in the back, I didn't – it did. But anyway, it finally got recognised. But that was the only time, that was the only time that I got into real strife. Anyway we were in that camp for some time. As I say, dysentery went through it.

08:00 There was virtually no tucker. And eventually they started to send us up to Germany or wherever we were going. The day that – oh, while we were there, rumours had it that the Australian troops on Crete were mutilating the Jerry paratroops when they come down. Which was lies, but it was German propaganda

08:30 that was put out at the time. And Himmler, who was the only one of the hierarchy that I saw, and I really didn't want to see any other. He was the coldest person I've ever looked at. He come down and he sent word that if what they says was true on Crete, he was going to shoot every eighth English prisoner. So lining

09:00 up to be counted each morning, like, you'd go, "Two, four, six, eight," and go back a step, you know, and try and get on an odd number. It didn't eventuate but we didn't know it wasn't going to eventuate. While we were walking down to get the train this was at Salonika, after we'd left Corinth

09:30 we come from Corinth – I must tell you, when our blokes retired, they say we never, ever retreat, I don't know. But when we fell back, they blew the tunnels, a lot of the tunnels and of course, when we went from Salonika – from Corinth up to Salonika, we had to walk over the mountains, because

10:00 the trains couldn't go through the tunnels. And it was a hell of a walk, because as I say, we'd had dysentery no tucker and it was hard. Even though I was young and in reasonable nick, it was still starting to get pretty hard. Anyway, we

10:30 walked over the – I think it was the Servia Pass, I know it went for a long time. One of our blokes out of the unit, Harry Crossfield, he'd walked as far as he could. Could not move another step and an old Greek come along with a horse and cart and he put Harry in the horse and cart. We continued down and they stopped us just before the

11:00 to count us before we got on the train. And when the officer in charge saw Harry get out of the cart, he come over screaming his head off. We didn't know what he was saying, but there was Palestinian Labour Corps, bloke there and he says, "You know, he's saying, if

11:30 he doesn't go back and walk that distance, that he'll shoot him." And Harry says to him, "Well you tell him, that he can shoot me, because I just can't bloody walk any more. Simple as that." Anyway after a lot of yelling and screaming he finally walked away. And we got loaded on the truck, about 40 to a cattle truck.

12:00 We were lucky, we – there was a hole burnt in our truck, so at least we had a toilet we could use. But before we got on the trains at – going back to – coming from Corinth, we were walking down the station to Corinth and this young Greek lad, about 15, we were on the back file,

12:30 and he threw us a loaf of bread. But the guard saw him and they're screaming, "You want to feed them? You'll go to Germany with them." And we've got this 15 year old, hid in the back line with us. You can imagine what he was like. Doing the right thing, throwing us a loaf of bread and he's going to finish up in Germany. Anyway, we stopped in the square outside the station, and

13:00 we sent word through the lines, "As soon as the guards start yapping to one another, we'll yell out, just open your ranks and let the kid go through." Well, finally the guards got bored, as any guards got bored. Having a smoke, having a talk. We said, "Right!" Well the ranks just opened like that. This kid went through like Jesse Owen [famous sprinter], he'd never run so fast in his life.

13:30 Turn around he's gone, and of course we're in strife. And as Rick and I says, you know, the last thing we wanted to do was get shot for nothing, we weren't bloody heroes. But we didn't want to see this kid go to Germany. Anyway, there again. We struck a good German officer. He come and quieten the guards down, we got on, as I say, 40 to a cattle truck, but we were lucky, we had the

14:00 hole in the floorboards which we could use as a toilet. They give us three to a tin of bully beef, two army biscuits and three to a loaf of bread. That was our tucker for four days. We didn't know at the time, it

was going to be four days. But certainly the four or five days, say four days. And we finished up

14:30 they split the train in two. Some of the boys went to a different camp, the last, we finished in a camp in Yugoslav, in Marburg. Which had been a Yugoslav barracks before we took it over. Not one of the best camps I was ever in. We

15:00 were there for a while we went out on working parties from there, doing road jobs, cos, like Hogan's Heroes [television series], you always get a shrewdie and of course when the German asked like, "Anybody ever worked the roads?" A lot of our blokes had because that's all they did

15:30 during the Depression. You know. Everybody was an expert. And of course, they got the cushy [comfortable] jobs supervising, you know, while us buddies that didn't have brazen enough to say, "Yeah we were road builders," we wheeled barrows, I was down about seven stone then. And wheeling barrows full of stones for twelve hours a day. On

16:00 a bit of bread and coffee of a morning, bit of bread and coffee for lunch, and then we'd come back of a night and they had a stew, made of mainly potatoes with a bit of veggie powder put in them. If you left it in your dixie for any length of time, it'd go hard and when you ate it, it'd give you the greatest heartburn, you ever had.

16:30 But that's what we were getting when we were doing the road. And there was a mob down from us who were putting a water line through. They were laying pipes for a water line that was going to a factory. So the two camps were in reasonably close proximity to one another.

17:00 All the experts on our road, I believe the first time it snowed, which it did that winter, it was the coldest winter Europe had had for 91 years, the winter of '41. They tell me when the snow got on it and half of it went down the mountainside, it didn't hold. And the blokes doing the pipeline, any time they had a chance, instead of putting a pipe, they'd

17:30 put a cement bag. And well, [Hermann] Goering came down to turn the water on there, and of course when he turned the water on, nothing happened. These are the things – I hear so many blokes say, "Oh we made so many escapes." Ninety per cent of them got two ks [kilopmetres] down the road and they were pulled back by a farmer with a pitchfork. You know.

18:00 To really get away from where we were, Yugoslav, you had to go to Austria. If you went to the partisans, the two lots of partisans were fighting. And the Mihailovic and Tito's mob, they were fighting one another. Even during the war. And blokes that did decide to go with them, they finished up coming back to the camp

18:30 because they says we're stupid, they didn't want to get shot, just because the two different mobs weren't – and of course, early in the piece England backed the Mihailovic and then he turned over and when Russia come in they turned over to Tito. And that made it worse. These are the stupid things that us silly buggers that have no say get caught up in. Anyway

19:00 they sent us back from there to the camp and we went from that camp they closed that camp. I spent time in hospital in that camp, I – the bit of shrap [shrapnel] – they hadn't taken a bit of

19:30 shrap out of my leg when they operated on it in the Pommy hospital and it went rotten and as far as I could understand, septicaemia had set in. And all I know, I was crook; I didn't care whether I lived or died. I was crook. And

20:00 they were closing the camp at the time and they sent us to Wolfsburg up in Austria. And they didn't have a doctor there each day. And finally after about three days a doc come in. I'll never forget he was only a young bloke and he sort of had a scalpel, well he was playing with a scalpel when he come in. And he took one look at the knee

20:30 and he just went – kchh! Kcch! with the scalpel and let the pus out of it. Still got the two little marks there. But I was looked after well. By the German medical orderly better than the English medical orderlies really, they used to knock off at six o'clock and that was it, if you wanted the orderly in the night it was

21:00 the German orderly that you got. Anyway we went from there to Wolfsburg and Rick and I went out on a farm I've got a photo there that those of us were on the farm and we went to a place called Erenhausen and Rick and I and another one of the boys, Pat, we were

21:30 picked by the farmer to go out to Retsnei, just a little village and we was on that farm, oh I don't know, for about 18 months I suppose and should have stayed there because the – it was all right, we ate what they ate. The boss had three sons in the German Army.

22:00 One of them, Herb, he come home to help with the harvest and we really got friends with him. He walked in the first day and he says, "Which one's Raymond and which one's Eric?" And we introduced ourselves. And he says, "How you being treated by the people in the village?" Which, we were being treated all right. And we told him. He says, "Well, if you have any problems,

22:30 tell me." He says. "You can't help being there. You get taken prisoner, you get killed, it's part of being in

the army." He was in the flat down in the – down in Poland. And as he said, he'd have made friends with the Poles; the Poles didn't want to make friends with them. And you can understand that, and he could understand that and

23:00 his fiancée worked on the farm too. But Herb was – he was a real good bloke. And we talked about Hitler and that. And he says, "Well, there's no doubt that he did do things for the country." Like, because the way they were treated at the Geneva Convention, everything was taken off them.

23:30 And he says, "But before he come in," he said, "We had things in the shops and no money to buy them. After he come in," he says, "We had money because we were working on the roads and the autobahns and all those sort of things but there was nothing in the shop because there was guns before butter." So he says, "It really didn't make any difference to the average German or Austrian."

24:00 But as I say, after- we found out while the – while we were there, that medical personnel and corporals and above, under the Geneva Convention, didn't have to work, they couldn't force you to work. So even though we were doing it all right on the farms,

24:30 we thought, "Well if we haven't got to work for them, we won't work for them." And we went back to the main camp. Well, there was three of us from the unit on that particular job, Eric Bourke, Les Irons and meself, old Les had had it very good, he was farmed out to a

25:00 quite an attractive frau [woman] whose husband was in the army and away somewhere and Les had a lot of the home comforts on his farm. That – I might tell you that was Section 92. They used to put up this list, every week. Those that were caught under Section 92 will not fraternise with German women.

25:30 And they used to put this list up ever day, Section 92 that was. And as I say, it was just a matter of principle if you didn't have to work, you didn't work. Anyway, Les and Rick corporals, my being made up a corporal hadn't come through when we got taken. It was only

26:00 come through after I got home. And they went back to 383 which was an NCOs [Non Commissioned Officers] camp where they didn't have to work. We went back to Wolfsburg and even the – I was a driver in the Field Ambulance as far as the Jerry was concerned I was a 'sanitator', it says in the book, I was with the Field Ambulance and therefore, and

26:30 so we – I with others started like real medical personnel particularly English and Kiwis there wasn't Aussie medical orderlies there but there were English and Kiwis and we used to run the

27:00 we used to look after the hospital. And you know, just for minor things, we had an English doctor and a Canadian doctor. Canadian doctor had been in England and joined the English Army. And we worked the hospitals in Wolfsburg we used to play a bit of sport, we

27:30 had a basketball team that we called the 'Kangariwis', they were three Kiwis and two Aussies. And we played soccer, seven a side between the huts and out of those 14 players sometimes you'd get five English or Scottish internationals from the British Army, you know.

28:00 But all of a sudden, I was sent out there again as a medical orderly, on a work job. Just over the border back in the Yugoslav, because Wolfsburg was just over the border from Yugoslav and we were working on a – what was going to be an aluminium factory, we're doing the foundations

28:30 from a map. And conditions were good, the huts were clean, tucker wasn't bad, what there was of it was mainly soup and of course we were getting our Red Cross parcels so we put our Red Cross parcels in that the cooks could make things, each hut sort of used to throw parts of their Red Cross parcels, anyhow. And

29:00 it was a Saturday we went down there. And of course being good unionists, well back home, we says, "Ah, well we're not working Saturday afternoon." And so we got down there, we got in the huts and they says, "On parade. Ahbeit." You know, "Work," and we says, "No." Anyway

29:30 the officer in charge he didn't muck around he just brought a guard in and he picked one bloke out and he says, "If they're not on parade in five minutes, shoot him." Of course we went outside. I hear muttering as I'm going through the door, "Oh, if it had have been me, I wouldn't have gone." If it had've been me, I would have gone. I couldn't see any sense in getting shot for nothing. Just for being stupid. Anyway, we worked on

30:00 that job until Christmas eve and because we were in Yugoslav, we thought, well we're with friends, so we decided that they - if possible, dig a hole under the wire and half the camp'd go off on Christmas Eve and half'd go off on Christmas Day. Well I was among the crowd that was going off on Christmas Day.

30:30 And that happened. We dug a hole, they got out, welcomed by the Yugoslavs in the village down the street. Great, that was good. But then when they were half full, they went around looking for German guards that they didn't like and of course they all finished up getting rounded up and brought back to the camp. But big Tom Mohana, who was a Maori,

31:00 Tom hadn't wasted his time there and he come back with a suckling pig and two fowls. Which we cooked on a pot bellied stove and – an enamel basin that we used to use for washing in the morning. But

they sent the SS [Schutzstaffel] out from there because we'd you know, we'd sort of made fools of them. And

31:30 they decided to send us up to the Austrian Alps to a discipline camp. Apart from those that they knew and of course the farmer was looking for his pig and his two fowls. And Tom Mohana was about six foot two and built like that and black as the ace of spades and of course as soon as the farmer come in, he says, "Well it was him." Poor old Tom, so he got sent back to the main camp.

32:00 But there again the camp commandant that we had in Wolfsburg, he – I think he'd been a POW in England in the First World War, I'm not sure of that but he was from the First World War and he was a good bloke. He only acted like a Jerry when the SS come down. Apart from that he was good.

32:30 But they decided to send us up to camp. Before we leave camp, the boys had made some home brew. And they got on the home brew and some of them up the back were mucking around a bit and the guards were getting cranky, and we got to the station and there was a bit of a kerfuffle and a German major comes up. And he says to the

33:00 guard, "What's the problem?" And the guard told him and I happened to have the Red Cross thing on, you know. And he says to me, "Look, there's SS blokes down there, tell the boys to get on the train." He says, "It's only being stupid." Which it was. As I say, I couldn't see the sense of getting shot for nothing. Anyway, we travelled all day and

33:30 finally we got on a little small gauge – it took us up a mountain like this. And I could never remember the name of the village we went to, but it was up in the Austrian Alps and we were met by a German officer there and he lined us up. We'd been travelling all day, must have been nine o'clock at night, when we got out

34:00 of the train. And course, around Christmas time it was freezing cold and he lined us all up and he says, "You blokes think you're tough." He says, "By the time I've finished with you, you'll know what tough is." Right. Somebody from the back, you know, Aussie voice of course, "Oh get stuffed!" Sort of thing. Anyway, they pull up a sled, we didn't have much, we had a blanket and a

34:30 dixie and toothbrush and towel and one thing and another, brought this sleigh up we thought, "Oh that's good, we're going to get a ride to wherever we're going." Put whatever gear we had on the sleigh and we walked and it was about five ks out to this place. And we got in there, there was straw but no palliasses to put the straw in so the first night we

35:00 slept on the straw. Two Scotsman and a Kiwi they says, "Doesn't look good." Got a pair of pliers that they'd found from somewhere, cut the wire on the window and away they went. You could see their footprints in the morning, they was never going to get anywhere, but – if you didn't like a job, that's what you did.

35:30 You attempted to escape, if you knew you couldn't get anywhere it didn't matter but they'd send you back to the main camp so you had a hope of getting to a better job next time. And these are the things that if they were done, like we did there, like those three blokes did, and the officer that was going to teach us discipline, he was on the way to the Russian Front for

36:00 allowing prisoners to escape. So he didn't last. Jerry was pretty strict on army discipline and if their troops didn't do – anyway, I'm out there as a sanitator. And it was a road job and it was a fairly hard job and the boys are saying, "Oh this is tough Ray. Can't we get back?" And blah, blah, blah.

36:30 So I'm doing different sorts of things, horse hair in the cigarette that'd make the ticker go a bit – a bit of aspro in the cigarette'd do the same thing. Coin-tied around the knee, tight, make the knee swell up a little bit, different things that you'd heard when malingerers were trying to get away in the unit. And that – and when they went in

37:00 to the doctor, the doctor was a older bloke but he was also a white Russian that had come out there in the revolution after the First World War and he'd been in practise there for years. And of course all the young doctors had been called up for the German army and he was a bit partial our way, he

37:30 marked the blokes unfit for working, you know back to the camp. And you made real good friendships there and the friendship got broken you'd try to renew it. And Stan Davis and this big farm boy from Victoria, his particular mate had got sent back and he says to me, "Oh Ray, can't you get me sent back?"

38:00 And I looked at Stan. And he's half as big again as any of the guards, like he's a big country lad. "Oh I don't know." I said, "All right, go crook then Stan, in the morning." So when he went crook, the guard come and he said, "What's wrong with him?" I says, "He's got a crook heart." And he's saying, "Cronk hurt? Him?" And I says, "Yeah, he's got a crook heart." So righto

38:30 so we march into camp for – into town to see the doctor and I said to Stan, "Just wait at the door here." Anyway, he waited at the door and sent a couple in and then heard the guard coming out, I says to Stan, "Put your hands up." He says, "What for?" I says, "Put your hands up." He went like that and hard as I could I went, whack! Whack! right under the heart. And I says, "Now go in and see the doc."

39:00 And I'm standing at the door and the old doc's putting the stethoscope on and he's frowning and then

he says to the guard, you know, “Cronk hurts.” Anyway and then it sounds a fairytale but it’s true, may I never move from here. The boys – there was about three of them that they sent back, including Stan and they’re on the train and they met a crowd that had been in

39:30 the mines. That’s another thing that you don’t hear about. Some of our blokes, these blokes were in Germany, but some of our blokes in Poland, they were 12 hours a day, six days a week, bent over like that in coal mines. You never hear about that. We were Cook’s tourists, they call it to a lot of people anyway -

Tape 3

00:43 It was me that come off worst out of that, because, as I say, this is as true as I sit here. Our boys are on the train and they met these blokes that had been in the mines,

01:00 and they were doing it tough and they were saying, “Twelve hours a day, six days a week, blah, blah, blah.” And our bloke says, “Oh jeez, you’d want to have a medical orderly like we’ve got, he does this and he’s done that and look at Stan, he got him sent back with a crook heart, look at blah, blah, blah.” Train stops at the next station, this is what they tell me when I get back to camp, train stops at the next station, this little fraulein that had been sitting there, she’s a good sort

01:30 about 20. Been eyeing her off all this time, sitting in the thing. She gets up and she says, “Heil Hitler. I happen to be a friend of the area officer, I’d certainly like to know what’s going on in his area.” And the next thing I know I’m sent back to camp on a sabotage charge. I say, “Sabotage, it sounds as though I’m blowing things up.” As I said, “I wasn’t a hero.”

02:00 But, as I said before, it was only medical personnel or corporals and above didn’t have to work. The others could be made to work as long as it was not on – in a war munition factory or things like that. And sabotage, working against the German work front, working around the Deutche’s front.

02:30 And I says to the guard, I got pretty friendly with because, you know, taking the blokes into town, you’d get magging [chatting] with a bit of German. I didn’t learn much German, because the more you knew, the Germans in charge of you and you were the ones that got the job if you could say, nix for Stan and they’d say, “Dumpkopf Australian.” And you’d get out of working half the time.

03:00 I says to him, I says, “What’s likely to happen?” He says, “Well, if you’re lucky, you’ll get six months in Gradenz.” Which was the German equivalent, Auschwitz and these places. He said, “If you’re unlucky, it could be two years.” And I thought, you know, anyway we get back to the camp, and this little SS major come down,

03:30 and he started with a lot of screaming and yelling, and one thing or another. And he had to go back to Berlin for something. And while he was away the exchange come on. And there was a Kiwi WO [warrant officer] in charge of the exchange and he come up to me one day,

04:00 he says, “Ray, you got mates in the camp?” I says, “Yeah. I got mates in the camp, why?” He says, “I think I can get you on the exchange if I can get cigarettes.” Cigarettes were like gold and we used to trade a tin of bully beef for cigarettes. And that happened and that’s how I come to get on the exchange because I was one of the youngest there. I wasn’t married.

04:30 No chance of getting on the exchange.

What is “the exchange?”

Well, yeah. Medical personnel are not classed as prisoners, they’re only held until such time as they can get them back to their own lines. That’s what the Geneva Convention said. Well in the First World War, as you know,

05:00 the trenches were 50 yards apart. So they were virtually exchanged every day, every second day. You know. But this time, there had been an exchange in late ’41 I believe, we didn’t know anything about it, they got as far as the blokes who were picked out to go, got as far as the English Channel somewhere in France and

05:30 the exchange fell through. And they all had to go back to the POW camps. Well, what the exchange was in our case, they took medical personnel and wounded personnel, or real sick personnel, from the various camps, we met up at a place in Germany, and

06:00 then we went right through Germany, through France down to Marseilles. And we sailed from Marseilles to Barcelona, and the same amount of German prisoners came from Alexandria to Barcelona and we exchanged ships at Barcelona. They come down that side and we come on that side. And we just exchanged ships. That’s

06:30 what the exchange was, that’s how we come to come home in 1941 instead of like the blokes that were there until the war finished in ’45 To come back in ’44, not ’41, I’m talking about. And that was the

exchange, the – we were met by Sir Samuel Hoare who was the English

07:00 Ambassador or something to Spain at the time. And one of the mob that was all for appeasement before the war.

So you were talking about the exchange, the possibility of trying to get on to this exchange.

Well, you know, it was only for the older blokes, you know, older – had to be medical personnel or had to be real crook, before you got on the exchange.

07:30 But as I say, I got on because I had cigarettes. And we came back, as I say, we transferred over at Barcelona. And we went back to Alexandria, out to Sidibish, which was one tram stop before Victoria where the big English hospital was in Alexandria. We were hoping to get home – this was December,

08:00 '43. Was hoping to get home before Christmas but that didn't happen, we spent Christmas, at Alexandria, where Snowy Allen and I nearly got into strife there. We went in – into town to see Judy Garland in a film, and that

08:30 was on there. And as soon as the Kiwis saw the Aussie hats, they thought a team of us had entered. And of course they'd been having blues [fights] with the Poms and they were looking for reinforcements. And we had to convince them, we were only two out, like, there wasn't a team of Aussies, who was going to help us we was just two out and we was ackwilly [Absent Without Leave] anyway we shouldn't have been there in the first place. But we thought we'd

09:00 go in and see Judy Garland. I saw the first female red caps, Pommy MPs there, they were like front row forwards. They were bigger than Artie Beetson [well-built Australian Rugby League player], both of them I thought. I says to Snowy, "I wouldn't like to be picked up by one of them, half full of something." Jeez they were big ladies. Anyway, we were there for some weeks,

09:30 and it was good, because we had money, we had three years pay. And so we could even – we could even go in where the Yanks [Americans] could afford to go in with our – the only time we could. For the few weeks we were there.

How did you manage to keep pay during POW camp?

Well they just - they

10:00 sent people from the pay corps over and they reissued us with – I think I got both of my pay books, they reissued us with pay books and they put the back pay in our pay books and we were able to draw money then out of our own pay books.

10:30 While we was out there, we were made honorary members of Smouha's Sports Club in Alexandria. The story I was told and I believe it's true, this Smouha was in the – he was in the rag trade in England and when Lawrence of Arabia got the Arabs on England's side, they paid him in gold.

11:00 They sent Smouha out with cloth so as they'd get their gold back. And he went to the Alexandria Club which was the club, with all the rich English people. Cos he was a Jew they wouldn't let him join. So he bought this land just outside Alexandria and set up his own sports club. Which had a football field, six

11:30 tennis courts, a couple of squash courts, you name it and when we come out, they made us honorary members there, we could go and play tennis and they played – I think we played a cricket game against some Pommy outfit and also a rugby league game or something, I played soccer for the club.

12:00 They were short a goalkeeper a couple of weekends and I played a couple of soccer games with them. But that's the story they tell me about Smouha and no one, what I heard about the Alexandria Club was probably right, they probably would have blackballed him because he was a Jew. Anyway then finally, we got a ship to bring us home. And it was the

12:30 Wanganella, which was a hospital ship and we had a good trip back home. Landed at Perth, or Fremantle, went into Perth, people at Perth and got a bit of petrol, they picked us up in cars about four to a car, we went into Perth, they had a do on at the Town Hall,

13:00 made a hell of a fuss of us. It was great. Some of our blokes were stupid enough and couldn't – a couple of blokes from my unit were stupid enough to get on the grog [alcohol] and missed the boat. They come home by train, I think they got home before us, but anyway, we finally got back to Sydney. Different altogether at Sydney, they sent buses down to pick us up from

13:30 where we landed. Took us to the showground, it was – I suppose half past nine when we got out there by the time we got our ration coupons, our leave passes and that, when we got our leave passes was about half past eleven. I looked at the leave pass and I just turned around

14:00 to the bloke behind me and I said, "Jeez they're giving us nothing," I says, "This starts this mornin'. And the day's almost gone." And there's this WO2 [Warrant Officer Class 2] , standing within earshot. He said, "What's the problem corporal?" I says, "This leave pass, at least we thought it would have started from tomorrow." Just like that. "You're going to remember you're back in the army now, son. You're not

sitting on your arse in Germany."

14:30 I says, "I realise that." And I found out, he made the mistake – Ian Roberts who'd been our OC [Officer Commanding] and didn't get taken prisoner, he'd been up to New Guinea, got malaria and come back and he was issuing the ration coupons. And he heard what this WO said.

15:00 And he come over and he says to me, "Right," He says, "Don't take any notice of this bloke. He's never moved out of the showground in two years." He says, "He wouldn't know what it is to be in the army." And he turned around to him and he said, "And if ever I hear you, talk to one of my boys again," he said, "I'll make bloody certain you're up in New Guinea." That was the other with a lot of them, Claire [interviewer], I tell you, we were

15:30 pretty disappointed. I don't think there was any of us that wouldn't have stayed on if they'd met us halfway. I didn't want to get out of the army, I didn't want to get out. I'd have been quite happy to stay in the army and rejoin my unit and go up to New Guinea. But there again, that's when Doc Selby,

16:00 he'd taken over, he'd been made a half colonel and taken over the 2/7th Field Ambulance. And I wrote him whether he had a job for me. And he says, "Ray I wouldn't take you." He says, "I wouldn't take any of you blokes." He said, "You've got to be absolute 100% fit to go to New Guinea." And he says, "And you blokes wouldn't be." Which he proved that because a lot of our blokes went to a camp where he was the MO [Medical Officer] and all of

16:30 them got discharged about the same time as I did. But they give us 21 days leave after four years. Cos we sailed on the January, '40 and come home in January '44. And went back to the showground and the – each day they'd line us up and they'd say,

17:00 you know, so many of the troops out there to do things and, " NCOs fall out. Dismiss. You're right for the day." This went on for about ten days and I thought, this is a good army. And this day they lined us up and they took the troops out and they said, "NCOs this way." And I says to the sergeant. "What's this business?"

17:30 He says, "You're going on picquet duty in the pig stalls." I went, oh don't like that. I says, "I'd like to see a doctor." He says, "What for?" I says, "I've had a lump of shrap in my leg all the time I'd been down and I'd like to get it out." "All right." So we go and see the doc and he says, "It giving you trouble?" I says, "Oh yeah, I feel it from time to time and it swells up a bit from time to time." So they sent me out to Concord Hospital. I think that was the best fortnight I've ever had in the army.

18:00 But we were the first POWs home; the VADs [Voluntary Aid Detachments] were mainly looking after us. Not the VAD- yeah the VADs and the AAMWS [Australian Army Medical Women's Service] the women's medical side. And of course, they're all mothering us, they knew that we hadn't been on a lot of good tucker and

18:30 we're getting milkshakes and we're getting orange juice and I'm thinking, jeez this is good, Concord Hospital's brand new, I'm up in the fourth floor, I'm looking over the Parramatta River and I thought – and I'm there about ten days and this doctor used to come in each day and he'd say, "How are ya?" And I'd say, "Good, I'm right." About the tenth day he said, "What're you here for?" I said, "I've got a bit of shrapnel in me leg, they're going to take." "Oh jeez," he said, "I've been

19:00 looking for you, we'd better do that." Anyway, they took it out and after a few days, I got sent up to the convalescent depot at Ingleburn and that was a wakeup, the little AAMWS that drove the ambulance, she was about five foot nothing, a little redhead and she had one speed and that was flat chat [fast] from Concord to Ingleburn in about fifteen minutes I reckon.

19:30 Anyway, we get up there and I knew what Doc Selby in his letter when he says that we had to be 100% fit and he finished up when he says, "Anyway, mate, it's not the army we knew." First bloke I talked to, was a corporal, been at Ingleburn for three years, absolutely nothing wrong with him but he's uncle

20:00 had trucks working for the army, and he was going to inherit them and there's no way he wanted to go up to New Guinea and take a chance of being shot. Strike a WO at a dance that a couple of the AAMWS that had invited me and me mate to. He was the same. Medically unfit, but fighting a ten rounder at Newcastle the following weekend. These were the things that was going on and it

20:30 wasn't the same army that we knew. We were proud of being volunteers and couldn't wait to get away. And then of course, we had the Yanks, like you'd go in a place and couldn't get served if the Yanks were in there, that happened. Time and time again, that happened. So particularly the girls behind the bar,

21:00 they wouldn't – not all of them. But a lot of them wouldn't serve you if a Yank walked in that was it, you took a backseat.

Can you explain why?

Well, they had more money than us. See we signed on for five bob a day and three bob a day sustenance money. Now out of my five bob, I'd allotted my monthly bob. We

21:30 did get extra money when we went away. I forget what it was now, extra one and sixpence or something. And that's a sore point, I was saying that I don't – as I say, we joined up five bob a day, three bob a day

sustenance. While we were prisoners of war, they didn't – the government didn't feed us. But we

22:00 never, ever got our sustenance money. And even after 60 years, that's the one thing I'm cranky on of being in the army that the bloody government never give me – me three bob a day that I was entitled to. Menzies did set up a tribunal in about 1948, I think he come to power in '48, and he set up a tribunal, one brigadier, I believe had been a POW of the Japs [Japanese] and

22:30 he says we didn't deserve anything because we were Cook's tourists, the legal bloke says, he couldn't see whether the government really was - had to give it to us. I don't see why, because that's what we signed up for. And the third bloke was either a colonel, brigadier or something, he says, it might set a precedence that blokes that giving themselves up just so as they'll

23:00 have money when they come home. Could you imagine the blokes that were in the Jap POWs doing that? Like, I have no problem with what the Jap POWs got. When they got this last 25,000 the only thing I had against it, they got it 40 years too late. They should have got it 40 years ago when there was more of them alive. And more of their families alive and 25,000 would have been absolute heaven to them.

23:30 You know, being able to buy their own home and things like that. I'm not one of these blokes that begrudges the Jap POWs anything they got, whatever they got they deserved, if they'd have given them – you know, 250,000 instead of their 25,000 wouldn't worry me. We'd all like to get the 25,000 but I've never sought it. But I do think I should have got me three bob a day.

24:00 And I've mentioned that to a couple of politicians in latter years and they just look at you blank. But anyway, I was sent to a psychiatrist from there. From Ingleburn, out the showground. Cos, there was an article in the Women's Weekly [magazine] by

24:30 one of the officers' wives that says that some of us may be barbed wire happy, that did happen to blokes. They couldn't take it and they did go - the same as blokes do in jail, go stir happy. They did go barbed wire happy. And so we had to see a psychiatrist. I didn't think he found anything but I was going through me record, not so long ago and he found out I

25:00 was twenty-five per cent nuts. But well – twenty-five per cent something or other. And there again, it was funny while I was there and a little AWAS [Australian Women's Army Service] come in and she's sitting down alongside me and I said, "What are you here for?" She says, "I shot a Yank, didn't kill him." I says, "What?" She says, "He was hanging around our camp

25:30 three nights in a row." She said, "I knew what he was after." So she says, "The fourth night, I just shot him in the leg." So she had to see a psychiatrist, I often wondered how she got on. I don't think she should have been discharged, I think she knew what he was after too. That's another thing that happens. Don't know whether you want that in there. But

26:00 that's – anyway, got discharged and I'd been made up to corporal, my corporal's stripe had come in so I got three years back pay as a corporal too. It's in me pay book somewhere, I think it was about 320 pound or something which was quite a bit of money in them days. And I didn't know

26:30 what to do, I didn't want to go back to medic – so I sort of didn't. Anyway I heard of this hamburger shop up in Ryde. And Mum and Dad had had a fish shop in Leichhardt and I thought, "Oh, I'm not much different, it's a hamburger shop and…" So I bought the hamburger shop at Ryde. Spent the first week tossing drunks out, because six o'clock close all the drunks used to come down to the hamburger shop

27:00 for a feed, spent the first week tossing drunks out. And then word got around that I was a returned bloke and Ryde car park was there with hell of a lot of troops so I made quite a good go of that and I made a few bob out of that. Tangled with the Manpower [government labour organization], I get a letter this day, saying that they heard I'd been discharged but I hadn't fronted the

27:30 Manpower so as they could tell me what I was going to do. So I went down and I see this bloke sitting behind the desk and he starts firing all these questions, "What would you like to do? blah, blah, blah." I said, "I bought a hamburger shop." "You can't do that." He says, "You're under Manpower, what?" I said, "Hey! I spent three years in Germany being told what I do, didn't always do it,"

28:00 I says, "Could have got shot for that." I says, "I'm not listening to you blokes, I've bought me hamburger shop and that's it." And so I worked the hamburger shop for about nine months. But I was taken blackouts at the time and I'd go into town to get food coupons, because had your coupons for your meat and that to run the shop.

28:30 And I wouldn't know what I was in town for. I'd roam around town and wouldn't have a clue what I was there for. So I thought, this is no good. So I sold it and bought an ice run in Newtown, well you could write a book about that. The Yanks were still there and the – a lot of ice chests were in bedrooms, and I tell you what, I could write a

29:00 book about delivering ice in Newtown during the war. I made a few bob there. Decided – my brother in law got very crook at the time; Jack hadn't been in the army because he was classed as unfit. And I'd always been close with me sister and always been good mates with Jack.

29:30 And Val and him had helped me in the hamburger shop and also on the ice run. Jack and I used to do the

ice run. And decided in our wisdom that we'd buy a truck, well every bloke from out the army bought a truck. Whatever money I'd made in the other two things, I went broke with the truck.

30:00 And they were not good days, for a while. I'd met my first wife by then. And we got married and – we got married while I still had the ice

30:30 run and I went from there, cos the war had finished by then, went from there, I think I did the started a dry cleaning run, cos dry cleaning was big in them days before all wash and wear come.

31:00 But I finished there and bought a fish shop with Daph, out at Marrickville. And we had that about six months and Daphne got pregnant, and she couldn't stand the fish shop, she reckons that she never got rid of the smell of fish.

31:30 So I sold that and got onto a good dry cleaning run and I did that for years because when the kids come along, Stephen was only seven and Sue was two and a half, close to three, when my first wife died, she just had a heart attack and died one night.

32:00 And I had the two kids, I did have me mother in law with me which was a help but a hell of a lot of age difference between a grandmother and two kids of that age. And I kept the dry cleaning run for years because during the school holidays, I could take the kids with me. And young Sue –

32:30 I say "young Sue," she's 46, 47 now. She had – and the dry cleaning run used to go from Greystanes to Riverstone, Schofield and right back to Blacktown, used to do a hell of an area. And Sue had all the places she knew which old dear'd give her something to eat. Which old dear'd take her to the toilet, or which old dear had a

33:00 pony down the back and it used to take me three times as long to do me run when I had Sue with me. But I could you know, I had her with me. When Sue started school, I've driven back quite often when it was education week and finished me run at Riverstone, driven back to Rhodes kids to be at the school and then

33:30 gone back to Riverstone to finish me dry cleaning run. I used to listen to their – to the women bowlers down the club, cos they'd have kids the same time as me, this was in latter years I used to listen to them – "Oh you know, when I had the girls." And blah, blah, blah. I says, "When I had my daughter, I finished up in Concord with a crook ticker, more times

34:00 because I'd been over the ironing board." Of course little starched skirts were in then, and I was determined my daughter would be the same as anybody else when she went out. I used to stand over there with these bloody ironing boards and doing starched petty coats. I wouldn't know how many times I finished up in Concord and the doc'd say, "What were you doing?" "Ironing, that's what I was doing." And

34:30 but still, they turned out great. They're great, we had a great relationship while they were growing up. Never got on the grog, never had drug problems. Stephen's 51 now, Sue's 46? I think. And we're still like that. We're – I'm pretty pleased with what I did with

35:00 my kids.

We might go back to Leichhardt.

Do you mind if I go get my book?

We'll just change a tape and do that.

Tape 4

00:44 **Ray, I'm just wondering if you can give me an idea of what kind of suburb Leichhardt was, when you were growing up there?**

Leichhardt was a good suburb to grow up with during The Depression,

01:00 people helped people. People were friendly, they were rough and ready, occasional blues at the pub at a six o'clock closing, but it was a real good suburb, I made very, very good friends in Leichhardt that I had for years, Bernie Hakes that I joined the army with,

01:30 people in the scouts, Mum and Dad were always on the committee of the scouts and guides. We went dancing at the old guide hall for sixpence. We had three places in Leichhardt when we were – while we were growing up, got of a dancing age. Sixpence at the guide hall, ninepence at the town hall and if you went to the Albert Palais, that was one and six.

02:00 If you took a good sort to the Albert Palais you expected a good night and one and six was a lot of money in pre-war days. But it was – it – and the funny part about it, it was a working class suburb,

always, always had Labor politicians, but when voting for council wasn't compulsory, never had a Labor council until

02:30 during the war, when they bought in compulsory voting for council. Leichhardt and it was run by businessmen. And they were interested first – oh no, I'd better not..

Say whatever you want to say.

Well, the first mayor finished up in jail because he had his own home built. The first Labor mayor. You know and

03:00 the first Anzac Day I was back, he looked through the troops who were still in uniform and says, "Oh, with all their families I've got some more votes here." We never got that before compulsory voting come in. Like, things are not always done for the best. But it was a great place to grow up in. I have

03:30 fond memories. I always tell them that's why I've had a long life because of the good lifestyle we had in Leichhardt growing up and we were – all us kids were born at home. Ronald wasn't born in Leichhardt Street, Val was, I was, Margaret was, the one that died. And young Wal, I remember young Wal

04:00 the night he was born, very clearly. Because we were following the Salvation Army, the Salvation Army bands used to come round and we were following the Salvation Army around when – the night Wal was born. And friends I made, as I say, Bernie and I joined together, we joined the ASC but we got split up, I got put with the Field Ambulance, Bernie got put with the supply columns.

04:30 We saw one another from time to time in Palestine and Egypt and cos we were still good mates after the war we went through the Thirty-niners Association and that together. And it was good – another one of my friends, he was a bit younger than me, Alexander family was always good friends with us. Jim, his Mum talked him out of joining at

05:00 the time Bern and I did and he finished up joining up, wrote me when I was in the Middle East said he had joined up and got the same as I did, ASC into a Field Ambulance and you know, when he got over the Middle East I could see my CO about getting him.

05:30 Didn't happen, they come down from Darwin got sent up and got on the HMS Centaur and Jim went down on the Centaur. His Mum never forgave herself, you know. "Had I let him go with you.." One of those things that happens.

Tell me more about your parents.

Well, Dad was a hard worker that could do anything

06:00 he had no education, he could read and write, but very little, the only note I ever got from Dad was about six lines. When – after our first action, I wrote to Dad at Metters, because I didn't want Mum to know at the time. Mum was educated, a beautiful hand writer, Mum,

06:30 I really don't know how they ever got together. I really don't. Because, Mum had lost her mother, I can't remember Mum's mother, she died early. But Pop Williams, he was an engineer on the Colliers and he was also dredge master on the Bellingen

07:00 River I think it was. And Mum and her two sisters and brothers, she had two brothers, they spent part of their life there, so Pop must have been reasonably educated too, but Dad was always a good organiser. president of the scouts, president of the guides a bit later on from that. Always

07:30 interested in things, Dad. And as I say, could do anything with his hands, worked for Metters for donkey's years [a very long time], left there during The Depression when we had fish shops and went back just before the war. No it was good suburb, good suburb.

Were there any signs of the Depression impacting on Leichhardt at that time?

Oh, hell yeah.

08:00 As I say, I was able to leave school at 13 and a half and got to Griffiths Brothers. Sixteen bob a week for five and a half days. Used to cost you threepence each way to go to the Central Railway [Station] and we used to walk up there and Ron was working, Dad wasn't working after we lost

08:30 the fish shop, early in the piece before he went back to Metters when things started to pick up when the war was inevitable. Uncle Wal, one of Mum's brother in laws, he worked at Lysaghts, I don't think he was ever out. And Uncle Charlie another one, he was a pianist in the

09:00 when they had the silent films, they used to have the pianist playing in there. So I think they got through The Depression but we did it hard after we left the – had to walk out on the fish shop and Dad wasn't working, there was only Val and Ron until I got a job. Ron, my eldest brother, he worked for WW Campbell

09:30 the furniture warehouse. Young Wal was still at school of course and - oh yes, I can remember – I think this bloke was a musician or something that killed his two children cos he couldn't

10:00 feed them. Things were tough. But as I say, in Leichhardt, people helped one another. I remember Dad used to mend shoes for anybody, that's a lost art these days, I don't know anybody that's got a shoe lasts these days. And he used to make our toys. And give them out to the

10:30 people for Christmas and things. Things like that were done. And of course, being in the scouts and that we made friends and we played sport and – but it did make a difference to people. There's nothing worse that takes a

11:00 man's dignity than him not being able to work. Absolutely drains – I know my Dad and of course, Dad hadn't been in the First World War which upset him. He was the youngest of four brothers and his mother made such a fuss when Dad went down to join that he never got to join to go away. Which is something that always bugged him a bit.

11:30 Because both of Mum's brothers and one of my brother in laws, as a matter of fact, Uncle Wal won a DCM [Distinguished Conduct Medal]. I have Uncle Wal's DCM medal there. I believe he was recommended for a VC [Victoria Cross]. But his officer got killed before it come through. So he got a DCM which is the next one down that the troops can get. And yet a quiet bloke, you ever met. He certainly didn't give the impression

12:00 of being a hero but he – if you read his citation it is very good. Both of Mum's brothers were in the First World War. Jack was only about 17 when he was in France as a machine gunner. It's funny, he give me three bits of advice, or three things he told me. He says to,

12:30 "Stay out of the boob [prison] in Aldershot if you happen to get to England and get picked up by the MPs. Stay out of the citadel in Cairo if you get picked up or ackwilly or something in there." And he says, "If you go to, I won't mention the wharf – if you got to the wharf in England and a certain pub's still there, if you see somebody that looks like me, it could be because I was going around

13:00 with the publican's daughter." That was the advice Jack give me when I joined the army. And I took that in well. I never finished in the boob in England cos, I didn't get in – and I certainly didn't finish in the one there. And I never ever got to the wharf in England to see whether I had a cousin over there either. One never knows. But no, we're a good family.

Did Jack tell you any stories about the Great War?

Jack used to reckon that he had a

13:30 bloke on his machine gun that could smell the Germans. He swore, but then Jack used to like his grog [alcohol] too. But he always swore that this bloke – he says, "We'd be there and he'd go – 'the bastards are around here.' And Jack says, "Sure enough, all of a sudden somebody'd start shooting at ya." But no he was a

14:00 he was my favourite cos he was a larrikin. Real one-eyed Balmain supporter. But Jack – they tell the story when he come home, my Dad was crook with the pneumonic flu that was on at the time. And Mum tells the story that Jack walked in and he says, "What's wrong with Benny?" And

14:30 Mum says, "Well the doctor says, he'll come back in two days and write me out a death certificate." And Jack says, "I'll fix him." So he went out and he bought a bottle of overproof rum and Mum says he sat there and he fed it to Dad all night. When the doctor come down in two days they told him what had happened and he says, "If Dad hadn't had such a fever, the rum would have killed him anyway."

15:00 But Dad got over it. And any time Jack'd get full, which he did from time to time and get picked up, Dad'd go and bail him out and start to give him a lecture and Jack'd say, "Don't talk to me, Benny, you wouldn't be here if it wasn't for me." So he was a larrikin, but a likeable larrikin, I liked Jack. The others, were a bit old and a bit more

15:30 staid but not Jack. I could relate to Jack cos I was a bit of a larrikin growing up.

Did you hear any other stories about the war from anyone else?

Not really, no, not really. They didn't talk about it so much and I can understand that. It's like the Jap POWs don't talk about it. Because of what they went through and I can understand that and I can

16:00 understand, after reading what they went through in the trenches, I can understand why they don't want to talk about it. I really can. Like, as I said, Jack only told me stupid things that he got into trouble about, he didn't tell me any of the gory details, but really and truly the First World War they done it hard. We thought we did it hard

16:30 at times but they done it hard. And they didn't talk about it a great deal. Even though I was connected with the RSL in Leichhardt I was a pretty good dancer. Old time, modern old time. And they used to run a dance down the guide hall, sixpence to go in. That's the only way they had of making money during The Depression, and we used to – the partner I had and I, we used to

17:00 go out to various places and learn the new dances and come back and we'd be right up with all the snobs, nothing went past us mob at Leichhardt. We got into everything. But no, they didn't talk. But as

far as seeing the war coming, of course you could see the war coming,

17:30 anybody that says they couldn't just wasn't reading anything. And the appeasement people, they had a lot to answer for, they really did. Because England certainly wasn't in the position to really go to war in 1939, even though she did.

18:00 And we certainly weren't – we had the militia and they used to dress up in their uniforms and one thing and another and we got a lot of good troops. Don't get me wrong, officers that we had, people like Ivan Dougherty and Brigadier Eather and blokes like that they were militia blokes and

18:30 were marvellous. Tubby Allen who'd been a First World War bloke, Ken Eather and Sir Ivan Dougherty hadn't been. They weren't old enough for the First World War but they were militia blokes and finished up right at the top of the tree. Tubby Allen was a brigadier that took us away

19:00 he went away as a lieutenant in the First World War and finished up a half colonel in charge of a battalion when he was only 27, 28. You know, marvellous but a lot of the troops didn't go in, a lot of the other blokes I think could see the opportunities that were going to come up when we had to get more troops in and probably it was a

19:30 good thing because they had – they did have people that had been in the army with an army background that could train the blokes that come after us. So you know, I don't blame 'em for it, we used to at the time. But I really don't.

What signs were there that the war was coming?

Well,

20:00 the fact that Hitler was never appeased with anything, even though they had appeasement all the time, he was never appeased with anything. He took – he wanted the Sudetenland back so they give it to him back. He went into Austria, the Anschluss [union] at Austria, people say that he you know, that they absolutely crushed the Austrians, not so, really.

20:30 You look at the newsreels that come out at the time, and the Austrians were cheering them as they come over the Austrian border. Like people forget that too. I have no time for Hitler or any of his mob, but by the same token, you can't say that they did things that they didn't. The Austrians come out in their thousands when he went into Vienna and cheered him all down the bloody street. And

21:00 you had Churchill was the only one that was saying, this was going to happen. The rest of them, Chamberlain, Halifax and those blokes, Sir Samuel Hoare absolutely appeasement. But we could see it. Like, the newsreels in Berlin, they took the Linden trees out at one stage so as they could march

21:30 so many abreast. I think it was 32 abreast. And it took over four hours for any one crowd, for the crowd to go through. And still, in England, they're saying, there's not going to be a war. As I say, I left school at bloody 13 and a half, I could see there was going to be a war. And of course, working at Metters, particularly when Dad went back, the

22:00 older blokes there were – we were getting army orders for the big double oven, Sampsons as they call them in those days, the big fuel stoves because they were starting to do army training camps. And I used to talk about it to Bernie and different mates and we always says,

22:30 I say, we weren't interested in going to the militia. But I think the Second World War was the one war where there was a goody and a baddy. And we were goodies. Like, the slaughter of the First World War has never really been explained. As to what good

23:00 it did. But this – the Second World War, Hitler had to be stopped. It was as simple as that. You couldn't have one man dominating the world. And that's what he would have done, if we hadn't have gone to war. And that's why I joined up, that I finished in the Field Ambulance I make no apologies for, I don't think the medics get the

23:30 not kudos, but I don't think they get the publicity that they should. I've seen Doc Selby operating in shell holes, not on your Hollywood screen with Clark Gable or some bugger, but Doc Selby himself doing it. You know, and as I say, we was through the wire seven minutes, seven minutes after the first infantry bloke went through

24:00 the wire. And we were bringing four stretcher cases, five sometimes, because we'd put a bloke on the floor. And we were doing exactly what the helicopters were doing in Korea. Didn't look as spectacular with an old Chevy ambulance lumbering over the desert, but we were doing the same job. And

24:30 probably closer than a lot of those blokes were. And as I say in the stuff I've written, this being a counselled all the time. The first bloke we picked up had lost both legs. Now, I was only 21, I'd never seen anything like that before, but we certainly didn't get counselled. As I say, if you take a job on, whether it be in the

25:00 ambulance service or a police service or something, you meet those things, you've got to deal with them. That's my opinion.

Do you think those things affect a person?

I think if you let them get too close, they affect a person. Like, I don't remember a lot of people we picked up. I remember the first bloke, and I remember a bloke that we picked up with

25:30 belly wounds. And my offsider, walked in front of the ambulance and called every bump as we got to it, so as we could ease that bloke over the bumps and get him back to our unit before he died. And we did. And even the – I'd marked my ambulance, Punchy's Pet, because that was my nickname,

26:00 Punchy because I used to get in the blues from time to time. And our ambulance got quite a name. Superstitions get around. Ours was a lucky ambulance. Our surgeon, Captain Blomfield, he was a lucky surgeon because he was one of the few

26:30 surgeons that knew something about wounds like this because he'd been a doctor at Newcastle, Adamstown, and he'd been in mine disasters where people had lost limbs and one thing another. Like a lot of our other doctors were just out of hospitals. You know, they hadn't seen anything like this. Blommy was a great surgeon, marvellous surgeon, but

27:00 as I say, he did have some idea of what these wounds were. And diggers'd say, you know, "Get me to see Blommy." Word gets around that these – as I say, I was proud of our unit. We did a great job and I make no apologies for saying what our unit was like that

27:30 eighty-five per cent of us got knocked off on Crete was a bloody sin, because we were a good unit.

I'm really interested in hearing about the girls that you knew round Leichhardt and what they were like.

28:00 Well, as I say, we could go to six penny dances, everybody could dance. You learnt – jazz wasn't real big, jitterbugging was just coming in at the start of the war, but we used to do modern old time. And we knocked around as a group, we really did. My sister was two years older than me

28:30 and even she knocked around with a group. If she got hold of a bloke, that I knew wasn't much good, I'd tell her. She'd probably take no notice of me for a fortnight but eventually he'd go. Well, it was the same with the girls. You treated a girl like your sister, 90% of them. Of course you got the odd one that you could have a little bit of fun with, but

29:00 all in all, they were like our sisters, they were good girls as you'd say, as my grandaughter'd probably say, they – we knocked around as a crowd, we had our different clubs, we used to go out on picnics and one thing another and you'd pair off but

29:30 that was it. There was not a great deal of – what's the word? Promiscuity. In Leichhardt when I was growing up. I don't say it wasn't tried. Don't get me wrong. I don't say it wasn't tried, but, "no," was no. Let's put it that way, no was no. And that was it. And I expected no to be no with my sister.

30:00 **When you say, you might be able to have a bit of fun, what was the expected level you could go to?**

Well you was hoping they'd say, "Sid go all the way." But that didn't – that didn't happen very often. And people might say that's wrong with a suburb like Leichhardt but it's not wrong. Because I was what they called the 'Leichhardt lair', I was a good dancer and I

30:30 used to have me pick of the girls from time to time. And most of them as I say, ninety-nine per cent of it was, no was no and that was it.

So how much did boys know about things like sex and things like that before they went away to war?

I don't think we knew as much as we thought we knew. I really don't.

31:00 I can remember, Doc Selby again, he come to my life all the time, even though I didn't get to know him at this particular time, he gave us our first lecture on VD out at Rosebery Racecourse. Lining us all up and he told us the be all and end all of VD and what could happen and blah, blah, blah. And

31:30 he finished up saying, "And don't come and tell me that you've got it off the toilet seat because it doesn't happen." He says, "My advice to you is keep it in your bloody pants unless you know where it's going." That was Doc. And I think it was good advice, because when we started to take the blokes to the VD hospital when we were overseas, you thought twice,

32:00 three times. Even the regimental brothels which were controlled and of course our doctors used to go and examine the girls. I remember a very good doctor, I won't mention his name, but he was a great bloke and I can remember taking him one day and this lass was

32:30 big and black and he finished examining and she says, "I clear doctor?" Says, "Yeah." "You want me?" This major turned around to me, he says, "Hey if ever you let that bloody out at the unit." He says. Of

course he said, “No.” He says, “You’ll be on bloody kitchen duty forever.” I says, “Hey Sir, I wouldn’t do that.” We knew.

33:00 they did try to have clean brothels, they did. Rosie’s and Marie’s were the two brothels in Tel Aviv, were the main two brothels in Tel Aviv and they were examined and they did try to – because it was very seldom that a soldier could get on with a Jewish girl. That was frowned very hard from the people in the kibbutzes

33:30 if they started going around with a digger. I had a mate that one of them fell for hook, line and sinker. But he was the only one ever I knew. I think some of the officers might have got to know girls at times but it was very hard even on the beaches you could mag to ‘em on the beaches and that but that’s as far as it went.

34:00 Beach at Tel Aviv. So..

Was there an expectation before you went away to Palestine that the troops would be able to get available sex, that the boys thought they could get some action from overseas?

Oh yeah, we were told there’d be regimental brothels, because you know, wherever we went, the army troops had been anyway or still were. So they had

34:30 regimental brothels for the English troops and of course, that’s what used to cause friction, because they were on a shilling a day as to our five bob a day. Well prices went up when we got there and the Poms used to scream blue murder, rightly so. They’d been paying so much for years and all of a sudden prices went sky hight. It was like we struck when we come home with the Yanks.

35:00 Exactly the same thing. Although, the Yanks were 20 times more than we were. But we were getting five times as much as the Poms too. But yeah, we were given lectures on the way over, we were told to stay out of the red light district in Colombo and Aden. Which didn’t happen. But

35:30 anybody with any brains stayed out of those at Colombo and I met a very nice native lass, native of Ceylon, I mean, Colombo that was in the library and we happened to be on picquet. A couple of us and this bloke gave her a hard time, he was half full and,

36:00 “I’ll have you Aussies.” And we tossed him out of the library and she was quite grateful for that. I corresponded with her until I got taken prisoner and then she must have lost touch after I got taken prisoner. And I corresponded with that lass for - oh, 18 months. Lovely lass she was.

36:30 She was in the English library. Oh yes, and we had lectures all the time, and but I suppose, human natures but..

How aware were you that there were regimental brothels available?

Oh everybody knew. Everybody knew

37:00 we had the regimental brothels. Everybody knew Rosie’s and Marie’s. Everybody knew the Birka in Cairo, that’s where the diggers burnt the Birka in the First World War, because there was so much VD coming out of it I believe that was the reason. There was a bit of it there in the Second World War, nothing like in the First World War but ah, yes. And

37:30 it was Sister Street in Alexandria, Sister Street was bombed before we went up the desert they reckoned there was more officers killed than troops in Sister street. I don’t know whether that’s a fact. I wouldn’t be surprised, cos they had their special places to go to, they didn’t mingle with the troops. But –

So you’re saying

38:00 **that there was a lot of VD around, but there were regimental brothels. What’s the difference between – why were troops going to the other brothel?**

Well, they didn’t care, when they got full they didn’t care. Look, I’m not saying VD was rife, don’t get me wrong, I don’t think it was rife in the Second World War maybe as the First World War. Maybe we knew more in the Second World War. I don’t know, like don’t

38:30 get me wrong, I’m not saying by any matter of means, we were taken ambulance loads down every day, two or three, you know, out of the unit, you know, but it was often enough to cause concern. Because they stopped your pay if you got VD. And course

39:00 if a bloke was married, that went back to his wife’s allowance I think. And so like, they were stupid in that regard.

Was it grounds for divorce?

I don’t know. I don’t know. But I think it was classed as a self- inflicted wound. That’s why they stopped the pay. They did that I think if a bloke shot himself in the foot or one thing another as a self-inflicted wound.

39:30 I think, I'm not sure of that, but I know they stopped pay if you got VD.

Tape 5

00:41 **You were saying before that the troops wouldn't believe you about VD.**

No, lots of them wouldn't, because it only happened to comparative few, you know. They used to think they were safe.

01:00 Well I suppose you could liken it to AIDS [Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome] with safe sex. You know, I don't suppose the people have got that through sex, ever thought they were going to get AIDS did they? But they had lectures, we had special doctors when they did go to the hospital, and course, they weren't off too long because

01:30 oh, the antibiotic had – penicillin had come out. And but they couldn't say they weren't warned. Like, anybody that got VD, it was their own fault. It was and I have no hesitation in saying that, because with all the lectures they had and certainly

02:00 they talked to us blokes. You know and they say, "Ahhhh you know, they're only talking ay?" They're not talking mate, you know, we do take a couple down there so it's – and we were only one unit, I was only one ambulance. We had eight ambulances in our unit, so it wasn't

02:30 only me, but they were a minority of the cases that we took to the hospital before we went into action, anyway. They were- these blokes with appendicitis and you know, bad flu and stuff like that – accidents. Like, the first casualty was – that we picked up was a bloke that the track come off his

03:00 little whatever they call them. The little open tanks thing. His track come off and caught him around the head. He was sergeant, married man. Poor bugger hadn't even seen anything. That happened in Egypt. And VD was a fact of life and it's as I say, I definitely

03:30 don't want to give the impression that the 2/AIF [Australian Imperial Force] was rife with it. But it was there.

How many of the blokes before they left, were still virgins?

I wouldn't have a clue. I wouldn't have a clue. How do you talk to any bloke who was never a bloody virgin?

04:00 Oh, no now Clare, I would not have a clue. I – no.

What about contraception, did the army – what..?

Oh yeah. Yeah. They give you a – a – they give you contraception they had a

04:30 cream plus the can't think of the word, I'm thinking the French letter [condom] but it's what you used to call them. And they also had places where you could go and wash yourself after you'd been. With Condy's crystals I think and stuff like that. So ah, yes. All precautions were taken, Clare. Like, really there was no excuse. It's

05:00 blokes that got it, just didn't take precautions or didn't even evidently take precautions after. And oh no, they were pretty well looked after.

Was there an assumption would you say, that most of the troops that would go away would have access to sex in one way or another.

Well, everybody had access to it, it was entirely

05:30 to you whether you took it or not. Everybody had access. But yeah, the Birka in Cairo was like a rabbit warren. And the girls used to talk to one another while they were halfway through, you know out their little cubicles. Bloody shockin' joint. There again, I don't know that I know it by sight, I don't know it by personal experience because I wasn't that stupid.

06:00 And apart from that, I suppose being a bit of a lair, I just didn't like the idea of paying for it. I tell you what I did find, out – and I thought I knew a bit, but the percentage of married blokes that had somebody on the side at home,

06:30 it surprised me. It really did. Because the crowd that I went around with, it didn't happen. But you know, and I was amazed at the blokes that had a lass on the side at home, as well as their wives.

Back at home? They had someone else at home?

Yeah. Yeah. And it surprised me.

07:00 As I say, it wasn't as though I hadn't knocked around a bit, I'd knocked around a bit before I joined the army but I didn't know as much as I thought I knew. But I certainly listened, I listened to the VD lectures and I listened to the gas lectures. Because I'd seen diggers from the First World War that had gas and they were the two things that I looked at. Probably gas more

07:30 than VD but I certainly – they were certainly the two things that I studied, I certainly didn't want to be gassed. I didn't particularly want VD either.

You mentioned earlier that there was a guy in the battalion that when you first joined – that tried to start a relationship with the country lad. Can you

08:00 **expand on that a little bit?**

Well there's really nothing to expand on, it just happened two nights in a row, and –

What happened?

Well, he started to try and feel the bloke alongside of him, from what I can gather. And he naturally took exception to it and he was taken away through the night and we didn't see him again as I say,

08:30 I believe he was discharged for flat feet. Or that's what we were told. I don't know whether that was right or not, and wouldn't have a clue. But that's what happened and I suppose that you get a team of blokes, you're going to – not that – that gays come out much before the war.

09:00 As you know, like, it's but they were around, we knew that certain people were, but they didn't flaunt it most times and therefore nobody took any great deal of notice of it and it certainly wasn't prevalent I don't think. But they were there, there's no question in the wide, wide world about that.

09:30 But they didn't come out and I could never understand why they had to come out. Like, if a bloke likes a bloke that's his business. But I like girls, that's my business. But I don't go down George Street and say, "Hey!" You know. "I like girls." But they want to come out and say, "Oh I like blokes." I've said in my story there, one thing my daughters took me up on, I says, "You know, if they want to come out they should have learnt to fight first, because

10:00 somebody was going to have a go at them when they come out and flaunt them." And as far as the Mardi Gras, now if a team of diggers or a team of footballers, walked down the streets like those blokes do, during Mardi Gras, you'd hear the scream from here to bloody Newcastle but everybody says, it's great for business, and so it happens.

10:30 A white heterosexual is the most picked on person in Australian society. They can say what they like about us, we can't say anything about them. Not that I want to. I have gay friends. I have plenty of gay friends. I've had – I've got one particular lass that I love that's been working down the club,

11:00 I have absolutely nothing, but I can't see why they want to flaunt it and I firmly believe, if you want to flaunt it, well be able to protect yourself because there's always going to be some yobbo, that's going to take exception. They don't care. I don't care what they want to do. I do object to making – my opinion again – to making heroes out of

11:30 artists and one thing another who have died of AIDS. Like, now you're going back to VD, army stops your pay, anybody that talked about VD before the war, it was absolutely taboo. Anybody that had VD was absolutely out, finished, family, friends, you name it. But with AIDS, anybody that got AIDS through blood

12:00 transfusions or kids that had it passed on from their parents, I have all the sympathy in the world and we should try and do something. But those that played around, all of a sudden they die, and they make a bloody hero of them. It doesn't make sense to me. Maybe I'm too old, I don't know. But it doesn't make sense.

Can you clarify one thing for me? You'd know this

12:30 **more than most, with the contact you would have had with it in your specific role, but is VD only contractible through unprotected sex?**

Yes, yes. Absolutely. Nothing else. That's what I say, that's what Doc Selby says, in a first lecture. "If you tell me you got it off the toilet seat, doesn't happen." Yeah. That's all you get it. And as far as

13:00 I know, you can only get AIDS off needles or unprotected sex. That's what I say. VD was absolutely, bloody horrified. But nobody seems to worry if they get it through sex if he's a bloody pianist or an actor or something. It doesn't make sense to me. Anyway.

These guys,

13:30 **were soldiers fighting for their country, what kind of understanding did they have about morality about things like respect for women?**

I think most of them were like me. I don't think, as far as I know, we had no wife beaters. We had no

14:00 would be rapists. I can't remember any of our troops ever being up on rape charges. It could have happened but I could – as far as I know, never. I think the average bloke, well I think, I was an average bloke before the war. And we had certain things and I

14:30 think you'll find, if you talk to them, they'd say the same thing. " I treated them like me sister. If they said no they said no." As far as I know there was no rape – could have been Clare, could have been but I never heard of it. Apart from a little bit on the side, with some of the married blokes, and that was only a minority too. That was only a minority. But

15:00 it happened and as I say, it didn't happen with all the families I knew in Leichhardt and I got a bit of a shock when I found out it did happen. I don't now, of course.

Can you expand more on the lecture that you were given about gas masks? What were some of the concerns that there were raised about that?

Well, we

15:30 we went to an NCOs camp in Sarafan and that was the only time we were actually subjected to gas. And they gave us lectures on what to do, like of course being with the field ambulance, they had certain papers that changed colour,

16:00 they made certain that you looked after your respirator, and they did put us through certain gases. They'd put us into a gas chamber for 30 seconds, or something like that then they'd put us in with our respirators on, to see the difference. So they were the lectures, I don't think

16:30 everybody got those lectures, I think it was only if you happened to go to a special school and as I say, it was a NCO's training course that I went to when I was made a lance corporal at Sarafan one of the big English depots there that we actually had physical gas training. But we came

17:00 back and talked to our troops, you know our particular unit about what we'd learnt and what we hoped we were able to do if it ever come to the point where gas was used. It wasn't used as far as I know in the Second World War. Only in the concentration camps.

17:30 But I tried to be a good soldier, I tried to learn what I could. And if I could help somebody well that was doing it and meself. You know, I – there were some people that believed in God, they reckoned he'd look after

18:00 'em. I looked for a bloody big rock to hide behind, if there was a – if there was Messerschmitts coming down firing. I didn't have enough faith that I could bloody sit outside and do nothing. Some people did, they honestly believed. And it seemed to work in lots of cases. But I wasn't a great believer. I didn't strike too many padres

18:30 in the army that I thought a great deal. I struck two. But some of them I don't think should have been with troops. I - but that's another thing – that's something I don't want to go on and that's my opinion and –

Can you tell me about the two padres that you really respected?

19:00 Yeah. One of them was Paddy Yule, he was a Roman Catholic padre, come from Maitland, matter of fact the day that Paddy was buried I believe Maitland closed – closed down. He was marvellous. He looked like Friar Tuck. A little fat bloke. Used to like his whisky. He'd

19:30 ring up the transport tent from time to time if you happened to be on duty and he'd say, "Who am I talking to?" I'd say, "Talking to Punchy, padre, what's your problem?" "Will you ring the 2/1st Battalion or 2/2nd Battalion and tell them seven o'clock mass will be a little bit late this morning, we had a night of liquid bridge in the mess and the padre's feeling a little bit

20:00 unwell." All said in good humour. And we'd say, "Yeah, righto padre." And we'd ring up and tell them. Terrific bloke, didn't matter what religion was that your son a burial, Paddy he'd bury him. Some padres wouldn't bury outside their own religion. He was very good friends with one of our doctors who was

20:30 a mason and if Billy Gunther happened to be the doctor in charge of – you know, Paddy'd say, "I got one of your blokes Billy, I got one of my blokes." And when the Palestinian Labour Corps come up the desert, you know, he'd say, "Palestinian Labour Corps, all going to the same place." That was

21:00 Paddy Yule. Fantastic bloke. He was on the HMAS Manoora was it, that was bombed in Darwin harbour, the day they bombed and he says he was actually caught with his pants down. He was on the toilet on deck when they come over and bombed the place. But Paddy Yule, he was

21:30 a marvellous bloke. He really was. He had an old – well not an old but he had a captured Itai.., little Fiat or something like that. And him and his driver I think pushed it fifty per cent of the way between when they picked it up at Bardia and when we finished up at Benghazi because it kept breaking down all the time.

22:00 And Paddy and his batman were always late coming into camp. The other bloke was a Kiwi, denominational, I think Church of England. The Kiwis says that he used to run a radio session over

there before the war. He was pretty outspoken and sort of didn't have his own church. Johnny Ledgerwood, his name was. And he ran the Escape Club.

22:30 Johnny, excellent bloke. Never – the only time he'd come around and ask you particularly to go to church was if the Jerry's had looked at his sermon and thought it was a bit too propaganda-ish for it and he'd come around and say, "I want a full house tonight." So you know, would we come, like when

23:00 they landed on Sicily and things started to look good he did the – he was a believer in God he brought God into his sermon. But as I say, he had his say even then but he ran the Escape Club, there very successfully. He

23:30 used to take things out. They used to – blokes from the ordinance used to draw maps on handkerchiefs and Johnny'd go out with the handkerchiefs tied around his neck under his uniform, you know collar of his uniform and things like that. He had 30 odd foot of rope around him one day and they stopped him at the gate, and wanted to search him of course

24:00 their rank was a captain and they refused to be examined by anybody less than – they couldn't find a captain, so he walked out the gate with his 30 foot of rope around his – he did things like that. Great, he was – he was a marvellous bloke, in my opinion, Johnny Ledgerwood, one of the few blokes I could go to church for.

24:30 But I didn't have a great deal to do with them apart from that. As I say Paddy was attached to our unit and I – he came down one time to an Anzac Day parade with Billy Gunther, they made the trip down from Newcastle instead of being up there they come down to Sydney. And I says to Paddy, "What do you do these days? You know, you can't ring up and say, 'seven o'clock mass is ten

25:00 past seven this morning.'" "Ahh," he says, " I send the boy out." I said – terrific bloke, Paddy Yule. Not very often I look up to people, I do to Doc Selby, because I've seen him in action, I know and I would – well I'm

25:30 wandering a bit. You want to know more about before the war.

What were the most important things you learned in training, in initial training, before you went away, that you kept with you?

I think obeying orders. They say that the Australian troops are wild. They don't like this and they don't like that. And we don't like a lot of things. But

26:00 They could never say the Australian troop wasn't trained or wasn't prepared to obey orders. They might think they were stupid, at times, and at times they were. And really there's no training. Apart from route marching and that

26:30 at Ingleburn and certainly taking blokes to the hospital and one thing another like that, that was about the only training we'd done. Even though we were issued with rifles, as I say, being the transport company. I fired three shots on a rifle range before I went away. And that was it. And

27:00 a thing about Sarafan, we had a – we had Scottish sergeant major from the Black Watch in Sarafan. And we went out on the rifle range there. And after watching me, he says, "The only bloody way you're going to hit somebody is if he moves." I was the worst shot in the AIF. He says, "No way you're ever going to hit anybody if he stays still." I was a

27:30 shocking rifle shot. They used to say, "Breathe in and hold your breath." I didn't know whether I breathed in or bloody breathed out, but it didn't make no difference. I was a shocking shot. It's just as well I was with field ambulance, yeah. Yeah, I'll never forget, Sergeant Jack, never forget him. "You're a good soldier, Norman. But don't ever try to kill anybody with a rifle." "Righto."

28:00 So, where do we go from there.

What would you say your experience level was with things like first aid and dealing with people with casualties before you left?

Not a great deal. We did more of it in Palestine, that's why we was in Palestine for nearly

28:30 12 months. You know. We did a lot of training in Palestine, each ambulance has an ambulance orderly, so he was the one that had first look at a casualty, naturally. But our bloke on the canvass top of our ambulance, he drew plans for – of the

29:00 different –

Arteries?

Yeah and different points that you could press arteries to stop bleeding. And one thing another. So a bit of it did rub off on us drivers. But it was the ambulance orderly that did the main training and they learned everything from burns to wounds to broken

29:30 limbs to shattered limbs. We got one bloke that had a bit of shrap in the throat, I happened to get him and I says to Wally, “Where do a put a pressure point here?” I didn’t – but oh yeah, we were trained, we knew what we were doing, we

30:00 although in them days, the idea was to keep the patient warm. They say if he went into shock, they got cold. That’s exactly the opposite these days. You don’t put blankets on casualties these days, they tell me. So I don’t know how many blokes we might have messed up by putting blankets on them, instead of what they know now. But

30:30 they were bad ambulances we had in so much as, the first ambulance we got when we were over there were English Austins and they had big wide tyres on them. And they were like a boat, they used to roll a bit. When we changed over to Chevs, they were on 30 overweight chassis, and they used to bounce.

31:00 Well, if you’ve got a bloke with wounds, that hurt. Instead of – and the funny part about it. My CO took me up – the only time I ever met real big brass, was the brigadier who was the director of medical services and the question was asked of me as a driver, as it probably should have been, what we thought of the difference.

31:30 And we said, “Absolutely – like the old Morris ambulance was absolutely better than the Chevy.” It also had a heater in it, so you could heat your blankets, as I say, that was the go in them days. You heated the blankets. They even had a heater in them. But within three weeks, all the Morrises were gone and we had Chevys. Brigadier

32:00 Burston I think his name. I don’t say it was his fault, it would be higher than him. But you know, why ask the question if they’re not going to – it’s like a boss asking you the question. Saying, you know, “Do you like that bit of equipment?” You say, “Yeah, it’s great.” And next thing you find something inferior. Stupid. But they don’t take any notice of us. And

32:30 they were. That bloke we bought back with belly wounds. That’s what I say, we – Wally our ambulance orderly he called out every bump as we come to it. We’re going over – took us about hour and a half to go about five ks back to our casualty clearance, we didn’t know whether time was going to kill the bloke or

33:00 you know, but we thought that was the best for the poor bugger.

As a driver, how much contact do you have with the ramifications of people in battle?

What do you

33:30 mean, mentally or physically?

Both, like the victims of combat, how much contact do you have with them?

Well, apart from, if they were wounded, well we had mates in various battalions that we’d see on leave and things like that. We mixed – there was often, even on the ship going over,

34:00 the battalion that was on our ship and I won’t mention the battalion or some of the idiots in it. They used to come up and say to us, “Why don’t you join the bloody men?” Oh yeah, that was often said. You have no idea, I’ve just leant a mate of mine, a book called, “The Thirty-niners.” Well worth reading. And when we

34:30 first joined up, it was, “five bob a day murderers.” “Conscripts from the dole.” “Those that want to stop paying their wives alimony.” Or, “those that were just out of jail.” Now blokes like Eddie Ward, blokes like him in the Labor party at the time, that was in every paper. Every

35:00 newspaper, every day. “Five bob a day murderers.” Things weren’t real good. A lot of people thought we were great. A lot of politicians that didn’t want the bloody war and course, you didn’t have all the solicitors and one thing and another in the Labor Party in them days, you had blokes that come

35:30 off coal faces, like Ben Chifley was a train driver. Curtin was a reformed drunk. But a good person in himself I think, but he’s admitted it – it’s all in his biography, it’s no secret. But blokes like Eddie Warden, blokes like him they were crap. Crap when I say, I have no problem

36:00 I you know, but we got all of that. They used to be down the Domain, they used to get up down the Domain and talk about it. Every Sunday, you’d get half a dozen people in the bloody Domain. Saying that we were their economic conscripts or five bob a day murderers, or getting away from our wives.

36:30 Happened every Sunday. But we didn’t take a great deal of notice of it. I think we did go down the Domain, once or twice and did a bit of heckling of our own. But mostly we just ignored them. We knew what we wanted to do, and we felt we were doing what was right, so and really, as far as economic conscripts,

37:00 in my particular unit, I don’t know about other units, but I would say, 75% of our blokes were working. Not always on good jobs, you know. Might be digging roads or something. I was working at Metters and Metters wages at that time for a stove fitter, was five pound eleven. That’s what I was getting when I went back to

37:30 five bob a day in the army. I certainly wasn't an economic conscript. We were only getting that money two or three of us that were 19, 20 at the time, because there hadn't been any apprenticeships right during The Depression and of course when they started to get busy for the army orders and that, the blokes that really were fitters that knew how to do the old fuel stove and

38:00 of course we would be on the lesser ones, we were doing the gas stoves and that. So – but that was the wage, five pound eleven and a penny I think it was. Was the top wage that we were getting. There was only two of us as far as I know that joined in '39 from Metters.

38:30 And we had 1500 working there at that time. That was the biggest stove manufacturer in the Southern Hemisphere, old early cooker. You see them in old films with the kookaburra on the front of the gas stove. They were ours. Early cookers. Like a quid now for every one of them I made. Mrs Pott's irons, used to put them

39:00 on the fuel stove and they had a handle so most of ours sales of that, two Mrs Pott's irons, one getting heated, while Mum was ironing and she'd put that back on and put the handle back on the other one. Used to work on them as a kid at Metters. Good place to work for I suppose in them days.

Tape 6

00:46 **Your father received news a couple times**

01:00 **that you'd been killed in action.**

They got news – the first time I was reported dead was when I was about nine years old. We were playing – we had the fish shop on Balmain road at the time, and three of us kids were playing and we climbed a tree. And the branch broke. And I come down, I hit a fence on the way down, broke my collarbone and hit the ground and

01:30 little lass, she was same age as me, nine, ten whatever it was at the time, and it was Friday night and our fish shop was chockablock with all the good Catholics buying fish, was about half past five, six o'clock. And Marge went in and says, "I don't want to upset you Mrs Norman, but Ray's just killed himself." And that was the first time. And then of course the second time, Mum got a telegram

02:00 to say that I'd died of wounds. And that's in my discharge papers. I got killed in action, so I believe it was a Friday and they were knocking off at the showground where all the records were and all the so called soldiers out there and it was colonel, they elevated me about 14 ranks

02:30 and knocked me off at the same time, I believe. That's what happened. So yes, I had those telegrams, I lost it with all the photos that I had taken in the POW camp. When I moved around a bit before I first got married. Yeah, twice, I've been reported – bloody third time's going to be unlucky.

03:00 **So do you know how your mum responded the second time?**

I believe, talking to the minister, even though she did stop writing, she found it hard to believe, or didn't want to believe it. And it was a lass from the Red Cross I couldn't understand why everybody's getting letters and I'm not getting letters when I'm a POW and of course, mother's write whether they've got anything to say or not,

03:30 and it was a lass from the Red Cross that convinced Mum that I was a POW before she got official word. She says, she had the official list and told her what camp I was in and that's when Mum started to write. I went and saw the lass when I come home and you know,

04:00 but those things happen I suppose, in wartime.

In the POW camps, were you guys corresponding back?

Yeah. Providing we didn't do anything stupid or open our mouth at the right time, they'd stop the letters so, there's one in my book there, they're only one page things. Originally, originally we only got cards. And they had – "I am well. I am sick. I

04:30 have been wounded. I haven't been wounded." And you just had to cross out what didn't apply. They were the first things we got. And we had them for quite some time, that's all we could tell our parents and I think, yeah, we signed them I think, but that was another thing, Mum couldn't make out with just signing, "Ray," whether it was my

05:00 writing or not. You know that was why she didn't know whether the telegram was right or not. But it wasn't. So. As I say, third time's going to be bloody unlucky. I hope it's not for ten years yet, or a bit longer.

The boat trip over to Palestine, can you tell me what happened on that trip over?

Yeah well, we done training, mainly

05:30 mainly PT [Physical Training], did exercises each day, had to take our turn at doing a bit of sentry duty on the stern of the ship and that. And we had lectures on what our duties'd be and that. Had boxing

06:00 tournaments. We had boxing tournaments on board, I used to fight as a featherweight I could just make nine stone. In them days, if I went over – the lightweights they could punch too hard. And I used to train to keep those couple of extra pounds off because of the lightweight bloke on the ship, he was a good fighter.

06:30 I just used to do it for fun. But yeah, we had boxing matches and – we had in our unit, a bloke that was a magician. He had been on the Tivoli circuit before he joined up and he went back after he did a lot of it around clubs. He used to get dressed up like Charlie Chaplin

07:00 and he'd do his magic tricks and then he'd show you how it was done, as though Charlie Chaplin had – you know, buggered things up at the finish of his film, well Paul Dalton'd do that. He used to go under, The Great Dalton. And he was around the clubs for a long time, he used to put on shows and cos, you always got, you got a lot of people together

07:30 you always got blokes that could do some things. Sing, play an instrument. We had the same thing in our POW camps. You know, you always had somebody who could do something. So that took the monotony away a bit. But apart from that, you can't do much on a ship. You can't do a route march around the ship like how many times can you go round the bleeding deck?

08:00 But the PT was good. We kept pretty fit.

What exercises were you doing in the PT?

Just the normal things. Physical jerks, you know, up and down from the floor, do a few you know 20 or 30 of them, used to be able to do in

08:30 them days, when you was young and fit. Just ordinary stuff, not a – it was nothing outrageous or anything, just enough to keep – of course the trouble is, in them days, you all smoked. You know there was very few non-smokers in them days. Everybody smoked in them days.

And sentry duty down the back? What did that involve?

Oh, just making certain no submarine come up your bum.

09:00 Never, ever saw anything. Never, ever saw anything. Pitch black, looking over the stern, looking that the boat was behind you. There was five or six on our convoy when we went over. We went on the SS Strathnaver, we travelled first class. I was in a first class cabin only two to a cabin you know. No fiddling

09:30 around with us. But they were going back to England to get fitted out as troopers. They'd been out here on the England Australian run. There was the Strathnaver, the SS Strathaird, the SS Orion, the SS Orsova, I think, I thought I might have had them listed in the book. I got them listed somewhere, there was five or six

10:00 in our convoy that went away on the 10th of January.

And seasickness?

There was a bit when we went through the bight, as luck would have it, I didn't get seasick. So we was having plenty of extra meals, and the blokes that were crook, yes, there was a bit of seasickness,

10:30 not a great deal I suppose for the number of troops that was on board. Cos, if we – we had the 2/4th Battalion and part of the cav unit, 60th Cav [Cavalry]. On board. And course those that were down in steerage class, they done it a lot tougher than we – we were lucky, we were two and four to a cabin

11:00 on deck number three. We were on the Strathnaver going over. Big time.

And did the doctors have any medical approaches for blokes who were seasick?

Oh yeah. They used to get treatment, pills and course with so many troops, somebody's always getting sick. Whether it be, you know, tonsillitis or something – appendicitis, things like that.

11:30 So they were all treated by our doctors or ship's doctor. But it – we had a good trip over. We had the Rameles I think, was the cruiser that took us over. We had cruisers and destroyers with us, all the way. I think

12:00 we had a couple of deaths, but blokes had to get buried at sea. I think – I'm pretty certain there was a couple that you know, died on the trip over. But yeah.

Did you do any target practising on the way over with ordnances?

No, we didn't. I can't – look I can't remember whether the infantry did or not. But we definitely didn't.

12:30 **When you got to Palestine and also in respect Egypt, what were the Arabs like? I hear they used to pinch stuff.**

Well yes, you had to chain your rifles up of a night. You used to chain them around the tent pole. Oh yeah, they'd pinch – they'd cut your wrist watches, if you had your

13:00 leather band on your watch, you're apt to lose your bloody watch when you went into the busy areas. Oh yeah, they – but then you know, our blokes were raiding their orchards too for the oranges and stuff, so I suppose it cut both ways. They I think

13:30 you know, I think not so long ago I saw a cartoon of that, you know. The Aussie blokes saying, "I just pinched these from your orchard, Abdul." And Abdul's got a rifle behind his back. And he says, "No problem Aussies, I'm in front." Or some words to that effect. But yes, you did have to watch particularly your rifles.

14:00 You had to watch them of a night. But all in all, because as I was saying to Clare, we got on so well with the kids that that did bring the Arab families that they weren't too cranky on us, you know. Because most Aussies, you know,

14:30 if the kids were coming begging, if you had a few pence you'd throw it where the English didn't. The English didn't – couldn't afford it. The English were on a shilling a day. And they couldn't afford it but we treated the Arab kids right. And so therefore, our relationship wasn't bad with the Arabs. And

15:00 I can understand the Arabs when they formed the state of Israel, and I believe they formed it because the world had a conscience about what they didn't do for the Jews before so many of them were killed. And that's why they're making certain that they stay there, but I can understand an Arab family that had had this farm for

15:30 1000 years in the family, and all of a sudden they cut a line down the middle and say, "Sorry Abdul, but that's no longer yours. That's going to be, Michael Cohen's." I can understand that. I can understand the Jews wanting a homeland, but I can understand the Arabs being cranky too. Because, you know, how would we be if all of a sudden somebody come down the middle of

16:00 this street and says, "Sorry, but this now belongs to whoever. And the mob on the other side can please themselves." So I can understand that. And I agree that the Jews have done a terrific job with the country. But I can still understand why the – and I don't think they'll ever fix it until they get their

16:30 own land.

In respect to Arab and Jewish relationships while you were there. What was that like?

It was still tense. It was still tense. And let's be frank. Arafat was a terrorist, but 90% of the Israeli parliament the older ones were terrorists. That Haganah [Jewish guerrilla movement] and

17:00 mobs like that, was them that blew up the King David Hotel, when all – I'm pretty certain that they strung two of the Palestinian police up two days before the English were due to go out of Israel – out of Palestine. You know, so

17:30 it's not only been on the Arab side.

When you were there, were their any differences?

They had clashes. Arabs used to come up from Jaffa, we were on leave when that day actually happened. They used to come up from Jaffa and Jews'd meet them from Tel Aviv and there was clashes but not a great deal, while we were there. But the

18:00 tension was there. The tension was definitely there. But we didn't see a great deal of it. Apart, if you just happened to be in Tel Aviv, we were in Tel Aviv on leave when that happened and there was stone throwing and stuff like that. Same as you see the kids doing now.

I understand in the early part of the war that the English were worried that the

18:30 **Arabs would go on the German's side. Was there any feeling like that?**

We used to hear of certain leaders that wanted to do that. I think the bloke from Cypress or somewhere, he was a bit of a pain in the bum. But no, it didn't filter down to us. It really didn't filter down to us.

How was your camp in Palestine, laid out so that the Arabs couldn't get in and nick your rifles

19:00 **and sentries put up? What was the landscape?**

Well, the landscape was fairly flat where we were and we were only in tents. And so you could only put a guard – you used to put a guard on the front and you used to build a picket that was going round the tents all the time. So you were going if you were on duty, you were on your toes all night,

19:30 you might have six on the – on duty on a night you know, with a NCO in charge. And you'd be roaming around the lines all the time. To make certain that nobody was trying to sneak in. We never struck

anybody trying to sneak into ours, probably they thought a field ambulance, they wouldn't get no rifles.

20:00 I don't know. But oh yeah. That's all you could do because they were only in tents, what about eight, 12 to a tent or something.

Now, I understand that you love the game of 500. Can you tell me about that?

Yeah well, four of us, every time we stopped, there were four of us in Two Ambulance, we played 500.

20:30 We had games after games after games and I suppose you think about the one we had in Benghazi when they bombed Benghazi and somebody asked what was trumps, and the answer was, "Shits." Before we went somewhere to get out of the bombing. We were all brave, bronzed Anzacs until the bomb come that close it blew the

21:00 shutters off the bloody windows. And we decided it was time to go. Yeah, we played 500. And then as I say, in the book, I had the win at two-up, won a lot of money in two-up. Lost it in the poker game on the way over to Greece. Then found out that they bought bully beef in Athens, so we was in business again. We all had bully beef in our ambulance,

21:30 so, oh yeah.

Can you tell me what happened in Benghazi?

It was a pretty severe air raid, that particular one, although, the Ities [Italians], used to bomb from a great height, oft' times they didn't hit much. But this one was pretty severe

22:00 and apart from the bombs, they sent a sort of landmine thing like, down by parachute. Everybody thought it was a pilot that was coming down and somebody's saying, "Well, I'm having his boots, and I'm having his leather jacket." And when we got there, this thing's in the middle of the road. And it's a whopping bloody great round cylinder thing that's a

22:30 landmine. Well they put guards on each end of the street there but it did blow up the following morning. And it absolutely razed the houses each side of the road. And no troop casualties that I can remember. We didn't pick up any troop casualties anyway, if there were. But a lot of civilian casualties that we had to take to the Arabs to the

23:00 hospital. And gawd, that was a day because, the women were wailing and kids were wailing and I'm not blaming them, their people had been blown up by a bloody landmine, but I honestly can't remember any troop being hurt in it. We certainly didn't pick up any, anyway. If there were troops that were hurt.

23:30 But it certainly demolished the houses on either side of the road when it exploded.

Can you tell me more about that day? You'd blocked off the street..

Well, then they were going to bring bomb disposal experts in to see whether they could delouse it or not. But before that could happen, it just exploded. You know,

24:00 you couldn't get a bomb disposal expert in five minutes I suppose and that's what happened. And they just kept the sentries on there to stop the civvies walking up and down past it. And the troops getting too close to look at it too. Because we took one look – well I did anyway, I took one look and that was it, I didn't want to stay alongside it. I didn't know what was going to happen with it.

24:30 But it didn't cause a kerfuffle with the Arab administration that our troops were dealing with I don't think, like our brigadier or – I think it was the 2/4th Battalion that came in so, Ivan Dougherty would have been the CO at the time.

25:00 I don't think – you know, it didn't cause a real kerfuffle cos, well there was nothing we could do about it anyway.

When it went off, what was your role? What did you actually do then?

Well, we went down, straight away and picked up any civilian casualties. Women, men, women, kids that were caught in the blast.

25:30 Or got hit by bricks or one thing another, you know. It wasn't a shrapnel one as far as I can remember, it was simply a blast that blew out that way. Because if it was sitting on the ground it blew out that way. I don't think it was a shrapnel charged one, not like they used to put in their artillery shells. As I said before

26:00 Itai artillery was very good and they used to use these shrap shells. And that's when we were going in and out we used to time artillery seems to work to a time frame, so many shots, a bit of a lull and – and we used to sort of try and guess what time they were going to be and go in and out of the front under the artillery.

26:30 But yeah. That's all I can remember about that really.

Who did you actually help, can you remember the people you actually went and helped?

Well it was people that actually lived in the houses that had got blown up.

Did you remember actually – it was a woman here and a boy here?

Oh yeah,

27:00 we took I suppose, we finished up taking, just in my ambulance I think, we took four or five loads to the hospital, of men, women children. Oh, yeah. It was a hell of a big blast and it made a – did make a lot of damage.

Was one of the soldiers or some of the soldiers managing the actual site where the bomb had gone off? Who'd taken charge?

Oh yes.

27:30 They brought troops down. There again to keep the road clear so as we could get in and out with our ambulances. Oh yeah. That was looked after. But still it was us that they wanted to see, it was an ambulance that they wanted to see not some bugger keeping them out of the street.

Just in regards to the ambulance, how many in the crew of the ambulance?

28:00 Three.

And who was in yours?

Two drivers and an ambulance orderly. Jimmy Shane was my ambulance offsider. Jim was an ex-Englishman that had been out here for some time. And a real good bloke. The worst two-up player in the 2nd AIF. He used to get his money, Jim wasn't married, so he had all his money, he used to buy his tobacco and cigarettes go

28:30 to the two-up game and I can't ever remember him winning. And our ambulance orderly was a bloke called Wally Stevens come from Newcastle. Very quiet bloke, don't know what happened to Wally after the war, whereas some of us kept in touch and they tried to get a unit organisation going at one stage. Never saw Wally Stevens after the war. I really

29:00 don't know what happened to him. I kept in touch with Jimmy Shane until he died. But I never, I don't know what happened to Wal after the war, I really don't. And you should, under circumstances we were, you should. But some blokes, they just wanted to forget everything, I think. And they didn't want to be tangled up in the unit. They went in and they did a job and they were out and that was it.

29:30 And fair enough. I have no problems there. But some of us did keep together. I say, I think I'm the last one, of the crowd that kept together.

Why did you have two drivers and one orderly?

Well, because we were the blokes that lugged the stretchers. Loaded the stretchers while the ambulance orderly was trying to stop bleeding and that.

30:00 That's why we had a – that's why we had an ambulance offsider and an ambulance orderly. We normally loaded the stretchers while the ambulance orderly was working on the bloke. You know, if he still had things to do after treating him on the – on the ground, we just loaded the ambulance,

30:30 they were four berth, lower and upper, and if it happened to be a busy time we'd put one in the middle of the floor otherwise we'd take walking wounded, people that just had a bit of a scratch you know, and bit of a shrap wound, maybe a bullet wound in the arm, leg or something like that.

Can you share an example,

31:00 **a story where a fella gets hit in the line, while fighting, how you get the call, driving out and knowing where to go? What's the process from the beginning?**

Well, we were there, as I say, we had a – my ambulance was attached to the 2/1st Battalion, wherever they were, I were. I'd take them back to our CCS. Casualty Clearance Station, and I'd immediately come back to the area they were in. Cos

31:30 when there's a blue on, you only know your own area. Like, while the casualties in the 2/1st were relatively light, one of the Victorian battalions got hell belted out of them. You know, only a couple of ks down – around the bend sort of thing. So we just went in and out,

32:00 and anybody that was away – if they happened to be away from their unit or they were engineers or something who were working in that area, if they got wounded we just picked them up and took them back to the CCS and then we come back with our ambulances, as I say, watch the artillery, got underneath that and picked them up. And about 48 hours straight I think at Bardia,

32:30 we were on the go.

So just talk me through as an eyewitness, the attack on Bardia, from the events – from the beginning events to the actually finished up.

Well as I say, I can only talk from where I was. The bombardment started at four o'clock in the morning, I think. It was still dark anyway,

33:00 and I think till that time, it was the biggest artillery bombardment in the Second World War. Not only that but we had warships off the coast that were sending big shells in as well. So there was a big bombardment first off. The infantry blokes had

33:30 done their night patrols and worked out where – and their CO and that had worked out where they were going to go through the wire. The engineers went in first and they blew the wire, with bangalow torpedoes. They did a marvellous job, the engineers. And when

34:00 that was done, the artillery barrage lifted and the infantry went through and they went through the wire. And that's what happened on the first morning.

And where were you?

I was in the 2/1st Battalion lines until they moved right out front. And I was picking up casualties seven minutes after the first infantry bloke went through the wire.

34:30 I say, "I," we were – I shouldn't say, "I." We were picking up and I said there, I first bloke had lost both legs so we could do that and while the unit had stretcher bearers,

35:00 out in the field and each infantry battalion had stretcher bearers. Normally the band were the stretcher bearers, with an infantry battalion. Instead of them having to carry the blokes three ks to our casualty clearance, we were taking four or five at a time, stretcher cases in the ambulance. And I hope, saved quite a few lives in doing so.

35:30 And once the 2/1st had gone so far then the 2/2nd jumped over them and then the 2/3rd jumped over them and turned right or left or something and while the 17th Brigade, the Victorians and the South Australians they were further around on a different flank and I think it was the 2/6th Battalion they ran into a lot of bother.

36:00 They ran into a black shirt unit that were fanatical fascists, believed in Mussolini and all he stood for. And they ran into a lot of trouble. And so the ambulances – I don't know whether they did attach them to battalions. I don't know whether the 17th Brigade allowed them to attach them to battalions.

36:30 **When your fellas in the infantry battalion were getting hit, what were the casualties the result of: artillery..?**

Yeah, could be those shrap shells, if they happened to be underneath them. Ordinary shelling if it landed close, or rifle fire. Some of the Ities did fight with their rifles. Irrespective of what they did back here.

37:00 And yeah, they were all sorts of wounds, you know, head wounds, arms, legs, blokes might hit a small landmine. Lose a leg. Outside Tobruk, we finished up in the minefield. Outside Tobruk.

37:30 But we was lucky to get out of that so there was all sorts of casualties.

When you came across – well the first fella who'd lost his legs immediately, how did you feel emotionally?

We did. We were all upset but you

38:00 couldn't allow yourself to be upset. As I wrote to my Dad with the note that I sent to Metters, I says, "All I'm thankful for, that I could do the job I was trained for, because nobody knows how they're going to react under fire." And it doesn't matter what training you have or what they look like, we had an ex-rugby union player in our mob that

38:30 but you don't know. You don't know. And I didn't know. I didn't know whether I was going to panic as soon as somebody would have fired at the ambulance or tried to put a shell on the ambulance and I remember only a short note, just to Dad, because Dad had never been to school, as far as I know. And – but he could read and write, used to read the papers, used to read the papers

39:00 from go to woe. And that's what I says to him. "Dad , I'm only happy that I was able to do the job." And continue to do the job that – from – we went to Tobruk, Derna, up to Benghazi.

So tell me about this rugby union player, what happened there?

I'd sooner not. That's unit business

39:30 and that's between us. I'd sooner not.

The Archive, everyone's actually telling us unit business.

No, I'd sooner not, because that was between us. It shows how different people react. You don't know. You know, you'd have swore blind he'd be leading the charge this bloke, but he wasn't. He didn't lead the charge.

40:00 But still, as I say, I wouldn't mention names and I don't want to – I don't really want to talk about that one.

Tape 7

00:42 Well, as I say, I feel Australian soldiers are the best in the world. Now, our infantry, it doesn't matter where, First World War, Second World War they were tops. But it's not everybody that reacts the

01:00 same. People's nerve does go from time to time. As I say, we had a sergeant, a good sergeant but in Greece, he actually asked to go back because he knew he wasn't doing his job. Which you've got to admire him for in a way. But the boys tell me, I wasn't on Crete, but the boys tell me on Crete

01:30 when they started to strafe this building, that they'd taken over as a temporary hospital. He volunteered to go up and paint the red cross on the roof, under fire. So it happens. People do not know how they're going to react. Ninety-nine point nine per cent of our blokes react

02:00 as they're trained to react. But people are people. That's about all I can say on that.

You can tell us the story of the rugby player.

Well, we had a

02:30 rugby player that looked as though he could hold a bullock out to eat. But was not worth a crumpet in action. Was not worth a crumpet in action. And he came home and

03:00 got a job in the Red Cross or something like that. But he was disappointing because he really looked the part. But he wasn't. I'd really – like, I mentioned the unit, I mentioned what rank he had

03:30 and what he'd done. People'd know and as bad as – I don't want people to know it was part of our unit and bugger it, he was one of us whether he – he was told by us, even though he was officer and we were troops, he was told by us in Greece, what he was thought of in the –

04:00 **Can I ask one simple question? Is it a case that you don't want others in the unit to know that you've..?**

No, no. Most people in the unit know. The originals, not the blokes that come after, most of the originals, if any of them are still alive and there can't be too many alive, they'd know who he was. But as I say,

04:30 it's human nature. I'd sooner talk about the sergeant who come good than the bloke that didn't. I know what you're trying to do, I know what you're trying to get, but I just don't feel comfortable with that particular question. And that's all.

Ray, you're an eyewitness in respect of this football player, what do you see and know in respect to him?

05:00 Well, he had a job with the unit, he was quartermaster, it was his job to see that we had supplies, it was his job to see if there was any comforts around when we was up the desert or in Greece or Crete to see that these things were bought up, he had a truck at his disposal and drivers. And

05:30 in Greece he didn't do it. We wondered why we weren't getting things up in Greece, and you know, we asked questions, didn't get answers, and but as I say, there was a load of wounded to be taken back wherever the boys were, I'd been wounded at this time. Wherever the boys were at that particular

06:00 time and this ambulance with wounded had to go back to the hospitals in Athens. And while they were there, Ernie, who always was ready to look after anything that was good for the unit or himself as well, he went to the Q-store and he was told that the

06:30 Q-store had notified this particular officer and that he hadn't gone down and picked it up. And Ernie had a few araks before he come back and when he came back, even though he was a private and this bloke was a captain and there again, I wasn't there but I – as Ern finished up me brother in law, I know it was true and I heard it from so many different ones of the boys that were there,

07:00 but Ern, in no uncertain terms, told him what he thought of him, until he was pulled up by Ian Roberts who was our OC. He says, finally he said, you know, "That's enough," he says, "After all I'm sitting there and the man is an officer the same as I am." But Ern told him at the time, if ever he saw him on the road when he was back in Sydney, he'd bloody well run over him. And he worked for the government stores and they used to take

07:30 stores around the various mental institutions and public hospitals and one thing and another. And Ern rang me one night and all he says is, "I finally got him." I says, "Who?" He says, "Carl, the bloke says I'd get if ever he was on the road." He said, "I was coming up from the markets," and he says, "He was

crossing Railway Square." He said,

08:00 "I chased the bastard right from Saunders Corner right across to the tram shed." So he says, "You know, we finally did it." So but there again, that's one out of a unit of 700. And I've already told the tale about the sergeant who come good. After he had guts enough to admit

08:30 that his nerve was going. So one counter balances the other.

And what about the great bravery of the unit. Any stories there in Bardia?

We got three MMs [Military Medals] at Bardia, the boys got three MMs at Bardia. Two I can remember.

09:00 Johnny Raynor he got an MM he was a stretcher bearer. Evidently picking blokes up under fire. Bloke with the name of Newman, I think his name was. He got one for taking a truck in and bringing people out. The funny part about it, he made one trip

09:30 at night, we'd made – I don't know how many trips during the day, but there was three in an ambulance and you don't give three MMs for the same job. I'm not saying we deserved an MM, we were simply doing our job but that's the way – I believe Teddy did and no doubt the other bloke did.

10:00 But no, yeah, they were the only two MMs I got, the unit got, I think. I think our CO got a DSO [Distinguished Service Order], but that's a unit citation. And our colonel, he got killed in Benghazi, he got killed in a bombing raid in Benghazi. There was a lot of kerfuffle about that because he was a specialist and that

10:30 and they – people wanted to know after he was dead, why he was in charge of a field ambulance and not on a base hospital. But there again, that was his choice. He wanted the job that he had. And the funny part about it, or the worst part about it I think, he got killed, his driver got killed, and

11:00 this particular officer I'm talking about that done the wrong thing, he was sleeping alongside of them and never got a bloody scratch. So what does that tell you about the bloke upstairs. He wasn't doing his job very bloody well. Ay? Jeez. Yeah, haven't got a bloody scratch. Tell me he's fair dinkum, can't believe it.

During Bardia was the ambulance

11:30 **shot up?**

No. No. It wasn't. It wasn't we just went in and out and we picked blokes up and the ambulance wasn't shot at. I don't say, it wasn't shot at, but it wasn't hit. Tobruk we were

12:00 lucky to get out of Tobruk. And there again that was the transport officer of the 2/1st Battalion who hadn't give us the map reference that we had to go in. Come in, in the morning, come in of the morning of the attack, in a Ford ute and says, "Follow me." And shot off at about 60 miles a bloody hour and we lost him. We were following the RAP truck,

12:30 and the RAP truck got a bit off centre. And that hit a mine. And the reason the driver wasn't damaged to any great extent, he was knocked unconscious, was he had a case of condensed milk on the

13:00 on the step of his truck. Itie stores that we'd got out of Bardia, they had stuff everywhere. Particularly grog, they had grog coming out of their bloody ears. And I don't know whether he particularly liked condensed milk or what he was going to do with it, but he did have this case of condensed milk and that took a lot of the blast.

13:30 We naturally, saw it go, we just automatically went to see whether he was alive or dead. And the next thing, this voice comes out of the bloody mist, "What the bloody hell do you think you're doing there?" It's a sergeant out the engineers. He says, "Can't you tell the difference between green and red?" Because they had green on the good side and red on the bad side, where they knew

14:00 mines were laid. And I don't know, we straddled them, must have straddled them because they didn't go off. But as I say, it was part of the job, we didn't think, we should have thought. Because, really there was no sense us bloody getting blown up too, really. But we didn't think. The bloke's hurt, you go and get him. Simple

14:30 as that. And yeah. I forget Jimmy Shane saying, "They didn't go off. They didn't go off." Of course they didn't go off, you know. Never went close. Happened. That officer didn't show a great deal of judgement

15:00 or see, it happens. I suppose it happens early in the piece until blokes that are in charge of platoons are sergeants, go through the mill, and actually show what they can do under fire. And as I say, nobody knows what's going to happen.

15:30 We had a bloke left our unit, he was a believer, he used to believe in his god, and he went into the small ships, up in New Guinea and won an MM and a DCM I believe, he got both of them. The last bloke you'd think was going to be a hero and

16:00 I know he wouldn't have thought he was a hero. Simply doing the job that he went from us. I don't know

whether he went up there as a medic cos, he was with the field ambulance he wasn't with our company. I don't know whether he went with the small ships, as a medic, or what. But I did hear that he got two decorations up there. Up the islands. As I say, he was one of these blokes that could sit in an air aid

16:30 and believe in god where, if I wasn't in the ambulance I got behind a bloody rock. I didn't believe that much.

So coming back to Bardia for a moment, what was actually in the interior of the ambulance to help fellas? Can you describe, medically what did you have?

Nothing apart from bandages and slings and stuff like that.

17:00 Ambulance orderlies sort of didn't give needles, they simply tried to stop bleeding wherever they could. And we just got them back as quick as we could, that's all. But they were very basic, very basic. The English ambulances they had heaters in them, and also the top

17:30 bunks wound up and down, whereas ours, just had the poles up and you had to lift them. I remember one of the first blokes who we brought out of Tobruk was a big part Aborigine bloke, was about 16 bloody stone and we sort of – we already had blokes on the bottom bunk. I could hardly make it.

18:00 They were very, very basic. Very basic. They were a 30 hundred weight truck, with a canvass put over them and that was it. Just a canvas'd come down the back of them. Didn't – and the reason I feel I got hit in Greece, was because they also had the spare tyre on the driver's side. Which

18:30 meant to say, when you got in an air raid, offsider had to get out, you know if you – whoever was driving had to wait till the other bloke got out, before he could get out. And they were well up the mountain when I was able to get out and I was only part way up the mountain when the Stuka come over and dropped his bloody bombs. And if I'd have been further up the bloody hill, I mightn't have got hit. But that's

19:00 only supposition, that's the way it goes. But yeah, they had the bloody spare tyre on the driver's door. You know that was real bright person that thought of that. Old ambulance they were basic.

Finally, Bardia, where were you and when did you realise that the Italians

19:30 **were surrendering in masses?**

When – well we could see them coming out. You know with a couple of infantry blokes. And the second day, I think or the third day, this Dick that wrote his story, Dick and I, he does mention this in his story, which I do know was right. We were round looking for souvenirs.

20:00 And Dick had picked up this Italian revolver. And he says, "I wonder if it works." Pfft! "Yes it works." With the shot, out come seven Italians, and I – I says to Dick, "What do we do with them?" "I'm buggered if I know." He says. I said, "Well you've got the pistol. I got

20:30 nothing." All of a sudden one of the Ities goes. Like this, "Stop." And they had been surrendering, dropping down and shooting over the top. Some of our blokes did get shot that way. Some of the Italians did do that sort of thing. But

21:00 we're big heroes, we've got this – these prisoners, "Stop." Says this – doesn't say, "Stop." He just held his hand up. Back in the cave he goes, where they come out of. And comes out with a blanket each. Least they were going to be comfortable if they were going to be prisoners of war. He come out with a blanket each. And they had so much – so many barrels of brandy and stuff like

21:30 that, they had it everywhere. Christ, and if they wouldn't fight on that, they wouldn't fight on nothing, I'll tell you, because you – it was pretty red raw. We – when we went into Tobruk, we were staying in the naval officer's house a team of us from the transport company.

22:00 And we decided to have a night. And we've got all this Itie grog and we're going to make a cocktail. Didn't know, nothing to put it in. All of a sudden I look up and there's a chandelier, I tell you about that – it was about that big around and that deep. And we mixed this concoction in there. There wasn't a bloke that drank it that wasn't bloody full after

22:30 three drinks. They were just going, "kshht!" As I say, I didn't drink in them days. And I was pleased. A bloody mess. It was a good brew, everybody says, it tasted great. Jeez it had a kick. And this great chandelier bloody cut glass chandelier, it must have cost a fortune.

So did the Italians get upset when you took their grog?

23:00 No, they were going to their POW cage, they were happy the war was over. A lot of them didn't want to fight. But the black shirt units did and as I say, and their artillery was good. It's anyway, we took these seven blokes up to the road and the next lot of prisoners is coming down with a couple of infantry blokes, we just says to them,

23:30 "Get on the back of that. Away you go." So – but the day that Tobruk fell, we went down, we were the only ambulance that actually went down into the village itself. And we got the last dozen bottles of beer

out and the day after, we

24:00 went in the bank, got this box of Italian bank notes, used it for the cooks to light fire, used it as toilet paper, all the way up the desert. Found out when we got up to Benghazi we could have put it in Barclay's Bank under our own name. Because, Farouk had so much money in Italy. And Egypt had never declared war on Italy so the currency

24:30 was good. And must have been worth a lot of money. Was a box like that, folded over. Ten thousand lira bank notes and a thousand lira was worth a pound English. But it didn't happen.

So tell me from the beginning of Tobruk, the movement and the attack, your involvement and all that.

Well

25:00 we were the same, although we were told and I believe it come out on order from division, "While complimenting the 2/1st Field Ambulance on a job done, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, while men are expendable, ambulances are not. And they will not go so close to the front from here on in."

25:30 You know. There again I get back to Doc Selby, I said, "What does this mean, Doc?" He says, "It just means I'll be too busy to bloody see where you are, mate. Don't worry about it." And we did the same thing. Infantry went through, we went through soon after them, although they weren't the first ones through at Tobruk, I think the 17th Brigade or maybe the 19th Brigade

26:00 went through first and 16th Brigade was the back up. So we didn't have a great lot to do although a lot of units that went in first, they hadn't attached an ambulance like we did at Bardia, so we were kept busy, bringing

26:30 casualties out of Tobruk.

Who were you up against?

Italians. Oh yeah, the Germans didn't come in till later. If they'd have let us go to Tripoli, probably the whole of that second lot of the desert and the siege of Tobruk would never, ever have happened because

27:00 Rommel wouldn't have been able to land. See we went as far as Benghazi stopped. They pulled our divvy [division] out, which was the only trained divvy at the time because they were the only ones that had been under fire. And as we've just proved, people can be different under fire. And I suppose it happened in infantry units the same as any other units.

27:30 We were the only ones was trained, but Churchill wanted to hit the soft underbelly of bloody Europe or something, and they had been over there and even though they knew, like history shows that they knew it was never going to be a success. They still sent us. And it's wrong. They never learn a thing and they formed an Anzac –

28:00 they actually formed an Anzac division, it seems every time they form an Anzac division they send us somewhere we can't win. Like, we went to bloody Gallipoli and we went to Greece and Crete. And it was never going to happen. And they knew that before we went there.

28:30 **Coming back to Bardia, but also Tobruk in respect to your experience, if a man did lose his arms or his legs or whatever, did you pick that up with the body, what was the process if someone had lost a limb?**

No, it was lost. That was it. No, I don't remember picking up any limbs.

29:00 Because you know, really and truly we were just a casualty clearance station. Our doctors done a magnificent job, I mentioned Captain Bromfield, who was a terrific surgeon, he had had mine disasters he was the surgeon from

29:30 Newcastle, I saw. He was a Victorian, he was attached to our unit I'm not certain whether it was Bardia or Tobruk, doesn't matter anyway. But he was in the operating theatre and I see him with a bloke's complete top of his skull off and picking

30:00 shrapnel out of the bloke's brain. I think his name was Orm Smith. A major from one of the Victorian units. They did marvellous jobs. And was only in tents and really, if we hadn't had so much Italian equipment, with generators and stuff like that,

30:30 we'd have never been able to go any further. Because we didn't have that sort of equipment. The Italians had all equipment, you've got no idea what the Italians, cos they'd been there for years. And we – we even used Italian doctors. They were prepared to work with our blokes, on their blokes, because we were picking up Italians as well as our blokes,

31:00 our blokes got preference but we were – we picked up Italians too, that were wounded and so yeah. You know, we had Itai generators that give them light so as, you know and

31:30 we'd have hardly moved if it hadn't have been for the Itai stuff. We weren't – we were basic. Very basic.

So after Bardia, in particular we were better equipped?

Yeah and we didn't see, apart from aircraft, we didn't see any action to – Barce and Derna and those places they virtually fell

32:00 with no problem. And I don't think there was a great battle at Benghazi but I could be wrong in that because that was a different brigade that actually took there but we went in actually after Benghazi had fallen. So it was Bardia and Tobruk mainly that we saw the action up there. But it

32:30 bugs me that people don't know what our first action is in the Second World War and as I say, after sending us to Greece, the blokes that got killed there as though they're – they really got killed for nothing. Yeah, at the time, and it was the first action that the Allies had won in the Second World War. It really

33:00 was the first action, the first time, the Axis had been beaten in the Second World War. And even now, we commemorate the fall of Singapore, course we do Anzac Day, but we – the fall of Singapore, we have Greece and Crete week, you know, we get some high ranking

33:30 Crete general out here, some Greek politician or the Greek ambassador we go deuce, never heard of a Bardia Day. We seem to love our defeats. You know, irrespective of what our blokes done on Anzac and they performed feats that nobody should have performed, I give them all that,

34:00 it was still a defeat. And as I say, fall of Singapore day, why do you want to celebrate losing Singapore? Why do we want to celebrate getting done in Greece and Crete. Why couldn't we say, "Yeah we had a victory on that.." Starting from the 3rd of January, '41, the first one against the Axis, that'd be nice.

34:30 Doesn't happen.

Let's turn our attention to Greece. In respect, you've sort of touched briefly on what you were doing there, can you help me understand what went on the day you were actually wounded. Where were you travelling to? And what were the events that took place in that particular incident?

Yeah. Word come down that

35:00 a couple of the platoons from one of the battalions, I don't know which one, were stranded up near Mount Olympus. Now, nothing was moving on the roads at that time, because of the air superiority and our CO come up and asked for volunteers. It was a job that really shouldn't have been done by ambulances because

35:30 you're not supposed to carry troops, but it was one of these things that they asked – they did have casualties as well. So and we were asked to go up and try and get them out. And for some reason they decided to send a sergeant with us. I always believe wherever possible you didn't stop.

36:00 I always thought the moving target was harder to hit than a not moving target. But anyway, this Stuka come over and he started to strafe and the sergeant says, "Pull up. We'll get out." All right, he's the boss at the time. We pull up and we get out and as I say,

36:30 the spare wheel's on the driver's side, I had to wait till- I happened to be driving at the time, I had to wait until the offsider got out. And the Stuka came back and instead of strafing he dropped a string of bombs and I just happened to get a bit of shrap in there. I was lucky it didn't come straight through, it probably would have taken the kneecap. When I come home and had it

37:00 out at Concord Hospital, the bit of shrap was up here. It went up that way. Great consternation, called for the brandy, they didn't give it to me, they give it to the bloke who was tying up me wound. Good luck to you Charlie Brown. I was taken to a Pommy, CCS,

37:30 casualty clearance station, they had a bit of a probe around and nothing. I remember the first thing after I woke up from the anaesthetic and I sort of – there was a Pommy orderly standing at the bottom of me bed he says, "It's all right digger," he says, "It's still there." Cos I didn't know anything about it, I didn't know, as it turned out it was only a scratch. But I

38:00 didn't know and that was the first thing I felt for to see whether me bloody leg was still there. And from there we were taken down to Larissa, not by our ambulance, by Pommy ambulances, by ambulance train really,

38:30 we were outside Larissa the day that they absolutely razed Larissa. I think that was the only time that our few aircraft got off the ground but they were only lost to gladiators against bloody Messerschmitts and they just got – they just got knocked out of the sky and they made a mess of Larissa. And we came down by hospital train, I was on the top bunk

39:00 and every time they made- a Stuka's made a raid or the Messerschmitts made a raid, on the train, the driver put it in a tunnel if there was a tunnel there but the rest of the train was out. And it wasn't a very

pleasant sensation being on the top bunk about that far from the roof.

Tape 8

00:30 **Just coming back when you got wounded with the shrapnel, and the Stuka came over…were you in a convoy?**

No there was two. When the CO come up, he asked for volunteers I had charge of the ambulances

01:00 so I was going to be the first one. I immediately looked around for my mate Ern, because he had been with the 2nd Battalion when I was with the 1st Battalion, all throughout the desert, he's the one I played '500' with, and his bus was out of commission it was getting something done to it. He said to me at the time, he said, "If you go out without me,

01:30 you will probably get into bloody trouble." I said, "Oh yeah?" You know….As I say, we travelling along and the Stuka came over and the sergeant says to stop, I stopped. Once he was gone they put me in my own ambulance and

02:00 took me to the Pommy CCS. And then from train, I went down…as I say, the hospital train, back to Athens, to a Pommy hospital in Athens. They had another bit of a probe there and couldn't find it, so they just bandaged us up. I was there for a while,

02:30 just a matter of days I suppose, and this WO came in this day and he said, "Is there anybody for the New Zealand Con Depot." And I thought, 'Oh, Kiwis live more close to ice than Poms,' so yeah…And as I was going out I struck Eric Bourke, a particular mate of mine, and we went out to the

03:00 Kiwi convalescent depot, where we stayed for awhile. Then one night this major come around and he says a series of trucks and ambulances and what have you up there, "Get aboard, we're going down the coast to get a ship out."

03:30 We happened to get in an ambulance, Rick and I, and with others, I remember there was a Pommy Airforce sergeant sitting opposite me. We went down the coast, we pulled up at this bay, but ships didn't pull up at the bay,

04:00 that particular night. We were there for about five days. Jerry evidently knew there were troops there, because he did a bit of strafing each day, for a while, onto the olive groves. I didn't eat olives for years after I came home, I couldn't stand them….I eat them now.

04:30 We were there about five days and then all of a sudden, this on dusk…on this occasion convalescent depot patients down to the beach and we went down to the beach. We got within about five yards of the beach, and the convalescent depot troops to one side, we moved to one side and a

05:00 Pommy engineer unit come down, they got onto the little boasts, went out to the big boat, that was the last we ever saw of it. We never saw another boat. The following morning, we got in our vehicles again, and…you know, the drivers of these vehicles were doing a terrific job,

05:30 because they had been hardly any movement of vehicles on the road at all. And we just over the Corinth Canal Bridge and this air force sergeant says, "Well, we're far enough safe now, they won't come this far south. When Messerschmitts come over

06:00 and started to strafe, we got out of the whatever vehicles, truck or ambulance…The only cover we had was a grape vine, we were near a vineyard and the grape vines were about a foot high and the dirt was just banked around them, that was the cover.

06:30 From memory, they came down in three lots of fours. And they strafed and they dropped the paratroopers in an area. When they landed they had big swastika flags with them, and as they moved up, and rounded us up like a bloody flock of sheep, they just moved the flags, and they dropped one plane off and they'd come over in four lots of threes.

07:00 So we kept our head down. Evidently it was where they decided to make their sudden headquarters for the paratrooper, because within half an hour there were fifth columnists [traitors] come up, Greek fifth columnists coming up and talking to the officer in charge.

07:30 He was only a young bloke, one of the good ones, Germans, just finished five years of Oxford, he was telling us, better English than I speak. He had us wrapping up parachutes,

08:00 after they were done we went to a church yard and we were on a bay.…And three boats in the bay. And Eric Bourke, he had been a patrol officer up in New Guinea, he never should have been in the army, he was lousy with malaria, but the officer who let him in was a….

08:30 Or the doctor who let him in was an officer he'd known in New Guinea, and knew how keen Eric so he

let him through. And he's looking at these boats going, and he says, "If we get on one of them and go that way, we'll hit Crete....or if we miss Crete, we'll hit Libya or Egypt or something." Righto.

09:00 So we got about ten to fifteen blokes, Aussie blokes around, "This is what we're going do. They're not going to keep us." Just on dusk, this is why I say this officer was a good bloke, he called us all in a huddle and he said, "Three boats in the bay, anyone could take you to Crete or to Egypt."

09:30 He said, "I don't want any heroes and I don't want to shoot anybody. I have armed guards aboard so don't be stupid, don't try." So that was it. In the meantime my leg had started to get a bit lousy because it had no treatment, it started to get a bit mushy.

10:00 And this officer asked anybody that had been wounded or sick or anything... that there was going to be a hospital established in the town of Corinth itself. This was brought about by an Englishwoman, I believe she was a nurse in the First World War, and married a Greek and stayed there. She had managed to get four or five Kiwi doctors; they had taken over a hotel that was right on the beach, in the town,

10:30 and marched up...she was only a little thing, she was, she marched up to the Jerry major and says, "I have doctors, I have a hospital, we'll have the wounded or sick in there." Which happened.

11:00 **Just travelling again, because you went forward with Claire into your story with the POW camp....I understand through your biography that you were actually taught Communist studies?**

No, that was one of our guards.

11:30 That was one of our guards when we actually got up to... when we were on the farm job.

Can you tell us about that?

Yeah, he was a real larrikin. I will go back to our first guard first. Our first guard was a farm lad that knew nothing else but farming. So he used to have us up at half past bloody five in the morning, and I kid you not, if we didn't stand in the same position each morning, he'd thought some bugger had escaped,

12:00 that's how dumb he was. You've seen Hogan's Heroes? This bloke was dumb, I kid you not. There was only nine of us, I think, in the photo, this nine...And as I say, if we didn't stand in exactly the same spot each morning, that was it, he wouldn't move us. Anyway, he went, we got the bloke we called Mickey The Mouse.

12:30 Him and I didn't hit it off right from the word go. He was one of these little blokes that liked to throw his weight around. We worked six days a week, and on the Sabbath was our cleaning day, and we used to take it in turn to do the billets out. The billets, by the way, were cow stalls, above the cowsheds in the grounds of this slosh that we got the photos taken at.

13:00 And it was the winter of '41. It was the coldest winter Europe had in 91 years, and there was an inch of ice on the inside of our bloody windows while we were sleeping in that. Getting back to Mickey, come my turn to scrub the billets out.

13:30 I thought I won't get on my hands and knees, I'd get a stick and put it on the scrubbing brush. He didn't want that, he wanted me down on my hands and knees and I wouldn't get on my hands and knees, so he locked the door and he went and got the sergeant in charge of the area...And looking back, it was like a B grade movie, you know, when the door suddenly flies open and there's the Huns there with

14:00 a bloody revolver and the barrel looked about that big. And he says, "Which one's Norman?" The other eight blokes step back and I'm left in the middle...And I don't blame them for that, don't get me wrong, I would have probably done the same thing. So bugger him, he's stupid enough to do this, it's his bloody problem. He started, "Why won't you take orders?"

14:30 I said, "He's a private, I'm a corporal." He says, "But you're a prisoner!" We argued for a while, and finally he quietened down....I said, "Righto, I'll be good." But that's when you couldn't write home, because they stopped giving out the thing for your mail home and they stopped your Red Cross parcels, too, if you got out of order.

15:00 But I've always had a big mouth. So anyway, he was there for a while, and then we got Franz. Well, he was good. His wife was the one that used to have Communist classes in Vienna. He brought her out to the camp at one stage, she stayed there for a while.

15:30 That was only after he'd been on with every single sheila [woman], and some married ones too, in the village. He was a beauty, was our Franz. He had every little sheila in the village on the go, but he was a good bloke. He had been a waiter in Vienna....and while he couldn't speak much English, he had mixed with different countries and he knew that Hitler wasn't the be-all and end-all.

16:00 And as I say, his wife.....so he told us, on the quiet, used to have classes in Communism in Vienna. But he was a funny bloke. He only knew one English song, one that he used to sing every time that he got

drunk.

16:30 “Get along little doggie….” I don’t know the bloody words. Where did he pick up the words for that? I don’t know. It could be the same way that I picked up words to a German song, the only German song that I ever knew, and I can still remember the words to that...But he was great. Rick got a note from him before he come home, in the camp that he was in,

17:00 saying that they had finally caught up with him, they had put him in a unit the first opportunity to give himself up, and he was acting as a batman to a Yankee major or some bloody thing. I believe him, too, because he was a real con artist but a likeable bloke, he was a good guardian.

17:30 We had no problem with Franz. Only the village maidens had a problem with Franz ,and I don’t think they stayed maidens long with Franz either. That was how the Communist come into it.

A big part of the archives is actually songs of the period, and troop songs, more than just the Top 40 type thing.

18:00 **You said you know every word of the German song. Can you sing that to us to give us an idea of the words?**

I don’t know what it means. (Song in German)

18:30 I haven’t got a clue what it means, not a bloody clue in the wide, wide world. And why I remember it? I don’t know. I can give you one on Hitler if you like. It goes,

\n[Verse follows]\n “Goering, he only had one ball\n Himmler had two but very small\n

19:00 Goebbels had something similar,\n

But Uncle Adolph had no balls at all.”\n

The Huns didn’t like it when we used to sing that in church. They used to take a dim view of that. We could always get the Huns going when we sang that.

19:30 That is my whole repertoire.

Can you give us the rendition again for audio? And is there any more of it than what you have sung?

(repeats song)

20:00 If we were being a bit….wanted to cause a bit of excitement...Of course, the padre in the camp, as long as running the escape club, he also ran the plays, he put on a series of plays. He’d have a drama and he’d have a musical going,

20:30 because with so many blokes, as I say you always had blokes that did stuff, and then some….We had two blokes in the camp, they went by the name of ‘The Two Ernies.’ Their names were both Ernie, they done a lot on English television after the war. They took the act that they’d sort of got together in the camp, and they were quite popular on English television, after the war, under the name of ‘The Two Ernies.’

21:00 We had a bloke that played the piano accordion absolutely unreal. We had two people who were dance champions, and in some of the plays they used to ballroom dance,

21:30 they were unreal, terrific dancers. The padre, Johnny Ledgewood, used to run that as well as the escape club, in the camp. The one on Uncle Adolph, it used to upset the Huns, those who spoke English, that what we were singing about.

22:00 **What would they do if you were caught?**

Oh, just yell and scream. They couldn’t do much really, because the camp commandant was a reasonable sort of bloke. He only acted like a Hun when the SS blokes came around. He would all of a sudden start barking a few orders around,

22:30 but all in all he was a good bloke. So much so that, I believe, that when the war actually finished, that the...what they called ‘Furtroonsman’, who was the senior NCO in the camp, normally NCOs went to their own camp, 383, but they WOs and sergeants who looked after us blokes, the troops,

23:00 in the various camps. And this bloke was a WO from the 4th Queens Own Armoured Regiment which was an armoured regiment from the Pommy army. And I believe he wrote a note for Hauptman Steiner when the war finished, addressed to any allied troops who

23:30 happened to stop him on his way home, saying that he treated the POWs right all the time he was camp commandant of 18B, and he was able to get from the camp home. I had a Kiwi come over one time, that I knew in the camp,

24:00 and he says one of the other boys, a Kiwi bloke, had been on a trip back to Germany and struck

Hauptman Steiner working on the main station in Berlin, and he says he went to the stationmaster and told him the connection between the two of them, and he went out and had a day on the grog with him.

24:30 Some blokes took up German. I didn't, because the more German you knew the more you were likely to get jobs, because they knew you understood what they were telling you, the guards knew. But if you shrugged your shoulders and said, "Nix for stan," and they'd say, "Bloody dumkopf Australian," and we'd say, "Yah," and that was it.

25:00 When we were on the farms for eighteen months, we could converse with the people on the farm, but there again, that was like going out the back in our country. It was their talk. Their slang, if you like. We could sort of make ourselves understood. Or when the son came home, the good son, we could

25:30 sort of part make ourselves understood with him. Some blokes did study it and could speak it very well, read and write some of it, even, went into the trouble of doing. We went back to Germany in '86, a team of us, ex-POWs and their wives, and we actually went to some of the camps

26:00 that we had been in, to see what they were now. Two of them were...The first one we went to was taken over by the German Army, one of the next ones we went to had been taken over by the German police, and then of course we got to the one, the biggest camp in Europe,

26:30 it had to be the bloody Yanks. We went there, we waited at the gate, there wasn't a Yank came down. They knew we were coming and they knew why we were coming, because it had been a Stalag and some of our blokes had been in it. They sent a fraulein down from the office, she took us in, she said we could have a look around. There wasn't one Yank spoke to us the whole time we were in their compound.

27:00 And the young fraulein says, "You might as well get a drink." And as we were coming out they charged us for our drinks. So much for the Yanks, and so much so, and I come home...The Germans treated us so well, they give us a lunch and everything in the officers' mess in the first camp we went to, where the Germany Army had taken over.

27:30 they took us through their museum and the whole bit. When I came home I wrote to the German consul and said how we had been treated, and I also wrote to the Yank consul and told them what a team of bastards they were that they had over there, with their troops. When I was president of the club and I used to do my block, which I did from time to time, Bobby Wickham, who was the assistant secretary manager; he used to read my mail before I sent it out

28:00 and he read this one and he said, "Christ, we'll have the CIA [Central Intelligence Agency] out here if you send that." I said, "No bugger them, that's the way I feel." And I did, I sent it to their embassy. Bugger them...

Just coming back to the camps. Victor Frankel [holocaust survivor] was a Jew caught up in the concentration camps and

28:30 **he said, after the war, he said that men behaved like animals in the camps because they were treated by the Germans as animals in the camps. In your prison camps, how did the troops respond to each other?**

All right. As you know, there is always conflict between us and the Poms, whether it be on the footy field or the cricket field or whatever, of course there were arguments.

29:00 Because a lot of it was that the English can't realise that when we talk about five hundred thousand acre farms, or stations, they're too big for them to realise it, they really are. And even the Germans, like the farm we were on, he was the biggest landholder, and he had forty one hectares, and he was the biggest in the village.

29:30 And it wasn't forty one as we know it, it was seven here, and five over there...to get around all these plots that made up his particular possessions, there was probably seven of them and, and it was only forty one hectares....what's that? A hectare's two and a half acres, which is about eighty acres. But when you talk about the paddock you keep the horses in, that's so big,

30:00 they just can't realise it, I think that was a lot to do with the Poms. We always got on well with the Kiwis. And I never saw a blue between a white Kiwi and a Maori. We used to abuse the Maori sometimes when we were playing cards with them and they would start speaking their own language, and the next time they would go double no trumps if we happened to be playing bridge,

30:30 and take all our money off us. That was part of the deal; we used to laugh about it, because the money wasn't any good to us anyway. No, even when the Palestinian Labour Corps, when they came in, there was never any real problems between the troops, in the camps. The Russians, they kept separate, we didn't see much of the Russians,

31:00 but as far as I know there was never any problems there....I suppose because we had all been in the same boat, at one time, we had all been under fire, we all knew that we should have never, ever have been there in the first bloody place because there was never going to be a win situation,

31:30 that we got on. I always played soccer when I was a kid, and I was the one Australian who played in the

English soccer teams. I was a reasonable goal keeper, and I played for the English medics against the French medics at one stage, so the relationship between the troops were...

32:00 If one of their sergeants or WOs wanted spick and span like you were on a parade ground, that didn't go down. I mean to say we kept ourselves clean, we kept ourselves shaved, we didn't want some bloke from a posh bloody regiment like telling us we had to be like we were going on parade every day.

32:30 There might have been an argument or three on that, but all in all, the troops got on pretty well.

Were there ever brawls or punch-ups between guys?

Not that I can remember. We used to work it out with boxing competitions. They did have...and sport. We played basketball against one another,

33:00 soccer, seven aside between the huts, so no, I really can't remember a blue... maybe... I can't, so if there were any, there weren't many I can tell you what.

I am not sure which Hollywood movie it was, but the premise of

33:30 **Germans putting spies amongst the British troops. Is that a case?**

Yeah, it happened. We thought we had one in our camp. We did have them, but we thought....There was a bloke in our camp whose family were still in Germany, but he went to England during the Depression. As he said, he couldn't get a feed in Germany. He went to England, he got a job, he married

34:00 an English girl and he joined the English Army, but he joined the ASC so he wouldn't be really in a combat unit. We didn't know for sure whether he was one, at one stage, but he wasn't....What you saw was what you got, that's exactly what he did. As a matter of fact, when I had to go back on the court marshal, when I got sent

34:30 to the road job on the court martial, he offered to interpret for me. Johnny.... can't think of his other name. There were blokes....We had a Kiwi in our camp, Callander, who says his

35:00 parents were white Russians, he finished up in an SS uniform. He was actually seen by blokes out of our camp in an SS uniform. Because what the Huns did to certain people, particularly the Irish, they would take them to a camp that had swimming pools and the whole bloody bit in them, and try and get them to join....

35:30 They had a special name for it the unit that English and Irishmen had actually joined and were fighting for the Germans. That actually happened. Well, Callander went the whole way. And you can read about Callander if you can go back far enough with the old Smith's Weekly [Australian magazine]. They had an article on him. And surprisingly enough, a bloke rang me up doing what you're doing,

36:00 and he wrote to the Barbed Wire and Bamboo [POW veteran magazine] and wanted to know anybody who knew Callander, who had been in the camp with him. I didn't know him real well, but a particular mate of mine did. They used to muck in together, with the Red Cross parcels. Bill was an escape artist, Billy Knight. He couldn't understand why he would get two ks down the road

36:30 and get picked up. Every time he went out Callander used to tell the Huns, and poor old Bill never got more than two ks away from the camp, I don't think, in about seven attempts, and he didn't know why until we finally found Callander in a SS uniform. I believe he got a discharge from the New Zealand Army, that's what the article was, from memory, in Smith's Weekly. But this bloke wrote...

37:00 was going to make a documentary about him because he says....When he spent some time in jail after he come home, from what this bloke told me, and then he set up a string of brothels I think he said....But I never heard any more about it, he'd never been able to get the money....

37:30 I rang him up. He was up the bush somewhere, too, when I rang up. I know it was a country number that I had to ring, this was some years ago, but that was Callander. You get all types. Most of the Irish didn't go over, but some of them did, from these camps. Those of them that were lucky enough to go said it was a fortnight of terrific,

38:00 good tucker, swimming pools, no parades...

Did you ever catch any guys in the camp?

No, we didn't, not that I know of. I don't say that the powers that be didn't, like the senior NCOs who were running the camp between them, and I should imagine

38:30 the camp commandant, he really wouldn't want him in his camp either. But no, I personally didn't strike any of them, no....

Tape 9

00:30 **Tell me how you got your MBE [Member of the Order of the British Empire]?**

In about 1948 they formed what they called a 39ers Association, and that was anybody who had joined before the 31st December, 1939,

01:00 and served overseas. A fairly exclusive brand, started in Victoria, but it spread to other states. I was the state secretary/treasurer, and I was federal secretary/treasurer, and we used to do quite a bit of work. We were the first organisation that actually went to the War Widows Guild to find out what the war widows particularly wanted us to put at the meetings with the government.

01:30 And after twenty eight years, 1976, I was awarded a MBE for service to ex-servicemen, which made my kids quite proud of their old man. I went down to Government House, Sir Roden Cutler was governor at the time, and it was a beautiful day.

02:00 I made the mistake when this woman came over, I said, "Is your husband here to receive something." She said, "No, my husband's the admiral charge of the east coast of Australia." Sorry darling. It would have been nice to get an Australian one. Our association tried for years to get the government to put out a series of awards,

02:30 which they finally did, the Australian. I was probably one of the last few that got the MBE because that was '76, I think, and I think...soon after that I got the awards. But it was pleasant, it is nice to be recognised by your peers.

03:00 You don't do these things for recognition, but if your peers recognise it, it is nice.

It means a great deal, doesn't it?

Yeah, it does.

Now earlier on when you were having a chat with Clare, you said you came back to Australia and started an ice delivery service.

I had a hamburger shop and I sold that because...I thought I was going off my head with not enough to do,

03:30 and I bought a ice run in Newtown. The war was still on, the Yanks were still here and a lot of ice chests were in bedrooms, with people sharing houses and one thing, and a lot of eye openers around Newtown in those days, with a different Yank and different colour, at various times and places. But we worked that for a while.

04:00 **So you said to me there's almost a book in it. Can you share some of the stories on it all?**

No, I don't remember. I remember situations of being a bit early and going in and finding somebody in bed, and finding maybe in bed a different bloke the next time, but that was their life, I didn't care.

We don't want you to judge them

04:30 **but we do want to understand what was happening in Sydney with the Yank influence....**

Look, the Yanks and bloody [General] MacArthur....MacArthur ran Australia, and I will argue with anybody about that. They say [Australian Prime Minister John] Curtin ran Australia during the war, but MacArthur ran Australia during the war. Read The Crisis In Command, and you will find out how much, when two of our best generals got sacked up in New Guinea.

05:00 And why did they get sacked up in New Guinea? Because MacArthur says our casualties weren't heavy enough, that they weren't fighting properly. And that was allowed to go by our government at the time. And [General] Tubby Allen, who was...the blokes that served under him, an absolute bloody gem, and Major General Rowell, who met us at Egypt, when we come out of Germany,

05:30 he threw this blue because he clashed with [General] Blamey, so they sent him over to England to get him out of the way. There were Yanks everywhere. You couldn't get served in the shop, even when I was still in uniform. Nine times out of ten....and you couldn't get beer.

06:00 The bloody Yanks could get beer. As they say, "Over here, over paid and over sexed." It should never have been that. And nobody will ever convince me that bloody MacArthur didn't run Australia while he was there. He was egotistical....

06:30 But that's what he said about our troops, that's before they started to push the Japs back on the Kokoda Track. They weren't fighting hard enough because they weren't getting enough casualties. And you know Tubby Allen, he was hurt that much when he was sent down from New Guinea, that he didn't join any organisations,

07:00 apart from the 39ers. And just before he died he come down and marched with us one Anzac Day. We took him to the pub to have a drink because he was pretty crook, and he was only having one or two drinks, and he wanted to go down the toilet so I went down with him, steep steps going down. And we're down there and he said, "What unit were you with son?"

07:30 I said, “The 2/1st Field Ambulance, sir.” He said, “Colonel Cunningham.” I said, “Yes Sir. He says, “I was at his funeral.” I said, “I know Sir, so was I.” He got killed in the air raid in Benghazi. He says, “Two people I used to talk to before I ever went into action

08:00 was my senior padre and my senior medical person.” He says, “I wanted to know the troops that wanted the spiritual guidance got it, and I wanted to know if we went into action and we had casualties, as we were gonna, that they’d be treated properly.”

08:30 And he says, “I know your unit came well up the desert in that way.” And he was the bloke they bloody sacked up in New Guinea because MacArthur, the admiral and whatever his name was, he started to get the kudos and MacArthur wasn’t getting bloody kudos and that didn’t suit him. They had never been out of Brisbane, so they didn’t know what the blokes were putting up with in New Guinea.

09:00 I didn’t either because I was never there, but I’ve read enough about them to know. But he didn’t know, he never bloody knew. And the first lot of Yanks they sent out to New Guinea got lost, that’s not publicised either.

Let me come back to the home front, and you as an eye witness in respect to the ice deliveries, what was happening on the home front in respect to the Yanks and the Australian households?

09:30 They had relationships, and sometimes the women had people in the army, there’s no question about that. Some were taken into homes and they were terrific. I know the lass, well the woman that lived next to my sister, up in Rhodes, she made a

10:00 point of having coloured American soldiers visit her place, she had two daughters, and they were made welcome, just as visitors, and as the saviours of Australia, as MacArthur always told us. There was a lot of

10:30 friendships made, but there was also people that played up. Of course there was people that played up.

What story sticks in your mind of one of those incidents?

Nothing in particular, just going into different places, seeing a different face maybe three or four times, in a month.

11:00 **Given that you have spoken well of the troops overseas, ninety-nine per cent were brave and strong and fighting for a cause. Do you think some of the women back home were letting the side down?**

I think a percentage, yeah, I think a percentage were. I don’t think that is a secret.

11:30 The same as it wasn’t a secret that some of the boys were playing up overseas, either. Even in Germany, Section 92.... were having intercourse with German women. That used to come out every week. And of course, those that got caught

12:00 they used to shave the girl’s head, or with the woman, they used to shave their head and parade them around the village and put the boys in the boob [cell]. I had a Kiwi mate who was caught with a Jerry colonel’s missus, and he was put away, down in the dens, and he was there for three months, and I didn’t know him when he came out. He had turned as grey as what I had.

12:30 And he says to me, “Ray, I will never go.” He says, “There’s no way in the wide, wide world I will ever go back there.” But he got caught. And we had a sergeant come into our camp not long before our exchange came along...Now that was over two and a half years.

13:00 He’d been living with a Greek family, on with the daughter of the house and started to playing around with the daughter of the house next door, and the first one put him into the Huns. When he came into our camp he told us the story, and we said, “What a bloody idiot you were. You’ve had it made for two and a half years and you do something stupid like that.” Christ, he had to be an idiot.

13:30 It happens, you know. Us blokes are stupid, and I include myself in that. We’re stupid.

What did you do that was stupid?

I didn’t put that in my stories, my family didn’t want to know what I did overseas, if I did anything, and I didn’t do anything much.

14:00 **So what would be the much?**

No, a little Greek lass in a shooting gallery I suppose. The blokes used to go to Number 11, Marney Street, I used to go to the shooting gallery, they had three sisters.....Yes, very nice.

14:30 Those things....I’ve had two happy marriages, I was a widower for 16 years before I met Raye, never, ever thought I would get married again. I thought I was too selfish to ever get married again, because when my kids left home I could do what I liked when I liked, how I liked.

15:00 I was getting good money at Hoyts, but I met Raye, totally different. We’ve had twenty-six years of

absolute happiness.

So how did you first meet these Greek sisters?

At a shooting gallery in Athens. I think they made more money than half the sheilas in the brothels.

15:30 It was always full, but I happened to get on well with the younger sister. And I have got a photo of one lass in the album who was in the Palestine Labour Corps that I took out a bit. And I took a judge's daughter.

16:00 Over in Egypt, they always had an English judge sitting, there and this particular bloke had been a pilot in the First World War, lovely bloke, terrific bloke, very upper class Englishman, and some nice English women put

16:30 on a musical afternoon for the troops when we come out of Germany, while we were waiting for the boat to come home. The captain in charge, he came up to Snow and I, he knew I wasn't a drinker, and Snow didn't drink much, and he says, "Look, these women have invited somebody down. Would you go?" So we thought, 'Oh yes, right.' So we were sitting through this music,

17:00 an afternoon of all classics stuff. And there was a sister there, an English sister, and she walked out to have a smoke, and snow says, "If it's good enough for her, it's good enough for us." We went outside, she was an Aussie, she had been over in England and she joined the British Army. We got talking to her, and I said, "Have you got a mate?"

17:30 And she said, "Yeah." I thought it would be another sister, but it wasn't, it was the judge's daughter. She had made friends with the English girl, of course. We took them out, Snow and I. As I said, we were in the clear, we had three years money, we had money to spend, but there was only one Aussie unit left in Egypt at the time, in Alexandria anyway,

18:00 that was an air force crowd, but they had one of the best chefs but the cheapest meals in Alexandria. And we used to take the girls there and four of us would feed for about £1/10/-d or something like that, thirty bob, we'd have a three course meal for four at the RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force] place. We took...

18:30 I took Helen out quite a bit, until she started to talk about what good jobs Englishmen could get when there was no war on. I thought, 'Ahh, time for me to go home.'

Did you want to marry her?

No, it was a friendship, and it was good at the time, and I wasn't married, Snow wasn't married, we weren't hurting anybody.

19:00 Only one of the blokes that was married, in our unit that come out, and he was having a bit of a time with an English WRAN [Women's Royal Australian Naval Service], but we put him on the truck to take us from Alexandria down to the boat, to make certain that he didn't get into trouble. But, it happens.

19:30 But most of my particular mates weren't married at the time, so if we played around it was nobody's business but our own.

And these friendships, were they just friendships?

Yeah, jus friendships. For three years, we had no female company, and it was good to get out....

20:00 But the funny part about it, they set up a canteen, but no Aussie troops there, it was English girls from the canteen. They put East African rifles around them guarding their quarters and the bloody canteen,

20:30 to keep us out, and they had dogs, with dog handlers, watching the bloody East African Rifle sisters. They were black as the ace of spades, those buggers. So that's how much they trusted us after three years in Germany. But there were friendships made there, some of the girls were terrific, down to earth...

21:00 Some cockneys, some higher class lasses, but they made us welcome. The Yanks didn't receive us, even there. When we come out, anything that was Americans only, it was Americans only, and no Americans tried to take us into where they were being entertained, even when we come out of Germany. Can you imagine how many come out...I don't know...two hundred and fifty, three hundred....

21:30 Can you imagine that number of Americans coming among thousands of Aussies and us not giving them a bloody good time? You really can't, can you? Knowing Australians as you do...But, not them. No.

When you returned to Australia after the war,

22:00 **Bardia, Tobruk, Greece, the POW camp...had you changed as a man?**

I had certainly grown up, and I think you can see that by the two photos. One before I was taken and I went away and one after I come home, certainly I had grown. You can't go through the things we went through without

22:30 changing, without growing up. I was a kid when I went away, I was twenty. I was….just going dancing six or seven nights a week, playing soccer.…Dad had an old A Model Ford I used to drive around. The mums that liked me didn't mind their daughters being in it,

23:00 and the mums that didn't like me used to tell their daughters to stay out of the A Model Ford. I was fancy-free and having the time of my life. When I came home, I was….I had been away four years, I was twenty four, I was starting to think about getting serious with somebody and I met my first wife, who….Ernie Myers,

23:30 he was going with Phil before we went away, and Phil waited for him and they got married, and I was down visiting him when I met my first wife, she was Phil's sister. We got hit it off, we got married, and I had thirteen years with Daph, two great kids, a good thirteen years. She dropped dead one night; I was up the Concord RSL playing indoor bowls,

24:00 I was only five minutes from home, but by the time she collapsed and I come home she was dead. I had two kids, one just starting school and one two and a half. And I say, I was sixteen years on my own. I met Raye….I will tell you the story about Raye, she won't go crook. I met Raye on the bowling green, I'd be playing bowls…

24:30 I had known Rayes husband who was in the commando unit during the war. And Daphne Watts introduced Raye to bowls. We were playing mixed bowls one Sunday afternoon, and I thought it was 40 cents, Raye said it was 60 cents a game at that stage…

25:00 And the thing was if you were playing with a widow, you threw the 60 cents in. I threw the bloody 60 cents in, and the next thing I got…..''You haven't got to do that for me!'' I said, ''Christ, I'm not trying to take you to the back of the bloody hedge and knock you off, all I'm doing was playing sixty cents for your bloody….'' That was our introduction, something must have clicked.

25:30 Because we got married, and we have had twenty six terrific years, we've got seven grand kids and happy as bloody Larry. All I'm waiting for now is to turn 100 and get Liz [Queen Elizabeth] to send me a telegram. I don't know what they do these days, they don't have telegrams.

If you had one message that you could send future generations about war, what would say?

Stupidity. One word, stupidity.

26:00 But I do want people to be Australians. When I was growing up I never heard the expression Italian Australian, Yugoslav Australian, they were Australians. You might call their parents, as we did in those days, and no-one can deny it, ''Bloody old dago [slang term for people of Mediterranean origin].'' But the kids were Australian. We had a fruit shop in Leichhardt,

26:30 he had three sons in the war soon after I joined up. They still kicked the front of his shop in, this is how people are stupid. When the war starts, he's got three boys in the bloody army and because he's Italian, when the Ities come in, they kicked the front of his fruit shop in. I get cranky

27:00 I think….everybody who comes out here comes here for a better life; ninety-nine per cent of them get it. If you've been in Europe and seen the way they live away from the cities and one thing and another like that….and obviously being in Egypt and seen the way they live in the bloody cities, they come out here, they come out here for a better life and ninety-nine per cent of them get it.

27:30 Where do these leaders of the different communities come from? They are normally business men that have come out here and made it, and all of a sudden they say, ''Mister So and So, leader of the Lebanese community.'' Or, ''Mister So and So, leader of the….'' They're never appointed, they're self styled leaders. They're there because the bloody politicians know

28:00 if they keep them happy they have got votes. The bloke who has got all the Lebanese around Auburn way, he keeps them happy because he has got votes. The bloke in Leichhardt keeps the Italians happy, because he's got the bloody vote of the Italians in Leichhardt.…And I got cranky, I get cranky at that expression.…All I want people to be, I don't care where they come from, and I've had….when I was president of the club,

28:30 Turks, Italians, Lebanese, you name it, I've had working for me down there, never had….The same as members, if they do the same things as us Aussies, happy to have them in the club, always happy to have them in the club. One of my best mates down there is a German. Carl jumped the wall as a seventeen year old, come out here,

29:00 made it good, terrific bloke. When we had a victory ball for the finish of the war, I said to Carl, ''You coming to the Victory Ball, Carl?'' He says, ''Yeah. If it hadn't of been for my mob you wouldn't had a bloody victory, there wouldn't have been a war.'' He's as much Aussie now as I am. I have no probs [problems].…But I do have problems

29:30 when they put them in separate groups. They're Australians, particularly their kids. Let them learn their own language, I have no problem with that, if they go back home, they have got family back home and they can talk to their parents, I have no problem with these things. All they want is to be is good Aussies.

Any final words that you would like to say?

I think I have had enough final words, haven't I?

30:00 But multiculturalism, it's the worst word that ever come into the Australian language. I don't like multiculture. I like Chinese food, I like Italian food...By the way, we've got the best Chinese in Sydney if you're ever in Concord....

One last thing I will ask you to tell is just the story of

30:30 **your brother getting married and you getting nicked by the provos [Provosts – Military Police] outside...**

I talked my way out of it. He got married at All Souls Church in Leichhardt, the old Reverend Parsons, that was a good name for a parson, wasn't it. Reverend Parsons...he often used to send me things, I didn't know what he was talking about, he used to quote Scripture to me when they landed in Sicily...

31:00 Anyway, I had been discharged in the September and Wal got married a month or so later, he was in the artillery. He wanted me to be the best man, so I put on my uniform and we got to the church, and we come out of the church, and on the other corner are two bloody Provos.

31:30 And Provos being Provos, they come over and asked for leave passes. Well, Wal's got his leave pass. I said, "I'm not even in the army these days." They said, "Well, what are you doing in uniform?" They made quite a....And I says to them, "Now, don't be stupid. I spent three years in bloody Germany, I don't have to listen to you blokes..."

32:00 But they finished up going away. As I said early, they're like coppers, never around when you want them, and when you don't want them they're there, and they're a pain in the bum.

Thank you.

INTERVIEW ENDS