Australians at War Film Archive

Stanley Bisset (Stan) - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:34 **Okay Stan. If you could start off by remembering your earliest memory from your childhood.**

I can remember when I was three years of age and my family, Mum and Dad, and had a shop in Greville Street Prahran. And we

01:00 young children, there were five of us, the youngest boy of four boys and had one sister two years younger than myself, and we were looked after at a little place by a couple of housekeepers. And I can remember one occasion I was left with my Grandma, Jane,

01:30 and she had her youngest son with her at – this was close to the Greenmeadows Gardens in Balaclava, East St Kilda, and I was there for a fortnight with them, and Mum and Dad had left me there more or less to get me out of their hair, I think. And anyway I was a bit unhappy after the first or so and I didn't like that, and I wanted to see my Mum and Dad. So

02:00 I walked out of the place and walked down to the Balaclava Station, which was about a mile, and got onto the train and then got off at Prahran, and then got out at Prahran and then walked up the shop which Mum and Dad's shop, which is only a couple of hundred metres from there, and presented myself at to the shop and of course they were a bit surprised at a three year old, I didn't have to pay a fare or anything like that. I just walked onto the train and so

02:30 that's my earliest memory.

That's so early. Three years old.

Yeah, well that's yes.

What were – tell us a little bit about your parents.

How did I feel about my parents?

Yeah. What did they do and...?

Well, they were wonderful parents. I had a wonderful Mum and Dad. They were pretty – they were kindly. They were pretty churchgoers.

03:00 We went to Presbyterian Church in Balaclava and they both in the choir. And Mum used to play the piano and Dad used to sing in the choir, and they brought us up. They weren't smokers and they weren't drinkers and we were sort of brought up in that way in our younger days. Later on in life,

03:30 we became involved and mixed up in sporting activities and that sort of thing, but I can only have wonderful memories about our parents. They were great and they helped to, you know, I think they helped to mould our characters and they had a love of the Empire, the same way as we were taught to have a love of the Empire those days.

Had your dad been through World

04:00 **War I?**

Hm?

Had your dad been through World War I?

No, Dad hadn't been to the World War I. I'm not sure exact reasons why but he was not eligible or had some disability that prevented him from going through, but World War I was pretty close of course to the beginning of World War II, and we had pretty vivid memories as youngsters, even when we were going to school,

04:30 in Black Rock. I can remember we went to school in Black Rock for, that's where I first started school

when I was about five and a half, and a lot of the older boys there they had memorabilia and gear their dads had brought home from the war, including gas masks and all that sort of thing, and they used to form gangs, terrorist gangs, and they would

05:00 play havoc on the younger boys and in those days, Black Rock was surrounded and riddled with ti tree and bush and you could easily get lost and so forth. They had hideouts and gangs and we'd get caught up with some of these gangs and they'd sort of kidnap us and then they'd put these gas masks on and terrorise us, and so forth. We wondered what we were in, Ku Klux Klan [American white racist group, distinguished by wearing white robes/masks] or something, but

05:30 anyway we had some pretty unhappy experiences when very young but gradually sort of grew out of those sort of things. But we had some wonderful memories of our days at Black Rock and later our family went to Warrandyte, which is a place where gold was first discovered in Victoria. And

06:00 at Black Rock we used to learn to swim and our older brothers were able to, you know, quickly teach us to swim and we used to slide down some of the great cliffs around Beaumaris and that area, and we'd have great fun and also the wreck of the [HMVS] Cerberus, which was at Half Moon Bay, and we all we used to swim out to that. It was a couple of hundred metres and we'd have fun and games

06:30 out there and we'd look for golf balls and things, which was close to Black Rock, which [was] close to the old Royal Melbourne Golf Course, and do caddying for them at times. When we got home from school, we'd always have to climb and pull out bark off the ti trees to make fires for our housekeepers that had looked after us and

07:00 we'd occasionally get into escapades and climbing of trees. Maybe if I can remember, I fell off the trees and broke my arm at one stage and I had to go to Prahran for a couple of weeks with my parents, and while that was mending and healing. But we had, Harold and I – he was my elder, two years older than I was, we were the two younger ones,

07:30 Murray and Noel were the older ones - and we were the two closest and we used to look after Joanie, our young sister, and I've got pictures, I can remember, of where we used to feed the fowls in the back garden with the two of us in little knickerbockers and things, feeding the fowls and oh, there was lots of memories there. And particularly when we got to

08:00 Warrandyte, we were getting a bit older and the little more ability at different things, and when we were at – two and a half years we were at Warrandyte - we had a couple of escapades there which were pretty hazardous, pretty dangerous, and we were lucky to survive in many ways but there were two other brothers at the school. It was an old school at Black Rock made up of great rocks put together and things

08:30 and been there for many years. But our home was right on the Yarra and our back fence went down right into the Yarra, and we built rafts out of kerosene tins, and each of the boys had a raft and we had double-handed paddles, and we'd got for miles down the Yarra swimming and on these rafts, and we'd catch fish and all that sort of thing. But

09:00 one time at school, these two other brothers and they were Charlie and Cecil Houghton and…

Yeah, we're just picking up the noise of the remote, sorry.

Oh I'm sorry.

If you could just put it to the side, Stan.

I'll leave it. Ah, two other brothers; Murray and Noel used to come up to Warrandyte at the weekends and at that, these two other two brothers,

09:30 the Houghton boys, they knew where there was - it was an old mining town and we had shafts, mining shafts, and mines all over Warrandyte - and they knew where there was a little supply of gelignite and fuses and detonators and so we decided that two of us, Harold and I and Jack and Cecil, decided that we'd wag it [play truant] for a day and go exploring over the

10:00 mines, and so and we picked up a load of gelignite and wire and detonators and we went to Warrandyte and we started to throw, put the gelignite and put the detonator in the gelignite and put the little section of the fuse wire and light it up and throw, toss it down these mines, and people of Warrandyte were amazed that there's explosions going all over all round the town,

10:30 and in the end we got one. There was one big tree, great tree, with a great slight cavity at the bottom and we thought, "Well, we put all our gelignite sticks in there, we might blow the tree up." So we did this and lit a fairly long fuse and then ran for our lives. And we got about fifty metres away and it went off and the branches and the trees and everything else came hurtling down and we went to the ground and fortunately nobody was

11:00 injured, and we also threw a couple into the river to see if we'd get some fish. Any rate, the next day we had to front to our headmaster, whose name was Mr Quick. He was pretty quick with his lash, so we had about six or eight of the best cuts and Mum and Dad had to fork out a few dollars to go pay for the cost of the – so that wasn't very good. Another one was Dad was the head of the Progress Association of

Warrandyte and he thought

11:30 this mistletoe was having a detrimental effect on all the, you know, lovely trees in, around Warrandyte and he thought, well, if we had a competition to collect all the mistletoe butts and from all the boys in the area and we'd get rid of the…and take out this parasite from the trees, that was destroying the trees. So my brother and I actually went in for this competition and we actually won it. We got about a hundred and fifty;

12:00 had to climb up the trees and cut these mistletoe butts off and we broke these off and we won the prize, whatever it was, but that was another competition. The other one was when my brother, Noel, that worked in the chemist shop in Melbourne, and he came up at the weekends and he brought some little what-they-call stink things, hydrosulphate there, but they smelled very much.

12:30 And they gave them to us and we were up early at the school there and we put these in the inkwells before school started. So that when they got in – it was one big room, the school - when the school started, the stench was so terrible that we couldn't, nobody could go into the school, so and we had to put open all the doors and windows and it was only, oh, we didn't get in 'til after midday, I don't think, and

13:00 so we got some more cuts for that. So that is some of the little things that happened in our early days at Warrandyte and then we went to Surrey Hills then, came back to Surrey Hills in Wattle Park and we lived there. Mum and Dad had a place there and we used to walk over a mile and a half to school there and we got into cricket team and the football team and had plenty of great times. We used to walk to church about

13:30 a mile and a half, Presbyterian church in Surrey Hills, and Mum and Dad would walk with us and we had six – can remember the, you know, the whole family six of us - or seven of us actually, standing in a special row and all singing and then when we were at Balaclava, my elder brother used to take the gymnasium class and he

14:00 did it, you know, extremely well. He was a pretty big strong fellow and he taught us a whole lot, gymnastics and that sort of thing, and we both, Mum, Dad and I both sang in the choir and we used to put on shows and I won a scholarship for singing at the Melbourne Conservatorium and I had

14:30 a couple of years special training as a result of that, and was invited to sing in the opera or the chorus of the opera Aida [Guiseppe Verdi, 1871] and at Her Majesty's Theatre and that sort of thing. So we had some great…we love all love music and loved singing.

How did the Depression impact your family?

How did the…?

15:00 **Depression. How did the…?**

Oh, Depression. I'm sorry.

Yeah.

Um, well I think Mum and Dad were able to handle it. They had this shop going and they kept it, they had a good team of workers and mercifully they grew, and Mum was very good on the administration side and the finance side and Dad was very good on the wool and dress

15:30 goods and running attending to the requirements or wants of all his customers. They built up a lot of goodwill and so the shop did very well. But then we were never able, we weren't – didn't have sufficient money – weren't able to send – they sent my elder brother to technical school and so forth, but we others mainly left school when we were about fourteen, about Leaving Certificate and that, we weren't able to go on to

16:00 college or grammar schools or university, so. But we were able to become associated with, later on I was able to become associated with Lord Somers Camp at Powerhouse and that had a tremendous influence on my life, because it was founded in England by the Duke of York and who was the King George VI. Lord Somers, when he was Governor of Victoria, well, he initiated

16:30 that in Victoria and got a great number of the public citizen people like K. Massey-Harris and John Sutherland of Kodak people, and George Nicholas of Aspro, and these people provided the funds and money to build a beautiful camp down at Western Port Bay and near Hastings, Somers, and we had big club rooms built on the Albert Park Lake in Melbourne,

17:00 and there this organisation we ran it on the same similar basis to the Duke of York Camp in England and it was bringing fifty lads from industry and public, and who weren't able to go through schools, and fifty lads from public schools and colleges, and they linked together into five groups. The five groups each had a very, well, a good leader, so far as that,

17:30 a group leader and he was responsible for blending that particular group, a mixture of ten industrial boys and ten grammar school or college boys together and they were put into two sections, ten in each, five in each, and then they selected their own section leader then they spent six, seven days down at Somers and we had roughly twenty sporting events which we ran

18:00 during the week. The rest of the time we had organised…a lot of fun and games were organised by what they called the 'slushies', people who'd gone through previous camps, and they learnt to understand the viewpoints of each other and they don't, you know, live together and recognise the talents in each one. It made a big influence and we had…

In what way do you think it made an influence on you?

Well we had, we were able to

18:30 go, participate in the activities. Once we went through the big camp then we became members of Powerhouse and that carried on through the year. We had this big clubhouse in Melbourne. We had sporting clubs. We had a rugby [Rugby Union] club. We had Australian Rules [football] club. Had cricket club. We had adventure clubs. We had rowing club. We had aqualung clubs. We had every different type of thing plus we had community service entertainments who were looking after the

19:00 poorer people of round South Melbourne and their area, target out some of the places where, you know, the kids weren't getting a chance and we'd go and help them and do things like that. So it was a question of, you know, giving as well as receiving and we all developed. We had good facilities at the clubhouse for we learnt gymnastics and boxing and wrestling and what have you.

19:30 So that, you know, that affected me because I'd never had the opportunity going to a school where you automatically everybody gets that opportunity but it helped in my physical development and development. My brother Harold, who was the younger one, he'd had the opportunity to or he'd gone up as a jackeroo and he then went over to Western Australia

20:00 and with my other brother, Noel, and they were working, the two of them were working with an uncle who had a vast property on sheep, but a very poor country where they had to really live like hermits and they had one sheep to about forty acres and they did all the digging of wells and the fencing and that sort of thing, and then they just had a shack to look after themselves and it was a tough life really and they were there for quite a number of years.

20:30 And Harold in the end I got him, when I got into Powerhouse, I wrote and told him and said, "How about coming back to Melbourne and find a job here and you join Powerhouse and it's much more to offer you than over there," which he did do, and he came back and so we were both in Powerhouse team. We were both into the rugby team and I was captain of the Powerhouse rugby team.

21:00 I initially joined St Kilda Rugby. I was brought up in Australian Rules team and I played A Grade amateurs but with Melbourne High School Old Boys, even though I didn't go to the school, but I played with some mates. Bluey Truscott [Royal Australian Air Force fighter pilot] was one, a great war ace, who had a reputation – he was a Melbourne footballer and so we had a background and we were brought up on Australian Rules but then I changed over to rugby, because I found

21:30 that I loved rugby better. You were in the game from the start to finish and you weren't out at the back pocket just freezing in the cold while all the play was up the one end of the field and so forth, and the camaraderie and the spirit of it was, you know, appealed to me and so.

How was it different? In like the camaraderie and the spirit?

Well I think that the fact that in rugby,

22:00 you seemed to have to develop bit more teamwork. It was necessary, as I say we were, everyone is involved the whole time and it's on a smaller, slightly smaller, different type of ground, but you had a task of getting that ball over a line, through the opposition over a line, and you had to have

22:30 all sorts of tactics and plans to achieve that and result of teamwork mainly of getting, striving together to be able to score a try and were not just individual efforts. And Australian Rules is a good game too, and I enjoyed all the years I had that, but I just loved the fact that being in the game from start to finish and I found the spirit afterwards was so good too.

23:00 **What kind of qualities do you think you like personal qualities that you learned through that time there?**

I think you learnt all about teamwork and mateship and not letting your mate down. You learnt that the only way to achieve success was to

23:30 work with your fellow members and to work as a team rather than as an individual. Your individual tendencies were sort of overridden by the fact that it was essential as a team to – that's the only way you were going to achieve your success. Mm.

What was the public perception of the different codes of rugby?

Well in Victoria where I

24:00 was brought up, all the emphasis was on Australian Rules. It was the game. It was the home of Australian Rules in the southern states. South Australia and Western Australia, they were all, you know, they were all heavily involved, and Tasmania, were heavily involved in Australian Rules, and rugby was

a coming, was not so strong. It was very strong in New South Wales and Queensland

24:30 but I think that before the war, Victoria and quite a number of rugby teams were playing. They weren't the same standard as New South Wales and Queensland, but we could field a very strong team and we did play against South Australia, West Australia. We played against New South Wales and Queensland and we found that we could select a team that was a

25:00 good match. New South Wales, in fact in 1938, our Victorian rugby team defeated New South Wales. That was the first time we'd ever beaten them and we had a team of quite a few of the players had come in from other states and perhaps from New Zealand and so forth too, but most of the ones that were playing for Victoria had learnt their rugby in Victoria. So they were,

25:30 so that was the – we were very thrilled to be able to do that.

What would you say your goals and ambitions were at that time with Powerhouse?

Well I think it was mainly to try and get some sort of security and decide on what I wanted to do as far as my work is concerned. At that

26:00 time, I was working with the Royal Automobile Club of Victoria. When I left school at about fourteen and I went and I had ten years at the Royal Automobile Club of Victoria. So in that in that period of time, I was involved with Powerhouse, and I'm still involved with Powerhouse, but I felt that my main things were I was oriented towards sport to a great deal. I

26:30 was in their athletic team. I was in their rowing team. I was in their swimming and water polo team and in their done in the rugby team and but when we joined when the war looked like, you know, it was over the horizon and there was a possibility of war starting, our

27:00 camp chief, who was Dr MacAdam, he was quite an outstanding person. He'd been in the war with Lord Somers, in the First World War with Lord Somers, and these two really initiated the camp based on – as a commemoration, as a memorial to the first, those – well, their friends, those they'd lost in the First World War. So the spirit of

27:30 that, you know, of the First World War diggers, was pretty strong in Powerhouse right through. So about 1938, '37, '38, it was decided that they would form a company. They could see that there was a possibility of war on the horizon. They'd form a company from the Prahran militia drill hall, so they approached the CO [commanding officer] there and they said, "Powerhouse would like to

28:00 form C Company in your – in the militia battalion." So they permitted us to do that, and so we conducted our training, we had a couple of…Phil Rhoden [later Captain P E Rhoden, 2/14th Battalion] was in the university cadets at that particular time so he'd had some military experience and quite a number of our other fellas had had some military experience and we got several other senior

28:30 people from other country areas that had been connected with military militia groups and they acted as officers and some NCOs [non-commissioned officers], and we conducted all our training outside the clubhouse on Albert Park Lake. And we would go down to Somers at Hastings, and we'd set up miniature rifle ranges and

29:00 that sort of thing, and we'd do a lot of our training down there and my brother I remember was, Hal, he won the competition for the best marksman in our battalion – in our company, and it was a challenge between Sutcliffe, who was the headmaster of, or one of the headmasters of Melbourne Grammar I think, at the time, and he fancied himself as a marksman and but I

29:30 think Butch - my brother got the name of Butch at that time but his name was Harold - but Hal, I always called him Hal, he fired off twenty bullets in a row and he left Mr Sutcliffe was – he just vastly – he couldn't have managed anything like that, but he got the reputation of being the best marksman in the

30:00 group.

Were you issued with a uniform at this stage?

No. No we weren't. Not at that stage, no. I think what happened then as far as I'm concerned is that rugby became, you know, more a

30:30 part of my life. I played in the Victorian side. I was selected to play in the Victorian side against South Australia and then in the rest, the Victorian rest team, which defeated the Victorian team, which was selected to go to play in New South Wales, and then the next year I played in the Victorian team, went to New South Wales, and then at the same year we played the Springboks [South African Rugby Union team], the Victorian team played the Springboks

31:00 at the Carlton Football Ground. We got about twenty thousand spectators there and, although we were well beaten, we held them in the second half. We scored more than they did in the second half and it was a bit of a story about that. I shouldn't go…I'd better not go into that. It might take too long.

No, no please do.

Hey? Well, Weary Dunlop [Colonel Sir Edward Dunlop] was playing with our team and Cliffy Lang, he was the captain of our forwards. He was a Footscray player, but he was

31:30 a dour Scotsman and he and I were second row together and at half time we were overawed by this reputation of the Springboks. It was supposed to be the greatest Springbok team ever, and they were very much heavier than we were and in many cases taller, but they'd thrashed Western Australia and South Australia then this was the game against Victoria and I think they were leading us something like

32:00 thirty points to three at half time. And Cliffy said to me at half time, he said, “Stan, we canna’ let this go on.” He said, “Weary Dunlop’s the only one that can match these fellows and he's not pulling his weight” and so forth, “So we're gonna stir him up a bit in the second half.” So the first lineout that came, Weary gave me a wink and went up the ball. Weary went up for this ball against Ferdie Bergh, the big

32:30 Springbok forward, and as he went up, Weary went under his legs and so Weary crashed down. As he was crashing down, I got him with my elbow behind his neck, gave him a good clout, and he went to the ground and got up and shook himself and sort of said, “Who did that? Who did that?” And from that time on, he played like a roaring lion and he sort of led our forwards very well and

33:00 we outscored them in the second half and played them. So as a result of that match that's two of us, one of them from Powerhouse and myself, were sent up to Brisbane to play against the Springboks, in the all-Australian side against Springboks on the Brisbane Exhibition ground. But we had to travel up by train. The night arrived, the night before, no training, you know, anything else. It's not terribly easy and then to go out and

33:30 meet these other fellows from New South Wales and Queensland, who weren't very happy about two Victorians pinching, you know, a couple of their places, but it worked out well. We were beaten again, but there were some of the fellows that were, you know, fairly certainties to get into the Wallaby team. They didn't play very well at all. They didn't pull their weight in the team and so but

34:00 I got a good report from the team and Sidney King, who was a Wallaby and expert news writer for the Sydney Morning Herald at that time, he pulled me aside after, and he said, “Stan,” he said, “you did well and if you can put on a half a stone or so between now and,” this was 1937, “in '39,” he said, “you're a certainty for the team to go to England in 1939.” So I got my mate Aaron

34:30 Beattie in Melbourne, I went to his gym [gymnasium] and built up more, put on half a stone or about a stone, and gym work and all that sort of thing, and so when the time came in '39 for us to have – we had four games in Sydney where they selected - the trial matches, to select the team to go to England, I played in four matches and Victoria we defeated New South Wales number

35:00 two team and we only just lost to the number one team and we morally defeated Queensland, except that we weren't accustomed to this, the whistle blowing and then playing on, and we stopped playing and they scored a try after we stopped playing. Otherwise, we would have beaten them too, but anyway and then I played for the ‘Australia versus the Rest’ team and I was selected in the team and so there were four Victorians in that

35:30 team and seventeen from New South Wales and eight from Queensland. So and that's the team up there but the twenty-nine of us.

So off to England?

So we were off to England and the day we arrived…

What was your parents’ reaction to you heading off to England with rugby?

Oh, when I, well it was a tremendous thrill and absolutely on top of the world and no, I was

36:00 made the sort of choir leader of the team. We had to teach them all some of the songs. We felt quite a few songs together.

Which songs?

Oh, there was all this week at the veterans’ golf club at Tewantin here, I sang one of them to two hundred and forty of us there at the veterans final break up, a dinner that we have at nighttime, and led once one that I

36:30 learnt a lot of the lads knew other rugby songs and some of them are not, you know, not very good. Others are, they're not very good but they're very clever.

Can you sing us one?

Oh this one's The Keyhole in the Door, but it's a little bit rude that one.

I'll block my ears.

Oh well it's: “I left the parlour early, was shortly after nine,

37:00 and by some glorious fortune, her room was next to mine, and like the bold Columbus with regions to

explore, I took up my position by the keyhole in the door. Oh the keyhole in the door, keyhole in the door, I took up my position by the keyhole in the door.” Oh I shouldn't no, that's enough.

That's great.

“I saw her approach the fireside her dainty feet to warm,

37:30 with nothing but her shimmy on to hide her lovely form. To take it off I prayed to her, I prayed for nothing more. By gee, I saw her do it through the keyhole in the door. The keyhole in the door, keyhole in the door, by gee I saw her do it through the keyhole in the door. Softly with my knuckles I rapped upon the door, and after many a pleading I crossed the threshold door,

38:00 and so that none might see us as I had done before, I stuffed her little shimmy through the keyhole in the door.” It goes on a little bit.

You should know – I'm sure there's another verse in there.

Yeah. No, I camouflaged any bits that need to be.

So these are the songs that you sang on the way over?

Oh yeah, but we sang some nice songs, like oh, we had

38:30 The Mountains of Mourne [Irish ballad] and all sorts of oh and, you know, we sang of course Waltzing Matilda [iconic Australian ballad] at that time was very popular, and we learnt all those words and another one.

Did you have any rugby specific-songs?

Ah well, we had one which we called…I don't think I've attempted to sing it since those days and

39:00 we composed it. Ray Wilson, he was the university from Queensland, he was captain of our team and he composed the words for, but oh something you know, “We're rugby players all, we're young and strong and some are tall and we can take a fall, de jour de jour to backs a lazy more. We come from far Australia,” and so and so and so and words. We did have one there that we sang

39:30 but nothing that sort of has stuck in our memories very well.

What was that trip like on the boat over?

Oh, it was a great trip. It was good trip. It took us a while for the New South Welshman particularly to accept four Queensland and four Victorians into the team but I mean we had,

40:00 we proved, you know, that we could more than hold our own with them in different ways. And in the end they relied on us and by the time we got to England, you know, we were all a happy bunch and it was going to be a great team. We would have been a great team.

At that stage, did you feel like the whole world was your oyster?

Oh absolutely, except that when we got to Marseilles

40:30 and that, we had a twenty-four hour leave at Marseilles. And while they blacked out our ship and we were on the Milton at that time, yeah, and they blacked out the portholes and all that sort of thing. So we knew things were rough, of course, reaching that stage and we had to travel from Marseilles then to - we thought we'd be going to Tilbury but they shifted us to Southampton - and we landed at Southampton

41:00 and then went by bus across to Torquay and Devon, and we were put up there for a fortnight and we stayed at The Grand Hotel in Torquay and there about eight of us volunteered to fill sandbags and pack them all against their plate glass windows of that beautiful hotel, that faced the Channel because that's where the, you know, if the Germans were going to come, they'd

41:30 make landings and then bring fire on those.

Tape 2

00:31 **So okay, yeah, if you could just explain to us how the training was done to get the states aligned as one.**

Yeah. Well, on the ship board life we did PT [physical training] together, PT training on board and we had quite a few little tournaments that we organised amongst ourselves and we had competitions like deck tennis and

01:00 all sorts of assault runs and courses and what have you. So it was quite competitive all the time, and I think we were billeted in different cabins, so that we mixed up amongst our state team. All the

Victorians weren't together and the Queenslanders weren't together so we got to know and went down to dinner. We were all dressed in our tuxedos at dinnertime and the P&O [Pacific & Orient] Line,

01:30 of course, they turned it on pretty well and I can remember argument with, oh, 'Steak' Malone, he was a policeman from New South Wales, and he was always trying to have a shot at us and he said to me, "Stan,"

02:00 going down to dinner, formal sort of dinner at nighttime in our tuxedos and he said, he was suggesting that I couldn't be, that I wasn't very athletic, that I couldn't do things. And I was, I did a fair bit of gymnastics and he attempted to do a hand-spring into the dining room and he fell flat on his back and so I did a hand-spring and landed on my feet and so forth and because it was just second nature to me, and

02:30 I said, "Do you mean like this, Steak?" and so, you know, took a little bit of a rise out of him, yeah, but they tried a few things like that at different times. There was another one when we were doing PT up top there. There was Aub [Aubrey] Hodgson. He was the heaviest member in our team and he was recognised as a bit of a rogue. I know in our trial match, in the matches in Sydney there,

03:00 I had to tackle him one stage and he came down and busted his eye open and so forth on the ground and he came back on and performed pretty well, but we were doing scratch pulling. We had a bar between our legs and sitting opposite each other and then feet together and we had to try and I had to pull the bar out of his hands or pull them up off the ground and I'd done

03:30 a fair bit of that with my brothers, who'd been up in the country and they did it a lot in the country, and I knew exactly from I put the shot, in the discus and the javelin in the four, our athletic team, and, as I say, I was about three stone heavier then than I am now, but so he challenged me to this and I had no trouble in pulling it out of his hand. So I think we earned a bit of respect, you know, from their

04:00 own ways and Nicky Barr, my mate from Powerhouse who was with there, he subsequently became an air ace. He sort of did it all, and just brought a book out on him similar to The Silent Men but and he's shot down twelve planes, you know, over in Africa and he had a sort of a piano accordion. He used to play the accordion while somebody else singing and songs and get together.

04:30 We got lots of photos of the team and the get-togethers and we had King Neptune stunts, you know, where they do all mixed mix-up and had fun and games together and they had a few drinks, but I remember the little scrum half, Cecil Ramilli, he was always playing tricks on people. So he a few too many on one occasion, so we sort of put him on a coat hanger and hung him up on the wall

05:00 for everybody to see.

I bet he wasn't too happy the next day.

Yeah.

Did you do, I mean what kind of facilities were on the boat for you to continue training?

Well, there wasn't much we could do as far as the rugby was concerned, apart from, you know, a bit of ball passing and handling and that sort of thing but by the time we got to Torquay we went did some runs down at the

05:30 Torquay oval, and then but as soon as we got to England and the announcement was made on the Sunday morning after we arrived on the Saturday, and the war was declared on the Sunday morning. Well, the management went to London and they found that the tour was going to be cancelled so it was all sort of fell through. So there was no purpose. I think we'd all managed to scrape together enough money to which hopefully would last us for the – we were going to be away ten months altogether.

06:00 We were going to play twenty-eight matches through England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland and then two games in Germany, two games in France and come back through Canada and the States [United States of America], play a game in each, and then two games in New Zealand on the way home. All by ship of course. So that was all cancelled. So anyhow it...

What was the feeling amongst the team?

Oh, one of great

06:30 bitter disappointment of course. Tremendously disappointed because to many, some of them had been on tours before and it wasn't so bad, but those who had made it for the first time, it was probably the most – the best sporting trip that ever made out from Australia from any of the sporting organisations I think because it had so much. It was offering so much. Everything was, all expenses

07:00 of course was paid, but it was strictly amateur game on the other hand. We weren't paid the sort of money that they're being paid now.

So you were getting a wage?

We were getting a pound a week allowance, that's all. A pound, an English pound a week, but all expenses were paid and our uniforms and so forth were supplied and that sort of thing, but that's all we

looked for and that's what we…because there was tremendous sort of, you know, love of the game in those days and

07:30 but, oh, there still is but there's a lot more.

So on the P&O ship on the way over, how much news were you receiving of what Hitler was up to?

Oh, we were pretty well briefed. We could except for the last, we didn't know until the last week, you know, that it looked like that there was a strong possibility that the war would

08:00 proceed. That it would be war involved and couldn't help feeling that there was every chance that our whole tour, all our dream would be broken and on the Sunday morning I think, you know, it came as a disappointment when we were…but we accepted it and we were after two weeks in Devon we,

08:30 those of eight of us that filled the sandbags, the manager of the hotel was so pleased with us that they supplied two Cadillac cars and he organised a cider crawl through Devon and Cornwall for us and we organised that. So we went to, visited different pubs and started off on smooth cider and then finished up on rough cider with a gin chaser and goes to your legs and we couldn't walk too good

09:00 by the time we got off, but I mean sang a few songs in some of the little English inns and what have you. Then we went to London for a week and we attended a couple of functions that they'd organised, for the Sportsman's Club and thing and we enjoyed those, and disappointments were exchanged and what have you, and we met some

09:30 of the captains of the English team and so forth that we would have been playing and people that we would have been playing against. We stayed at the Park Lane Hotel in London and Lord Somers came and visited us there, and had quite a chat with us and with the three Powerhouse lads that were in the team. We were all from Powerhouse, three of us, and

10:00 Weary Dunlop came to visit us there too and we went out, had a night out with Weary Dunlop in the blackout.

What was the general atmosphere of the English during these weeks?

Oh well, there was it was just one of acceptance. It was one of just they accepted that the fact

10:30 that there was nothing that could be done about it. They just had to pull together and get themselves ready to confront whatever the threat was going to be at that time, and nobody at that stage, you know, it wasn't anything very evident. I know that a couple of the little inns that we went to and I remember admiring a couple of pieces of little pottery that

11:00 we were in one of them too and we found them very hospitable, the licensees of the different inns and they looked after us well. We always sang them a few songs and I admired this thing and he gave it to me and said, “Well you have it.” He said, “I don't know what's gonna be here by the time we're finished with this with the war, whether it will still be here or what'll be left of it,” but he, “You're welcome to it,” and

11:30 little mementos like that. That was their attitude, that they were very generous and very warm to us and wished us well. Yeah.

So when did you start heading back home then?

We only had three weeks altogether in England and two days before we sailed from Tilbury, we were met, we visited

12:00 Buckingham Palace and we were all put into one large room and the manager and captain and vice-captain went in and met the King and Queen and then they came in and we were formed in a circle. While we were in a circle, one of our wags entered the circle and flipped a couple of coins, two up, to say that he'd played two up in Buckingham Palace, and then they urged me to go in. So I

12:30 quickly went in and sang a quick verse of Old Man River or something and sang it and so I'd sung in Buckingham Palace and then they came in and they introduced each one in turn and the King was interested, I talked to him for two or three minutes about Powerhouse and Somers Camp, because he'd initiated the Duke of York's camp in England and he knew all about the Somers Camp and

13:00 Powerhouse. He was very anxious to know how it was going. So and then the Queen, she was interested in the music side of it. She said, “I believe you're the choir leader,” or some sort. So that was happen, that was the Queen Mother that died just recently.

So you talked to her about music?

Music. Just a little bit.

What was she interested in hearing about?

Oh, she just asked me what sort of theme, did we have any

13:30 particular theme song and so on, and how we learnt them, but that was about the extent. We didn't have time for much else but she was lovely of course. No, it was a great experience and though it wasn't, you know, we were thrilled about the whole thing and the memories were great and but it was

14:00 just disappointment, we all as I say had only a limited amount of money to last the trip. Well, when a lot of them then they played cards a bit and they played there and on the way home they didn't bother themselves so much to keep in strict training. We'd go into a little hotel in Torquay and Devon, yeah, and the first beer I remember we went into a little place called 'The Hole in the Wall', and

14:30 we looked at the back in there and they had these three kegs lined up at the back and one was marked five pence, the other was marked sixpence and the other was seven pence and I said to one of the locals, I said, “What's the idea of that, which is the best beer that you get here?” And he said, “Well,” he said, “You don't buy a five pence one, you don't buy a sixpence one and you don't buy a seven penny one. So you pay a – ask

15:00 for half a five pence and half a seven penny. You pay sixpence for it, but that's the best beer.” That was a pint, sixpence per pint for beer. So that was a few pubs that we got to that they were good people and we got up and sang a few songs on the table and they turned it on for us. So we had some good times really. I remember at Marseilles

15:30 on our way over, we really burnt the candle. We didn't go to bed that night because we had the ship was sailing early in the morning and but we went down to a place called, about twenty miles down from Marseilles, and a place called [UNCLEAR] and there we had a beautiful view of the harbour and a little curving cobblestones

16:00 around the water edge and the boats pulled up all alongside there and inns across from the cobblestones and tables were just right on the water's edge and so we found a table, a group of us, about six or eight of us had gone down there and we'd taken a cab, and then we started to sing our songs and as soon as we started singing our songs, all the local people, it was a weekend I think, and they came around our table and started joining us and

16:30 listening to us Aussies singing this and then we found it very difficult to pay for drinks sometimes you know. They turned it on for us but it was great experiences. On the way home, we came back on the Stratheden I think it was, Stratheden

17:00 yeah and it was a very sad time. I know that there was Neville Percival, he was a good jockey, and he and his wife and a youngster they joined us at Bombay and I made good friends with them and they were on the way from Bombay

17:30 to Adelaide and we had quite a bit of fun on the way. We used to go up at nighttime out on the top deck and we'd join a party and have a sing a ring and anyway we were able to join the ring of which you had to stand in the middle and skol down a beer [drink it in one go], and then provide another three stubbies or something else, and then the ring widened out until it was about

18:00 twenty metres wide diameter in the end and they'd all be, you know, all sorts of things, turns, put on and…

How long did that trip take to get back?

It took about six weeks. We went via Malta and had to zigzag a bit and yeah and then anyhow this Neville Percival I know, he went ashore at Adelaide and when he came back, the little trip from Adelaide

18:30 to Melbourne, we got off in Melbourne. He said, “Stan,” he said – it was Moonee Valley Cup Day on the day that we got off, and I wasn't very interested in races at all at that time - but he said, “I've got two good things for you, Moonee Valley Cup. Do you have a bet?” I said, “Oh I don't know. Very rarely I've had an odd one but,” he said, “Well I've got two good things. Moonee Valley Cup winner and

19:00 another one.” One was Mosaic, Mosaic was, and the other one was Giltown. Giltown won the Moonee Valley Cup and Mosaic won the other race and one was twenty-five to one and the other was a hundred to one. He said, “Just have five,” he didn't know the prices then, but, “You just have five bucks on one. All up the other,” and I didn't. So sort of

19:30 so forgetful with meeting my family and friends and brothers and sisters and that, forgetting I didn't even think of it – another thought. But I thought it would have been worth a few thousand dollars. Would have set me up, yeah.

What were you planning on that trip back?

Oh that's a good question. I wasn't – I don't think I was planning, Kylie [interviewer], I don't think I was planning

20:00 anything other than getting home and seeing Mum and Dad. And I was just bitterly disappointed and disenchanted. Not so much now. I didn't immediately go back into the Powerhouse militia, you know. My brother had stayed in that and he became a sergeant. He'd become a sergeant

20:30 while I was away, in the four months that I was away, and Phil Rhoden, my best friend and Powerhouse,

became chief and he was our captain in our company, Powerhouse company. I didn't immediately go back into them and then I had changed my

21:00 job. I was working with Vestey's [cattle company] at this stage out Footscray. Meat, William Angliss and Vestey's the meat people out there and I was in the costing department. And it was a few months, quite a lot of us felt it was a phoney war, and it would be over very quickly and that.

21:30 **Why did you think it was a phoney war?**

Well, it was just that there was not much pressure being brought in Australia, you know, as far as enlistments and getting people to, you know, recognise the fact the danger or the hazards of what was going on or any possibility that Japan or anything like that would ever take part as well, and that

22:00 the combination of France and Britain and the Allies would, you know, would quickly be able to stop the Germans' one nation, Germany, against Russia and almost all the European countries. 6th Division had been formed and gone over or they went over first and they were comprised largely of fellows that were out of work. Many that were adventurers.

22:30 Others which were dinky-di [genuine], you know, had officers in training had been in battalions and anxious to get over there quickly and play their part. But then 7th Division and 8th Division and 9th Division they all gradually got to be their name became as the deep thinkers or something. People who were thinking a bit more deeply about it and that, you know,

23:00 they were giving up everything to decide that it was necessary for them to participate but it wasn't more than a couple of months at Angliss and talking to – I used to work alongside Bluey Truscott, who was this I mentioned before, he was this air pilot and a great war ace, subsequently killed. He was in our football team that I played with and also our athletic team but he was killed up

23:30 off Darwin area and flying too close to the water but he was a great war ace too. I joined up the same – he and I decided we'd have a couple of beers and Friday night, we decided we should join up. And my brother had already joined up two weeks ahead of me, the 2/14th Battalion at Puckapunyal.

What were your decisions

24:00 **that Friday night?**

Hm?

What were your decisions that Friday night?

I'd said right, I'd go and enlist, and go to the town hall and sign up to join the battalion. I was going to join the 2/14th Battalion too.

Sorry I meant to ask what were your reasons?

Well, I knew at this time that it had become more and more serious and I just had to feel – I had an intense

24:30 patriotic feeling towards Britain and I felt that we – England our allies, and we all had – and we all Australians had – we'd done so much in the First World War when we'd. Up to us, to support not necessary to fight, where just on our own back yard and wait for the enemy to come to us, but to fight where we had a better chance of beating them and

25:00 so the only way to do that was to join the AIF [(Second) Australian Imperial Force] and that's what we did. We had to go to Caulfield Town Hall and signed up and then they sent us to the Caulfield Racecourse for a couple of days and then up to Seymour and to Puckapunyal.

So how old were you by now?

I was twenty-seven, twenty-eight then.

25:30 Twenty-eight yeah.

What was your parents' reaction to you joining up?

Well, they weren't too happy but they accepted it. They felt the same way as, you know, we all did, that we had to as far as the Commonwealth and the British Empire and what have you, but Noel and Murray, they were older. They were, one was thirty-five and he was

26:00 a plumber and in a reserved occupation. My brother Noel was still over with his uncle running this million-acre property on the sheep and he didn't actually join up til we came back from the Middle East. But he did join up then, and he…

So what were all the medicals and all that kind of thing like when you joined up?

What were the…?

When you joined up, you had to go through medicals

26:30 **and...**

Oh yes. Yeah, we had to go at Caulfield, we had to go through certain medical tests and what have you. And then went to Puckapunyal and we were formed up as new recruits, reinforcements for the 2/14th, for the 2/14th Battalion and we were allocated or selected by company commanders of A, B, and C, D Company or Headquarter Company, whichever

27:00 company commander wanted us or selected. My brother had already gone to B Company of 2/14th Battalion and Phil Rhoden, my great friend and Powerhouse mate from Somers, he was 2IC [second in command] of B Company and of 2/14th, so I had no option but to go straight to 12

27:30 Platoon of B Company and which my brother actually was the platoon sergeant of that 12 Platoon at that time.

How was that with your brother being in charge?

Oh it wasn't a worry, we were great mates and he was two years older than I was. I was the youngest but he'd had a great experience. He'd had a pretty tough life out in the Western Australia. He'd cut sleepers for the wood liners on the

28:00 mines at Collie and he'd played football out there and he'd learnt to have a beer there, which, you know, I hadn't had a great deal of, prior to my rugby days and so, you know, we were good but we both fit and well and we both played in the Powerhouse championship football team, because Jack Pollard, who brought out a

28:30 book of all the champion league Australian Rules league teams, he also included the champion Australian Rules team from Puckapunyal in that book, and we're both in that. And Butch and I were the two ruck players in that team, and we won a championship. We played against the 2/2nd Medium [artillery regiment] in the final at Puckapunyal after quite a few matches

29:00 and they had two Brownlow medallists playing for them, [Wilfred] 'Chicken' Smallhorn [Brownlow 1933] and Allan Ruthven [Brownlow 1950] [both from Fitzroy club], and Jock Rosser, who was the captain of the University Blacks team. So they had talented team but we beat them and our officers collected a bit of money, because they'd put bets on. We were pretty much fitter than they were, I think

29:30 that was the important thing. But we had a great period of four months or more, five months, or four months to five months training in Puckapunyal.

What sort of things were you being trained in?

We were trained in every aspect of an infantry soldier really, which meant drilling with

30:00 equipment and arms. We learnt to fight. We learnt to shoot accurately with the rifle. We learnt how to fire a Bren gun; how to handle, cleaning and care of weapons. The operation of the submachine guns, the Thompson submachine gun, and the Bren automatic [light] machine gun and some of us learnt something about the

30:30 Vickers [medium] machine gun and the other we learnt about the two-inch mortars [light company-level mortar], which were used, and the use of grenades, throwing of grenades and how to handle those. We learnt how to use the bayonet and do bayonet fighting with our rifle and butts and so forth, and we learnt to dig, how to dig trenches and dig weapon pits and all that sort of thing. We learnt how to get fit and

31:00 we learned how to care for ourself. We learnt quite a bit about first aid and all those necessary things. How to put together, how to put a tent up or how to sleep on the barest necessities and so forth. We did training over long distances and difficult country and we drank. We dug the Drake-Brockman line up at Puckapunyal, which were

31:30 deep trenches with so it was and that was a feat in itself because it required a lot of physical effort to do that. It was pick and shovel and all that sort of thing getting down deep, fairly deep. Not that we ever were involved in deep trenches during the war.

You were probably with a lot of younger men at that at this stage?

Ah,

32:00 there were quite a few older and quite a few younger, yeah. Yes, I'd say there was a mixture. I would have been about – I probably would have been pretty close to the average age of probably twenty-five or twenty-six, would have been about the average age. Yeah, Mm. Although they talk of – Four Corners [Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) television investigative/documentary series]

32:30 and other shows have over-emphasised the fact that, you know, that of some of our militia battalions being eighteen years of age and so forth, but that's quite incorrect. It's all a matter of balance. If you average them out, not one of them would have been less than twenty-three years. The average would have been twenty-three years of age but we had a number of sixteen-year-olds in our battalion too that joined

33:00 up at sixteen. They weren't supposed to and weren't allowed to and we even got signals in the Middle East from times that this, “So-and-so is sixteen years old. He should be sent back,” but this is by that time he was seventeen and a half or just on eighteen. Yeah.

Was there any reprimand for them?

Not really. No. No. No, they were well accepted. We developed a great – by being in sections

33:30 like in the rifle companies. There were four rifle companies, A, B, C and D and a headquarters company, and you have a battalion headquarters and you have a headquarters company. In headquarters company, you have six platoons and they're number one platoon, a sig [signals] platoon, a mortar platoon, a Vickers machine gun platoon, a

34:00 transport platoon, a quartermaster's platoon and a transport platoon. There are six different platoons. They each have, and a pioneer platoon, which looks after all your bridge building or your roads or repairs or special work like the carpenters or something like that sort of thing. And in the band on the battalion headquarters, you have a band which they – or they've got all their

34:30 musical instruments that they do the – provide the band that you march to and so forth. And usually if you go out on a ten mile, fifteen mile or twenty mile march, they'll meet you at the last mile and they'll march you in to the last mile to come home and you pick up your step and you swing along, you know, pretty and they're also the stretcher-bearers, the bandsmen, they act as stretcher-bearers.

35:00 **At this stage in training, were there any particular areas that you found you had a natural ability for?**

Ah well, I had a natural ability with my rifle with my marksmanship and everything, 'cause I learned to when I was a youngster, to be able to fire it, use it, the .22 rifle and shotgun and the repeating rifle, the automatic rifle.

35:30 I'd been able to shoot rabbits on the run and I'd been able to fire out and to shoot the flame of a candle out at about twenty-five metres. My brother and I both did. We did this at Warrandyte when we were only fourteen and so we were brought up at that time on accuracy. And we did a lot of this on the rifle range where we – Butch and I both did this at Williamstown, on the rifle range. We fired at five hundred metres and a thousand

36:00 yards range. So we fired, we were very accurate, but my PT – I'd done nothing but PT all my life, and I took our company in PT and that's how I got – I joined up as a private and my brother was a sergeant. Phil Rhoden was a captain at that stage. I was made a corporal because I was given charge of the company as

36:30 PT instructor and I was given a section and so I had a section of ten men and they were mostly lads from – well, when I say lads, some of them were older than I was - but from Murray and Murray River up at Robinvale and that area. And they were great fellows, and there were a good mix and most of them and parties. The final week before we sailed we were able to…oh, there was one occasion, my brother

37:00 was company –he'd been made company warrant officer - so he was this warrant officer sergeant-major of our B Company at this stage and I was made, oh, this was the final week and our CO had said, well, he'd allowed, the officers had allowed each company to have beer in their lines for the first time ever,

37:30 to allow a keg of beer per hut, and all of the companies agreed except that our B Company, Diddy Noonan - Diddy Noonan his name was, we called him Diddy Noonan - he wouldn't allow it in our company, in B Company lines, and my close mate, other corporal of the other section in my platoon, in 12 Platoon, was Ronnie Dredge, who was a great mate also before the war in Powerhouse,

38:00 and after the war. He worked with our company I worked with; he was the corporal of the 8 Section. Anyway, but I was made battalion orderly corporal for that for this particular night because they expected with beer in lines there might be a little bit of trouble or something else, and I'd won the shot put in the divisional – over the Puckapunyal –

38:30 in the division competition and also sang songs in the officers' mess and at the Seymour Town Hall, where they had some concerts, and I was patrolling the lines with my bayonet scabbard on as orderly corporal and I passed my hut,

39:00 just a big tin hut providing twenty accommodation of twenty palliasses on the floor, and shutters down each side, all the way along, and the steps leading up into it. I hear a lot of noise and frivolity coming from it and I said, “That's funny.” So I pricked up my ears and I walked up the steps and here at the end of our hut they've got a nine-gallon keg lined up there and Ron

39:30 Dredge and some Murrayvalers and others had lined up around this all enjoying themselves and having a beer and so forth. I said, “What the hell are you going on, Ron? You know Diddy said there's no beer in our lines.” He said and just at that moment Butch walks in the door behind me, my brother here, and said, “Alright, you're all under arrest.” Including me but, so unfortunately we all had to front up

40:00 the next day. But I was exonerated because I was the orderly corporal and I wasn't involved in it. So I was just about to tell them that they had to take it out and get rid of it, because the orders were against – weren't, hadn't been allowed. Anyway to compensate for that, at the last day there were Diffy Lang, my old mate from the 2/2nd Pioneers, he was the sergeant down in the 2/2nd Pioneer Battalion. He was a sergeant there and he had access to a nine-gallon barrel.

40:30 So I got one there and went up the hill at Puckapunyal and I took it up with my section and we drank it, the section had a drink. So we had our little farewell then.

Tape 3

00:30 **The training I think in Puckapunyal.**

Puckapunyal.

But what happened after that? Or how long did that go for?

We had roughly four to five months in Puckapunyal and a good training. It was tough. We did up to, you know, thirty k [kilometre], forty k marches at times and we, as I mentioned

01:00 earlier, we dug heavy big pits and big ah the Drake-Brockman line. Yeah, that was what Puckapunyal was famous for, the digging at that. It was about six or eight feet deep and heavy through clay and heavy work.

What was the point of that? Was there an objective?

I think it was mainly to get us for getting

01:30 our muscles up I think and developing ourselves physically I think, that was the important thing, and teamwork. Working it together in sections. Each section was given an area and we had to, perhaps we had, sometimes it was competitive. We'd one section would have to do a section and try and outdo the other section and so it was bringing in the competitive side of it and other training of course. We were trained on

02:00 recognition of ground, appreciation of ground levels, like the foreground, middle distance and the background and to be able to recognise and identify objects in each of those areas and be able to quickly pick up targets or positions of enemy. If we could give immediately a description of

02:30 the ground, the type, you know, whether it was in the middle foreground, or left foreground or centre and middle distance and so forth, you know. It gave us all sorts of things and then we also learnt marching and in different types of terrain and country and country areas and we're at Puckapunyal, aren't we? Yeah.

Yeah. How did you enjoy

03:00 **training?**

I think we were all in a learning process and I think the most important thing was perhaps the learning of discipline. It was our introduction to discipline, and that's what particularly an infantry battalion is all about. From a section up to a platoon and company and battalion, we had these battalions. Every morning we came up as a firstly a company parade and then accompanied down to the

03:30 battalion and onto the battalion parade ground, and it was all a very ceremonial type of business, with good equipment, good timing and good conduct and good bearing. I think that those were the important things that had to turn out. Our dress, we had to turn out and make sure that our dress was correct, that we were properly shaven and we had our uniform put on correctly and so forth. So

04:00 it was all in the learning process of each one, and each section commander was responsible to see that each member of his section was turned out well and so on, and right up to the company level and battalion level and into cleanliness and tidiness around the camp itself. We had a 2IC that, you know, if he saw a match on the parade ground, he would, he'd go off his head, and “Who was responsible

04:30 for putting that there?” and so on.

Were there any men that found this new army life difficult?

I can't recollect any. We had a cross section. For instance in my section, I know I had one chappie that was over forty, and but he was a country…

05:00 a lot of our fellows were from the country and the country chaps, you know, adapted themselves to whatever was put in front of them very readily and very well, and they were excellent to lead, they were excellent to live with and play with or whatever. I feel that there were always, oh, I suppose we did have just a few, half a dozen or so, that

05:30 are ratbags or fellas that gave problems and were always getting into problems, getting marched up before the CO of the battalion and getting reprimanded or punished and so forth, but they were pretty rare. I think everyone was in it, they knew why they were there and they were looking forward to getting over, going overseas and getting involved in whatever they were asked to do.

06:00 **And in these early stages did you see the natural leadership qualities of men starting to come through?**

I think we did. You couldn't help but see that. I know that in our platoon you could see it throughout the battalion. There were men there that really, you knew that if anything happened, we got into trouble, there were potential leaders in

06:30 amongst every section and if we got into strife, and that, as it turned out, this was actually the case there. We came into contact and there was always another someone else to take the lead, to take over from the leadership and to take that there and we had a great collection of experienced, and fellows with potentially initiative to take command.

And what about your own leadership qualities

07:00 **at that stage?**

Well, I'd played a pretty prominent part in the Powerhouse and Lord Somers camp and Powerhouse activity. I'd been captain of the rugby club for something like nearly five years, six years and I'd had the opportunity to be a leader. So I'd been a leader in our rowing organisation

07:30 and our aths [athletics] and I found that, you know, I enjoyed the opportunity to become a corporal and to be responsible for ten fellows, who were all good fellows, and I used to spar with them in boxing and I had trained with them and I'd helped to guide them in different ways and I was proud of my section,

08:00 particularly at that time, and so it was just a, you know, it was really a great asset to be able to have fellows that you knew that you could work with and rely on.

Boxing was very much a part of a young man's world back then, as opposed to the way it is today. When was your first introduction to boxing?

Before the war, I felt that when

08:30 I hadn't seen much of my elder brother and he was at somewhere, he was working and that sort of thing, and Noel, my next one, he'd gone over to Western Australia with his uncle and he'd been on a jackeroo, up in the Riverina for a while also. And he'd been an outdoor countryman and he'd brought up the hard way and had to do everything for himself. And he'd developed physically and

09:00 then Harold went over to…joined him in West Australia and we'd grown up together, as brothers we'd done a lot of sparring and through Powerhouse we'd learned boxing, and I decided that I had to, because they were getting strength and physical build up and improved that in that respect,

09:30 you know, come by their country activities, their physical activities, that I had to do it in my gymnasium and activities in Melbourne, because I was working in an office. So I linked up with Sammy Gray, who was an ex-Australian old lightweight champion, and I took boxing lessons from him in Melbourne there, and I used to have quite enjoyable times there, and get punished at

10:00 times. But he'd put me up against some of the heavyweights there, so I learnt a bit of boxing there and I felt that it gave you a little bit more confidence to be able to, you know, look after yourself. You would become – you wouldn't become aggressive - but you at least felt confident being able to handle yourself. So that was, you know, part of the preliminary make up.

Was it through boxing that you discovered skipping?

Well,

10:30 yes, and my Dad. Dad got it through, I think, a tip from one of his mates at work. He worked in Myers [department store] at that time in wool and dress goods, and he used to keep himself fit. He used to go out in the backyard and skip of a morning. He'd do five hundred skips or something like that every morning and so I got into this and I got mad on skipping and I reached a stage where, there was a fella named

11:00 I think it was Brown. He was the chief railways commissioner at that time and he was supposed to have the world's record for the most revolutions in skipping and I think he skipped something like fifteen or sixteen thousand revolutions without break, and so I was going – had a group of our boys that went to Bible class up there, and I got them home one day and I'd been doing a couple of thousand skips every morning and so forth and I could do it,

11:30 all sorts of skips and double skips and different feet and so forth and I found that a tremendously good way of keeping physically fit. And any rate I got the group of them down, they timed me there and I had a go at this world's record, what they said of this commissioner, and I skipped for about an hour and fifty-five minutes it was, and it was without a break. And I got up to

12:00 just under the two thousand, about eighteen thousand nine hundred or something like that without catching in my feet but it, you know, that was one of my main forms of keeping fit and exercise. You had to have a good rope, with a good leather rope with the swivels on it and it was no trouble.

Nearly two hours of skipping. How exhausted were you at the end of that?

Oh, not too bad at all. No. No. I think you

12:30 by doing it regularly, you know, you built up a lot of stamina and your breathing was good. I wish it was just a fraction as good now, but it's not.

You mentioned going off to Bible classes and that. How important was religion?

I think because Mum and Dad were involved in the church and I used to love the choir part of it. We used to learn singing and all those different things, concerts we used to turn on and

13:00 my brother, older brother, used to take this gym [gymnastics] class at Murray, at the church and we did all sorts of things. Turned on displays and pyramids and acrobatics and gymnastics and things, and I think all that helped to do and make you more agile and more mobile, and I think that helped me in my sport and my rugby particularly. I think that applies today to the average forward in rugby union. He's not quite agile

13:30 enough. He's not quite mobile enough. He's got to know exactly where the ball is at all times and then and he's got to have the ability and speed to get to that ball quickly. Speed to the ball is the most important thing I think. That's where our team can improve, rugby team.

So at this stage of training did you have any idea where you may be sent?

Ah, I

14:00 think not probably not until about the last month or two before finally we knew we were going to be sent overseas but we weren't sure. We felt pretty confident it would be to the Middle East somewhere because the 6th Division had already been sent to Middle East, to Palestine, and they were from Palestine, then they were sent over to Egypt, and the

14:30 desert and so on. So we'd but we didn't worry about that vaguely. We just knew that we'd be sent overseas pretty soon. There was talk of it, you know, within the next month or so, and then finally the final week came up where we were knew that we were going to embark from Sydney and we all caught, we were entrained at just outside of Seymour, and went to Sydney

15:00 and then trained and got onto the Aquitania and we were with the…ultimately there were the three vessels, the Aquitania, the Mauritania and the Queen Mary, I think we picked up the rest of the brigade [21st Australian Infantry Brigade] that the 2/27th Battalion from South Australia and the 2/16th from Western Australia and

15:30 we had the 2/16th and the 2/14th on board the Aquitania.

You spoke earlier on about how because you were in the militia unit before you decided to join the AIF. Is that right?

Mm.

You joined the 2/14th. What did you know of the militia in regard to what their responsibility would be in the war?

Ah I don't think at

16:00 that stage that I knew very much really. I wasn't, you know, quite au fait with their – there wasn't this strong feeling which developed subsequently, you know, when we came, time came that ultimately were sent, we were sent over to – we did go over to the Middle East and we spent a year and a half to almost two years over in the Middle East there, and we went through a number of battles there. We didn't know really until we got back

16:30 to Australia that there was a distinct – the militia and particularly with Powerhouse, there were quite a number of fellows that our mates that we'd known for years in Powerhouse that hadn't joined the AIF, that they were still in the militia units and that they were not eligible to go overseas or to go in the AIF. So it was at that time it started to get this little feeling about the militia and

17:00 even suggested it's a 'choco' ['chocolate soldier', derogatory term for the militia] and what have you and then went particularly, when it came later to New Guinea, but ultimately then of course the government made the New Guinea it was going to be an Australian territory and it wouldn't be regarded as, so that militia were…they were able to send militia over to New Guinea and that happened. But there was that little feeling about them and

17:30 I think it's been overwritten in history and in books the differences between the militia and the AIF. I've got a lot of respect for the 39th Battalion. I've got a lot of mates that still see and, you know, with them and have relationships with them and we had a close bond up on the Kokoda Track with them.

When you joined the AIF though, was it a conscious decision to join the AIF because you knew they would be going overseas?

Yep. Yeah. Yeah, oh

18:00 definitely, yeah, that was the volunteers were to go overseas the same as would have been done in the First World War. It was that's the same procedure and I felt that well we were going to, we weren't going to wait until the enemy came to Australia to find them on our soil where it would be our families and all our loved ones would be threatened. It would be far better to - that was one of the principles of war - if you're going to fight an enemy, you choose the ground on which to fight in, and defeat him.

At that stage did you ever feel like Australia

18:30 **itself was in direct threat?**

At that stage, I don't believe that we felt that at that time. I don't think we felt at that time, not at all. Not until the Japanese came into the war did we feel any worry or concern about that.

So when was it that you were told, "You're off to the Middle East"?

19:00 Well it would be just about or just about the last week before we sailed. Yeah.

Did you have embarkation leave before that?

No, we didn't. No, we'd had that where I mentioned earlier about the odd-allowed a keg of beer and we had a little trip out to a place called Ash's Bridge in there, where we had a sort of a picnic there, and

19:30 we were allowed beer out there and I know that our company and a few of the other companies did there but some of the local farmers were a bit upset because some of their – an odd sheep or an odd pig were purloined and used as a barbecue and we were allowed – we had beer and we had singalongs and sort of a let your hair down, that final fling

20:00 out in the bush somewhere. The only penalty we were subjected to was that the adjutant had told us on the following morning that we were all being, had to ascribe threepence each to pay the cost of a certain pig that one of the – that prize pig that the farmers had lost.

Can you remember the last time you saw your parents before you left?

20:30 Yeah, it probably would have been about a week before we sailed. I think we had a weekend leave or a week leave down at Melbourne. We used to go down to Melbourne; we'd go through Seymour,

21:00 Kilmore, and we'd get to – then we'd usually ring up Maurie Barlow's pub at Broadford. We used to call there and they'd always have a chicken out there for us for supper on the way down and have a beer and we'd all a bit of singalong there, and then we'd ring through from there and order a steak at Hosie's [Hotel], had a steak or a big flounder – big flounders, beautiful flounders we used to get there - and it'd be ready for us by the time we got down there, about six or eight of us.

21:30 Then we'd go home and spend the week or the weekend at home but no that would have been the last occasion. The weekend before our final leave where we saw Mum and Dad. Mm.

Were they emotional about you leaving or

Oh they – Mum – they were but, you know, no way, they'd…they accepted it and they were, I

22:00 think, they were proud really, and Dad used to be Myers; if I walked in there with my uniform on in Myers, some time they had a leave or a so and so, and he was loved by all his customers because he'd go to no end of trouble to get what they wanted, exactly what they wanted, and he'd have a queue sometimes of twelve or fifteen women that would only be served by him and he'd see me across the room and he'd wave his arm and say, "Come across," so and he'd

22:30 introduce me to everyone and then carry on, but that was his attitude, you know, and they were proud of Butch and I, the whole, my…

Can you tell us about boarding the ship and departing Australia?

Ah yeah, I haven't got anything particularly, particular memories. I know that Phil Rhoden was smuggled on aboard. He had mumps at

23:00 the time and they had to smuggle him on board to get him through the medical section, but I know we were billeted and it's a big ship and we were billeted way down in the scuppers somewhere, and it wasn't very comfortable or very nice but there were a lot of troops. I can't remember how many were on, but it would a been in the thousands at least on the Aquitania and

23:30 we did have a little beer issue once in the afternoons, or beer was turned on for a little while and we had a couple of beers. We always had an opportunity to have – we had a bit of PT training and we had a little bit of rifle lessons and my section had a bit of few concerts aboard. I know I had to sing at the officers' mess on a couple of occasions on the ship going over. We had the brigadier was on

24:00 board our ship, Jacky Stevens [Brigadier, later Major-General, J. E. S. Stevens, Commander 21st Brigade], and we had some little sort of competitions of different types. Yeah, they played quite a bit of cards and things and bankers and what have you.

How did you feel when you saw Australia disappearing over the horizon?

24:30 Well, I guess at the time we probably felt a bit home sick, but we were starting to make friends. We were starting to link up with members of the 2/16th Battalion and they ran a boxing tournament there too on this ship, and we were involved in a few boxing competitions there, and I was in the heavyweight competition but I lost on points in the first round, my first round, to a

25:00 Kalgoorlie miner who was about six foot five and about three stone heavier than I was, I think, but unfortunately he didn't, unfortunately he wasn't able to carry on his spot, because I'd knocked him about on the face a bit too much and he didn't win the competition, but I was knocked out in the first round. At least, I was beat on points in the first round.

With the boxing

25:30 **matches, were blokes good natured about it after they'd beaten the living daylights out of another fellow?**

Oh yeah. Yeah. Oh yes. We were good sportsmanship right through. Yeah. No, it was just a – no, the whole spirit, I made great friends with Alan Haddy [Lieutenant Alan Haddy], who was quite a famous name in the 2/16th Battalion. He was killed at Gona [‘Haddy’s Village’ actions],

26:00 but he also helped me and when I was cut off on the Kokoda, going up the Kokoda Track. But no, we were good mates and that friendship formed then and it was fulfilled later on. I was at the time I got that sniper's bullet, he was on the west of Gona, and he was killed a couple of days later after that was taken.

What were the general living conditions like on the ship as far as accommodation

26:30 **and food?**

Pretty basic, very basic and not very good; not very good. We were quite happy to get off it ultimately. We stopped at Bombay of course and then we were shifted up to the British camp at Deolali in India for a week, where the British army were, and there

27:00 we were billeted in these EPI [EPIP, English pattern Indian product] tents and we had natives virtually look after us. In fact, we could get a shave by someone and go for next to nothing and we learnt to know we played a couple of football matches or cricket matches, I forget now, but oh no, that was an experience and we got

27:30 to know, made contact with the English, a few – the trip up on the train was, we had a few experiences the trains. You could get some of the wallahs [workmen] or the wogs [derogatory term for Indian/Middle Eastern people] would come up and try and sell us eggs to cook and a few things like that. We started to learn a little bit of Arabic in that time and then we came back to – I was entertained at the Bombay gymkhana and I went to the Taj Mahal Hotel,

28:00 because I'd been there with the rugby team beforehand, because we played a match in Bombay on our way back from England. It was only a few months, you know, before that. So I knew a couple of them there and they looked after us and we went back as privates or corporals and that.

Having been there not much earlier than that, had you seen many changes as a result of the war at this stage?

Not so much in Bombay, no. No, I don't think there was. Only

28:30 changes were the military installations in Deolali where the British had formed and getting prepared for certain operations that they were wanting to do, that they participated in there, but no, very little really.

Was it on the ship over where you were offered a promotion?

The day before we disembarked at

29:00 El Kantara on the Suez Canal, Phil Rhoden, who's 2IC of our company, he said to me, “I've got to parade you to Jacky Stevens,” our brigade brigadier. I said, “What the hell? What have I done wrong?” And he said, “I don't know but,” he said, “I've got to parade you.” So he paraded me and he's a bit like Napoleon, Jacky Stevens, he's got neck and red cap and what have you. He said, “Bisset, are you interested in becoming an officer?”

29:30 And it took me back a bit and I said, “Yes sir, I am.” He said, “Well, when our brigade gets up to Julis in Palestine, the brigade requires an amenities officer and I don't know what exactly that means, because it's a new terminology that's just been coined. But when we get up there, I think that you'd be ideal for it and I'll send for you and we'll see.” He said ‘if’,

30:00 so that's what happened. He did. I was sent for in a couple of days when we got up to Julis and he said,

“Well, I know a little bit more about it now. This is what's involved in it.” He said, “You can either get your commission tomorrow and become the brigade amenities officer, that's a lieutenant, or you can have the first nomination to go to the British OCTU [officer cadet training unit] in Cairo, which is a four months course in Cairo”

30:30 and I said, “Well sir, I would be overstepping all my, all the unit, all the NCOs in our battalion including my brother, who’s a sergeant-major,” and he said, “Well that's for me to decide, Sergeant Bisset.” So he made me a sergeant straightaway and I said, “Also,

31:00 Sir, but if I'm going to be an officer I'd want the training necessary to be an officer and I'd much prefer to go to the OCTU and have the training.” So a week later I was up at the OCTU in Cairo in the first intake, the number five course, and they got seventy cadets each month, new cadets each month, and they formed a company out of those because they've had four months in that time have had all specialist training

31:30 for the war. So fortunately I was sent there with - I was the only one from our battalion, one from the 2/27th, one from the 16th - and fortunately next month Butch and Morrie Tracey and one of our other chaps that came in the next intake. So we were there three months together, Butch and I were in three months together, so.

What did Butch say when you first told him about this?

Well,

32:00 he said he didn't worry at all. He wasn't worried at all. He said, “Good luck to you,” he said. He was only too pleased, he was never upset because I overstepped him in seniority but it meant that I was senior to him in the officers’ list, battalion list, but that didn't mean a thing, but the main beauty of it was that we did have a, you know, a great time in Cairo

32:30 for the three months we had together. We had some good friends and we made friends with some Egyptians in Egypt and we were entertained by people, local people. Some musicians there that had a dentist friend and Isaac Zuckerman who was a great – he and his wife were great friends and they were musical people and they had a lovely home and turned on wonderful meals for us occasionally.

Were there any Powerhouse

33:00 **connections there?**

No Powerhouse. The only Powerhouse connection was a couple of fellas that were in the 2/6th, in the 6th Division. They'd been in the Bardia show and they were in the hospital at Cairo and they were wounded and I was able to catch up with them and had a couple of, spent a bit of time with them. They were the only ones and then

33:30 we went up to a place called, oh, it was up towards Luxor or up the Nile. We had a break, mid-term break, and I went up with a Rhodesian mate that I'd befriended and become friends with in our company and he knew friends up there and we stayed with them for the weekend and we went to the dances and parties up there and we

34:00 were guests out at one of the sheik’s big tent complex. There were great massive tents there, where we well looked after by the Arabs that were there and they looked after us extremely well. So that was an experience.

What were you being told about the war at that stage? What information were you receiving?

Oh well, we were given

34:30 sitreps [situation reports], you know, of how the things were going on up at Bardia and then later, I'm not sure of what time at this stage Tobruk came into it, but it'd be pretty close to that, but we knew that from some of the wounded that come back that how they'd got on and the successes we were having against the Italians particularly. They were sort of capitulating in large numbers and

35:00 having a great deal of success. We weren't told, but our training was excellent. We had some wonderful training. We had a great parade ground, which was about a kilometre square, and we did all our training. We had to take command of one company, of a company of seventy or nearly seventy, perhaps broken into two of thirty-five and we had to

35:30 drill them all over this whole rectangular, so we used our voices for over a kilometre, more or less, and we always had a British sergeant-major or something else who was on our back to make sure we did it the right way and projected our voices and so forth, and it was good because we were in barracks up top. We were upstairs from our – and we could watch others doing it and see the thing going on. It was like clockwork. It was magnificent drill they'd turn on

36:00 and, you know, it was just top grade and top standard. And then we'd go out in the desert and do the various exercises and on approaching trying to get a company or a platoon section in to attack a position. Use of ground, covered approaches to make sure we could get to that spot without being detected and so forth. We'd have to put demonstrations, and doing that sort of thing the whole time, and

36:30 field work and we were using live ammunition in some of our exercises and so it was all great and we also had a great deal of sport and rugby was their main game. When I got there, the captain of the OCTU team was Jack Griffiths. He was a Kiwi [New Zealander] All Black [New Zealand Rugby Union Team] in 1937. He was captain of the All Blacks in 1937 and he was a nice bloke. He

37:00 subsequently became aide-de-camp to General Freyberg [New Zealand commander] after the war but and after the war I visited him in New Zealand and he was a bank manager in Wellington and we caught up, and had played golf together on Paraparan [golf course] over there. But he was only there for the best part of a month and then I took over as captain of the OCTU team. There were two other internationals

37:30 in our team, so we had a pretty good team. We were unbeaten for the four months that were there and we played the Australian team, we played the South African team, we played the Kiwis and we played all the British regiments. The last match was against The Welsh Regiment and they were undefeated and we were undefeated. Or no, they'd lost one match, that's right, and we were undefeated and we had to go up to Alexandria from Cairo by train

38:00 for this match and they played on the Alexandria ground. Thirty thousand troops, including Blamey [General Sir Thomas Blamey, then Commander Second AIF, Middle East], and finally I hit the post on one kick. I was doing a – kicking – converting and I missed that. I hit the post on a difficult kick outside. That would have given us a win but I think that was, it was a tie. So we finished up as a tie and they billeted us

38:30 for the weekend and we had, the Welsh of course are famous, as you know, for their singing and for, so they fed us on Mackerson Milk Stout [brand of stout made by milk process], but that night over there we entertained and we sang into the early hours of the morning all the Welsh songs and other songs. It was a great weekend and it was very successful.

How did the Australians get along with the British?

Oh very well on the whole, you know, altogether very,

39:00 very well. We loved some of our instructors and what have you and got on very well indeed. There was a good feeling in the whole, there was never, and I can't recollect any disharmony of any sort at the four months I had at the OCTU and particularly having Butch there too, because we had a good canteen, a NAAFI [Navy, Army, Air Force Institute] canteen, there at nighttime we'd relax. We had a piano there and

39:30 we used to be mad on darts and the first, I suppose, the first four weeks, or five weeks or six weeks, I think, they used to have a habit of playing darts for just shout the round of drinks or so forth, and we weren't quite so expert at that time in the darts, but after four weeks with Butch and I picked it up pretty quickly and for the first four weeks we paid quite a…bought a lot of drinks, but after that we didn't buy any

40:00 drinks, because we could shoot a bull or a seventeen or a double or a treble whenever we wanted to.

Tape 4

00:31 **So the first training exercise you had there with live ammunition, did that cause any problems?**

No. No. We had done training of course at Puckapunyal with live ammunition too but no, I don't think there was any problems in that respect, because it was very important for us to, you know, to get the subjected

01:00 to operating with live ammunition and we'd had a lot of experience with using live ammunition but never very much with where it was anything that might be flying around.

How different did the fellows find the climate?

The only thing I found out that the grounds over there are pretty hard when the rugby games and so forth. A lot of us, including my brother, got you know

01:30 abrasive knees and things like that and it was easy to get infections, but fortunately I was okay in that respect and Hal had his battles. He had a little bit of dermatitis and so forth, but he was subjected to that right throughout the war really, but it never made any difference to him. He was tough.

So what happened after you'd, you're training up, getting up to a certain level, what happened next?

Well, I got my commission

02:00 on the 31st of March, '41 that would have been, and just I was posted immediately then back to

Palestine to the battalion and I was given command of 18 Platoon of Don Company, which was there for another month with these other fellas, and when they came out they

02:30 were…there wasn't an immediate posting available in the battalion for them, but they went to the training battalion over in Palestine and then he subsequently joined us during the battle of Syria. In the meantime, our battalion had been sent over to Egypt up through Alexandria out through the desert to Mersa Matruh, and we were stationed at Mersa Matruh

03:00 for a period of time. I can't, just can't remember how long but it was quite a number of weeks or might have been a couple of months and we built defensive positions there because Rommel at this time was coming down with his armour and forces, pretty strong forces. Tremendous amount of armour and we were building great tank traps and over in the sandy areas and also

03:30 putting treble apron wires [barbed-wire fences] across the defensive positions at Mersa Matruh and the conditions there were really, really very, very tough and hot; sandstorms and strong winds and temperatures up to a hundred and ten, hundred and twenty. At times there, you couldn't touch you had to have gloves to touch the wire, the steel stakes that we were putting in, driving in and so forth, and the Italians had

04:00 put a lot of in this area, had put a lot of land mines and personnel mines over there in the minefields, and they weren't all properly recorded. So there was always danger of getting in the minefields walking up for those, walking in the mines, because sometimes…unfortunately my platoon lost one of its chappies, and trying to take a short cut through one of these so-called minefields. And

04:30 he was blown up and unfortunately he didn't survive.

Can you explain to us, Stan, how tank traps are built?

Well, they were mainly a type of a V in this area, a fairly long, and if a tank got into this, it went over the dip into this, well it had no way of getting out if it,

05:00 a deep V in the sand and just because of it's narrowness of nature it would get in there it wouldn't be able to reverse or get forward out of it. That was basically the main reason. The shape and the type of nature of the sand or the nature of the soil was such that it couldn't get the traction necessary to get it out.

So the hard digging you'd done in Puckapunyal paid off, did it?

Yes. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

05:30 Oh we were always on guard duty there and we had, there was a bit of water, bit of beach there where we'd over there and we did a lot of, we were subject to a lot of bombing raids there and we had to have some sort of cover, particular cover, in the, you know, underground. Dig in to dig underground in some places. That's my recollection. I remember that

06:00 there were two brothers, a Peter and Alan McGavin [Lieutenant A. S. D. J. McGavin]. Well, I had Peter McGavin with me, 'cause he was a private in my company, in my platoon, and he was a bit of a character. He was a great pianist. He could play the piano very well and he subsequently turned he was a good soldier too, but always to be a little bit of conflicting to orders

06:30 and he had the job of – I gave him the tank attack rifle [Boyes anti-tank rifle]. We used a tank attack rifle in these at this particular time and they were big heavy rifle, which had a tremendous recoil impact on it when you fired it, but you had to, you know, hold it reasonably firmly and make sure you had it all well against your shoulder and so forth. Alan, I remember I had him on guard duty there at one

07:00 night and it was this tank attack rifle and my patrolling around there, I found that he was fast asleep, so I took the rifle away. So he had a little bit of explaining to do in the morning. He never lived that down. I always once I saw him after there, I said, “What did you do with that rifle?” And ah.

Can you remember the first time you were subject to an air raid?

To an air raid? Ah

07:30 yeah, I think it would have been at that Mersa Matruh. It would have been at Mersa Matruh there one night. Yeah, we had some sort of tunnels that we'd built underneath a shelf or a big shelf or something else and I think we hopped into these when the air raids were on but I don't think I had any recollection of panic or great concern. I don't remember anything

08:00 coming, you know, that was really very close to us or not at that stage. We had plenty after later but not at that stage.

What was the signal that was given to indicate an air raid?

Usually, there was a siren that went up from the brigade or divisional area and you could hear that, you know, you could hear that very clearly, which would give the alarm and then

08:30 from our own battalion you would have signals it’s usually a telecom [telecommunication – radio or

telephone message], move so and so, where it was, what was happening and…

Did you ever see any of the aircraft?

Oh, we saw some of the Stukas [German dive-bomber] and others that came in. Some of these dive-bombers and things, yeah, saw quite a few. Later on, I did an aircraft recognition course at Bradfield Park in

09:00 Sydney when I was up on the [Atherton] Tablelands and I knew every aircraft there was. I got a hundred per cent success in my recognition. They had some silhouettes and all that sort of thing but it was a comparatively easy course but I know that I found it interesting that I went to, well no, I went to after we left

09:30 Mersa Matruh, then we were suddenly called back from Mersa Matruh to Palestine and in Palestine we were stationed pretty just south of the border, the Syrian border, and then we heard word, we had to all get ready because we did more training with, we met, were introduced to the training of the Jewish settlements. We did a lot of marching and we were

10:00 very well received going through the Jewish settlements. They always had some water or a glass of milk or something to hand out to us, or fruit, and we got to appreciate those, and we got word that we would be crossing, or we'd have guides, at a certain time we'd be crossing the border to go into Syria because we'd been told and vetted that

10:30 the Vichy French were in occupation of the whole of Syria and that they had a great number of the Foreign Legion troops amongst them and they would…some reports were that there wouldn't be too much resistance and other reports were that there could be severe resistance. Any rate, it turned out to be a tough campaign and it was there was no question of them giving in easily,

11:00 lightly, and in fact they had more casualties and more difficult than the whole of the Greece and the Crete campaigns as far as our forces were concerned, and yet it was never recognised and it was always hushed up by the powers that be, because we were supposed to be and the French were supposed to be our allies and not that too many people understood that about this Vichy French and the Free French and

11:30 so.

What did you understand at the time to be difference between the two?

Well, we understood only that Syria was occupied by the Vichy French and we had to fight the Vichy French. We had to and that there were some indication that they or hopeful that there wouldn't be too much opposition but that was proved wrong, you know, right from jump off and we had some, you know, bloody fights and bloody battles.

Can you tell us?

But it was

12:00 well done, the intelligence and the tactics that we adopted. We had the three advances. One by the 21st Brigade did the coastal strip, up the coastal drive, they were going through Tyre and then ultimately to Damour. And then the other centre one, 25th Brigade, did the centre group, was going up through

12:30 Merdjayoun and Jezzine and up towards Damascus and that area; and then there was British section with the Indians, Ghurkhas and others that were going on the extreme eastern section further to the east and that happened all at once. And we crossed the border with Jewish guides that one night and our objective, our Don Company objective, was to take the village of Alma Chabb,

13:00 which was some kilometres across the border in pretty hilly mountainous region and they had a fort there, which was occupied by the French, and well that's all, that was the Don Company objective, and that's what we did and we had to take that village and we did it with minimum casualties and we had the French –

13:30 a great number of the French were on horses, Senegalese and others there were a few Foreign Legion troops and I took a prisoner of the Foreign Legion, officer, captain, who he came out with his revolver in his hand, from the fort, running down the steps and he was aiming this at me, and I was aiming my revolver at him. Fortunately, I had one of my corporals with a rifle and bayonet also pointing at him but

14:00 I think he realised that it was a bit silly for him to do any stupid business and I was able to take, it took a bit of tugging, but I got the revolver from him and you know. Then he was sent back as a prisoner and he apparently gave a fair bit of information to them and I lost one sergeant there, he was sniped by somebody further forward, but that was about the only casualty that we had,

14:30 but the others quite a few got away but quite a number were killed and got killed.

As an officer, how did you feel the first time one of your men was killed in action?

Oh, it was not very good. I felt that well you've lost one of the team but you felt that, you know, the casualties were going to happen and no

15:00 matter what and you had to accept those. I think you prepared yourself to accept casualties and to try and ensure that they are minimum casualties and don't subject them, put them under unnecessary risk and we could do it another way, which was later proved so completely in places like Gona and Buna where our fellows were slaughtered unnecessarily there

15:30 with complete lack of thought or care, and we've got bitter memories of that, some of those things. But in those early stages, it was a question of going in and doing a job and we subsequently took over and we were subsequently, we kept moving inland in Syria along the range of the small mountains, parallel to the coast,

16:00 and our other companies were working along the coastal strip. And the road had been blown up or had been mined by the French and one company went forward to try and stop them from blowing up this mine, to stop our armoured stuff getting through, but any rate it, I think we, you know, it was very successful in getting up through, the coastal drive was very successful. We got through to the Litani

16:30 River with the 2/16th and 2/27th and we occupied the village of Tyre on the coast there and that was without any great, not too many casualties. We managed to get most of our stuff over the road, which was damaged, but didn't stop us from making it accessible to getting our stuff through and then

17:00 our company was kept on the inland plank clearing out the villages, the pockets of resistance that were in the villages in the foothills there, and then we were moved to take over the advance guard of the brigade going along on the coastal road and I remember there that our platoon

17:30 was the forward platoon and we had the artillery officer with me, 2/4th Field Regiment, for supporting us and we pinpointed a fairly strong position across a gully and I think we were able to bring a fair bit of fire to him and I directed artillery fire in a couple of onto that area and after some time they put up a white flag and

18:00 we took some hundred and thirty prisoners or so forth and then we were able to move forward with them. Then we moved then further inland into a road that went across to Merdjayoun and Jezzine, and then our battalion was then transported across to help in the centre area, while the 2/27th and 2/16th continued the advance up on the coast way towards Damour.

18:30 And then after we had some nasty battles in Jezzine and Merdjayoun, the mad mile and so forth, and ultimately we were subjected to a lot of artillery fire and we had a position that Don Company were holding the road. They had armoured fire, we knocked out a couple of their armoured vehicles that came down the road. We had a two-pounder tank attack and support

19:00 and they knocked out a couple of vehicles that were on the road and then we were on this saddle and over the range of mountains further ahead of us they were occupied by the French, the Vichy French, and they had [UNCLEAR] and they could bring their seventy-five pounders to bear and they subjected us to quite a lot of artillery. Some we were we had to build rock sangers [fortified defensive positions],

19:30 big sangers, to try and get as much maximum protection there but we didn't suffer very many, very few casualties there. A couple of fellows got a bit of shell shock; that was about all. I had to take a patrol out, I took our platoon patrol out to the range of the mountains, which is across in front, and I was able to observe

20:00 their positions on the other side and down I went down through a deep wadi [ravine, dry watercourse], and we were able to give them information as to what was there. They had certain tanks and artillery pieces and what have you there, so much in front, and there was a pill-box that they had on our left flank and I felt that to get access into those areas was going to be extremely difficult without being detected and without coming under

20:30 artillery fire and a lot of fire from the others, but I couldn't do much more any rate. As it turned out, I brought back all this information and the following day my other platoon, 16th Platoon under Alan McGavin, went out and he put an attack in on this pill-box and he brought back eighteen prisoners and unfortunately had a couple of casualties, but he

21:00 did – it was a good job and he did very good, but I felt that it wasn't worth risking the lives of men to do that.

As the leader of your company, how much other interaction did you have with the other section commanders and platoon commanders and that sort of thing?

Well in at that time

21:30 I had pretty close association, pretty close connection with the whole of company really. We were stationed pretty close to where they are. We didn't occupy a big area, a vast area. I think we moved on from there and we went up to Ain Sofar, I think was the name of the place, Ain Sofar.

22:00 It was above bay of Beirut, on the mountains above Beirut, and we were in olive groves there. I can't tell too much about that because I was there just a couple of days, it was just a few days before the armistice was declared and before the final battle of Damour, and I went down with a bit of what they

call sand fly fever or something like that. Temperature of about a hundred and

22:30 six, and I had to go into the Haifa hospital for a couple of days but so I missed that.

How did they treat that for you?

Just had to give me doses of something. I don't know what they gave me but I was certainly recovered fairly quickly 'cause I got up just as the finishing of Damour, the battle of Damour. Got back to the unit then and that was the

23:00 armistice, and then we were stationed, sent up to a position about fifteen, twenty miles north of Tripoli and we had to build defensive positions and right on a high feature that overlooked the road coming down through Turkey from which the Germans were supposed to be using and coming to try and cut the Suez Canal, sever our life line from the Allies and fortunately because of their

23:30 problems with the Russians at that time, that didn't eventuate. But here again the four of us, the four platoons were stationed on this beach and it needed a mule train to bring our supplies up this winding track, which we could look through our binoculars and see it coming miles away, and we could see this mule train coming up for our weekly supplies of food and odd

24:00 ration of a bottle of beer per man, and a bottle of spirits for the officers I think, so.

Who would be in charge of the supply train? Was it Australian soldiers?

The supply track? Well, our battalion there would be responsible for supplying our battalion but there'd be divisional headquarters, which would supply each of the battalions.

But with the mule train, were locals employed in that role?

They were. Yeah. They employed

24:30 by the locals, yeah.

Was there an Australian in command, like in actual physical command of that train?

There would have been some of our people with the supply train, yeah, with the mule track, yeah.

And how did you go in regards to food and water and daily provisions?

Everything was pretty adequate. I know in these particular weekends or at a time when the mule train

25:00 came up, well, it was always a pretty memorable period because I remember Butch’s batman particularly, his name was Muscles Baker. A little fellow but very ingenious fellow and he made friends with some of the wogs around the place, and we were a bit wary of some of these wogs because some of them were mowing sort of track lines pointing to where we

25:30 had our dugouts or where we'd started to put our special defensive areas and positions and we had to discipline some of them because of they reckoned that they were doing it for their aeroplane spotters to pinpoint our positions. But he was able to get plenty of, a few chickens and what have you. So that and he'd cook up a meal and I would have it in my brother's tent and we'd four of us would or

26:00 four or five of us would have a very nice meal with a couple of grogs and have a pleasant interlude but on a weekly or fortnightly basis. Then we'd all have to go down, sections at a time, down to the creek that came down from the Cedars. It was cold water but beautiful water and we'd do our dhobi-ing [wash clothes, from dhobi (Hindi), an Indian washerman] and washing and wash ourselves at the same time, and I remember

26:30 we stripped or stripped off and we were doing our dhobi-ing on these little rocks, this beautiful water, and I had a cake of soap and I was washing away with my clothes and dhobi-ing up. I suddenly realised I was washing the head of a snake with this lump of soap. It was liking it. Any rate, I wasn't too happy about it 'cause I was pretty vulnerable. I had nothing on and so I got my revolver and then I blew his head off

27:00 and threw him away but and then on the way back I saw another snake and I got my revolver and I shot him too, but that was one of the snake stories I was going to tell you. But they or my batman always laughed about that after, but of course he reckoned that, you know, I never did my dhobi-ing myself, but I did.

Can you tell us a little bit about your batman?

27:30 My batman. Yes. Oh, he was a good little fellow. His name was Bob Regan and I know that he on one of his nights apparently when we perhaps celebrated a little too much in my brother's tent there, and I found my way back from my brother's tent to my own tent, which wasn't that easy, it was fairly rough ground, and I got back and I was

28:00 having difficulty in finding my bed but he found my bed and reckoned that I got on my back and I had

my legs up in the air like a beetle, and he couldn't turn me over but that's what he says. But I don't remember but no, no, he was a pretty staunch sort of man and I kept my relationship after the war with him and he

28:30 married in Brisbane after Kokoda campaign and I was at the wedding and he died just a couple of years ago, and subsequently his wife married again, one of our fellows, one of the fellows who was originally in my brother's platoon and they're still alive.

How was it for you

29:00 **when you were commissioned to suddenly be given a batman and was it odd?**

Yeah it was. I had to get accustomed to, I'd been accustomed to doing everything for myself and suddenly to find I had a little black boy, but we made a good relationship, a good mateship amongst us.

Do you know...

And I was able to help him in some ways.

Do you know what the military reasoning

29:30 **is behind having a batman for officers?**

I think it was basically the fact that an officer had to have more responsibility, had to keep himself fit and keep himself, you know, at a level of fitness, you know, above the rest of the fellows, you know, where possible

30:00 to ensure that he was able to think clearly and act clearly in times of emergency or in tough times when it became necessary, and I think that if a batman could make his personal life and make sure that he was properly equipped and properly help him in thinking and getting himself right, little chores, that it would have that

30:30 effect of making the task a little bit easier.

What was the relationship like between the soldiers and the officers?

Oh, on the whole it a hundred per cent, you know, it was most officers had the respect of their men. 'Course there was always – in every battalion there was always two or three or four officers that just didn't make the grade and they – the opinion

31:00 of the troops, and felt they were no-hopers and so forth, but that was rarity really.

So what happened after building these emplacements at Tripoli?

Ah, at well yeah. Well then, we

31:30 had Christmas Day up there in the snow and the winter up at Tripoli. We went down, we were pulled back from there at one stage and we went over to Baalbek and to some of those places, which were biblically quite famous, Zahle and biblically, and I remember we experienced there was some wonderful sights and some of the

32:00 old ruins.

How was Christmas day celebrated?

Christmas Day I think we had in the snow and I remember we had, I think we had a little bit of whisky amongst us and I know we, I remember with Stace Howden, he was the commander of C Company, and he's a Scot, and I remember he came in with a bottle of whisky and we helped him drink it, but

32:30 we had some very happy memories of that Christmas. I think we were having a snow fight or something amongst at one stage but yeah then from, I'm just trying to think, from Tripoli, ah

Sorry I'll keep you on Christmas Day for a tick.

Yeah. Yeah. Sorry.

Did you get Red Cross parcels or anything like that?

Oh yes. We used to appreciate some of the parcels that we

33:00 got. We got quite a number of different parcels both from on the home front, organised on the home front, and from our loved ones and also from the Christmas parcels, as you say, the Salvation Army and others. I think many of them had cigarettes in them and others had goodies, sweets and cakes and chocolates and they were greatly appreciated, some of the

33:30 things that they sent to us.

Did you get any correspondence at that time as well?

I think on the whole we got our correspondence we got, you know, fairly regularly at that particular time. We were getting our correspondence fairly regularly. A bit different to later on when we were up in the jungles and they had, you know, I think we got our correspondence fairly, pretty on a consistent

34:00 basis. I think we wrote pretty regularly. I've still got letters that I wrote home. Copies of letters that Hal wrote home to Mum and Dad and there, and I've got copies of some of the letters that I wrote home to Mum and Dad as well from those areas and from New Guinea.

How well were the chaps equipped to handle the cold conditions?

Ah,

34:30 I think from memory we had pretty warm jumpers and things on and we could always put our tunics on and, you know, and with reasonably warm. I don't think we ever felt that we were being subject to anything more that really severe. Nothing like we had to as we were in up in the ranges in New Guinea.

Because that's the thing. A lot of

35:00 **people when they think of the desert, Middle East…**

Mm.

and the jungles, New Guinea, they don't realise that it can get quite cold.

Yeah well that, oh yeah. Well it can get very, very, very cold in New Guinea, particularly at times there it became, you know, very cold because we had practically no clothes to speak of and you had to survive with as little clothes as possible

35:30 and it was wet. Being wet most of the times, your clothes were never dry and that's the main thing and the temperatures were up in the mountains there was always pretty low.

So can you recall where you went from Tripoli?

Well, I'm pretty sure that we went from Tripoli to the stage where

36:00 we were called back home and we embarked and at Suez, at the start of the Suez Canal, we embarked on the Ile De France and we headed back and we

36:30 got to Bombay ah and then from Bombay or no, wait on, no, sometimes I get mixed up sometimes with our troop thing [troop ship]…

That's alright.

Where we got to. We were heading for Batavia, for Java, in the convoy and we were about

37:00 twelve hours or just a day out of Batavia and some of the ships in the convoy had actually landed in Batavia and Java and they included some of the 2/3rd Machine Gunners and the 2/2nd Pioneers, which included two of my rugby mates, you know, Bill Hammond and Cliff Lang, the one that I mentioned earlier

37:30 with Weary Dunlop, and he was the 2/2nd Pioneers and he was a platoon commander in 2/2nd Pioneers and he was killed there in Java. He had told his platoon to get out while he held the Japs back from that position. So and we were – then there was a debate, battle then between Curtin and Churchill and our troop [troop ship], we were sent initially, directed up

38:00 towards Rangoon. We were going to be landed in Burma but then they changed. They battled it back and then they finally turned back and our ship was redirected to Adelaide, to Australia. 2/16th got into Fremantle and Perth and some of them got…a few of them went AWL [absent without leave] but they rejoined later on.

What was the reaction of the chaps when they were first told they were going home?

38:30 Well I think, you know, we were all a bit worried about the fact, the Japanese threat. We've heard more and more about the Japanese threat now with the success of it they were having in getting, coming down through the islands and the Pacific and so and so. Singapore had gone and others and, you know, things looked pretty serious and we were glad to be going home because we felt, “Well, that's where we'll be needed. That's

39:00 where we're going to fight this war. It's going to be fought close to our home ground.” Ah yeah, we were all anxious to get home as quickly as possible and we were hoping also to have a little bit of leave.

Tape 5

00:30 **So the fighting when you were fighting against the Vichy French, did that differ in any way,**

did you come across any of the Germans or Italians or anything?

No. We were mainly – they were a mixture in some of the Foreign Legion that we captured. There was a mixture of some of them, and Germans and Italians and Frenchmen and all sorts of different nationalities. But

01:00 we didn't have very much to do with them other than the fact we took them prisoners and sent them back behind the lines. But we didn't, not personal basis, but they put up good resistance in particularly the some of the coastal battles that we had there, that much more resistance

01:30 than we anticipated to the extent that we, you know, we did have, as I mentioned earlier, we had casualties something like over four hundred casualties altogether, the whole the whole campaign as against, you know, ah Crete and Greece, Crete campaigns were less than that.

Would you say there'd be any difference in approach when fighting against the Vichy French?

02:00 Ah, a different approach to?

In combat with them? Fighting against them?

No, I think that they were experienced in war, battle training and in military tactics and what have you, but if we carried out our operations in the correct

02:30 manner as far as using our maximum means of support that we had available. If we had superior air force, air power for most of the time that we were in Syria but if we had much more, better air supply, we would have done better and got it over more quickly, I think. But we did have some naval support from going up the coastal way, but we used artillery and mortars and our heavy

03:00 machine guns, you know, to good effect. And they also had tanks, which were pretty difficult to combat because we didn't have the tank attack weapons to stop them and they were responsible for quite a few of our casualties. The tanks got in amongst our troops and the tank attack rifles were pretty useless unless you got a direct hit on one of their tracks and or we could get a sticky bomb

03:30 to adhere to their casing. So yeah, I think the fact that they had some tanks, which we didn't have at the time, gave them superiority in that field just for a temporary, but then we were able to get our artillery to bear and our tank attack guns were able to just deal with them. We had some, I think superior forces, and

04:00 superior fire power.

Did you have much leave?

From during the Syrian campaign?

Yeah.

No. We had or I had very little leave. We were, I think, when we were stationed outside of Beirut, we were granted leave for perhaps a day or so down to the

04:30 Beirut area or to Haifa area, but about the only time. I know that in Beirut on one occasion we had a pleasant night out. There was the name of a well known French soloist that used to sing there and I sang a couple of duets with her on one occasion and we had a night and a good night out and sort of thing.

05:00 **Some men that we've spoken to about Beirut have talked about the bordellos and what they used to get up to at nighttime. Did you come across them at all?**

No. The only time would have been when I was in three days in Haifa when I was in hospital or the fever that I had that I had a couple of we went to; we

05:30 were entertained by one group of a night time but nothing that I nothing that, you know, stands out in my memory as being tremendously memorable or exciting.

Did you ever have any of the younger privates come to you with, you know, 'cause it's a whole new world, especially when they're overseas and some of them were so young and you know

06:00 **and I guess sexually they were very inexperienced and so did you ever have any case of where they'd come to you for advice or be in a sticky situation or anything like that?**

Ah no I didn't, I didn't have that experience. I know there were times when there was some of our people they attended brothels or anything

06:30 that was available in that respect, but I can't recollect any particular problems that we ever experienced in those.

Was there a different set-up for the officers?

No not really. No. No, I don't think that you could, no, I've got no recollection,

07:00 not in the Middle East in that area.

So you spent how long did you spend in hospital?

Oh, I was only about three days altogether in hospital with mainly the fever that I had. And as soon as that got down, I was back out back to the unit.

And then was it

07:30 **long after when you were started heading back to Australia?**

No, it wasn't long. During that period that we were in, waiting after the war, I attended a signal school. A signal school lasted about three weeks and then I also attended the intelligence school, which are the divisional – the intelligence school run by corps headquarters and

08:00 that was six weeks. That was under 'Manda' Jones, it was a well-known intelligence school, and as a result of that now, I was transferred from my 18 Platoon command to become intelligence officer of the Battalion. I took over from Andy Pochin, who was our intelligence officer and I became intelligence officer attached to battalion headquarters.

08:30 So I was then responsible - at this intelligence school we did all sorts of special things, particularly one was sort of reading the stars and the night direction, by direction finding by nighttime and by various means. But we would march at night time by the stars and be able to, you know, march for several miles and march right on to a

09:00 spot, or a particular mark that we were aiming to reach there, using in that area the north star mainly, which we used as our basic for direction-finding, but we had ways and means of, you know, establishing north and then from north we'd work various degree movements from our hands, from either east or west to give us a line and then we'd consider the distance that we had to march and

09:30 step that out, and we had exercises at nighttime and during the voyage back to Australia, I gave quite a number of lessons to our troops on the top deck when the stars and we were able to demonstrate to them the means of direction-finding by the stars, using our hand and our fist as a guide to establish degrees and that sort of thing. So in the Southern Cross, for instance, it was

10:00 much easier. We'd locate the Southern Cross, which we could always do that with the two Pointers that were there and the shape of the kite, and then from the kite, from its tip of the kite, to the tail of the kite we'd draw a line through that, and we'd put our little finger on tail of the kite, and our arms full length there from our we'd say our hands spread out would be nineteen degrees, and then

10:30 from that spot we've got that our fist, clenched fist would be another eight degrees, so that would be twenty-seven degrees from the tip of the kite would be, or we'd go from north. We'd put our hands onto the north star and work out the number of degrees we were from the south, Southern Cross, or from north and that would give us, that would line it, get a spot there and then we'd draw a line straight down to the horizon, and that'd be due south.

11:00 **That was very accurate?**

It was accurate, yeah. Yeah, it helped us a lot or helped a lot of our people when they were cut off in the bush and the jungle in New Guinea. They used the stars for direction finding to help them out. Mm.

Just a quick question back in Beirut and Syria, were there any signs of men that had been through in World War I?

Of –

11:30 in those areas did we come across any?

Yeah.

Of our own troops, or you mean people living over there, you mean?

Yeah, or just any signs left over that might show that men had been through there, whether it be things or...

Tied up from the First…

Yeah.

World War? No, I can't immediately call anything to mind, Kylie.

12:00 Hadn't really thought about that, but I don't think that sort of struck us at the time, and sort of got into my memory.

So you were on the boat back home, on the ship back home,

Mmm.

What was the general kind of atmosphere of the men on the ship?

Oh good, good morale and good

12:30 comradeship and good fun and it was I think, there were a few of our characters. My brother had a reputation, Butch, of being able to entertain them and get them laughing and joking about different things. His was an outward sort of soul and he would

13:00 get them to tell stories or recount somebody's experiences over in the west and have them. But I think Albert Moore, the Salvation Army man attached to us in New Guinea, he regarded him as this special spirit that sort of helped to relieve the tension from a lot of the troops because of his approach to life and generally and his ability to look on the humorous side of

13:30 things and also he was a good commander, a platoon commander. He did a great job in New Guinea, you know, when things were pretty tough and he brought the best out of his platoon and they did a fantastic job at one stage you know, particularly at Isurava, and they withstood a lot of attacks by the Japanese

14:00 outnumbered, you know, very considerably.

You just mentioned the Salvos [Salvation Army] and did you have much contact with them in the Middle East?

With the?

With the Salvos?

Salvos? Not as much in the Middle East as later on, but we did have a contact and we had them, they were present on the boats, on our ships, and they were always present and we always had a great respect for them and

14:30 a great attachment to them. And we had over the period of five years, six years, we had two particular ones that were attached to our battalion. One was Albert Moore, who was quite a well-known character, and the other was Eddie Cooper. Eddie Cooper's still alive. Albert Moore died a few years ago, but Albert Moore is regarded as an authority on the, a reporter on the Kokoda campaign, because he

15:00 was ever present close to the front and he always had supplies and goodies and help there available to help give a little bit of morale boost in the form of coffee or chocolate or something right up. He was granted a few natives and villagers to help him carry his supplies and he was always very close to the battle at the front. So, you know,

15:30 everyone that had associated with the Salvos, you know, developed a great respect for them, and it's evident even today. If they're around the pubs and if a Salvo comes into the pubs or the bars and puts this thing around collecting something, they'll always give pretty freely spontaneously to them.

The other men have always spoken very highly of the Salvos.

They do. Yeah.

Mm.

Yeah, they…

Did you receive any Red Cross parcels?

16:00 Yes. Yes, we would have at different times. I can't remember, you know, any specifically but I know that any parcels we got from time to time were always greatly appreciated, you know. Always looked forward to. Usually, I never worried about cigarettes much but I'd always look to see if there was any cake or special cake or fruit cake, or if by any chance there were chocolate, but I think chocolate was very rarely in a

16:30 food package, because the weather conditions didn't keep those, but I can tell you a story about cigarettes and chocolate later on as we get into Kokoda and New Guinea.

Okay. So arriving back in Australia, what was that like?

Well, it was a great experience to be home

17:00 and know that we'd had our first taste of battle and we'd all come through pretty well with a good reputation and with credit and our battalion, our brigade, was regarded as being battle seasoned and an experienced infantry brigade, as one of the finest in, you know, certainly in the 7th Division. We were moved

17:30 to – we came to Adelaide initially, Springbank, and we were camped there for about two or three weeks and we did training, more training in that area in the foothills of Adelaide, Lofty Ranges, and that sort of thing, and then we were trained over to Melbourne. We had one week's leave in Melbourne where the battalion was formed. That was consisted pretty well purely of Victorians at that stage and then

18:00 from there after the week's leave we were shifted up to up north and we spent a week in Glen Innes in New South Wales, which was a pretty cold place, right? Very cold. It was, from memory, it must have been around about the May, April or May time, and we had a camp there. Got to know, you know, a few

people there. Did a bit more training and then we were moved onto Queensland

18:30 and our battalion arrived in Yandina just south of here and our battalion was camped on the slopes of Mount Ninderry, which is just three kilometres on the coastal side of Yandina towards Coolum and the 2/27th was camped in Caloundra and the

19:00 2/16th was camped in Maroochydore. So the three battalions were formed. It was to some extent like a Brisbane Line [supposed government policy to protect Brisbane and the south if the Japanese invaded from the north] before, because at that time it was felt that the Japanese, the major landing might be made up north of the northern part of Queensland. They'd come down the coast there and we'd be the major defensive buffer established in this area. So we had to dig

19:30 weapon pits in many cases on pineapple plantations and other areas around Nambour and all that area and defensive positions just in that event in the initial stage but the brigade was there for three months. In that time, we did training, which we felt was oriented towards jungle, to jungle training and jungle conditions that we would experience in New Guinea and we were sent

20:00 out at times as a, well I was sent out as an intelligence section. I had a section of twelve men and each rifle platoon had a platoon of thirty-nine, forty men and companies at times three platoons, forming a company of roughly a hundred and thirty men, and others there, our headquarters companies each were with their specialist section platoons

20:30 of either mortars or heavy machine guns, Vickers, or Q [quartermaster] stores and artillery or pioneers and transport. They were all used in their different characteristics or purpose. And we were sent at the time, we had to live off the land. We were sent off, sometimes platoon at a time, sometimes a company at a time, and we'd have to look after, feed ourselves and

21:00 maybe try and find. Sometimes they'd have to go inland up on the Blackall Ranges and they'd have to rely on getting the milk from some of the cows that were there, and or getting the odd sheep that was about or a kangaroo or a wallaby or whatever wildlife they could. But they had to fend for themselves to make themselves sustainable, which we might have to do in the jungle if we were cut off over there. So

21:30 we virtually, I didn't have any trouble, because I took my I [intelligence] section down through towards Coolum and then we cut up through Marcus Beach and Peregian [Beach] and then established a camp on the site where Hastings Street is now, and we did unarmed combat training and direction finding and all that sort of thing, training there, and I had no trouble living off the land, because I had little plugs of

22:00 gelignite and I tossed one of these in. I'd hook out about seventy bream at a time and, you know, nice big bream about this size. So we'd have no trouble in feeding ourselves or keeping ourselves fed and when I did this there'd be a few odd local fishermen on their lines there. They'd hear this explosion. They'd wind up their lines and come down. We'd give them all a feed of fish so that, you know, they were pretty pleased about this, very easy fishing, but there were lots and lots of fish in those days, in

22:30 1942. This was in 1942. So we had three months training all around the back of the ranges and sometimes we'd march as many as thirty, forty kilometres and all over the mountains and live back, and then we'd come back to camp and we got to know… Our band established local dances at Dunethin Rock and out of Yandina and initially the locals were a bit scared of the AIF coming back from the Middle East and

23:00 sort of locked up their daughters and they were worried about, you know, different things, but as soon as they got to know the sort of the calibre of the men, they threw their homes open and we made many friends from the people in Yandina and in Nambour and even as far as Kenilworth and places like that and Eumundi and Cooroy and Pomona even, Mother Mountain and Noosa particularly.

23:30 We made many friends there and we got to know and we used to sing a few songs down at Maizie's Café. She's still alive now, and she's ninety-five and we still spend our birthdays together, you know, she's one of the original Lebanese families that were established fishing families in Noosa-Tewantin and they're well-known and so, you know, we loved the time spent here and

24:00 we made many friends, and they made us a happy battalion, you know, we were a good battalion. We were fit, we'd done a lot of training, hard training, and a good morale and we had plenty of good times and fun and we were very confident of that, we were just waiting, itching to get into the grips with the Japanese at that time.

What were you told about the Japanese during this training period?

Ah,

24:30 we weren't told a great deal, other than the fact that they were pretty ruthless and that they'd had victories, easy victories, all the way down from the time they launched out. They were well organised. They'd been fighting against the Chinese for quite a few years. They had many years experience. They were well equipped. They had great armament. They had tremendous navy at that time and they had a very large air force,

25:00 a very competent air force, and they were, you know, a real threat. And there was Britain always felt

that Singapore would be a bastion and would be a strong fortress, that they had no way of taking it, but that was proved wrong, and two battleships were sent out from England, the Repulse and the Renown, you know, were sent out from England. Two of the biggest in the world and they were sunk within a matter of a week by kamikaze pilots [Japanese suicide pilots] that

25:30 just dived straight into them and sunk them very quickly. And that was a very great blow to the British and the English, you know, pride and their know-how, and their skills, and it didn't help their morale at all and it was partly I think that that caused the fall of Singapore so quickly. They surrendered and capitulated there without a reasonable fight or, you know, attempt to

26:00 hold the fortress there. They attacked from a different position than they expected and that made it, you know, so much more difficult for our troops and so we were under the control of the British at that time in Singapore and they surrendered and our people just went along with them, and so that's where we lost our 8th Division and people like Weary Dunlop and others were involved in that and, I mean, I've since

26:30 had association with Weary before he died and I was great friends with him and after the war. We used to go Scottish dancing together and all that with the Melbourne Scots. So I think that, you know, we knew that we were told that the Japanese were ruthless, and we'd heard also that at this stage they'd captured Rabaul and they'd made a fortress in Rabaul.

27:00 They'd put, they had a hundred thousand troops in Rabaul. They had the navy and the air force all there, established their base, and they were in a position then to have the sea power and the air power and the army power to go straight into New Guinea and take Port Moresby, which would give them a wonderful base from which to launch an attack on Australia, particularly on Queensland, the northern part of Australia and they

27:30 knew where our weak links were. Where they only had to get into Newcastle and places like that and they'd, you know, get into the only parts where we had manufacturing and we were making munitions or building planes and so forth. War effort.

So during that training, did your approach to your tactics, did they change? Were you prepared for another type of fighting?

Our tactics did

28:00 change to some extent, because we were living off the land was one, which we knew we weren't – we had to be prepared if we were cut off in the jungle, that we were able to, prepared to exist on our own resources and perhaps, you know, live on a much more limited diet and to be able to see every opportunity to secure some fodder, foreign fodder, or some

28:30 sort of wildlife or something that we could use as food and to be sure that we always had plenty of supplies of water and other drinks.

So these were things that you foresaw in Australia during your training?

We experienced these sort a conditions, yeah, and that's our training. We did do a lot of wild real life training and real life

29:00 live ammunition training in New Guinea. We did a lot of these around Marcus Beach and Peregian Beach. We were using full battalion attacks and company attacks with support from our artillery and fire and tanks and the whole lot. So there's still a lot of the unexploded bombs and things all out around that area and people that get a house lot now, they've got to make sure they clear the whole lot before.

We saw one of the, a sign on one of the fields

29:30 **as we were driving here actually.**

Yeah. Yeah you do. Mm.

So what prior knowledge did you have before leaving Australia about the 39th Battalion?

We'd had some knowledge because we knew that they were the 39th, the 49th and the 53rd Battalions, they were of the one brigade, the 30th Brigade,

30:00 that they were all militia battalions and they came from different parts of Australia and that some of them had received more training than others. The 39th was fortunate that they'd received a little more training than the other two battalions. They'd also been allocated from our brigade and from the 7th Division, a number of officers, some of actually

30:30 lieutenants. Some were lieutenants who weren't actually in control of any platoons in our company that were supplementary officers that we had, that they'd had battle experience and others, some of our senior NCOs who were almost due to become officers. And we were able to allocate from our battalion, I'd say we were up, we had about eight of these that we

31:00 gave to the 39th Battalion or to that brigade and then they were allocated over the brigade, and then 39th Battalion got the bulk of them and some of them were capable of being company commanders, and

they took the place of some of the older commissioned officers in the 39th Battalion and the other militia battalions. So it built up the strength of their leadership of each of those battalions and that was

31:30 an important part of the contribution that it made.

Was information getting back about the conditions that they were being faced with when they landed?

Of over there?

Mm.

Well, I think that was the fault of the establishment that was in place in Port Moresby and New Guinea at the time. They hadn't made any preparations for the reception of,

32:00 a brigade of militia or later of the AIF, and they just hadn't prepared the camp sites, they hadn't prepared the materials that were required as far as camping or mosquitoes or anti-malaria and all those sort of things, and they just weren't catered for, and so they played that by ear and just over a period they just gradually supplemented the things they found

32:30 necessary. They didn't anticipate and work out beforehand what should have been necessary. They should have with proper planning in the higher quarters, they should have been capable of doing that and had everything ready for the reception of those of the 39th and that brigade to get into Moresby.

But they didn't even know, no one knew how far the Japanese had gotten either, did they?

Well, oh they knew that they, you know, they were at Rabaul and

33:00 they knew that at this stage I think that the Coral Sea was the first one that came in, the first Coral Sea and the Japs [Japanese] had a bit of a set-back, but it wasn't a complete victory at all on our part, but the Japs had a set-back and the Americans had a set-back too, but it did prevent the Japanese from immediately going in and making another seaborne landing into Moresby. And they decided

33:30 then they'd make this landing on the northern coast of New Guinea and then came the Battle of Midway later, then that was the time when, due to our superior air force and the power, that we did have a conclusive battle and we sank four of the Japanese carriers and that made an enormous difference. It clipped their wings.

34:00 It gave us vast superiority as far as air is concerned and it cut short any possibility of the Japanese being able to make a seaborne attack against Port Moresby. So they then concentrated on taking Moresby by a combination of a landing at Milne Bay and landings at Lae and Salamaua and Buna and Gona,

34:30 in that area and that's what they did and they were able to, they had lots and lots of ferries and barges and smaller craft, still a fair bit of navy, they were able to ferry over from Rabaul and supply their forces that made the landings in these areas that I mentioned and they established very strong beach heads and in those places, Lae and Salamaua and up as far as Madang and

35:00 what have you, and Gona and Buna, and it was only very slowly and gradually that we were able to get on top of that and ultimately destroy them.

Did you have a final leave before taking off?

We didn't. No, we didn't have a final leave. The only leave we had was that week that we had when we came back from

35:30 Adelaide, on our way through to Glen Innes. That was the only week's leave we had, when we got to Melbourne.

Did you get home during that week?

Yes. Yes, we spent mainly with the week at home.

And did Hal get home as well?

Yeah. Yes. Yeah.

How was that week?

Oh that was great. It was. We caught up with everything, with Mum and Dad and some of our friends and what have you. By this time, we'd become very close

36:00 within our battalion, within our companies and with all our mates and we had a great number of mates within our battalion and we, you know, you couldn't leave them for very long. We had to perhaps meet them in Melbourne at one or other of the pubs and have a get-together or we went to functions that we had. Powerhouse, they were running little dinners for, and they were inviting the servicemen in to have a meal at the club

36:30 house there. And there were a number of our senior people there that ran these: Lady Dalziel Kelly and

Mrs McIntosh, Dorothy MacAdam and others. They had a ladies' auxiliary pretty strong and they turned on meals and many of our fellows, you know, took the opportunity if they didn't have anything to do to go in and have a good meal and catch up with some of the people, friends and members.

Did you have time for a quick game of rugby?

37:00 No, I didn't have any time for rugby at that time. No, the only time I had time for rugby was a little bit later on in the war when, I got married in 1944 after the first New Guinea operations, and I was in Sydney on my honeymoon and I met – we were

37:30 walking down the street. My wife was Shirley then, Shirley Craig, and we'd spent a week – I'd got an extended week's leave from my CO - and we'd spent a week at Clifton Gardens next to Taronga Zoo there and walking in Sydney and I met the ex-president of the Victorian Rugby Union.

38:00 He asked me what I was doing in Sydney and I told him I was on my honeymoon but I was due to go back to the Tablelands, to my unit, at the end of that week. He said, "Oh I could use you in a fortnight's time. We've got a big charity game coming on, on the holiday weekend. The AIF are playing New South Wales on the Sydney Cricket Ground and on the Monday the Combined Services are playing

38:30 New South Wales." So I said I couldn't get leave, I'd already had a week's leave but he said, "Oh, don't worry about that. I'll fix that." He was the amenities brigadier or something. So next week, Sydney King comes out in the Sydney Telegraph, 'Army captain goes into training on his honeymoon', and the guests at the Clifton Gardens Hotel are complaining about the skipping noises that are going on upstairs and as I started getting my skipping rope to get into a bit of condition.

39:00 Any rate, we played at the Sydney Cricket Ground and we had five of the team '39 were in the AIF side that we played there and we beat New South Wales comfortably and it was a great game. We had about thirty thousand spectators. And then on the Monday, we had to include a number of league [Rugby League] players because they came out of the services and from the air force and

39:30 the navy and we had Herb Narvo and others that were famous in those days, but none of them were in condition and none of them had done any training with us and we lost that match, just lost that match on the Monday, but and then we went back and we went up to Burleigh Heads and there I went down with malaria. We were doing a PT course and training up there and I went down with malaria. I was the last one to go through all the campaigns in

40:00 New Guinea to go down with malaria.

So this is obviously after you…

This was in 1944 yeah, so.

Tape 6

00:30 **So you're leaving on the ship. What ship did you go over to New Guinea in?**

The James Fennimore Cooper. It was a Liberty ship that we went over. We sailed from Brisbane. Just iron, all iron, welded ship that the Americans were turning out, one a day I think, and it wasn't very comfortable. It was pretty crude and

01:00 so and so but we put up with it. We'd learnt to – we were pretty – we were a fit battalion. We were a happy battalion and we were prepared to put up with anything and there were no toilets or anything like that. We just had a, you know, had a bar and a flowing water trough and so forth and we had but we had a couple of

01:30 concerts and on board on the ship and we had, you know, it was quite okay. It wasn't too long. Only about a week it took us, about, and then we got into…

Just on the boat. Um I have to ask, with the concerts…

Mm.

Did you have any special 2/14th Battalion songs?

Yeah. We had the marching song. Yeah.

And was that specific to you?

Do you want me to sing it?

Yes

02:00 **please.**

"Spearhead of the army, front liners are we. We're tops of the service, the 14th Infantry. Singing over

the highway, singing merrily. We're fistical, ballistical and very much militaristical. We're the boys for the scraps, just look at the tilt of our caps. We're even very

02:30 definitely most belligerent chaps. Oh, spearhead of the army, the 14th Infantry."

Fantastic. When was that song actually written?

It was written when we were at Puckapunyal doing the training down there and we used to sing this when the band caught up with us and, you know, marching us back in after big hikes and marches and that sort of thing. Yeah. I've sung that at a few of our

03:00 reunions in post-war years when most of our old original fellows who knew it so well are no longer with us, and they enjoy it.

What other performances were there during these concerts?

Oh well, I just, there's a photo I've got inside of one of our chappies that's just died recently, Jed Lang. He was quite a character. He

03:30 was a comedian and who was in our sigs, sig platoon. He was a lovely character and he'd turn on different acts, comedian jokes and laughing and humour, and he'd have us all laughing in fits and so forth; and there'd be others who were little three or four that would sing and do things and others would dress up as girls or dress up in fancy dress and put on

04:00 turns and things. All sorts of funny things.

How would you say the atmosphere was different on the boat over to New Guinea?

Well, it was only a short trip and it was pretty rough and we didn't have many conveniences or any sort of any luxuries whatsoever, but

04:30 we were just anxious to get it over with as quickly as possible, I think, and we also – there was a bit hazardous because there were submarines about that particular time and there were one or two of our ships were sunk. So we had this the possibility too that we might be in the water but no, I think we were pleased to see the mountains of the Owen Stanleys and the Port Moresby, you know, loom in the distance and get in to Port

05:00 Moresby, although it was not much of a place to look at.

Yeah, what were your first impressions of it?

As I say, I think the first impressions were that the big range of mountains in the background. It was like a dark cloud. It looked like high big high clouds in the background instead of they were actually mountains and we didn't realise at that time they were the mountains we had to climb over or get over and so forth

05:30 but, and then the front there was, it was a nice little harbour and quite a lot of craft of different sorts but rather squalid for the rest of it. Looked pretty, you know, haphazard, very poorly built and no mansions or nothing of any nature and rather a poor poverty more than anything else and we didn't have much time to really stop in the Port Moresby area or stop. We were

06:00 bundled off-loaded from the ship and put into these American trucks and almost a platoon in each truck and then headed off up into the hills about up the start of the Koitaki area and the McDonalds plantations where they had the rubber plantations, and then Ower's Corner, which is the start of the Kokoda Track or Trail,

06:30 whichever you'd like, but the road was pretty terrible. There was very muddy and slippery and we had to get out at times and have to help push the vehicle back onto the road because of the fact it would slide off the edge of the road and so forth. So it wasn't, you know, and it was wet. I think it was raining a lot of the time and we were in open trucks.

What effect did the climate have on you

07:00 **immediately when you arrived?**

I think it, you know, probably initially dampened our spirits a little bit but not to any great extent you know. We were just anxious to get up to the starting point and we got into a training camp training area at Koitaki and we were there for a few days in the rubber plantations. We got a fair amount of shelter there and at McDonalds plantation they had some of these

07:30 big wheels that they used for sharpening all their equipment and so forth, and we used these to sharpen all our bayonets. And sort out all our packs, what we were going to carry and on our packs and how much we could carry and we whittled it down to as little as we possibly could because we were told by our some members had some experience. Some of the local planters and people that knew the track very well and over

08:00 that, you know, if we take the minimum that we possibly could do. So ultimately we settled on the load that we needed to…

How many...

The minimum.

days supplies was that?

Well, we took five days up to, virtually up to eight days rations really we carried on us but that was a minimum ration and then about five days of ammunition and so forth including grenades and

08:30 two-inch mortars [bombs] for some of our two-inch mortars that we carried with us. But we didn't carry the Vickers gun, and we only carried the Bren gun, one Bren gun per section, and our couple of submachine guns and that was all. We had our rifles and bayonets and our webbing equipment and everything else and stacked in our pack across haversack and pack around us.

Were you in any

09:00 **kind of haste at this stage?**

Well we – yeah, I think we were. We were all trying to get exactly what to was our best equipment, our best load, and to make sure we were ready for the start, because we knew it was only a matter of a day or two before we were ordered to head off, start walking along the track, because the 39th Battalion was starting to have problems at that stage. They'd been forced back from Isurava – not from Isurava, from

09:30 Kokoda – and they were in trouble at Deniki initially. Then they withdrew to Isurava and we'd heard reports that Ralph Honner [Lieutenant-Colonel Ralph Honner, CO 39th Battalion, August 1942-July 1943] had taken over, landed to take over from…their CO had been killed and then we were given orders, but we'd lost, I had to get stay back for the latest intelligence reports on the

10:00 Japanese landings to find out that we were told initially that fifteen hundred Japanese had landed and then Colonel Key [Lieutenant-Colonel Arthur Key, CO 2/14th Battalion] and I stayed back for an extra two hours after we were ordered to start marching, and which we did do, and our battalion went ahead. The 2/16th followed and then the – no, it was just the two battalions went over. The 2/27th were kept back in Port Moresby, 'cause they still felt there was a possibility that there

10:30 could be a landing by the Japanese in Port Moresby. So we only had two battalions, and when you say a battalion, our battalion strength is normally about eight hundred and fifty but we only had a battalion of four rifle companies plus as many of the others as we needed and the maximum was we had five hundred and forty in our group, and five hundred and fifty in the 2/16th Battalion. So there was roughly a thousand men, you

11:00 might say, or a little over a thousand men altogether in the two battalions. So that was the maximum strength that we had to go forward with. Not much more than a full battalion. We started off and Colonel Key and I stayed behind to get the latest situation intelligence report and we heard that another two thousand Japs had landed

11:30 at Gona and Buna, and then we had to set off and Albert Moore was with us, Salvation Army chap was with us, and the three of us went along the track and he took a photograph of the three of us. He had a camera. He set it in the track ahead of us and we walked towards it and took it and that photograph is in the Australian War Memorial of the three of us.

12:00 Colonel Key, and myself in the middle and Albert Moore and I was carrying Colonel Key's rifle, but he was not a particularly robust man. He was a bit older and he also hadn't had the training that we'd have had because he was supervising on this 'round the Yandina area and the Mount Ninderry area. Our companies were doing training in vastly different

12:30 areas quite miles apart and the only way he could supervise them and make contact was to go in the vehicle in a battalion unit and be driven with a driver and inspect each one in turn. So he was unable to get as much physical training for himself as would have been necessary but that didn't matter and he's still a great fellow and a great leader and, you know, good CO.

Did it take you long to catch up with the

13:00 **other men?**

No. We were, only took us a couple of hours. The line was strung out very much over a distance because that was the way it…that's the way the track developed. It comes up and down and soft and muddy and slippery and some were dragging but became a very long standard line of single line of supply and we then ultimately from that time onward, myself as intelligence officer with my some of my

13:30 I team plus four or five members of our Q side, that's our cooking and supply side, food supply side, we went ahead each day and ahead of our battalion so that we could got into the village, you know, an hour or so before the main body, and we were able to tee up with our representative or the village chief or whoever was

14:00 there. There were a couple of our whites, the 7 Division chappies, there and we were able to allocate

company positions and where they'd go when they came in and so they get led straight to them and also have salt tablets available for them, because everyone was losing a great deal of salt with the perspiration that they were losing. You, you know, initially your eyes stung and so forth, but then all the salt got

14:30 out of your body and you became, you know, and desperate for salt. So I had to…we sent for salt tabs [tablets]. We distributed these as they came in, plus the cooks, the Q staff set up their fires and had some knocked up, some sort of meal of some sort with the bully beef out of tins and so forth too. They'd be ready for a meal or a cup of tea or something when they arrived.

How did that

15:00 **work if everyone was carrying their own rations?**

Mm.

and they stopped to cook?

Well they each…

Did they use other rations, or…?

We worked by platoons. They handed them in to each cook area that we'd established and they just put them in as each platoon organised, the platoon commander, he organised each platoon as they came in. You had to.

In your opinion, was it a track or a trail that you were climbing up?

Well as far as I was

15:30 concerned, we never regarded trail. We only felt that trail came into it with the Americanism, that the term is American really. A track was the same as we've ever been used to. It can be a bad track or it can be a good track, you know, and it was a bad track in that, no question about that, but it's always been a track as far as we're concerned. Although the New Guinea people now, since they've got independence, they've decided to

16:00 call it a trail and they've got on their start of the track now at Ower's Corner, they've got this big gateway with timber, they've got "Kokoda – Start of the Kokoda Trail" on there and books have been written the same way. Many books refer to it as track, others trail, but most diggers that went over and fought over it - but the Americans were nowhere near it and didn't have any part of it at all - ah, regard it as a track.

16:30 **When you're travelling through on a track or trail…**

Mm.

like that, is there any need to have some sort of forward scout just to make double sure that there was no danger immediately ahead?

At that stage, no. No we did have a few police boys that were part of the native staff and the native equipment, as far as their

17:00 sort of military presence. They were part of the army really and we did have a couple of these in each of our battalions that were there for if they were needed for advice or, you know, as far as the type of the track and the initial or particular areas that were a bit more hazardous or a bit steeper were going to take them longer than we had. But we were able to find out

17:30 the conditions of the next day's march ahead when we got in and as a result we were able to, going ahead, we were able to inform our company commanders and battalion commander of what lay ahead for the next day's journey and so forth, "It'd be a bit easier and or a bit harder," and so forth. "It'll take them so much longer," and worked on time rather than distance, you know, but it depended on the weather too, you know.

18:00 Every afternoon, we found from our experience that pretty well every afternoon it rained. The rain came down there and it rained into the night and we had practically nothing other than we had sometimes on some occasion, we had a two-man tent or a half a fly or even a ground sheet, a plastic sort of ground sheet that was used as a cape over our shoulders.

How long did it take you to reach the 39th?

Well,

18:30 the first we got as far as Myola, which was where the dry lakes are up on top of the Owen Stanleys, and that's where we were supposed – it had been arranged that there would be at least two weeks' supplies left dropped by plane and stored at Myola for us so that the supplies that we were carrying would be replaced and they'd have supplies to go forward to which was another one day, two days

19:00 from Myola to Isurava, where the – that's where we had to relieve them but we found there were no supplies had been dropped. The six transport planes had been left in Moresby wing tip to wing tip. The

Japs had come over and bombed them and destroyed them all in one bombing raid. So there were no means of getting the supplies there even if they'd they wanted to, but they should have had them there before and they should have had these transport planes dispersed so that they wouldn't have been all

19:30 destroyed. But that was one of the many, many faults that were done, you know, in that campaign and the exaggeration of the lack of intelligence was criminal, because the Japs that landed were alleged to have been a maximum of about three thousand at that stage. Well, actually at this stage something like over twelve thousand had been landed and including ancillary troops

20:00 and engineers to build their roads, and they got hundreds and many thousands of bikes and things that they could rode on some of the flat areas. Three of the Japanese could ride on them. They had horses that they brought over from Rabaul and…

These were things that you found out after?

Afterwards, yeah.

Mm.

And that completely and, you know, it was even after the campaign was over, it was alleged that we were up against inferior numbers and

20:30 this was the most criminal thing to ever suggest, because we were outnumbered at least four or five to one at even the worst possible stage, or the best possible stage you might say, but we were outnumbered, you know. At times there were eight and ten to one and that's where Blamey made his mistakes in later on. We arrived

21:00 at – I went ahead a couple of days before we'd left Myola with our brigade with Potts [Brigadier Arnold Potts, Commander 21st Brigade], our brigade commander, and we arrived at Porter's [Brigadier S. H. W. C. Porter, Commander 30th Brigade] brigade headquarters, the 30th Brigade headquarters, where the 39th Battalion, the 53rd Battalion were at Alola and that was about, oh roughly two hour, three hours south of Isurava, the village of Alola and

21:30 that's where they'd set up their brigade headquarters and he'd set up a little mud table showing the dispositions of the troops where the enemy were and their terrain of that particular area. Of Isurava, the Eora Creek, which ran in the great gullies right through along between the two high ridges of mountains and the track going across Eora Creek on the one side was with waterfalls leading

22:00 into the Abuari village on the east side and then beyond the Abuari village was the Missima village and then further on you go on and you get back on the main track on to Kokoda, or it led on to Kokoda, and then our main track the Alola-Deniki-Isurava or Isurava-Deniki track, Naro, that went straight through to Kokoda and that's where, Isurava, the 39th Battalion were. They were in position

22:30 at Isurava and that was on the western side of the Eora Creek and the valley like, the steep valley like that and here is Isurava and over here on the other side is Abuari. On the other side is steep gorge and mountainous country and the very fast torrential creek going down the middle of it. The only way you could cross that is on a log, walk across or climb across or

23:00 crawl across. The only way you could get across and I went across it on, I crawled across it later on with about fifteen of my lads, thirteen of my lads, but well when we got to this mud village, our purpose of the mud table was to have the dispositions of where the 39th Battalion positions were,

23:30 where the Japanese were and where the 53rd Battalion had been sent. Some of them had been sent out around on the eastern side through Abuari. So we were able to point out, as our troops came through, I was able to point out exactly the topography of the ground and the nature so they'd have some idea if they were cut off and have some idea of the best route to get out or where to go and also where the enemy were and where our troops were.

24:00 So as they came through, each platoon commander, I was able to give them a pretty fair indication of exactly the set up of the battle position and it was just roughly a mile forward, further forward of Isurava where they were, the 39th Battalion were, and this was the 20th, about the 26th of August our first company came through. We could only send one company through at a time, because that's all the supplies

24:30 we could give them that were back at Myola and we couldn't send them all, couldn't bring our whole battalion forward at once. So if we had have been able to, it would have made a difference to the battle. We would have held out longer possibly and certainly caused more casualties but, as it was, we still created a lot of casualties in, you know, in amongst the Japanese. So we, the C Company came in and they took over from C Company of

25:00 39th Battalion on the eastern side of the track, the main track, and down towards Eora Creek, and they established a company position there. They checked the pits that they were in that had been dug and prepared. They improved them where possible and took over. Then the following morning B Company, our B Company, which included my brother's platoon, and they came in and they took over the position

25:30 of B Company of the 39th Battalion, which were up on the higher ground on the west of the Kokoda track, up in the high ground towards what do you call it, Naro Ridge, and the canefield and that's about two hundred metres west of the main track. We've been up, I've been up there in, last well in 1998 when we had the last parade, the pilgrimage, over there and I had forty-six of the veterans up there for our

26:00 memorial service before this memorial was built and we had, I had over ninety that we took over in a plane there and we flew each one over to Kokoda by Caribou and then went up by helicopter in parties onto the site and then we had a wonderful service there, which the villagers prepared for us on the site. They'd cut trees and put us seats for us and

26:30 blue and gold umbrellas, which they held over our heads while we had the service and it was something, you know, memorable, and then I then went back in 2000. We camped for three nights up on this high ground where I mentioned that B Company was. They'd cleared an area the size of about two tennis courts where my 10 Platoon and 12, 11 Platoon, B Company, held the main Japanese force for

27:00 over three days and inflicted - they had thirty-odd company attacks against them at that time. That was a platoon of thirty men and afterwards they found two hundred and fifty Jap graves in front of that one position and that's when my brother was. In the third day and final day, he was wounded by a burst of machine guns to his tummy and was delivering grenades

27:30 around to his men at that time. So that was the position of B Company, and that afternoon our next company came in and took over from the balance and so this was by the 27th of August, late the 27th of August, all the positions had been taken over from the 39th Battalion and they were slightly back in reserve position

28:00 and they deserved that because they'd had a grilling and they'd been in contact with the Japs for about three weeks or more and they'd had the PIB, the Papuan Infantry Battalion, with Major Watson [Major W. T. Watson] and some of their people, you know, supporting them but, you know, altogether the combination they did a good job. They had some good officers and they did a good job to hang on there. So, by this time the Japs had gradually built up their forces

28:30 from originally about four or five thousand that were there, they built them up to ten thousand, you know, right in there behind them as reinforcements able to force through. They had six regiments at least to throw against what now only our two battalions of 14th and 16th. 16th Battalion was sent around on through the Abuari and the Missima area on the eastern side of the Eora Creek

29:00 side so and they took over from the 53rd Battalion, who actually hadn't performed well because they weren't led well and they were inexperienced and had no training. And they'd held the Jap battalion that were coming around that side. So it prevented our main force, the combination of the 39th and the 14th, from being out to having our

29:30 track cut off behind us. So from the 26th of August to the 29th of August, the battle went on and furious, really sort of furious. Tremendous amount of firepower. They had mountain guns. They had mortars. They had their heavy machine guns, which were equivalent to our Vickers machine guns, which we had to leave in Moresby, and they had far superior numbers for, and they were

30:00 able to send almost a battalion or several companies around on either flank and pinpoint our positions and until almost the positions of every one of our troops in their dugout or in their dug hole that they'd built or their little box that they'd made. It was, you know, pretty well known to them. So, in the end after these attacks, the Japs at this time had lost, we'd created well over a thousand casualties amongst

30:30 the Japanese and we'd had something less than a hundred. But we knew that we were vastly outnumbered and there was no way we could hold there because they could bypass us and get behind us. So we were given – I was going up on my way up to see my brother's platoon, because I hadn't got there. I got out to the other platoons and to see how and I'd gone forward. We'd

31:00 gone past our forward troops and I ran into a Jap patrol and I'd forced them off the track in front of us but we had a platoon in the bush in the jungle beside us and we withdrew then, but I then asked our CO if I'd like to go up and just check on the position of B Company. I knew that they'd been confronted by some of the stronger forces and the Japs were desperate to get that high ground because that dominated the whole

31:30 battle area. I got within about thirty or forty metres of the position where I had to go and there was two or three hundred metres we had to go through, a combination of scrub and open country and I met one of Butch's men, Tommy Wilson, who was one of two brothers, and they were Bren gunners actually in 10 Platoon and he'd just lost his hand with a faulty bag, a light grenade. The tape hadn't

32:00 come off properly and had blown off in his hand and he'd lost his hand. So I had to just stop and bind it up and he was disoriented. He didn't know where the RAP [regimental aid post] was, so I take him back to the RAP to the doc and when I got there, Colonel Key had received orders from Potts that we were to withdraw that night to a position just south of the Rest House, which was back towards Alola, getting back towards Alola, and he wanted me and

32:30 Ralph Honner, the CO of the 39th Battalion, to go back and select the position and get the position ready for our withdrawal. So I did this and as I was going back, I had a word from one of the wounded

going out that Butch had been wounded and shot and I knew that the fellas were bringing him out, that were carrying him out. So we got…

What did you think at this stage?

Hm?

When you heard

33:00 **the first news, what did you think?**

That he'd..

When you first heard?

That he'd been wounded and, well, I was just, you know, concerned and worried and I had him, I felt that he'd been shot and when it mentioned that he'd been shot in the tummy and I felt that that was the end, because an abdominal wound up there was absolutely fatal because had no way of getting medical treatment to treat it and I felt, well, I maybe, if it's a matter of bringing him out I'd, you know, I'd love to be

33:30 with him before he died. Any rate we went back and some of the 53rd…

Just before we move on from that, so you went and saw him.

Not at that stage, no.

Right. You went and saw him later.

I couldn't go. I had to go with Ralph Honner back to select this position for our troops to withdraw. That was urgent. That was…

Mm, okay.

the priority at that time. So that was about, oh, perhaps a thousand metres back, perhaps less,

34:00 and we selected a position which was the only suitable position there.

Why was it suitable? How was it suitable?

Because of the nature of the ground and the nature we had features, which we could spread out, it was defiled, it was only a limited area. It was deep on both sides for the enemy to have to get up and we could have a reasonable field of fire over the approaches in which they could come, the only approaches they could come. 53rd Battalion were

34:30 lying in that area and they'd been sent forward to help to relieve us but there was only two companies of them and I asked – I tried to find an officer, but I couldn't find an officer from them and they wouldn't want to tell me any rate that they were tired, they were flaked, that they'd had it. They'd been marching for a few hours and in the end I had to pull my revolver and ask them to move, because I'd explained to them that we were or

35:00 the front line troops were all withdrawing to that position. That was going to be our defensive position. Some of them saw the light immediately and they moved back and they were okay then, but and then we established the position. And then I went forward about a couple of hundred metres to where I'd meet the…met our stretcher-bearers carrying Butch out and I met him and helped them with the stretcher-bearers out from our platoon that were carrying him. There was about eight of

35:30 my mates that were doing it. They'd had to fight their way through and we put him on a – I saw Don Duffy, my medical officer. I had him and he was a great friend, because he was Powerhouse before the war and he said, “Well put him on the track”, just about fifteen metres off the side of the track and had a look at him and we looked together. He shook his head and I could tell that there was no hope, but

36:00 he gave him morphia, morphine, and I said to the doc, “I'll stay with him. Don't worry.” And he, “You tend to the others, you know.” So he came, Don came back several times over the next six hours. That was from ten o'clock nighttime that was at in the dark and I was with him 'til four o'clock, four o'clock in the morning and when he passed away. He died, but we talked and he was good at times, but Don came

36:30 back and gave him morph to ease his pain quite a few times and but we talked about, you know, quite a few things, Mum and Dad and other times, good times we'd had, and that sort of, some of our rugby and but we just held hands and chatted away. We were very close. We'd been through lots of the good and bad things together. So then we buried him. Padre Daly came along and we

37:00 buried him on a little clearing just this side of the track and put little cross up to mark the spot and took his tablets [identity disks] off him and that was it. Then from that time onwards, at the 30th we established, I went to the position we'd established. I directed all our troops to the new position and got…

Did you have much time though? When after you'd buried him, did you have much time to

kind of think of that or did you have to move

37:30 **on straightaway?**

No, we were right into it from there. The Japs at this time had moved up on our western flank and were looked like getting 'round behind us and we would have been in real trouble if we hadn't, didn't get in established our defensive positions very quickly. So we had to be ready but for another attack by the first light.

But after just having been through that, did you kind of go on with a different

38:00 **approach to what you were doing there?**

I just had – I went on with what we had to do and that was to just check our position and make sure every company was in there at the correct position we wanted them to be in and platoons positioned, that they had their reasonable field of fire, that they had their pits, that they could scrape some sort of a pit together and as much cover as possible for them to get and

38:30 protection. I went up with two of my I fellas up to the west side of the hill, up the steep slopes there, because that's where I felt the Japs would try and get across, get around behind us. And we went up several hundred metres and we didn't see any sign of any Japs getting around us at that stage. So I reported it all clear, but then later on they did get behind us and they did get across, but we didn't have the strength

39:00 or the numbers to put any more troops up high to give us warning of this. But ultimately they had to – such large numbers that they got troops behind us and they got behind us and they cut the track behind us again - and we were forced to make an attack through along the track to try and clear them so that we could withdraw. We were given orders to withdraw to Alola, my brigade, and our battalion headquarters, and we were

39:30 sort of lined up on the track ready to withdraw at five o'clock, that was the same the 30th of August, and we were about to withdraw when the Japs opened up with fire from the front area and those on the west opened up as well and some of our own troops attempted to fire across from the C and D company were trying to clear the Japs from the rear. So battalion headquarters were caught in a cross

40:00 fire, which sort of forced us to go off the track on the lower side of the track to get some ground cover and I went down about twenty or thirty metres at that stage and I had to do it. There was so much fire coming across, it was cutting off saplings and doing everything in the - nothing could live on for more than a few seconds, you know, on the track. So I had to get ground cover. The saplings were not, you know, big enough to get protection and

40:30 the jungle. So I went down.

Tape 7

00:31 **What was the reaction from the chaps when they were told there was going to be a withdrawal?**

Ah, I don't think there was any; there were no problems with the morale. The morale of the fellas were they reckon they've done so well in holding the Japs against such superior numbers and superior firepower and they'd inflicted so many casualties on the Japanese, they felt that,

01:00 you know, he couldn't go on losing casualties the way, the extent and the manner in which they were doing it, because they were just lying in heaps and heaps and heaps in front of them in many, many places and when they withdraw, they knew that by this time that most of them had got an idea or intimation that, you know, they had vast numbers and they were outnumbered and outgunned to such an extent that the only way that they could

01:30 survive was to hold and deny the track behind, their life line, to the Japs I think. They just fitted in. They realised that they were being – this was the tactics that the brigade commander, 'Pottsie' [Potts], had to adopt in order to keep ourselves between Port Moresby and the main Jap forces. So they were, you know, would go along with whatever were decisions were made by…they had a lot of confidence and

02:00 respect and trust and a lot of admiration for Pottsie, the brigade commander.

How orderly did you feel that the withdrawal took place?

I think it took well, as well as it was able. It was a very difficult withdrawal, because it was basically in the dark and some Japs had got around to our flanks and they were able to deny and they were able to bring fire on some of our withdrawal troops while

02:30 it was being done. Even the stretcher party that was carrying Butch out, his was, you know, fire attacked on two occasions and we lost one of our fellas, one of the stretcher-bearers got killed and

during that was taking place, and another was wounded.

Was that an Australian soldier or a local?

Hm?

Was that an Australian soldier, one of the stretcher-bearers, or was that a local?

Yeah, there were no locals in this side at this stage.

Okay.

They'd never –

03:00 they were never in the area or close to the area where the fire fighting was going on. They did their great job in getting them out further back but they weren't when there was any firing or so and so, they weren't there, was only our own fellas that did the stretcher bearing.

And you said that chap that you came across that had his hand blown off, he didn't know where the RAP was. Where was the RAP in relation to where you were?

Well, it was down towards where we had battalion headquarters. It was down on the main track just about two

03:30 hundred metres down on the, well east from where I'd met him and taken him and got him down to, but it was very steep ground and some of it was very much overgrown and junglified. Now, it's much more junglified since there. I was up there in 2000 and it was very steep and very dense there, but it was more open in

04:00 1942.

Well, can you continue on with the withdrawal and tell us what happened?

Yeah. Well, when we were forced off the track, it was really bedlam. It was a tremendous firepower, which those of us that were in the battalion headquarters and that area. I had some of my I Section; some others were distributed amongst the companies. The CO was in a different

04:30 area to where I was at the time and the adjutant, Tommy Hall [Captain Tom Hall]. It was just a question of instinctively everyone adopted their own instinctive course, and that was to get off the track to find a ground cover. And it was so steep like that and this track was going along this ridge. And the firepower was coming, most of the fire was coming across the track and forcing, knocking any timber coming through.

05:00 Our instinctive was to get below the line of the fire and hug the ground or try and get into a dip or a hollow there, where we would be secure from the actual firepower going over the top. So, I went down about twenty, I'd say, about twenty metres roughly and found some reasonable cover there. And there were a couple of others with me: my I Sergeant, Bill Lynn, and Les Tipton [Warrant Officer First Class L. E. Tipton], the RSM [Regimental Sergeant Major] of our battalion, and they were fairly

05:30 close to me too and they were about the only ones at that stage that I could see close to it but there was a lot of scrub and stuff. It wasn't easy to pick them out and it was getting a bit dusky, ah, dusk at that time. It was about a quarter past, half past five, so.

Was it still raining at this stage or had it...?

No, it wasn't raining at this stage but and then slowly and slowly the firing intensity of the fire

06:00 abated and we had no way of knowing whether the Japs had, you know, got onto the track and but our orders were to get back to Alola and to withdraw to Alola. That was our orders, to get there and my responsibility was to, whatever I could get back there, was to do that. So I felt we had no way of knowing by the fire the way the fire had come from, no way in the world that they could

06:30 have cleared the track of the Japs that were on it. So I decided to gather the fellas, and I gathered actually eleven of our fellas together and including Bill Lynn, my I sergeant, and the RSM, Les Tipton, and three of them are walking wounded, and we made out so I had to make my way along parallel to the track as well as I could.

07:00 And try and cut our way through the rough stuff, and over the undulating gulches and things there and keep roughly about forty or fifty metres below the track and get back to Alola, if we could, and find out once we got to there, to make a reconnaissance at Alola to see whether the Japs were there or where, and it took us from up 'til pretty well two o'clock in the morning to before I reached a position and said to Les, “We'll leave our party here,” in I felt a pretty safe spot.

07:30 It was between the track and Eora Creek, which we could hear rushing torrent below us, and I said, “Well, we'll go up. I'll get you to come up with me. We'll go up onto the track and see.” Everything was pretty still and quiet at the time. There was a little bit of moonlight and we walked, crawled up onto the track, got onto the track, crept along there and I knew the area pretty well because I'd been at brigade headquarters for a day or so beforehand. Knew exactly the junction of the track. One track went across up

08:00 through the village of Alola onto Naro Ridge and the other one went down across the Eora Creek and then up through the waterfalls into Abuari and at that, at the junction of the track we had a big supply of supplies and ammunition and other stuff and bully beef and what have you. I knew exactly where it was and so we came to this little, crawled along pretty quietly. We could hear a bit of noise, you know, ahead. I got to a little rise

08:30 and we could see just below us there in front of us about thirty metres or so this supply dump and ammunition track where the track junction was. There were about fifty or sixty Japs clamouring and chattering around the dump and, you know, chattering excited and gleefully, and Les and I decided, we debated just for a few seconds whether it would be lovely to throw a couple of grenades amongst them and we even

09:00 you know deliberated doing that. I said, “Les, it's my job to get our fellas back. They won't have a clue, those three walking wounded back there, and they're depending on us getting them out.” So we crept back and went down and joined them. Took about an hour, had an hour's kip 'til first light and then went down to Eora Creek, crossed it on a log, picked up a company commander of the 2/16th, who had just had his batman there and he didn't have any the rest

09:30 of the troops there and he joined us, but he was happy for me to carry on and take charge of the group, and we checked up our rations that we had and split, made sure we had, you know, distribute them fairly evenly and we made our way with some difficulty through the Jap lines. And got through. I could see a battle at Eora Creek there, but we couldn't get there, because of sheer drops and precipice and everything else on the other side. And I had to make a

10:00 detour around and used the stars one night to check my position.

How concerned were you with the noise, the amount of noise that was being made because you were off the track?

Noise that we were making?

Yeah.

Oh no, I wasn't at this stage, we weren't near the track, you know, the track was on the other side of Eora Creek.

No, earlier on when you were going running parallel to it...

Mm.

before you got to the junction.

Yeah.

How much noise?

Well,

10:30 my recollection that we were, you know, we varied from probably being thirty metres below to about fifty or sixty metres below, depending on whether we had to make a detour of a deep gulch or a gully or something, and clamber up other things. But we weren't making that much and we were going fairly quietly, but there was certainly no noise above from there, and as it turned out, there would have been some of our troops up in that area too, as well as

11:00 the Japs were further up north.

Were you on real heightened senses at that stage of the game?

Oh, I'm sure we were, yeah. Absolutely, yeah. No, we were just, you know, we none of us had idea; it was impossible to know exactly what the situation was. In hindsight, you know, we found that

11:30 it's possible that if we'd got back there fairly quickly, that we may have linked up with some of our troops that managed to get onto the track and pull back. But that was a job and we had to get back to Alola and that was we found that Alola was occupied and the Japs, so we then had to go back to Eora Creek, make our way back to – well I'd to bypass Eora Creek, because I felt that we had no way of getting into Eora Creek. The nature

12:00 of the ground and the country was such that it was impossible to get, you know, into it from the cliffs and the drops, sheer drops that were there. So I had to make a detour a little bit further to the east and ultimately we got onto a ridge, which I was aiming to get on to reach. The one night there we'd been about four days, four nights thing, and wet every night and we only had one emergency ration per man for the five days and

12:30 it was raining pretty every afternoon and we were wet and cold, and we decided it was raining so heavily that we'd try and make a bit of a lean-to. So we cut a tree and made some bamboo supports and picked up pandanus leaves and put them over the top, then the eleven of us or thirteen of us at that stage just we lay virtually on top of one another on the ground to keep our body warmth. To try

13:00 and keep it, get some sleep for the few hours and I know that will live in my memory because the smell from the wounds of the three walking wounded was pretty high and pretty terrible, but it was something that did live in your memory.

Were their wounds dressed at all?

They were. Bill Lynn, my I sergeant, he had a number of spare dressings and we organised, I delegated him to look after the wounded and he treated them

13:30 very well. Once a day he gave them, treated new dressings on their wounds, in that time. I've since met a couple of them – when we got, when after the fifth day I was started to, I was getting worried and we came onto a track on this high ridge and I could see by the track that it recently somebody had been over it and I couldn't immediately tell whether it was our troops or Japanese troops but

14:00 it was heading in the right direction and suddenly I was about two or three hundred metres ahead of the rest of them and Les Tipton was, he's a little bit tubby and not quite as fit as I was at that stage, but he said, "Stan," he said, "you're going too quick. They can't keep up." I said, "Les, I've gotta push them along because if we don't get in there quickly, well, the Japs will be in front of us."

14:30 So fortunately in about another quarter of an hour, half an hour, I came face to face with the rear guard of the 2/16th Battalion and it was Alan Haddy, the chappie that I'd made friends with on the ship going over and I hadn't seen him, you know, since then - and he'd got a decoration for crossing the Litani River carrying a rope across and bringing canoes across with against the French - but he was acting as the rear guard there and we faced each other with rifles

15:00 and facing each other. I said, "Thank God for you, Alan!" I said, "Think you could drop off a few tins of bully beef or something. My blokes are pretty starving," and we at that stage we were only practically into Templeton's Crossing. So we at any rate had time to sit down and have a bite and then we went in there and when the Japs attacked there half an hour later after we got in, and fortunately all of them they were all taken

15:30 out at that time. They were all evacuated back. I wasn't. I took over back, stayed on 'til we finished Ioribaiwa, 'til we were relieved at Ioribaiwa Ridge, but I was fit enough, I was okay. But the others had had it at that stage.

All the blokes make various comments about the bully beef. Does it improve with taste the hungrier you get?

About the which?

Bully beef.

Oh, bully beef. Yeah, it tasted like chicken.

16:00 Yeah, it was beautiful. Yeah, it really was. It was something from manna from heaven. It really was. Yeah. No, they had but the morale was never, I was never conscious of the morale at any stage of our troops when they got down to even as low as seventy or eighty at Ioribaiwa Ridge and there again we were still outnumbered and outgunned and they had the mountain gun firing at us across open sites across the gully and we were still

16:30 holding the main track position that combined battalion, the 14th and 16th, we'd been combined into one battalion at that stage.

At any stage, did you think when the Japanese had their heavy machine guns, did you ever think, wish you had have had the Vickers?

Oh, we certainly did. At Brigade Hill in particular there, we were just desperate there but we had a mortar, three-inch mortars, and short term we caused a lot of damage there with the three-inch mortars but they only had a limited number

17:00 of rounds and but we would loved to have our Vickers guns there because they were all within range of our Vickers and that would have made an enormous difference.

In hindsight, do you think it would have been possible?

Oh, in the time we had and the ability, I don't think it could have been possible, but if they could have been flown in to us at Myola and then brought forward by, you know, some of the villagers, then, you know, it would have been possible but

17:30 in that sort of country at Isurava and many of those areas, there was very little occasions when we could use the heavy machine guns. It certainly would have been on Brigade Hill and Mission Ridge, that area, and certainly at Ioribaiwa Ridge we would have been able to use them too but we went down. Alan

18:00 Avery [Lieutenant Alan Avery] he was a great buddy of Bruce Kingsbury [Private B. S. Kingsbury, VC]. They'd grown up together as youngsters and Alan Avery was awarded the MM [Military Medal] for the battle of Isurava. That's the time when Bruce got his VC [Victoria Cross] and Alan was at Ioribaiwa Ridge when we were down to about our battalion strength was only about sixty or seventy and I said to

Alan, “Look, I'd like to go down to the forward

18:30 positions,” which some of our fellows were still manning on the track, “and just check up on, make sure everything was alright there,” and we went down and Alan said, “Yeah, sure, I'll come with you, Stan.” We went down, checked the positions and any rate a couple of fellas in front must have moved around a bit and the mountain gun was firing across open sights and had most of our positions pinpointed and they opened up with a blast of about forty rounds.

19:00 So Alan and I jumped into a pit, which was empty at that time, and just until it was over and they'd spent their…unfortunately one shell did land directly in a pit which was about five metres in front of us, and two of our fellows were killed and made a mess. But when it had abated and stopped and quiet, I said, “Okay Alan, let's get out of here,” and we jumped out and I put my hand to grab on

19:30 to a stick or something to put my hand on and vaulted out and I realised that the thing I'd put my hand on was a snake of about four foot long and multicoloured thing and I looked at it, threw it away like this, and I said it was just as scared as I was I think and it was strange the experiences like that, little experiences like that, but, you know. Then the 25th Brigade

20:00 took over from us and we withdrew to Imita Ridge and held there and virtually that was, as far as we were concerned, that was the end of the Kokoda campaign and we were camped at Koitaki and that area, did some training and reinforced. Not heavily reinforced, but we got reinforcements. Some of our people came out of hospital. Some came back

20:30 out of the jungle and we developed a strength of about three hundred and fifty, and then we were flown back over to Popondetta and marched to Soputa. And then on to Gona and we were ordered to put in an attack against positions the Japs had prepared for four months, pill-boxes and dugout joints with

21:00 kapok mattresses and heavy coconut trees and sandbags and everything. Impregnable things. They had slits and things to fire and just open ground, which to take cover them over and without a chance to make any reconnaissance or try and pinpoint each individual pit or dugout, we were put in an attack and to go to Point White. We did

21:30 this, and it was getting on to dusk, and we had to go to Point White on the beach there. And against – I asked our brigadier. I said, different brigadier at this stage, and I, “Sir, I think we shouldn't be making this attack in here without any reconnaissance. We haven't had a chance to make the reconnaissance or pinpoint any positions,” and he said that they'd reported the positions. There were no enemy in the positions there and

22:00 that was all clear. So our CO went ahead and said, “We'll go ahead,” and had to go through swamp of about three or four hundred metres of swamp up to our waist there, ultimately there, and then they ran straight into these inflated pill-boxes and six of our best officers and forty other men killed in just an unnecessary attack, an ill-conceived attack without

22:30 gaining anything. And then by this time it was dark and it was a question, and we all had the job, fortunately I brought a sig, one of the sigs up with me and we were able to get our stretcher bearers and everything through and give each one a hold of the wire and to guide them out, to get them back, get all our wounded out and back, and that was the only the reason I was

23:00 given an MC [Military Cross]. The main reason I was given a Military Cross, although it doesn't say that in the book, it's different. So that was Gona. Then for two days we did then, we made our way out of the beach and into position on the beach. We patrolled along there and the following two days we made attacks along the beach through the coconut trees and trying to get shelter from an escarpment

23:30 on the beach as well and from jungle. I had an OP [Observation Post – an artillery observer], an OP officer with me and we were directing [artillery] fire, trying to direct fire onto their pill-boxes and still didn't give us time to, you know, to pinpoint their position and they had other snipers up a lot of the coconut trees and we lost more casualties unnecessarily there. And then from that time on, I paraded myself to

24:00 Brigadier Dougherty [Brigadier, later Major-General Sir Ivan Dougherty, then Commander 21st Brigade] and said, “Sir, can we leave it to the front people to make their decisions and give us time to make reconnaissance and pinpoint the enemy positions and we won't have any casualties then.” And we were there for nearly two, three months longer after that and from that time onwards we lost six, we had six casualties altogether and we were responsible for killing over four hundred Japanese and

24:30 we were able to take our own steps, and our own tactics, and pinpoint, use maximum fire support on every one that we knocked out.

Does your Military Cross have that tinge of sadness about it, in that it was at such a high cost to men in an ill-conceived attack?

Well yeah, it wasn't spelt out like that. But it did in my memories and my heart that

25:00 and I know that there was so many, well, so many wonderful things and brave things were done by others that could have and should have earned…got gongs [medals]. And Alan Avery said after he talked

about Isurava and he said, “Every man should a got a gong,” you know, and that was the way it was. It was just individual efforts and there's one man was killed or wounded and one of our other fellas took their place and led

25:30 the platoon, got them going again, and their morale was never down. The only time that ever got just a little bit weak was when we were still on Ioribaiwa Ridge and we were still holding this pocket, only about forty or fifty of us were still holding this position, which was open to the artillery fire that was coming, a mountain gun that was out there and a machine gun, and we were losing casualties from this

26:00 at the same time, and we knew that there was a fresh brigade of three fresh battalions, plus the 3rd Militia Battalion plus the 2/1st Pioneer Battalion plus two commando groups that had come up all to be fresh reinforcements and the 16th Brigade, the 1st, 2nd and 3rd Battalions were all just there to take over. And yet we were still holding the forward position and losing casualties, which when we felt that we should have been,

26:30 you know, relieved a little bit earlier.

Did you have to make a physical conscious effort to keep a check on your emotions?

Oh, we had to do that when a few weeks after we were withdrawn, and we had to then, were called up for a parade at Koitaki and was to be a brigade parade where as many as those of us were fit. We'd all been re-outfitted and were well turned out and equipped and turned out very

27:00 smartly, the three battalions, and we had to face up to an address by General Blamey, and you've heard about this, and he told us then, and I've read that, it's written in my books in The Silent 7th and in The Memoirs of a Regimental Officer by Blue Steward [Captain, later Major H. D. Steward, Regimental Medical Officer 2/14th Battalion] and Peter Dornan [author of The Silent Men] and others. It's written in many books but

27:30 he just misguidedly and, you know, without knowledge and without being briefed correctly beforehand, he just told us that we'd been defeated by inferior troops with inferior numbers, and that the soldiers that run, they get shot like rabbits and, you know, it was just something that's made us everyone in mutinous rage. And I was very upset and I

28:00 could hear rustling going on in the troops and the troops had they…there was…it was incredible that, you know, somebody hadn't really shot him at that particular stage, because it was so unjust and, you know, so incorrect and so inaccurate. Even his PA [Personal Assistant], his private aide, Carlyon, Norman Carlyon [Lieutenant-Colonel N. D. Carlyon, Blamey’s personal assistant 1940-45,], who was there alongside him and he said afterwards he couldn't believe that Blamey would use such insensitive words,

28:30 you know, to troops that had fought so well and Pottsie did a wonderful job and he was bowler hatted, you know, because mistakes were made along the way and other…

What sort of stirrings were there in the ranks when he said that?

Oh well, there were stirrings. The officers were asked to go into the marquee afterwards and for a further address by Blamey after this parade, and there were about six of our officers that refused

29:00 to go out and I was one. And Phil Rhoden went in, but he said it was the same sort of theme and he wouldn't go along, and he [Blamey] was never respected or admired in any way by our battalion or our brigade from that time onwards.

Were there any repercussions for not attending that briefing?

No. No. No. No, I think he later realised that, you know,

29:30 the sort of criminal mistakes that he'd made and I think he could have been sorry or regrets after that. He was so ill-informed or perhaps he attempted to, perhaps he was being pushed to a great extent by MacArthur [General Douglas MacArthur, Commander South West Pacific] and that was one of the reasons too. MacArthur would have been, had to take a lot of the blame, too, because he tried to belittle the tasks that the Australians

30:00 did all along the line. He'd said it was never – if it was a successful action, it was the Allies that did it, but never the Australians and so forth.

And did you find that officers like yourself had to then talk to your soldiers and calm them down?

Yeah, we yeah, we did. I think we found we all agreed, we were all in agreement with the

30:30 unjustness of the claims and of what had been said. And [Blamey] never lived it down because, you know, when he went to visit a hospital in Port Moresby later on, there were quite a lot of the 21st Brigade in wards and in the beds and they knew that Blamey was coming in to visit them and they'd prepared beforehand. They'd got lettuce leaves and all that sort of thing and they planted these at the foots of…those that

31:00 could get out of bed had them at the foot of the bed and as soon as he opened the door they all started singing, “Run, rabbit, run, rabbit, run!” Chewing up the lettuce leaves and things like that. He walked out and didn't enter any further.

The soldiers' revenge?

Mm. Yeah. They were and that was about it. I think after that

31:30 we got a bit of leave and we came back to Australia and got a decent leave for a change, I think, about four or six weeks leave or something like that. But we were over in Gona for roughly about three months, four months, and when we

32:00 ultimately came out of there with two officers, three officers and thirty-nine of our battalion. I was fortunate in being one of the officers. [Captain] Bill Russell was one, who wrote the history of our battalion, and Jack Schwind [Lieutenant John Schwind] was the other one.

Have you told us about the incident you had with the sniper?

Well, there was a great soldier

32:30 we had in our battalion. He was a Powerhouse lad too. That was [Lieutenant] Bob Dougherty. He played rugby. He wasn't all that star of a rugby, but he played in our – he was number one in our reserve grade team and always great courage and battler, but he'd always come off with blood 'round his head or face or ears or nose or somewhere; but his Dad was in the – he was a Legacy boy actually. His Dad was in the First World War and

33:00 he was a great member of Powerhouse and a great soldier. When we were asked to provide a patrol to go up and see what the situation was with, there was a group of three hundred Japs that were landed by submarine on the west of Gona. They were landed with a party that already escaped, or remnants of the Owen Stanley Japanese. They had about five or six

33:30 hundred there and they were alleged to be coming down to go into the garrison to relieve the garrison at Gona and put the pressure on the people who were trying to attack and destroy the Gona garrison. So we said to send a patrol of fifty up to meet this Japanese patrol that was alleged to be coming down, and Haddy had been up there and he'd actually been killed. It was about the same

34:00 time by these same Japanese and he'd killed quite a few in the process, and Bob Dougherty was selected. We gave him fifty of our fellas from different companies. At this time companies had, you know, almost disappeared and it was just a question of getting numbers from any of the survivors, and those that survived, and we had fifty chaps who were

34:30 fairly fit and able and well, and able to send a couple of point scouts out in front, and they located a couple of the Japanese sentries that were out and about, would be roughly less than about eight hundred metres on the west of the Gona garrison. And he said, “Right, we'll go straight into the attack.” So Bob organised, went straight in with his fifty. Bob was with the Tommy gun and

35:00 [Private] Les Crilly and [Corporal] Stan Weeks, they both had Tommy guns and they both got the MM, soldiers, and they went straight in to attack these three hundred-odd Japanese fresh troops that had arrived in the submarine and they caused ninety-eight casualties in the Japanese and they had six casualties to their own party. Then they held the line there and the Japs didn't advance

35:30 any further. They held them there and the rest of our battalion, which was only about fifty or sixty, came up and we formed up with the forward group and we held the position then and from then on we conducted patrols out towards the rest of the Japs that were established there with this 'round Haddy’s village [village just on the western side of Gona Creek, named for Lieutenant Alan Haddy] on the western attack. And ultimately we forced them back by patrol activity. But Bob Dougherty

36:00 subsequently took patrols out and he killed more Japs and captured more weapons and so forth, until ultimately he was shot and killed - he was, he should have got, was recommended for VC, but it never came through. He didn't even get an MID [Mentioned In Despatches], but he should have. And then we joined up with the 39th Battalion and three of our NCOs led the 39th Battalion around that flank and Ralph Honner with

36:30 a pretty full strength 39th Battalion at this stage and what was left of our battalion, which was about a hundred, over a hundred, and we linked up, we occupied a third of the perimeter and we had the Japs bottled up in a semi-circle and the sea was on their flank, beach was on their flank. They were dug in there and for about, oh, about five days we just sniped off them and

37:00 hit them off and gradually we got some 68 grenades there, and they used them with a discharger cup [Number 68 anti-tank grenade discharged from an EY rifle]. It was the first time they'd been used with a discharger cup. Normally the ordinary grenade is used with the – these 68 grenades were very powerful and if you land them on any metal, they caused havoc. They could, you know, destroy a tank and all that. Any rate, they had a nest of heavy machine guns of about eight of them in one pocket there and

37:30 Teddy Sheldon [Acting-Sergeant Ted Sheldon, MM], who was awarded the MM for it, he'd already

knocked out one of their posts underneath one of the huts that the Japs occupied, gone ahead with grenades and Tommy gun and he'd knocked them out, and it allowed a section to go over and occupy those positions. And then he spotted for the [Private] Digger Walters, who had this, fired the discharger cup with these new 68 grenades. They hadn't been tried before and

38:00 he fired a couple of these for sighters and Teddy gave him the distance and the shot and the rise and so forth, and he landed them right amongst these nest of machine gunners and when we went in two days later and finally, and there was only one Jap still alive. And he was hiding in a hollow tree, but we found this a complete destruction of all the guns. And about twenty or so Japs around the in this pocket of area that had been caused by these

38:30 68 grenades.

Can you just explain to me again essentially what the difference was between that grenade and the other standard grenade?

Well, it was a much more powerful grenade in every respect. The grenade, the Mills grenade, is a little like, almost like a cricket ball but it's serrated, all its outside skin is serrated. It's a thick metal there that when it's exploded it all breaks into little pieces of metal about the size of a fingernail here and that goes in all

39:00 directions and any one piece of that was enough to kill anybody and these other, this 68 grenade, it's the combination of the power and the degree of the explosive and the concussion that would have tremendously affected it, you know, if it hit a tank well it would almost blow it to pieces and I think it would at that area the confined area where these guns and pocket of guns were that it just caused that devastation

39:30 and it, you know, it neutralised so many guns that the Japs were killing 39th Battalion fellows on, too, at that stage. They lost a lot of casualties in that attacking on that area. Well, I was a little bit upset about this because it wasn't quite necessary really. At the time we were trying to, you know, avoid losing casualties.

Tape 8

00:31 **I was going to get you to tell me about that incident where you were hit...**

Ah.

by the sniper.

I mentioned that, because about Bob Dougherty, because I would love – not to miss him because he was a great man and a great soldier and one of the stalwarts of our battalion, but I used to take the odd patrol out. There was one

01:00 at that stage because our numbers were getting lower and but we'd also established a defensive position there just in case the Japs decided rather than we do all the patrolling that they might do patrols forward. So I'd gone forward along the beach front, oh, perhaps fifty metres or a hundred metres along the coast, and I'd spotted some movement of the Japs where they'd had a

01:30 an FDL [Forward Defensive Line] along there and I had two of our fellows, actually they were Les ah Stan Crilly and Les Weeks, and they were in a little pit in about twenty metres in from the beachhead and I crawled out along the beach side to get a better view of these position, and amongst the scrub and coconut trees,

02:00 and I got a good sight on a couple of the Japs. And they were, one of them was up the coconut tree and so forth, and I managed to bring him down and then I got another one. That was, well, I'd hit him and I'm not sure what happened to him. But and then apparently some one of their fellas must have sighted me or somewhere I was 'cause I was spreadeagled on the beach getting a little bit of cover. Now the first thing that happened was I felt

02:30 a little flick on the head and they'd cut a hole in the camouflage net on my head. Cut one of the strands there and next one went through a gaiter on the side of my ankle and it was spreadeagled about, the next one went through the side of my eye. Just took the eyebrow off and just whizzed through a furrow through there and started to bleed down there and I called out to Les, ah, Crilly, Stan, and said, “The sniper’s onto me” I

03:00 said, “I'm getting out of here.” So I crawled like a snake pretty quickly and got into a safer place but that was all there was to it but they never came any closer to us than that particular area.

Have you ever sat and pondered just how close?

Oh I was a fatalist. I decided after that that I was definitely a fatalist. That if my number, my name was up, well I was, that

03:30 was for me.

It took that long to become a fatalist?

Yeah. Yes, well it happened, because it happened again in the Ramu Valley and the Markham Valley at Shaggy Ridge and so forth up there. I had the task of, when Ralph Honner was wounded, I had the task of virtually taking over the battalion just for the short time until we put the attack in and were successful

04:00 and then we had another commander that was appointed as CO of our battalion. And then the – this is coming out in a book now, it's called, the book's being written by Phil Bradley. He's the son of a 2/27th Battalion soldier who served in the campaign and it was the 2/27th Battalion were forward near Shaggy Ridge.

04:30 They were being confronted by the Japanese in pretty strong numbers and we were watching the supply line back at place called Kumbarram, which is near Dumpu and there was another hill feature called King's Hill. I've got them all in features and photographs of them and so forth but and this supply line that the

05:00 villagers, a few of the natives were taking, carrying up the supply line to the 2/27th and a few of our troops were accompanying them and sort of keeping watching and guarding or providing them with cover. Any rate suddenly we found overnight a company of these Japanese had got up on a feature which we subsequently called Palliasse Hill overlooking the supply line

05:30 route, which all these supplies went up there and when first light came, when the supply line went up they brought fire down on these and all the villagers of course dropped their supply line and went into the bush and our fellows couldn't do anything about it. It was very steep and high and very high ground and it was connected to a long narrow razorback ridge of about seven hundred metres long and King's Hill was just above where we were

06:00 located, our battalion was located, Kumbarram in the valley, and we'd sent a company up onto King's Hill where we could observe and we suddenly realised in the first light, we could see this digging going on along this feature at the end of the ridge from King's Hill, that we called subsequently called Palliasse Hill and it was between a – we had a platoon further out as well - so thought,

06:30 "That's a worry. What's…?" And eventually we realised it was the Japs had got in there and dug in there overnight and they fought and anyhow the orders came through straightaway we've got to clear the Japs off, because the 2/27th were desperately in need of supplies; had to get the supplies up to them and open up the supply line. So we had to, so at that stage we'd just had a new CO put in charge and hummed and aahed and so forth. Any rate, so I

07:00 suggested, well, the only place we could tell what the positions were like and how many Japs there were, and what strength, and how to attack them, or clear them, would be from a feature which was across from the creek, Faria Creek, which was around the features opposite this long narrow ridge and on the feature we called the Three Pimples. It was higher there. I said, "I'll go up there and check on that and have a look. I'll be able to get on that, the last of these

07:30 Three Pimples, should be able to overlook Palliasse Hill and see exactly where their positions are and how strong they are and also see the best line of approach for any attack to be made on them, which I was able to do, and then though I went up with one of my platoon, chappies from the I Section that, no, I was adjutant, that's right, I was adjutant of the battalion then and the I from

08:00 there. I had a little walkie-talkie [radio] with me and I could see, I had my glasses, ah binoculars, and I estimated that I was roughly about between four hundred and five hundred metres in direct fire sight from their position and I could tell their position exactly. I said there was only one line of [approach] and which any platoon could make an attack was on the reverse side of this ridge, narrow razorback ridge. If they kept in single file along that until they got onto the Palliasse

08:30 feature, then spread out and then made an attack, assault up to on Palliasse Hill where they where they'd dug in, and if they could give me two sections of Vickers machine gun and a platoon of rifle fire and we had a four-pounder short gun, artillery piece, down below, that we could fire over open sights and a mortar. Give them up to

09:00 me where I was there, we could give them all the supporting fire we until this platoon could get into position and make the final assault on the feature and that that's what actually ultimately hummed and aahed. Any rate I conveyed this through the walkie-talkie to Landale [the CO], over the walkie talkie and I couldn't get anywhere to and after a half an hour I tried getting back to who's

09:30 in charge who's and I couldn't get anyone. Ultimately Murt Lee [Major A.J. (Murt) Lee], who was the ex or CO of the 2/16th Battalion, or 2IC of the 2/16th, he came on the buzzer [radio] and he said, and he was with the brigadier, and he said, "Stan, what's the story?" and so forth. I'd been to OCTU with his brother, John Lee [Captain J. D. Lee] and four months and I said, "Murt," they owned a string of pub hotels in Adelaide,

10:00 the Lee brothers. He was Sir Bert Lee in the end. I told him exactly what the story was and I wanted. I

said, “Look that's the only way, I feel that's the only way to attack them and we only need one platoon to make the attack, but there's not that many troops up there, and if we give them so much support, if we can give them covering fire when the Japs panic, when they leave, we can come in with machine gun, trap them as they go down the cliff, the sheer drop off from their position that they'd panicked and that

10:30 had to fall about two hundred feet.” So he said, “Right, Stan it'll be on. The start time right immediately.” So he sent the platoon up. I got my platoon up to me and I got the Vickers gun section up, Jack Cunningham. I asked him to give me a burst just the distance to get the fire the distance, that’s about four hundred and just over four hundred metres, or four hundred yards actually, and I got the rifle platoon commander

11:00 to set their fire sights at that and then the time started and the platoon set off. ‘Teddy’ Bear [then Sergeant L.A.(Teddy) Bear, DCM, MM] led the platoon, the attack, and Nolan Pallier [Lieutenant N. W. Pallier] was the platoon commander and they went in single file along this there. And fortunately they left a two-inch mortar chappie and a Bren gunner off to saddle halfway along.

And you're watching all of this through your glasses, are you?

I was watching all this, yeah, all kunai sort of grass, all open country.

11:30 No jungle or anything. All clear and then we were able to give them the supporting fire. We gave them twenty rounds of artillery fire initially and then all the mortar fire and the supporting fire and the Vickers gun all in front of the – keeping the heads down of the – while it was going on until the platoon was able to get into position for this last fifteen metres or so. They had to get up to the Jap, on the top of the

12:00 hill, and then I saw Teddy Bear start to make his way there and he’s big fella Teddy Bear and he won the DCM [Distinguished Conduct Medal] for that and he already got the MM before and then he had his bayonet in and he was into them and almost like a sheaf, tossing a sheaf, a Jap over the ridge. Then they started to panic, and the Japs were running. I could see them running down the slope and going over the cliff edge, and our rest, two sections went in, and they got two MMs for the two section leaders,

12:30 but they did there and they killed over about thirty-odd Japs in this and others went to their death or not there but they were successful. They cleared the thing completely but it was a typical example of a platoon in attack with maximum supporting fire, so.

So that freed up the supply line then.

Yeah.

What was done then to maintain the defence of that supply line? Anything?

13:00 We had our platoon patrolled along that area and there was no chance of the Japanese there. In the meantime, the Japanese had, we'd gone further later on, we'd gone further around and put in attacks on against Shaggy Ridge, on the Shaggy Ridge itself. So the Japs at that time were gradually being forced back on into the Finisterres and back towards Madang and Bogadjim and mainly Madang, which where their base was

13:30 at Madang at that time.

I was gonna just go back and ask you a little bit about when you that leave and you went back to Australia. What did you get up to when you went home?

Well, I think I mentioned to you that I played the rugby game on my honeymoon.

Yeah.

I was married and we had a happy marriage. I had four children. I married a Bachelor of Science lady and her parents that

14:00 doted and they were pretty wealthy, but that she – we were very much in love and she was a fine girl. We had four children, two boys and two girls. One's a boy and then two girls and then a boy, the young one's over here in Pomona. He's an electrical contractor there. The eldest

14:30 boy has been managing sheep and cattle stations and he'd been up on the big property up at west of Cairns and he's been managing for one of the big cattle people. He also got his pilot's licence and did a lot of the mustering on the plains and there, but now he's since been taking safaris out from Alice Springs. Taking

15:00 tourist groups, German tourist groups and others out, and he married. He had three, two girls and got a grandson, great grandson from one of them, and he's now taking tourist parties over to Kangaroo Island to there, but he's recently married one of the German tourist girls, a second marriage, and they've built a home,

15:30 and they've got a home in Adelaide in a place called Uraidla, foothills of Mount Lofty, and Holly, the eldest daughter, she's a physiotherapist in Melbourne. She's also did the Feldenkraus course four years ago ands she takes classes in that and work's pretty busy and her business. She's got two girls and

16:00 a boy and Sally, my other one, she's a chartered accountant. She came up with her young son a few weeks ago. She's a chartered accountant. She lives down at Point Lonsdale and works at chartered accountant people in Ocean Grove.

16:30 **'Cause you got married while you were on leave?**

Yes. Yeah.

Did you need to get permission to do that?

No. No. No. No. No, I just had to record it on our state of affairs there but then.

How hard was it come back to New Guinea after having gone home on leave and getting married?

Well, it was a bit hard, but I think we accepted it, you know. It didn't

17:00 mean all that, we were just happy to, I was attending other schools. I attended a staff college in Brisbane and I attended aircraft recognition course in Bradfield Park and I was attending a tactical school in Beenleigh and I got a signal from corps headquarters at Morotai that I was being seconded to go to Morotai for corps headquarters as G2 [General Staff Officer Grade 2 (GSO2)]

17:30 Operations and I wasn't very happy about this because I'd left the battalion as adjutant and Phil Rhoden, I was adjutant to him, and we'd been together for a number of years, and I wanted to see the war through in the same battalion, and so anyway I was flown up to Morotai immediately and then I paraded myself to Morotai to General Morshead [Lieutenant-General Sir Leslie Morshead, commanding 1st Australian Corps], and said, “Sir I'd like to go back to the unit.” I explained the reasons why and so then, “I

18:00 couldn't permit you,” I was needed there and also I'd done enough and so forth and I said I…at any rate I didn't make any progress. So I saw the last couple of the months out at Morotai as G2 Operations and

What sort of work did that involve?

So I missed the Balikpapan show really with our battalion but I did it on the battle board at Morotai.

What sort of work did you

18:30 **have to do there? In G2?**

At Morotai?

Yeah.

Oh, mainly look after the all the battle arrangements. The signals that were coming through and the situation up the front and it was the different units, where they were fighting, where they were operating, what sort of support that was being given to them from the navy and the air force and the supporting troops – and had to keep

19:00 constant touch with the intelligence that was being conveyed through and work with closely with the Americans too at that time.

With all the different courses that you'd done leading up to that appointment, did you sort of think that's where you could have been going career-wise?

Well, Ralph Honner felt that I would have, you know, finished up as a brigadier or something like that, but he wrote a letter to me to that effect, but, and told me just how, but oh, it didn't worry me too

19:30 much. I wasn't planning anything like that at that stage or had it in mind. Soon as the war finished, well, we were still up there. I was made orderly officer up on Morotai, headquarters there, and ‘Bombardier’ Wells, he was a GSO1 [general staff officer grade 1], he made me orderly officer. Apparently felt I perhaps had a little bit more discipline than some of the others, and they had film shows going on there and then there was a bit of a battle in the film show there, so, and guns were going off and so

20:00 forth and a lot of them hadn't known about the armistice being declared, and a lot of them when they heard the news of the armistice, they were letting off rifles and guns all over the place. So there was a little bit of a shambles going. So I turned up at the 5th AGH [Australian General Hospital] and the 9th AGH after all the other officers had been there for several hours, as and when I came off duty from the orderly office at about two o'clock in the morning, and had the opportunity to

20:30 celebrate the end of the war with them.

Being in that position that you were in there, did you hear pretty much straightaway about the atomic bombs being dropped on Japan?

I didn't know any, I didn't know prior to the…

No.

That it was being dropped, no. No, I didn't. No, it all came as a shock to everybody, secret. Yeah. Yeah.

Did you have any idea when you very first heard what exactly it was all about?

Not really.

21:00 I'd heard that there was a tremendous amount of devastation and the effect that it had of stopping the war. Well, you know, I could assess the, you know, what it actually meant, it meant it was going to save a lot of lives, you know, both Japanese and every other participant really and that was the important part of it, I think. So but I managed to get –

21:30 Bill Lynn was over there with me on Morotai at that particular time, my ex-I sergeant, and he was a in a different section, but he knew a couple of the American Liberator [bomber] pilots and a G1 [GSO1] said to me, “Well, you've got your time, you've served,” he said, “If you can get a lift back to Australia, you can get discharged any time you want to.” So he organised for me to thumb a ride with a Liberator back. So we

22:00 teed up with this pilot. He said to me, he said, “Get your gear.” So I had a little jeep and we drove to the end of the runway and he let his bomb bays down at the end of the runway and we scrambled across, climbed up in the bomb bay only in shorts and that sort of thing and were flown back to Darwin, and there it was freezing cold and just in shorts and no air conditioning or anything else, and all the time thinking we might be dropped off and out the bomb bay over the Pacific or something, but when we

22:30 got to Darwin, everything sort of became normal.

Where were you when you heard about Darwin being bombed?

Darwin being bombed? Ah, I think we were probably at Morotai, probably at Morotai at the Darwin. Yeah. Mm.

What did you think about that? What impact did that have? That the Australian mainland had been attacked?

Well, it may have been earlier than

23:00 that, that Darwin was bombed. Yeah it was much earlier than that. Probably when we were up on the Tableland and training there. Yeah. I think it sort of made us realise that we hadn't, you know, war hadn't been finished in New Guinea at that stage and that was even before, I think it was probably before we finished the Ramu Valley campaign. Yeah. Mm.

23:30 **At any stage, had you thought about becoming a career soldier? A career officer?**

No. No, I hadn't. There was some of our fellows who did, and they were happy about it, but I didn't at that stage. At the same stage, as far as work

24:00 is concerned, when we demobilised on the home front, I had to check up on the old employers and see whether they had a job and they had a job, but not the sort of job that I felt I was attracted to. So I wasn't very interested in, and 'cause I felt that I had qualified to a much higher extent through the various schools that I'd attended and I felt I could offer more. And so ultimately I finished up taking a job with my brother-in-law, who was

24:30 an engineer and he had a gas and furnace and combustion engineers in Melbourne, and we built furnaces and tunnel kilns and all sorts of things, gas works all over Australia, and I became a secretary and director of that company and it was ultimately I came up, finished up in Gladstone here about thirty years ago and it was at that time things had…I’d sent my four youngsters, I'd managed to do things

25:00 and I sidelined [had other interests], which enabled me to afford to send the two boys to Scotch College and two girls to PLC [Presbyterian Ladies’ College] and things weren't all that happy on the home front, and I came to Gladstone for a year and a half to take charge of contracts that I'd managed for this company and the steel works and construction on the aluminium plant here. Of course, that's when I

25:30 met my present wife, Gloria, and one thing led to another and happily married to a second lady. My Gloria.

Can we fill in the gaps from arriving back in Darwin via the Liberator and actually being demobbed? What happened once you got to Darwin?

Well, then we went through via Brisbane, we went down to Melbourne and then we all went through Melbourne. We were demobbed there and had to sort of

26:00 sign off our papers and get our clearance and what have you, and then get back into sort of normal routine. Try to get back into, decide on what I was going to do and make a decision on the working and…

How quick was that entire process?

Oh, it was pretty quick because I also had a couple of other strings to my bow too. I had a little engineering company, which my brother-in-law gave me the opportunity to manage that on a sideline

26:30 and I also had a contact that I'd met in friends in a commando unit that had sawmills up in a place called Woods Point. I don't know whether you ever heard of it. It's in Victoria on the Baw Baws and they had beautiful timber up there, alpine ash timber, which was free from any demarcation and marks and at that time there was a black market on good quality flooring for hardwood floors and that sort of thing. So I decided

27:00 that I would, chappie this sawmill owner, he was one of the fellows and he said, “Why don't you go side, why don't you?” I said, “I wouldn't mind having a little sideline.” And he offered me a supply, a constant supply of this hardwood flooring. I could get it kiln dried in Melbourne from another friend and so I had ten thousand super feet of flooring, which I re-did, and I got one of my mates from the battalion, who

27:30 lost his eye in the crossing of, the blowing up of that bridge over at Syria and he was awarded the Military Cross, a Jim Kyssin, and Jack Hedderman [Lieutenant J. W. Hedderman, DCM, MM], who was the second in my other brother's battalion, the 2/6th, and he was awarded the DCM and MM. He was working for our companies as a carpenter, as three of us we decided to contract to supply and fix the complete floor, like for a house, and

28:00 so I did this on weekends and Sundays and Saturdays and for about five years, and we paid ourself wages out of this, plus a little bit of profit, and it helped provide the wherewithal to send my kids to school and got a little holiday home down at Point Lonsdale before we came up.

When you first got home from the war, can you remember going home to your mum and dad? See your mum and dad?

28:30 Yes. Yeah I do. I do and it was very well. Mum and Dad got a telegram to say that Hal had been killed and I was missing in action on the same telegram on the same day, but fortunately they got a telegram next day to say that I'd turned up. So the lapse of time between those things, but

29:00 they were very good. They had a lot of the letters and memorabilia that we'd sent home to them and years after the war I saw, you know, Dad, Mum and Dad. We still sang in some of the choirs together and went to church together and had some happy times. Mum actually was born on Christmas Day. She died on Christmas Day

29:30 and my first daughter was born on Christmas Day, too. That was a chapter of coincidences, you know, with that.

Because she'd had a bit of time to deal with Hal's death but did you coming home sort of spark emotions in her again?

I think, no, she'd had Noel and Murray too and they'd kept close company with them, and Murray had stayed over, he's a plumber and he

30:00 didn't get to the war, because he was in the very reserved occupations and Noel, when we came back from the Middle East, he'd said to Uncle, he said, “I've gotta leave. I've gotta join up. I can't,” and he must have been over thirty-five then. And that was time when you couldn't become an officer that stage, you were too old, but he came over and joined up the militia here and NCOs training camp there and he qualified as an NCO and he

30:30 joined the 2/6th Battalion from the 6th Division. That was the original 5th, 6th and 7th Battalions that were formed and he finished up becoming RSM, finished up as RSM of the 2/6th, fought in Aitape and Wau and New Guinea and up that area. But it was after the war that he provided his greatest contribution because finished up as President of the RSL [Returned and Services League] in Western District and

31:00 Timboon down Heytesbury. And he did a tremendous amount of work for widows and disabled people there with the veterans society, and got so many through and he was awarded the Meritorious Medal, and he was awarded the MBE [Member of the British Empire] for his work on in that over many years. He was president for about twenty-five years. He was a great mate of Bruce Ruxton and Bruce is up here now. He's just around the corner.

31:30 Gloria and I had lunch with him just a week or so ago and he's having lunch with us next week because we know him pretty well. He's a good man.

After Butch died, did you have to write or did you write a letter home to your mum and dad?

I did. Yes I did. I told them, you know, that I'd had the opportunity to be with him and talk with him and ah, and spend

32:00 time with him, and told them what a wonderful job that he'd done and the tasks, whether how much of it was censored or not, I don't know, but I never came across that particular letter that I'd sent to them, so.

When you look at your war service, do you see it in different chapters? Is the Middle East was

32:30 **like a separate chapter to the Pacific and then within the Pacific, are there different chapters of your Pacific campaign?**

Yeah, I think so. Yeah, I think the Middle East was one chapter really. Well, Puckapunyal and our training and all that was sort of one chapter, was learning the game and so on and then the sailing, and the Middle East was another chapter, and then New Guinea you could almost divide it into, as far as I was concerned, into two chapters. One would be the,

33:00 almost three chapters really. The Kokoda campaign and then the beach, Gona campaign, which I've got very bitter memories about because it should never have happened, and even on the Kokoda campaign there was so many mistakes and so many bad mistakes and lack of intelligence there but, you know, things could have been done so much better but one can't, you know, I think that everyone made mistakes

33:30 on that, in that earlier part. But it's pretty difficult to find excuses for some of the mistakes that were made around the beachheads at Gona and Buna and Sanananda and they're the ones that bitter because, you know, we'd made such wonderful friendships from so many of our officers and men of the battalion and we lost so many that we felt were unnecessary and Australia lost them too, because they

34:00 would have been terrific tremendous contribution to Australia in the post-war years.

You told us what you had been told to expect of the Japanese soldier. After fighting them, what was your appraisal of the Japanese soldier then?

Well, I didn't personally come across any signs

34:30 of some of the things that I'd heard about and that I knew were actually true and actually happened. In fact, it's possibly the reverse because I think a lot of our fellows had been affected by that, by what they'd heard, and they had no mercy whatsoever on the Japanese and they didn't take any risks with them. For instance, at Gona there was – I placed a section –

35:00 for a while I was taken over, my position as adjutant was taken over and I was made company commander of A Company and I was sent around towards Sanananda to try and check if there was a route through there where we could get through, or we could stop Japanese from coming around to Gona from there. And we struck a few Japanese there and also I placed a patrol around there with the charge of a section and subsequently a Japanese came around, a couple of Japanese came through, and they waded through the water and they were

35:30 taken prisoner by this a chap named Yates, who was our section leader, and he was sort of attempting to interrogate him or get some sense out of him, and he suddenly made a spring at the corporal and fastened his teeth on the cheeks of his cheeks and bit a piece out of the side of his cheek and, well, he didn't last any many seconds after that happened but that was typical of some of the sort of things that could

36:00 be said. And I know I had great personal friends, Powerhouse friends, in the 2/22nd Battalion, the ones that were captured, some of them were captured and escaped from Rabaul, and the things that they did there were, you know, beyond all acceptance. They captured a lot of our 2/22nd boys, and then tied them to trees and

36:30 then stripped them off in some cases, and then a lot of the officers got their men to use them then as bayonet practice. You know, so they got used to using the bayonet and then they even did worse things there. They cut off their penises and stuck them in their mouths and things like this, these disgusting things that you can't credit or believe. And I, on the west of Gona, when I said I found

37:00 one Japanese that was still alive when we made the final move into Gona there. One Jap that - we buried over about a hundred and eighty or so Japanese were there - and this one chap and he had glasses, wearing glasses, and he was obviously a teacher or a well-educated fellow, but he could talk a little bit of – and one of our fellows made a grab at his nice-looking wrist watch, which was on his wrist,

37:30 and he said, "Oh," he tried to hold it back. He said it's from his sweetheart or indicated it's from his fiancée or somebody else and I just stopped a fellow taking it – our fellows from taking it. I said, "It'll probably be taken off further back along the line, but we're not going to do it," and so we sent him back a prisoner. But then, we were frightened on other occasions of taking a prisoner, because they could just as likely have a grenade tucked behind them, and let it go

38:00 when you interrogated them or trying to take them as a prisoner. So you lose yourself at the same time.

Because time and time again, we've been told by various chaps that there was no prisoners taken because of those reasons.

Mm.

But that wasn't a policy was it? It was just the way that it evolved, because of that sort of behaviour?

Well, that was right. Yeah. That was it was just too dangerous to attempt to take prisoners and there was no,

38:30 you know, no sense in us in trying to take prisoners. That was the difference between our war in the

Middle East against the French and the Vichy French and the Foreign Legion, and the Japanese. We just couldn't afford to take any risks whatsoever in attempting to take prisoners there. You had to kill them to be sure of the…

But your opinion of the Japanese soldiers must have been different up on Kokoda before you'd heard about and witnessed these sort of…?

Yeah, we had to give credit

39:00 to them. They were brave and they were competent and they were well trained and they had good equipment. They had better equipment than we had: better camouflage equipment, better shoe foot equipment that they could move more softly than we could, but better, you know, all round. Even some of their weapons were better than ours and I think, you know, they'd been in

39:30 battles and in conflicts for several years, you know, beforehand.

Tape 9

00:32 But a thing wasn't very happy. It happened then, which it soured it for her a little bit, because Margaret Lindorff, she's the other one that came with us, and she's our editor, and she's the daughter of one of our original veterans and he was in 12 Platoon, the next 11 Platoon to my platoon originally at Puckapunyal. I remember him well. A ginger-haired lad and

01:00 we were great, you know, good mates. And now she's assistant professor at Monash University and she's a very talented lady and she's played a big part in our battalion association and she's provides a lot of background data and she does the editor of our newsletter Comradeship Notes, which comes out now every three months, and she came on this with John Rennie and Gloria and I

01:30 and we stayed at John Rennie's house just at Moresby above the high ground hill there. He's got pretty good security on, razor wire and all that sort of [thing] to stop the rascols [criminal gangs (New Guinea pidgin)] from getting in, but the morning that we had to leave we had to catch the plane early.

Now I ask all of the fellas about how they rate the enemy, but how do you rate the Australian

02:00 **soldier?**

Ah, I could only rate them as being first class from my experience with our battalion, the 2/14th Battalion, and my association with the 2/16th and the 2/27th Battalion and my knowledge of other

02:30 AIF battalions, the 2/6th the, you know, the 6th Division and the 9th Division and others that I've had mates and officers in each, in all of those, in most of those battalions, and they've all got similar reports and they consider that the Australian is a great soldier. He can be undisciplined at times, particularly on leave, and can take a

03:00 little bit in the initial training, but once he accepts his position and accepts the training and the discipline and his position in – as a section or a section commander or in a company, platoon or whatever part he plays in the cog in that machine as so many different parts he could be, once he's accepted that, well, he does it, you know, to the full

03:30 extent of his capacity and he puts everything into it, and he gives complete loyalty and the comradeship is something really special and more. So I think in the Australian camp and in our battalion and you would come on in any activity or association, and you felt you'd never let your mate down, and that's why I feel that these four

04:00 tokens that we've got, these four granite tokens that they've got up there [memorial at Isurava on the Kokoda Track], I couldn't have wished for any more, because I think that I played a major part in getting that memorial put there on account of the 1998 pilgrimage we had there. When Bronwyn Bishop and Charlie Dean and others tied up with the government and our Bruce Scott, our Department of [Veterans] Affairs minister, and our Prime Minister got to know exactly what

04:30 the importance of that action and the importance of the actions that took place on the Kokoda Trail. It's only then that they realised how important and how badly they had suffered as a result of that, and the silence that had taken place in the intervening fifty or sixty years, that they realised that they had to do something, and then this John Rennie and Margaret Lindorff, they actually put it in words together to the key people

05:00 on the [Australian] High Commission [in Port Moresby] and the Department of Veterans' Affairs in Canberra what we wanted and what we proposed and that's this memorial that's at Isurava now is the fulfilment of that, and so I'm actually now really thankful and really feel I can sleep in peace. And I feel that for my brother and other mates that I lost there that, you know, we've got something that we'll always

05:30 remember, you know.

How important was it for you to go back to New Guinea?

Oh, it was important, very important. It was important the first time that when we had the pilgrimage and our ceremony but never dreaming that I'd be back again, but then I went back twice then since. In October, just camped under two man tents, seven of us with three days and walked right over the battle site to identify it completely, and then

06:00 have another ceremony at the RSL in Port Moresby, and then later to go over and see this memorial that yeah. So that was the final piece de resistance, ah, with Gloria to take her back and for us to see that memorial there and to understand that the villagers there and they were the kinfolk of those that had helped us, and to meet

06:30 some of them that had actually helped us, to be able to thank them in person and to identify with them and to say, “Well, this is a memorial that we've got for you and for us and we hope that it will benefit your people in the villages,” and I know that it will, that it's already doing it and they're benefiting from it. The guesthouse that they've put in there, that brings in a return and ultimately

07:00 they'll put a flight strip up on the Naro Ridge close by and they'll get more and more people in to inspect the battle site and the memorial. So more and more people will, they'll be able to sell their produce. They'll be able to benefit. Their standard of living will improve. They're very happy souls. They come and sing songs and we sing songs back to them and you both would have loved the first night that we had in, Tuesday night on the 26th,

07:30 was it 26th, the 25th of August in their little tent in the marquee. And the villagers were all around with their babies in their arms and so forth and then they sang us their songs, their welcoming song to us, and there was only two others and myself there, and then I sang, I think I sang Mighty Like a Rose – was one of the old Paul Robeson songs, Sweetest Little Fellow and back to them and, you know, the appreciation they had. It was memorable.

Can you speak a little about

08:00 **the assistance you got from the ‘Fuzzy-Wuzzy Angels’ [Papua New Guinean porters and stretcher-bearers] in New Guinea?**

Well, there's so much been written but I can only substantiate that we would have lost many, many more of our fellows. They wouldn't have survived if it hadn't been for those our Fuzzy-Wuzzies who were so used to operating on that track and under those conditions with their

08:30 splayed feet and their ability to balance and recover on the slippery paths and the logs going across, and to be able to be strong enough to carry, you know, to bear the weight of the stretchers and they even had little branches. They kept the flies off the faces of our wounded and that. So they made sure that they were comfortable in every way and looked after them as the poem by Beros [Sapper Bert Beros, The Fuzzy Wuzzy Angels], you know, is quite

09:00 accurate and quite explicit in, “Don't thank the Lord, we thank the Lord that they, that Jesus was Christ or Christ is” yeah, that there, but they were wonderful. They getting the supplies up and even I'd go up there when I was there in October 2000, there were two of them that held my arm as I walked down the steps down to inspect the Kingsbury statue and

09:30 down the steps there and down some of the steep parts. They were there to help me and steady me. We all had sticks, mostly, when we was going over the track too. I didn't mention that but, you know, you're familiar with that.

Did you ever see in your time in New Guinea any of the war photographers or journalists or artists?

Yes I did. I saw Damien Parer and Osmar White. I knew I met them both and talked with them and briefly.

10:00 I think Hugh Challen [Lieutenant-Colonel H. B. Challen], who was our brigade major and subsequently became our battalion commander for a while but, and he did his best but he wasn't a good battalion commander, but he was a great friend he'd been to school I think with Osmar White [with Chester Wilmot], and they knew each other and were able to exchange notes and that, to help them sometimes and they helped us at times and they were able to pass

10:30 on some of the information which they'd learnt from the 39th Battalion and what was happening up front. No, they were good value and the messages and the information that they brought back to present to Blamey and to MacArthur and others, it was unfortunate that that information wasn't actually acted on, because it wasn't and we

11:00 could have affected the whole issue a great deal if they'd heeded what was all the data and the information and the facts, which both Osmar White and Parer had given them information: the clothes, the material, the gear that we were using, the supply situation, so many things, the lack of our weapons, the disparity in our weapons power and fire power.

11:30 So no, I think our Salvation Army, Albert Moore was the other one, that was the other reporter that he

gave a lot of information back too, which was good, been well heeded.

12:00 Was…

Were there any clothing issues or weapons issues that you had?

There was some attempt made at Myola for the remnants, I think our last company that went through there, to issue them with green jungle greens, and then we tried to dye them. But

12:30 then the dye all ran off on our bodies, and clothes, and it wasn't effective. But we didn't experience that. I had no experience of that but Allan Waite, who did this portrait here, but he did one of Ralph Honner, which I presented – we presented to the 39th Battalion just recently, and he's also done some of quite a number of the war, at the war memorial,

13:00 and he keeps close touch but I've got a couple of his there too that taken of the actual track themselves on the Kokoda campaign too. Good pictures. I think they're the same as the ones that I've got on the piano loose there. They're in frames that one, those two.

So what was your uniform when you first went up the Kokoda?

Just shorts and shirts and we had American gaiters that

13:30 came up to here, that came up over the ankle and everything, gaiters and army boots and what have you and that was about it and we had our normal webbing, army webbing, and pouches which hung in front and a haversack which went on the back and a pack that went on the back. And I had another separate haversack, which I

14:00 carried on my side, which I had there was a few maps and data as IO [intelligence officer], information on the terrain and strength of the enemy and all that sort of data and stuff.

In retrospect, what do you think about the fact that you had shorts?

Well, I think it we were very miserable with them at times, because of the

14:30 wet and the fact that we were constantly wet and they were very cold and we could never, it was very difficult to get warm at times and, yeah, we could never light fires until we got over the – even until later on, at certain areas only we could light fires and I think that the jungle greens would have been better camouflage-type outfit - would have been better

15:00 in every respect, so as long as it was well camouflaged and we're well oriented to the actual, well to the village, to the actual terrain.

It must have left you terribly exposed to mosquitoes and scratches that could go septic and things like that

Well, that's right. Yeah, we were. We had little protection from that sort of

15:30 thing and we had plenty of falls because the slippery side of the roots and on the track and so forth and a lot of even where they'd built tracks and steps and so forth, they were all bad steps and they'd sunken, the earth had been washed out of them. And they'd slip or the stays had been broken down and they were broken and slipped, and tended to slide on them, too, if you got your boots on them. No, they weren't -

16:00 our equipment wasn't good at all. It wasn't suitable for it, but it'd be vastly different today but if we had to do the same.

How long was it before you were issued with jungle greens?

Ah, well, I don't think we were ever – oh, we were issued with jungle greens but not camouflage greens, but we were issued with greens, I think, from

16:30 after Gona, and that sort of thing, from then, and around Gona we had some. Yeah. Pretty hard to remember that exactly; the time when that happened.

Did you have any problems with weapons? With weapons and ammunition?

Ah, with the maintenance of our weapons at times, we did have problems with trying to keep them clean and with getting

17:00 into mud and the conditions of wet and so we had to take constant care of our weapons. We had to have a little quantity of oil or something to make sure we could keep them in good condition and some of the cleaning equipment it was necessary to clean them with and our pull-throughs and our cleaning equipment. So that was one of our first principles of war: to be sure that we maintained our weapons

17:30 in good condition and that was very difficult to do that under the conditions on many occasions because of the quite constant pouring of rain and lack of shelter at times.

If anybody had suggested to you to go back to the Kokoda Track in 1950 say, what would you

have told them?

Unless it was for a purpose such as we did do and organised in

18:00 1998, it was only then there was a chap named Graham Scott, he's a psychologist and he lectures at the university in Brisbane here, he has lectured. He practises around the Brisbane area and he had read some of the books about it and he knew the location. He knew my job as secretary of Queensland. He rang and said could he come up and see me and he sort of sowed

18:30 the thought in my eye. He knew that I was looking after the Queensland branch of our association and throughout Australia and he said, "Have you ever thought about, you know, making a pilgrimage back to New Guinea?" and I said, "Well, not really." I said. Well, you know, we talked about it and thought about it and then suddenly I talked to one or two people and I said, "Well, not a bad idea. We'll do it."

19:00 And I went ahead and organised it. It took a lot of organising and I've got a little book somewhere called The Last Parade, which I produced after it was all over with, that told the whole story of it, the whole pilgrimage, what support we got and how many were involved, who was in it and what we achieved and so forth.

What are your thoughts on the fact that the Kokoda Track has become a Mecca [pilgrimage/memorial site] for Australians?

I think it's…

19:30 I'm really thrilled about it and I'm really, you know, wonderfully pleased that it has had the effect that people have at last realised that it's something like Gallipoli. Gallipoli created a nation and Kokoda saved a nation. They were the words that the High Commissioner used there at our service in Bomana [War Cemetery], service in Port Moresby at Bomana and

20:00 Phil Rhoden said in one of the two his speeches that he made over there he said, ah, that it's better for the thoughts to be to young ones, rather to be on our tombstone or something, so many words he said. Nicely worded like that, but I can't get them off pat, but they were even written in some of our booklets.

20:30 **Did you ever suffer from dreams, bad dreams?**

Yes. I have. I have had some really bad dreams and for quite a time. I was sort of a depression at one stage for that sort of thing. I just couldn't get them out and I was suffering a lot from pain from my degeneration in the upper spine around the neck and the back of the head and my lower spine. A combination

21:00 of old – oh, I had a fall and that when I was going back with Les Tipton and one of the gullies just before we went up to find the Japs around a gully and I fell down a gulch and I know I damaged something on my back then but it wasn't enough to put me out of action, but it had an after-effect. So I have got a war disability as far as accepted spondylosis and chronic arthritis

21:30 of my back and neck, but it's mainly at times the depression particularly when, you know, things don't go right, and it gets when we hear people talking derogatory terms about, you know, what was done, what was over there. It can upset me when I feel because I know the performance

22:00 that was done by every one of the fellows in our show and likewise I'm certain it was done in the same way in the 2/16th were a great battalion and the 2/27th, and it needed that sort of action and behaviour and conduct on their part to confront what we had to do and overcome it. It was, we weakened the

22:30 Japanese to such an extent that they couldn't carry on.

What are your thoughts on Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder? Have you ever discussed it with anybody?

Ah yes, I've had discussions with a couple of my mates at the RSL and that sort of thing and even

23:00 Bruce Ruxton and others have talked about it. There are quite a few of our lads that have got, you know, have had real problems. They've become TPIs [totally and permanently incapacitated pensioners] and others that are EDAs [extreme disablement adjustment] or a hundred per cent disabilities and I can understand them, you know. They're in a situation now, and now I mean Charlie Butler [Lieutenant C. D. G. Butler] for instance, who's

23:30 known as the one-eyed Melbourne supporter in Melbourne. He's got a patch across his eye and he was in one of those that were cut off with Benny Buckler [Captain S. H. Buckler], who was our original adjutant, and they were cut off and they took forty-five days to – were cut off at Isurava at the same time when Colonel Key was cut off and captured and killed - they took forty-five days to get back through the bush and jungle, and ultimately get back to the

24:00 battalion. But Charlie Butler was one of these and he finished up coming down one of the rivers on a raft. But his name is on the MCG [Melbourne Cricket Ground] honour board still as 'missing believed killed', killed in action, but he goes along, we used to go in the days on Anzac Days, we'd always about four or five of us from the battalion, we'd go in before the march and head for the Naval and Military

Club just to have

24:30 a couple of beers before we'd head for the march and we'd call in at the MCG and pay homage to Charlie Hopman there, who was with us at the time, and but it's just a story about Ian Johnson was one we used to play squash at the Naval and Military Club and Phil Rhoden and Charlie Butler. Charlie's still alive and I saw him when I went down to Melbourne to Phil Rhoden's funeral and he's a great character.

25:00 There are a few survivors that are still alive of our old original ones, but they're dying off. They're dying off fairly quickly now.

Do you see your war experience as a positive or a negative experience on your life?

Ah, a needed experience, you say, or a…

25:30 **Was it positive or negative?**

Oh, negative experience, did you say, or a needed?

No, no. Was it positive or negative?

Oh I see. Oh no, I think there was a positive experience. Yeah, I think it was a positive experience. No, I'm not unhappy about any portion of it at all and but it was something that the same thing with Australia and

26:00 Australians in my family and sons who were confronted with similar decisions to make and if they had to combat evil, whether it be terrorists, or whether it be people that are going to blow up or try and change our way of life, or change their whole environment or go against or subject the world to evil instead of good, well I think that the same

26:30 would occur.

Some people say, even though they like yourself saw the war as a positive influence on their life, they feel like they lost that five years or whatever that they spent in the army. Do you feel like that?

Well, I probably felt that initially when I was looking for a

27:00 decent job with the company that I worked with before the war and they were a big company. They're an English firm, Vestey's, a well-known company and the reaction that they gave me was – I was pretty upset with that - because they suggest, "Well, obviously you've missed a certain number of years of training with the company and so forth, so it's limited as to what we can offer you at this stage," and when I believed and I put up to them that I had more to offer than

27:30 my father and I had before and that I had many more qualifications then to help them, but they didn't accept that, so that upset me and I felt that I'd lost, you know, five years of my life in that respect and that's why I also took up these side issue jobs to make up for the time I'd lost in. When I got married and then I felt I had to provide extra money to educate

28:00 four youngsters, which I'd have loved to have Mum and Dad do for me, but they couldn't afford and for my brothers as well, and I felt that it was that prompted me to, you know, take these extra work on and extra jobs up to make the extra money so that I could send them, because I'd loved to have gone to Scotch College myself and gone through the schools and heard so many,

28:30 I'd met so many mates through as they went through schools and other things and activities and sporting things, to have the opportunity to do these sort of things but I missed out but, oh no, I've got no regrets because Powerhouse made up. I came into influence with, I met people like Doc MacAdam and others, Dalziel Kelly and other people, go to their homes and they entertained me in a

29:00 lavish manner and had the opportunity to meet people and to mix with a social circle and so I've had a, you know, really wonderful life really. I've married two beautiful women. Two lovely girls and bit sad in many ways about the first one, but it's something that it's happened in many cases, hasn't it?

29:30 **In what ways do you see your army war experience affecting the rest of your life?**

Ah, I don't think that that necessarily had any adverse effects on the rest of my life. I've

30:00 only those that I've mentioned. The fact that I had to slave and work harder and it took me longer to, as I say, rehabilitate myself for those lost years and I felt that I've achieved most of the things and I think happiness and love are the important things that one has to have in a marriage and I've been very fortunate in having that. My

30:30 Gloria is my second wife and she was married before, and I took her little seven-year-old too, and she's now thirty-seven. She's a legal secretary in Sydney and we're very close. So I've got an extra little one apart from my ten grandchildren and one great grandchild and four beautiful little…

Have you spoken much about your experiences to your own children?

Oh,

31:00 well, most of them would know. They've had our history books and they've read all the books that I've given them that have come out and they know the background and Jamie, the youngest one, is – well he's over fifty - but he's planning to walk the track next year with his three boys and they all play rugby and three of them are, two of them are over about six foot three, six foot four and quite big and strong

31:30 and they're hoping to walk the track. They're trying to organise it amongst the Powerhouse group and also Powerhouse are organising a group to go over to walk the track too. So it's happening in many ways.

What are your thoughts on Anzac Day?

Well, my big regret is that I've led our march of a small contingent of our Queensland people up here in Brisbane on Anzac Day for the last

32:00 fifteen or twenty years and only last year for the first time was the first time I felt I wasn't capable, physically capable, of leading the march because I have troubles with my breathing and then troubles with my pain in the neck and back and shoulders and I thought that I wouldn't be able to stand up to it. So they, the kinfolk and others that have been marching

32:30 every year with us and have a little get-together afterwards they said, “You've gotta, you've gotta march,” and so forth. “Use the, get a jeep and go with us. We’ll follow you,” and they wouldn't hear, they said they're gonna leg rope me next year to get me in to lead the march so and they insist on it. So I might just use the jeep next year, this coming next year.

What about Kokoda Day?

Yeah, well, we don't, some of our people

33:00 they go to our function down in Brisbane there and we take our banner along and we have a little ceremony. We provide a little wreath and there's a commemoration there and we've got a memorial just here at Maroochy where we trained, put that in about oh, eight or ten years ago, twelve years ago, and a great boulder that we've got there and the Maroochy Council, I got them to co-operate and the owner of the block has

33:30 created a 2/14th Battalion Memorial Park and they've built a little concrete path winding up through a plantation of casuarina trees, which were only planted that high and now they're thirty metres high and at the top there they have tables and a little barbecue area and a magnificent view of the whole of the sugar plantations and the Maroochy River winding through it and the Blackall Ranges in the background. It's a beautiful spot and on this boulder, I've got a

34:00 plaque telling you the story of this period that we were camped there and did our training and we went made friends in the area, and we became a happy battalion. And we lost a hundred and sixty-six of our members were killed in the Kokoda and the Gona campaign, and how much we appreciated the friendship that and the help they played, the people of that area, and we still have little

34:30 get togethers and bits in the paper.

INTERVIEW ENDS

NB. This transcript is of an interview filmed for the television series, Australians at War in 1999-2000. It was incorporated into the Archive in 2007.

Tape 10

01:26 **Okay Stan, let me start by asking you,**

01:30 **where you grew up?**

Where I grew up, well at what age would you…?

Well I’m thinking of the twenties and thirties and …. the 1920’s or 30’s?

Well, 1920 that makes me about eight years from…

Lets focus on the 30’s them shall we?

I can tell you quite a bit about from

02:00 the ‘20s to ‘30s but we had a –I first went to school at Black Rock close to the beach, but Black Rock is a different place now. In those days you could almost get lost going to the school which was about a mile and a half away from where we lived. Lots of tea-tree and that sort of thing. I had to be taken by my older brother

02:30 at that stage and then from there we went there for a while and then we went to school in St. Kilda or Brighton Road actually, state school. We were there for a few years and then, Mum and Dad had to, then they had a place in Prahran where we had a shop, we called it the 'House That Jack Built' in Greville Street, Prahran and he had a nice little business

03:00 and shop, he was a great expert on wool and dress goods and all that sort of thing. Then due to mother's health we had to move up to Warrandyte, and we bought a nice house on the river at Warrandyte. We were up in Warrandyte for about two to three years and went … I was still at school at that stage and I would have been about twelve I think and my brother

03:30 Hal was about two years older; he would have been about fourteen. And we left Warrandyte and went to … Mum and Dad, Mum's health wasn't too good and we exchanged the place at Warrandyte for a house opposite Wattle Park in Melbourne near Surrey Hills, and we went to finish my schooling at the Surrey Hills state school.

04:00 Hal at this stage took a job, my brother, and I had two years in Surrey Hills state school and then I left.

Just tell me about growing up as boys together, what was it like?

Well I think – we had four boys, but I was more – the two youngest ones

04:30 more or less did things together, more so than the two older ones. And there was a pretty great friendship, sort of developed between – I call him Hal, but he was commonly known as Butch, this came later in the battalion. We did so much together; we used to go swimming around the Black

05:00 Rock, slide down cliffs, and he went to school there. Sometimes we'd become terrorised by some of the older boys who had fathers that had been in the First World War and they had gasmasks and all this sort of thing. And they'd form gangs, and they'd sort of terrorise us sometimes. They'd sort of get hold of him, we were a bit younger, and they'd sort of kidnap us and put us through an interrogation or that kind. And it'd have some

05:30 effect there, but we used to – we had a very healthy life, we'd go, be down swimming, off the beach at Black Rock, we had our own box, bathing box on the beach. And we'd go, we'd do caddying for some of the golfers at Royal Melbourne [golf course] at that stage, or we'd ramble over the heaths and cliffs and things. And at Warrandyte we did lots of things again. A gold mine, an old gold mining town, where gold

06:00 was first discovered in Victoria at Warrandyte. And one of the escapades there that I can remember clearly, there was a couple that were very interesting. One was, two other brothers, the Halpin brothers and the two Bisset boys. Because the Halpin boys told us that they knew where there was a cache of gelignite and fuse

06:30 and all that sort of thing, which was not being used at the moment, in one of the old mining places. So we scouted around and we found this old deserted place and we got, we got hold of, we decided to wag it from the school for the day, and we got hold of some gelignite and fuses and detonators. And we went, spent the day roaming all over the old mines at Warrandyte, and even down to the river, blowing up

07:00 trees and blowing up all sorts of things. It's a wonder we didn't kill ourselves really, because one great big tree with a big hollow underneath it there, we plugged about six plugs of gelignite. And we put this in and then lit the fuse and then ran for our lives and barely got fifty yards or so, the whole thing goes down as debris and everything came down over us. But it wasn't a very sensible thing to do

07:30 really. And we had to take our punishment the following day when the teacher lined us up and gave us the cuts [the cane], and Mum and Dad had to pay for the cost of the gelignite. But there were all sorts of things happened, we had these rafts that we made and we used to go floating and paddling down the river and up and down the river, catching fish and doing all sorts of things. So –and we played sport, we played football and took part in all the games,

08:00 the usual games that they had.

You were pretty close to Hal in those days?

Oh, we developed a very close companionship. He'd stick up for me and I'd stick up for him if the times came, but we were, we did lots of things together and I think it developed this – well, love for one another, really I think. Although it wasn't on display

08:30 openly it was there. And strangely enough when we left school, when he left school at Surrey Hills, he went to a chemist's shop in the local Surrey Hills town, and he worked in this chemist's shop, for a year. And then he went into the RACV, the Royal Automobile Club Victoria in Queen Street in Melbourne,– as a junior office boy –

09:00 and when I left school I did exactly the same thing. I went to the same chemist's shop, worked for a year, and then I followed him at the Royal Automobile Club. And I worked at the Royal Automobile Club for about ten years, but in the meantime Harold had been – we'd both had a yearning to go on the land, and Hal – we had the opportunity to go onto a property in the Riverina at a place called Barrabool, and,

09:30 well he being the oldest he was able to go, and I was left at home to keep an eye on Mum and Dad, and

that's the time we were separated. But up to that time, we spent a good many years together, working together and playing at school together.

What about the Depression years? Was that hard, how hard was that period for your family?

10:00 Oh, it was hard yeah, with Mum and Dad. I think we both would like to have continued our education. I'd love to have gone to Scots College, because I knew a lot of Scots College fellows and people, the background. But Mum and Dad, you know, they couldn't afford to send us to school, to a further college, but we did go to some night schools later on, and of course when

10:30 Hal went up in the Riverina, he was a couple of years there, became a pretty a pretty solid, healthy, hard-working man on the land, a jackeroo really. He went up as a jackeroo, but – and he came back and I was sort of felt left behind. But I sort of visualised myself being a little weakling in the

11:00 family and big brother coming out of big country, tough fellow coming back. So I got into other activities and into gym work and physical culture and started to try and improve my fitness that way. And Dad was a maniac; Dad was very fit, keen on keeping himself fit. He used to do a lot of skipping every morning in the backyard. And so I took on this too. And later on I used to skip

11:30 a couple of thousand revolutions every morning in the backyard, and on one occasion the lads – this was later on – the lads from the local church, the Presbyterian bible class that we attended, used to come down and I made an attempt on the world's record at skipping revolutions there. And I managed to get about sixteen thousand revolutions in an hour and a half without stopping.

12:00 And at that time it was supposed to be a world's record. The chief commissioner of the railways was supposed to hold the record, and I was supposed to have taken it from him, but we never had that verified or put in the record book.

What about your memories, or the family memories of the First World War? Was any member of the family involved in the First World War?

12:30 No, no, Dad was not involved in the war because of his particular case, his particular occupation at the time. And I had an uncle who saw some service, but we weren't affected by the First World War. And it seemed to be; even then it seemed to be quite a long way away, even though we had these

13:00 odd occasions at the school when it was brought up to us.

I was just wondering if you had some sense of what war was like through the stories that were told to you?

Well, this developed later on when I was involved in sport, and I played Australian Rules initially

13:30 with Dan and I was playing with a team called Melbourne High School Old Boys, and we played with some great fellows. And we were doing reasonably well. Then I changed over to rugby through a friend who came down from Sydney who ultimately became my brother-in-law, he married my younger sister. And he got me to come down to the Albert Parks

14:00 Lake where all the Rugby Union was being played, and he was a member of the St. Kilda Rugby Club there, and he persuaded me to have a bit of a run with them, the footy [football] season hadn't started at that time. So I went down, became absorbed over the two month period, and we had a couple of practice games, and I loved the sort of the feel of the game and the spirit of the game, and the contact,

14:30 body contact. And I decided to give it a go for the year, and so it was then subsequently I invited a couple of my mates, they took me down to Lord Somers Camp and Power House [a youth camp] and there I had the opportunity to meet Doc MacAdam, the camp chief, for the first time. And it was – I had the opportunity to

15:00 really become a member of Somers Camp and Power House. And it was from that stage onwards that I was to learn more about the war and the possibility of war. Doc was in the First World War, he was with Lord Somers at that time, who was our Governor of Victoria at this stage. And Doc used to tell us stories at Somers Camp of things that had happened during the First World War,

15:30 of fellows that he'd known, and been associated with in the same units. And some of the particular episodes, some of their bravery and some of the bad things that happened too. And we would be enthralled by these stories of Doc down the sand dunes at Somers, where perhaps twenty or thirty of the lads would be

16:00 listening to his oratory while he'd tell these stories. And when things looked a bit ominous, started to look a bit ominous in the, you know, '37, '38, he was being very knowledgeable and intensely imperialistic outlook, love of the British Empire and all that sort of thing. And that was, that was pretty inherent in Somers and Power House too, because we all had a great feeling for the British Empire and the

16:30 king and the queen and what have you. And it was based, Somers was based on those sort of principles, and was founded on that, on the same sort of ideas and inception of the Duke of York, who was King George VI. So I did, I did get a feeling about war and in 1938 it was, things looked so serious that Doc

MacAdam approached the 14th Militia in Prahran, where we were located at Albert Park, and asked whether we could raise one company from Somers men, from Somers boys. And that was granted, and we, C Company of 14th Militia became known as a company of, strictly from, all Power House members.

17:30 And Butch and I, my brother and I, both joined. And we were in that for a few months earlier of course, but then in the meantime, the rugby side of it did come into it. And I happened to have developed reasonably well on the rugby field, and I was sent – Doc had persuaded me to head, persuaded me actually join the Somers

18:00 Camp, and – but he said I'd have to play, had to transfer from St. Kilda Rugby Club to Power House rugby club, which I did do and the first year we played in reserve grade, the next year we went up in the seniors. And I – well I was selected in the Victorian teams and then subsequently in the Wallaby team [Australian Rugby Union team] and I played against the Springboks [South African Rugby Union Team] in 1937.

18:30 I played at Carlton, and [POW doctor] Weary Dunlop was playing in that team too. And then as a result of that game we, the two of us were selected to go up and play in the all Australian team in Brisbane, against the Springboks. And I think I was able to do well enough there that they gave me a pretty good chance of the possibility of getting in the team in '39 to go to England, when war

19:00 was declared.

I just want to go back to the Somers Camp. What were the principles that that camp stood for, and what effect did they have on you?

Well it was, the whole purpose of Somers, of the camp, was that they brought together fifty boys from industry or community service activities, the more underprivileged lads. And fifty boys from grammar schools

19:30 and public schools, mainly with the object of putting them together into five different groups - red, green, yellow, dark blue and light blue groups. We all had scarves, different coloured scarves, and we had a staff and we had slushies [?]. The principle was to put ten of each in each group, and over the period of the week down at Somers, we had a competitive little tournament, games tournament

20:00 which consisted of twenty-two different events. And each event was quite unique in its own nature, it wasn't necessarily designed to favour the number one athlete, but it was different. Most of them were based on team work and of the ten, each of the ten would be, try to get the best times or encouraged, the least

20:30 perhaps talented in the group, to get the best from him and most of them were based on times. So it was a mixture of the two groups, the two classes, to try to eliminate any sort of class distinction, get them to understand and know each other. To form friendships throughout the camp, and to induce in them some realisation of what it meant to be, say a Somers

21:00 boy, they called them. And they had games, we had songs, team songs and play the game was the main, one of the main principles of this, play the game, it's only the game that counts.

What effect did it have on you?

Well, it had a tremendous influence on me, because I particularly, not having gone to a college, and I felt that my education by mixing with some of these lads that I grew up

21:30 through the camps with people like Doc MacAdam, and Lord Somers and many of the other senior men that were involved with the camp. George Nicholas, and many others, they had a tremendous influence on my life, my whole, watching development of sporting progress and when I first joined camp it was, my brother Harold, Butch, had been transferred

22:00 over from the Riverina over to the centre of Western Australia and he worked with his other brother Noel, next older one, with his uncle. And they had a vast block of land in the middle near Gwalia and Leonora, which was a pretty desolate part of Western Australia. But there was one sheep – they were on a sheep station, they ran the sheep station, there was one sheep, and they had just a shanty – they fended for themselves.

22:30 And they had to put, you know, bore holes down, and [(UNCLEAR)] fencing and all this sort of thing. It was a very – there was no money in it at all, but ultimately it would improve. So Harold was over there working and he found it pretty hard and not getting anywhere, and he went then on the wood line cutting sleepers and things for the mines over in the west near Leonora, that area.

23:00 We felt that he would be better off, so he was sent off and Doc MacAdam sort of suggested that I write over and see if he could come back to Victoria, get a job, which he did do, with my elder brother, who was a plumber. And so Butch came back and he took the rugby up as well and worked with the same team, and we were back together and we were playing sport together and going down to camps at Somers together and through the camp.

23:30 Hal became a group leader at Somers. He was in charge of red group, and strange enough, the year, I think it was 1938, his group and Phil Roden's group who was – Phil Roden who was one of my mates at

Power House and there, he was the other group leader of yellow group there. It was a battle for those two groups to come out top of their tournaments at the end of the week.

24:00 **Going back to playing with the Wallabies, tell me about getting selected, selected for the tour, and how that happened.**

Well, in 1937 when I played, two of us went up to Brisbane to play against the Springboks, I think that I'd managed to play well enough to be noticed

24:30 by some of the old ex-internationals, some of the followers and the coaches of the state teams in the Australian side. And Syddie King, who was a commentator and a journalist on the Sydney Morning Herald, and ex-Wallaby, he said to me after the game in Brisbane, after the Springbok game, he said, "You know, I'm quite convinced that if you could put on another half a

25:00 stone and work on it and over the next year I tell you, you'd be a certainty for this 1939 team to go to England." And, because at that stage I was mad on the rugby and I was keen, I was going to gymnasium and thought there'll be no trouble on putting another half stone on. So over the next couple of years I just went into physical training and went to a gymnast under Aaron Beattie in Melbourne, and

25:30 I built myself up with weights and wrestling and a few things, and a course of boxing with one of the ex-Australian champions. And I was able to bring my weight up to well over the fourteen stone. And you know, I was really fit, because I didn't smoke and I just enjoyed a beer after a match or something, that was about it. But I've never smoked.

26:00 And I could run for miles and swim; we swam in the three mile Yarra [River], swim and so forth. So when the trials came about in 1939, we played in Sydney. We played four matches over the week, or eight days, nine days. And I played in the four games. There was only about three of us I think, from the four

26:30 teams, that played in the four games. It was a matter of fitness and survival and a certain amount of luck in not getting injured. I managed to – although Victoria didn't beat either, win either of the three matches we played, we played the Victoria versus Queensland, and we played Victoria versus New South Wales.

27:00 Number one in Victoria versus New South number two. Then the fourth match was Australia versus the Rest. Well I was selected in the Australian side. And I was able to maintain my fitness and condition throughout the four games, and we all with bated breath, sort of looked at the papers when the announcements were made. And I was included,

27:30 which gave me a great feeling of joy and everything that I'd worked for and strived for, because I was just looking forward to going to England. I'd have loved to have gone to England and Wales and Scotland and Ireland. They had twenty-eight matches to be played over there. And so that's about how I managed to make the team.

Tell me the story of arriving there, and what happened.

Well, when we got to Marseilles, there was a bit of,

28:00 there were warning signals. The ship started to put blackout on the windows and so forth, and the ship had to institute a blackout from the trip to Marseilles to, we were to have landed at Tilbury but we diverted to Plymouth. And when the ship arrived at Plymouth we were transported by coach over to the Grand Hotel at Torquay in Devon. And then there were

28:30 murmurs going around of what looks like as though anything was going to happen. The following morning after we arrived, eleven o'clock in the morning, [English Prime Minister Winston] Churchill announced that war had been declared. The rest of that day we went down to the Torquay oval and had photos taken, pictures taken. And later that afternoon we heard that the rugby powers had got together and they said well, there was no possibility of the tour

29:00 proceeding. It was to be a ten month tour altogether. And we were to play twenty-eight matches in England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland. And two in Germany and two in France and on the way back playing a game in the [United] States and in Canada, and then finally one in New Zealand on the way home, all, of course, by ship. So then we were told the tour was cancelled, we'd spend two weeks in Torquay and a week in

29:30 London and then we'd embark at Tilbury and then head back home. But while we were at Torquay the manager of the hotel, a group of about eight or ten of us volunteered to fill sandbags, and we filled lots of sandbags to put in front of their plate glass windows, which were fronting the channel. And the manager was so pleased with this that he gave us a couple of

30:00 Cadillac cars, and the chauffeur, and they drove us around Devon and Cornwall on a cider crawl [drinking apple cider in every available place], what they called a cider crawl. So we, with the driver of course, it was a help because they started us up on smooth ciders and finished us up with the gin and rough cider chaser at the end. And by the time I got back to the pub, you know, our heads were reasonably clear but our legs weren't.

30:30 The cider apparently goes to your knees and we were a bit wobbly when we got back to the pub.

Tape 11

00:58 **How did you feel**

01:00 **when you heard that war had been declared, and that you were going to miss out on the tour? What were the feelings going through your mind at the time?**

Oh, I think just, we were completely devastated, I mean I was and I think my mates, Sandy Barr and Max Carpenter, the same as the Power House team, members of the same team, we were all just you know, really so, worked so hard and looking forward to it.

01:30 And we weren't going to have the opportunity to get over and see a bit of Scotland or Wales and all those traditional places we'd heard so much about. Cardiff and all the grounds, the great atmosphere and the stories we'd heard about the things that go on at these games. All the singing that goes on, in particular at Cardiff and the Welsh where they sing in great numbers before the game and during the game. And that appealed to me because I loved singing myself, I was the choir leader of the team. And

02:00 I'd sung in the opera earlier here and I'd been trained in singing, and it was so disappointing to us that this didn't happen. And we were flattened, but we got, we hired cars and three or four of us would go round and see as much of the south of England and Cornwall, went over to Newquay and places, and we enjoyed the time. I sang at the local

02:30 hall, Paul Robeson [famous black American bass singer and activist] had been singing in the, at Torquay hall the week before we arrived there, and I was asked to sing in the same, and I was singing virtually the same songs that he was singing.

What did you sing?

I sang, 'Mighty like a Rose' and the 'Mountains of Mourne' and 'Old Man River'

03:00 and those things, 'Cobbler's Song', all those, lots of those, I was a bass voice in those days.

Any Australian songs?

We always sang a lot of our songs like 'Gundagai' and all those types of songs, and 'Waltzing Matilda' and of course we knew all the words, and I used to sing some of the South African songs, which were taught to me by

03:30 a couple of the Springboks that I chummed up with, you know, Sarie Marais and the African Zulu war cries and things like that, there was lots of those.

What was the mood like in England at the time?

Oh, it was pretty, very concerned, people were unhappy. We used to go around into the little pubs and you know, really we had some great times in some of those

04:00 little pubs, just a bit of a sing along. We'd get to know the publican, and I can remember one publican would, he'd be so impressed with the performance, our performance, and feel we were pretty decent sort of guys I guess. And he'd make a present of one of these say pewter cups or something like that, and we all brought back all sorts of things which came, because they said, well we don't know whether it's going to be here in a few year's time.

04:30 It was, we were impressed, I mean I felt that the British were great really, particularly the ones we came across.

You got up to London too, didn't you?

Yeah, we had a week there.

What happened in London?

Well, Lord Somers came round to see us; we stayed at the Park Lane Hotel in London. And he came around and spent a day with us, and shouted us a few drinks, but was very anxious to

05:01 have a chat with Andy Barr and Max Carpenter and myself, because from Power House he was the one that initiated the camp. He was very interested to know how it was going, the progress that was being made, and so forth. And he was delighted to do that, he was a wonderful fellow, and a thorough gentleman. And Weary Dunlop came round to see us too, and he was in one of the hospitals at that stage. And Weary came, and I was great mates with Weary.

05:30 And he took us out for – we had a little bit of a get together, the three of us, and Weary. And I'll never forget that we had a taxi driving in the blackout after that, and after we'd been having a few drinks,

anyhow the taxi driver bumped, in the blackout, bumped into a pedestrian who you know, looked as though he could have been hurt. So we yelled out to the

06:00 driver we'd better stop and check him over, and Weary was sort of a medico, and we got out and found he was covered in blood. But he was conscious and said, told him [(UNCLEAR)], so Weary said we'll drive you home, so they drove him home. He lived in a beautiful place in London, one of the beautiful – a unit of some kind, and they took us inside and Weary cleaned him up and got him right and he turned out to be a,

06:30 an Austrian baron or a baron from Europe somewhere who was living in London. And he wasn't too seriously hurt, but he had a very nice bar set up and luxurious place. Now it was pretty late in the, early in the morning I think at that stage, and he said, 'You'd better stay here the night. No use going out in the blackout." So I think we did, we stayed the night. But that was one incident that Weary's quoted,

07:00 mentioned about that.

And you went to the Palace, tell us about that.

Yeah, we went to – the day before we were due back to sail from Tilbury we were invited to Buckingham Palace, and we were there, we each sort of individually met the King and Queen. That's the present Queen Mother and King George VI. And well I was absolutely thrilled to do that, because

07:30 it was done so nicely and we all formed a circle in one of the big rooms in Buckingham, Vayro Wilson, the captain and manager of the team introduced each one individually to the King and Queen. And I'd just always remember the few little moments I had with the Queen and with the King. He asked me about Somers Camp, he knew that I was a member of Somers camp and

08:00 he was very anxious to know how it was going, and so we chatted about that for a few minutes. And then the Queen, apparently somebody had intimated that I was the choir leader or something, she asked me about singing and the music and so forth. So they were memories that stay with you. Next day we were back on the ship, we were going back via Malta and around that way.

So what did you think your future

08:30 **held at that stage?**

Well we were – I found it very difficult to envisage I suppose, we were so let down, the whole lot of the fellows. They weren't despondent, demoralised, but we – some of us actually inquired about the possibility of joining up over in London. Andy Barr and Vayro Wilson and some others,

09:00 I think Vayro Wilson did stop there, but we weren't allowed to. Stanley Bruce who was the minister at that stage, he said, no you've got to go – far better for you to go home and join up there if you want to. So that's what, that's the way it went. We had a great trip coming back, and he had, all of us, I think we got a pound a day allowance

09:30 money from the union, it was strictly amateur game in those days of course. And then when we got back home, well then I think we were, I know that I was very unsettled, because I just didn't immediately go back into the militia unit, C Company, which my brother was still in and was still being conducted,

10:00 even more so sort of anxiously and with much more purpose. But I went back to my job and then just as the sort of phoney war was sort of discontinued; it was sort of proved that it was going to be something much more serious than a phoney war. Well we suddenly got, the

10:30 2/14th Battalion was formed for the 7th Division; it was the only infantry battalion in the 7th Division from Victoria. And as soon as that was formed, well there was a group of – Butch, Hal and a number of our Power House fellows joined the battalion there, including Phil Roden, who was a, he was our

11:00 2IC [second in command] of the C Company at the time and he joined at Pucka [Puckapunyal Army Camp]. And they were there for about two weeks and then I decided – I used to work alongside Bluey Truscott, out with William Angliss [Sir William Angliss, successful exporter and member of Victorian Legislative Council] in Footscray at Vesteys [UK based company]. And at that time we suddenly decided that it was time we joined up and we joined up with the – went to the town hall and next day or two I think we were out at Caulfield

11:30 Racecourse. We were billeted there for the night and issued with certain gear and then we went to Puckapunyal and there the 2/14th [Battalion] was formed. They sort of claimed, CO's [Commanding Officer] claimed us, and of course I went into B Company, the same company as my brother, which – into the same platoon, 12 Platoon, which was my

12:00 brother's platoon. He was sergeant actually of B Company. We were together into the 2/14th Battalion.

12:30 **How did two brothers end up in the same platoon?**

Well I think it was – we had the opportunity then to nominate sort of what platoon we'd like to go into, and I think in some cases the brother that was already in a platoon, or in a company, was able to say claim more or less their brother into that same company at that stage. Later on I think they did try to

cancel that out, because we had a lot of, we had many two brothers and some three brothers

13:00 in our battalion at the time.

You'd been in the militia prior to the war?

I was in C Company before I went over on the rugby trip, the Power House militia battalion, it's a C Company. I was with them training just for a – I was only in for a couple of months, two or three months, that's when they first started, formed, the same time when Butch went. But I was away for four months, so that they had really six months training in there,

13:30 and I didn't rejoin them, the 14th Militia, until I joined up at Puckapunyal.

What date was that when you enlisted?

On 4th June 1940, and Butch had joined in early May.

What did your parents think about this?

I think they

14:00 accepted it. They were sad, but they accepted it, and they felt the same as we did, that well we were doing the right thing as far as the country's concerned. It felt that by joining the AIF [Australian Imperial Force – the army] we were able to fight the enemy on ground which was not of our own choosing. Not on our own, it meant if we were going to

14:30 achieve success on other fields without our families or our homes being threatened, well then that was the proper thing to do. The right thing to do, and we also felt that we had to support, if we didn't all support the British Empire at that stage, well then they'd be, we could be doomed. I mean the Nazi forces and the [(UNCLEAR)] they

15:00 certainly had carried much before them at this stage in Europe. So I think it was very important that lots of fellows from all parts of industry and the workforce who previously perhaps held back, at this stage felt it had become something serious and that Australia must play a part. And they elected to join up and to go wherever they were

15:30 required to fight.

How important was the Anzac tradition to you at that stage?

I think it was – it was not something that you know, was perhaps hammered into us, but it was something that was probably at the back of our old teaching. We'd been taught in schools about the Anzacs and about Gallipoli and we knew the history of the First

16:00 World War and we felt that the Australians were proud; they had a good reputation as fighters, as soldiers, and particularly aggressive soldiers in attack. I feel that this probably did have some effect, but I don't think it was something that really registered with us at the time. But we certainly felt, well, what the Anzacs did, that we

16:30 could certainly match them if it became necessary, providing we had the necessary training and leadership to handle it.

Can you describe for me the experience of the two of you leaving for war, embarking from Australia?

Yes. We knew that, we were told that we'd be

17:00 sailing around about October-November '40 it was from memory, and we knew that we would be in training from near Seymour, near Pucka, and going to Sydney and then embarking in Sydney at the time. And so we had a week, we knew a week before we were actually entrained,

17:30 this would happen. And as a result I think we were allowed, first time I think some of the company commanders allowed for a keg of beer to be brought in and provided to each hut. Each hut contained twenty-one, twenty-two men, two sections, eleven men in each section, a corporal, two corporals and twenty men.

18:00 But on that particular – only one company commander, and unfortunately that was our company commander, B Company. That was Captain Silverman, he was our CO, and Phil Roden was our 2IC, and Butch was the warrant officer, he was the company sergeant-major. And our company commander wouldn't permit this, the beer to be allowed in the company lines, because they were standard orders, that

18:30 it wasn't allowed, but other company commanders just permitted this for this one occasion. And on that same night – it was only one night – on this same night I was made battalion orderly corporal. So I had the responsibility of going around and making sure that all companies behaved themselves, in other words, no disorderly conduct and so forth. And I was just going past my particular hut in B Company lines and I heard a bit of noise and frivolity

19:00 and so forth going on, a bit of noise, and I thought, this is unusual. And Ronnie Dredge who was a great mate and a Power House lad, he was the other corporal. I was corporal of the one section and he was corporal of the other section in the hut. And I opened the door and I looked in and here's a keg of beer mounted at the end of my hut, and all of my Murray Whalers, fellas who were in my section, they were all from the Murray [River], we called them Murray Whalers, and they had this keg

19:30 around and they were all carrying on, loud voices and noise. Obviously enjoying the beer. And I yelled out, "What the bloody hell are you doing?" And Ron said that Silverman ordered no beer, no beer in the barracks. And just at this moment I'd walked about ten paces in and just at that moment in the door behind me, my brother, Butch, came in as sergeant-major. "Right," he said, "You're all under arrest." Including me, I was battalion orderly corporal.

20:00 So afterwards, during explanations, there was no further action taken as far as I was concerned. But Ronnie and the rest of them were reprimanded a bit for the behaviour. But at any rate the day before we had to embark I managed to persuade from one of my next second row man who made it from the 2/2nd Pioneers, was just a couple of

20:30 units down the line in Pucka. I managed him to get a hold of a nine gallon, which I heaved on my shoulder and took up in the hill at the back of Puckapunyal, and took my section up and we consumed the nine gallon. So we had the opportunity to do that. So then we got entrained and got over to Sydney and then we embarked on the Aquitania,

21:00 and from that time I think that we were on our way to England. We picked up the Queen Mary later on, and the Mauritania, we picked up the 2/27th Battalion, our sister battalion in Adelaide, off Adelaide, and the 2/16th Battalion off Perth. And then the three big ships headed straight for – Bombay was the first place we arrived.

What were your feelings on leaving Australia?

21:30 Well it was very mixed. I think it was same applied to all of us. We were in a, four thousand probably, three or four thousand in the Aquitania and we were pretty crowded and it was pretty hectic and go go, all the time. There was – we were right down the bottom and conditions weren't all that good. But oh, there were things went on. We had all sorts of games. We'd play cards or we'd do tournaments and

22:00 sports and things that we carried on. But it was – we were very sad and I sort of, I hated leaving Mum and Dad to some extent, because they'd been wonderful parents to me, and I knew they were going to find it hard. Noel was still over in the west and on this property in Western Australia, and Murray was older,

22:30 was over the age when most of them were joining. And he was pretty important job in his plumbing business. So, at Bombay we were, we embarked, or disembarked at Bombay, and we were taken by train up to the British Army camp there at Deolali.

23:00 And we were there for I think eight or ten days, and it was quite a new experience to everybody, and we even had little wallah-wallahs [word meaning 'man'] or people that would even come around and shave us in the morning, which we weren't used to that sort of thing, but we enjoyed that. I was able to go to the Bombay gymkhana, to take a couple of my mates there, because I'd had, they'd entertained us

23:30 in the rugby club, our Australian rugby team on our way back. We played a game against the British Army at Bombay, that team in '39 on our way back. So I met some of them there and they were able to take us in as privates, or corporals at that stage, and sergeants, into their club, and gave us a nice treat on that one occasion.

I want to take you forward now to

24:00 **your arrival, and I want you to describe to me how it was preparing for that first battle experience.**

Well, Tim [interviewer], we arrived at El Kantara and the day that we arrived, in the ship, Phil Roden approached me and said,

24:30 "I've got to parade you to Brigadier Stephens." who was on the same ship. And I had been – I'd sung a few songs at the concert, and I'd also taken the officers for PT [Physical Training] training on the ship going over. I'd also played in the football team, the premiership football team at Puckapunyal, I'd managed to win the shot-put competition in front of Jackie Stephens. I was corporal then, and

25:00 Phil Roden … at any rate I was paraded to Jackie Stephens. He said, "Listen, are you interested in becoming an officer?" And it took me back; I wondered what was going on. And I said, "Yes Sir, I am." He said, "Well," he said, "When we get, our brigade gets up to Julis in a few days time, the brigade needs an amenities officer." And that was a new term that had been phrased, and he wasn't sure what

25:30 it involved, I certainly didn't know anything about it. He said, "When I get up there I'll see what it's all about and I'll send for you." So this he did, and when we got up to Julis a few days, he saw me and he said, "Well this is what it's about." He said, "You can get your commission tomorrow if you wish as the brigade amenities officer, or you can be my first nomination from your battalion, there'll be one from

the 2/27th [Battalion] and one from the

26:00 16th [Battalion] to the British OCTU [Officer Cadet Training Unit] in Cairo." It's a four months officers' cadets training unit. I said, "Sir, if I'm going to be an officer, I want the training necessary to be that." And I said I'd be unhappy about superseding all the other sergeants and NCOs [Non-Commissioned Officers] in the battalion, including my brother who's a warrant officer of our battalion. He said, "Well that's for me to decide, Sergeant

26:30 Bisset." So he immediately made me a sergeant and even then superseded the officers, so anyway that's the way it turned out. And fortunately Butch was put in the next company intake to the OCTU a month later, so that we actually had three months together at the OCTU, getting our commissions. I got my commission and went straight back to the battalion, and it was then

27:00 that I was given command of the 18 Platoon and Don Company, and we were sent up to Mersa Matruh in the desert. And we were there for a period preparing defensive positions, putting triple, a barbed wire apron fence, digging tank traps and other things out in the desert. Sometimes pretty tough conditions, hot, one hundred and twenty-six sometimes, and the air would be burnt, you couldn't handle anything, and the camps things would be

27:30 blowing. Butch had to go to the, when he finished his month later, he had to go to the ITB [Infantry Training Battalion], which meant he was able to train some of the reinforcements which were coming in, but he wasn't immediately – there wasn't the vacancy in the battalion at that stage. So then we were switched from Mersa Matruh suddenly back into Palestine and to the borders south of Syria. And then we

28:00 found – we weren't sure what was happening, we did a bit of training. We got to know some of these through the little Jewish settlements and found they were very helpful and very kind and used to bring out, when we were doing route marches and things, they'd bring out milk for us to drink. So we thought kindly about them. But then we suddenly were informed that we'd be crossing the border into Syria and fighting against the Vichy French, including the Foreign Legion and other people. Our particular company

28:30 had an objective, one of their towns which was occupied by the Vichy French and particularly the foreign, some of the Foreign Legion, the Senegalese troops and others which they employed. And we were to capture this village on that night, across the border. We were led in by a Jewish guide who knew the route and everything else. So that's – and we all started to feel that,

29:00 you know, battle adrenalin sort of going and moving, and the thoughts and hesitations, this is our first experience sort of going into battle. And I had pretty terrific fellows in the section and my section I was happy about and they were pretty tough guys from – about four or five of them up from the Murray, and I had two brothers, two Green boys, and they were good fellows from Richmond. And I had two terrific

29:30 fellows too, one was Stan Bruton and the other one was Teddy Sheldon, and Teddy Sheldon and Stan Bruton was later to go into my brother's platoon, had his hand blown off. But we still see him and he's still a mate, still comes up to our reunions, he's a fantastic fellow. And Teddy Sheldon is still alive in Nambour close to me, and Teddy did a wonderful job at Gona, and he was, he

30:00 was awarded the – Mentioned in Dispatches – and the Military Medal for the work he did there.

There you are going into battle, just briefly, how did it feel?

Oh I think that I was afraid of, I probably felt a little bit afraid at the fact that I would feel fear, and that, I was just a little bit concerned.

30:30 I certainly wasn't going into battle with the sort of feeling that joie de vivre [Joy of living], that I would really, such as I was going to have no trouble in dealing with the tasks that had been set me. But I knew that it was something that was going to keep my wits about me, alert and be able to keep control of my section, the men and keep their morale up and try and do the job we'd been trained for

31:00 really. It was a great experience.

Tape 12

01:05 **You were going into battle against the Vichy French, how did the Australians feel about going into battle against the French?**

I don't think that it worried us as individuals or as a platoon or as a battalion.

01:30 In retrospect the people had mentioned, even earlier, had mentioned the fact that they possibly might surrender easily or so because they just didn't want to have too many casualties and so forth. But as far as we were concerned it was just, we'd been given an objective to capture and do and we just had to do that as best we could and

02:00 with a minimum number of casualties that we could do it with successfully. Because the attack was being put right across from the south of Syria in three different columns, we had the coastal area to attack and advance right up to until they reached a stage where they'd capitulate.

Did they know they were fighting Australians?

Oh

02:30 I think after, within, I'm not sure whether they knew initially or whether they knew that we were going, that Australians were in the vicinity and could be attacking them. I'm not sure whether they knew that or not. But I don't think so. They certainly didn't know, the people that we came up, and the French that we came in contact with, they didn't know that. I think they knew it as soon as we actually met face to face and we took prisoners and

03:00 they realised within a matter of days. But – that they were up against the Australians, on the coastal side anyway.

Once you were engaged in this campaign, how well suited did you find yourself for war?

I think our training had been pretty

03:30 thorough, we'd been well trained at Puckapunyal in the basic principles of war. At the British OCTU, I found it was a wonderful course. At the British OCTU they had expert instructors from the British Army and they were, all the officers that we worked in the same company with, were from different regiments, and all famous regiments that had fought. And they were, had a lot of experience and a lot of know how

04:00 which they were able to pass on to us and you know, that four months had a tremendous – I felt – helped any knowledge that I had of soldiering, it helped me tremendously.

There must have been a difference between the theory and the practice, once you're in amongst it?

Well that – yeah, that's true. At that stage I don't think

04:30 that we had the same sort of quite aggressive killer attitude which we developed, had to develop later. But we had to get the objective and that was our – once we'd achieved the objective well, you know, it gave us a great feeling, a great feeling of confidence and the ability and faith in ourselves and our trust in ourselves and trust in our men. The fact that we could work as a team and

05:00 one was dependent on the other and it was just, we were beginning to learn just what it meant to be in an infantry section or in a platoon or a battalion.

What did you need, personally, to develop that killer instinct, how did you develop that?

Oh, I think that, I think it came later, in our later campaigns

05:30 against the Japanese. We felt that we'd learnt so much and we'd heard so much and experienced so much of the manner in which they fought, and the atrocities they committed to some of our prisoners and others that you know we developed a feeling well they wouldn't – we knew that they wouldn't surrender and that we just had to kill them.

06:00 You took your life in your hands and perhaps the lives of your own men if you failed to do that. Because, they could have, they could indicate they'd surrender, but they'd have a grenade ready to discharge in their hand when you approached them. And so that they'd kill themselves, and you at the same time. That was their culture. And it was, all those sort of things and that sort of attitude I think hardened our

06:30 fellows and made us, you know, we were less mindful of – we just had to go into win and had to achieve the victory.

In the Syrian campaign were you with Butch, where was Butch at this stage?

No, Butch was – in the early stages of the Syrian campaign he was still at the ITB, it wasn't until after the first week or so of the campaign that he was able to join.

07:00 He was released from the ITB and he took charge of number 10 Platoon in B Company, which was the original company he was in, as the platoon commander. And he joined them when we, after we'd gone through the earlier stages of capturing up to – each of our objectives, El Maza

07:30 and the coastal areas, Tyre, and we made progress up, and then we had to – our battalion was switched over to the inland drive. There was a coastal and a centre drive and a far sort of eastern drive, which was made mainly by the British Army and the Indian regiments. We switched over to Mersa Matruh and Chazen[?] and the mountainous area where the 25th Brigade were having

08:00 battles and a lot of casualties. And we had to go over and support there and make some attacks on the French positions around Chazen and Mersa Matruh and it was there that Butch joined the B Company

and his first [(UNCLEAR)]. From then on he was in charge of 10 Platoon and he took an active part in leading the 10 Platoon

08:30 in the subsequent, further operations further north and finally in the Battle of Damour. And it was a four day battle which ultimately was a very big battle and where a combination of all our artillery and naval and air support and our infantry were successful in achieving a victory there, forcing the Vichy French to surrender, to capitulate

09:00 and they had a peace at that time.

As an officer, how did you feel about sustaining your first casualties?

I was very, I was, felt all along that it was part of my duty to try and ensure that we had the minimum casualties as far as our battalion, but still

09:30 conducted our operations in such a manner that we could achieve our objective, really with the least number of casualties possible.

But still there were casualties?

Oh, there are always casualties, yes. I lost my sergeant in the El Maza Battle, it was the – there were only two casualties I had there, one a sergeant and another one got

10:00 shot in the knee. But he was killed there and he was killed by the Senegalese. That was unfortunate, but it was something you had to accept. We, later on I mean there were many, many casualties and you had to accept as an officer, a platoon commander or a company commander, you took every opportunity to – when the opportunity occurred to get a message to his kinfolk

10:30 back home and so forth and write something about it and give them some story about it, give them some sympathy.

Tell me about the support you were receiving from the RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force] and the navy.

Yeah, well as I say, the support from the RAAF, we didn't get much support in Syria from the RAAF, because they had their superiority that the French in those operations.

11:00 It was not very readily available at all, any air support. But there was support from the navy, they were going up alongside and they particularly, coastal island, they could, we had naval FOs [forward observers] that came with us sometimes and they were able to relay the positions where they wanted the targets, to indicate the

11:30 targets so that we were able to get, we had our own artillery, but we also had some naval bombardment for support.

So what condition were you in after that first Syrian campaign?

I did have a three day evacuation when we reached Einsafar [?] which was just about the time of the last

12:00 battle, that was when that was just about over. I went up, I'd been up through the mountains and up through there and I went down suddenly with a fever. I think they called it at the time sandfly fever, but I had a temperature of one hundred and six or so, and I was evacuated down to Haifa Hospital for about three days. And that's the only time that I missed, and then I came back to the battalion and

12:30 it was – armistice had been declared and our platoon had been then, our company had been sent up to north Tripoli to build these defensive positions north of Tripoli.

How did you feel when you heard that Japan had entered the war?

Well I guess initially I didn't quite,

13:00 ,we didn't quite have the impact. But gradually as Japan progressed and there was every indication that it, Japan wasn't sort of encountering any, very much opposition. Was sort of taking everything before it, in spite of the, in spite of Britain sending over the, claiming about tremendous forces and the

13:30 tremendous bastion at Singapore and sent over the two battleships, the Repulse which was sunk within a matter of a few days, by Kamikaze planes. But they'd gone through the Philippines and then Singapore and Malaya and they were getting so – once we had started getting information that they were getting through there and there was concern being felt at home

14:00 in Australia that they were getting closer and there would appear almost that their objectives could be to Australia. Well we started to feel well we'd much prefer to be back home sort of fighting against the Japanese than being sent, to be sent over to Europe and continue on with the war. We were very, I think we all felt that we'd much prefer to be doing that than be utilised by

14:30 say Churchill in the European war.

So how long did it take before the message got through that you needed to get back?

I think when we were preparing these defence positions up north of Tripoli, from about that time onwards that we, the news became so important and so alarming, and the battle was going on between [Australian Prime Minister John] Curtin and Churchill

15:00 and others about they wanted the Australians brought to relieve, some of the Australians, some of the divisions. We had the 6th, 7th and 9th Divisions at that time were over there. 9th Division and 6th [Division] were mainly in the desert, and parts of the 6th [Division] and all the 7th [Division] were in Syria. And we suddenly got word that the decision had been made that we were to go back. And even then it wasn't

15:30 certain that we were going. Nobody knew that we were going back to Australia, but we were certainly going to embark at Port Tewfik and we were heading south somewhere. We were actually, some of the 7th Division were landed at Batavia, and some of them were landed there without their weapons, one of the machine gun battalions were landed without their weapons. Another, 2/2nd

16:00 Pioneers were landed there and they were captured and many of them were killed, my mate got killed, my second row mate was killed there. And then we were suddenly switched, we were only a day out from landing on the Mauritania we were on, and then we were suddenly to be switched to go up to Rangoon to be fed into the Burma campaign which was – the British were having

16:30 a bad time there. And then apparently the battle between Churchill and Curtin, and Curtin won the battle and the convoy was switched back and we came back to Fremantle and to Adelaide. Well 2/16th [battalion] were given, I think they had twenty-four hours I think off at Fremantle, but it was the first time they were back for a year and a half or something else. I think only

17:00 a fraction of them got back on the ship, but all the rest came back overland by train to rejoin the brigade at Springbank in Adelaide where we were in training out of Adelaide there.

How did it feel to be back in Australia? What was the mood? Had things changed at all?

No, I suppose there was at one time probably a little bit of feeling against some of the, perhaps the militia and

17:30 the feeling that those that had elected, they wouldn't join our effort because they felt that they'd stayed in the militia. There was that – initially there was that feeling about that. And often we found that militia were getting much more better, many more benefits and much superior benefits than the AIF were getting as far as, or as far as wages, as far as salary, as far

18:00 as promotions were concerned. All these mates which we'd had in the militia before were finding, you know, were up senior ranks, where previously they were more junior. But it wasn't deep seated, and it only was, only existed for a very short time, because we then, after the training at Springbank we were then moved by train over to Melbourne. And we had a

18:30 week's leave in Melbourne, which we didn't think was long enough, but we honoured it, and then proceeded up to Glen Innes in New South Wales, which is a very cold place, and it was a cold time of the year at that time. And we were there for a couple of weeks, and then we moved then up into, into the Sunshine Coast,

19:00 with the 21st Brigade that is, with the 2/14th [Battalion] was stationed at Mt. Ninderry at Yandina. The 2/16th [Battalion] were in Maroochydore, and the 2/27th [Battalion] were at Caloundra, and this was the 21st Brigade, and that was virtually, many indicated, considered that to be the Brisbane Line [supposed last line of defence].

I'm just wondering what the general population was thinking at the time.

19:30 **What was their mood? Did they appreciate what you'd been going through? Was there a sense that this was getting serious?**

I think it was in certain quarters, but in many quarters it was not. I don't think, I think there was a lot of, an attitude by many people that it wasn't going to be all that serious and

20:00 so on. This was a little bit later on, but I was up on the tablelands, and I went down to attend a school, an aircraft recognition school, because I was IO [Intelligence Officer] at this time. I was made IO, intelligence officer of the battalion just before we left the Middle East, so that I switched from aiding platoon commander to intelligence officer. And I attended this aircraft

20:30 recognition school at Bradfield Park here, and there were people from all over the place, members of the air force people, American pilots, and all that. They were quite a mixed crowd. But I had a week's course down [there]. An American particularly that I chummed up with, and went into the – after the Jap submarines came into Sydney Harbour while I was there at that school here.

21:00 We went in, we had a couple of beers together in a pub, and the communication and the talk that was flowing on, there was babble, there was so much noise going on. But everyone was saying so many shells had landed in their backyard here, someone else from miles and miles apart further south, they'd had a whole thing of shells had landed in their street down there. And shells were

21:30 landing, they needed an armada of battleships and aircraft carriers and everything else that caused the sort of damage that would have occurred by what I heard in just that few minutes, short time in the pub there. And I was amazed at the attitude then. That's just something I remember just so distinctly.

22:00 **At this stage you didn't know but you were heading for Moresby?**

No, not initially. We were in, we landed there on roughly the 6th May 1942, and we were there for three months in that area, right near…

I'm thinking about after this, after the training.

Well, we'd just – in the last week I suppose that we were at

22:30 Yandina we probably sensed that we were being sent up the north somewhere but we didn't know specifically that we were going to Port Moresby. We weren't certain of that, no. We only knew that we had to, we were going to Townsville, we were going to embark in Townsville, and we were put in a liberty ship and that's where we went over, straight to Port Moresby in pretty rough conditions on the ship.

So at this stage, was there

23:00 **a very different sense about the urgency of the battle ahead of you, given its proximity to Australia?**

Oh yes, I think that our training was such that it changed. We were given a platoon section, platoon and company and battalion training as a whole. We were given perhaps a few days, up to a week at a time. One platoon could be sent

23:30 out to live off the land for a week and to exist. We were given training up on the Blackall Ranges, which is in many ways some parts of it are comparable to the jungles over in New Guinea. And over near the Kenilworth in that area, there are many areas there, Little Yabba Creek, there's lots of jungle and stuff there. And we did

24:00 quite a lot of training in that area, and we did, the section trained I think the section living off the land made the units pretty independent and more dependent on each other.

Was there a greater sense of urgency that you were now fighting for Australia rather than fighting for the Empire?

Yeah, I think that definitely existed.

What was the feeling?

24:30 Well, a feeling that at least everything we had, we knew that we were about the only division or the only force that was fully trained and had battle experience, that would be able to make some sort of a combat if we had to meet the Japanese. We had no doubt that we'd have, we'd be victorious over them, we could handle them, we didn't have any qualms or fear

25:00 about it at that stage. But we had a pretty, there was an urgency, the fact that we had to get over, we had to get and meet them and make certain we could put them out of the war as soon as possible.

So what was the timetable? You got to Moresby, how quickly were you up on the [Kokoda] Track?

Oh, only a matter of days, only about – we went straight from Moresby and then up to

25:30 Koitaki and that area, and then Uberi and McDonald's [Corner]. We spent two or three days up there, just working out, getting the latest bits of reports, intelligence reports, enabling us to plan the sort of the load, the pack that we would take over the track. We knew that tremendous difficulty was going to be experienced in that track, but nothing like what we actually did experience. But we had to sort of try and visualise this and put together

26:00 the minimum items that we could carry, don't carry anything more than we could possibly handle. And we sharpened our bayonets on one of the McDonald's rubber plantations, he had a big grinding wheel and all made a point of doing things like that. And got ourselves, you know, generally organised to confront the time ahead. It was said at that time and we were told by some of the villagers, the natives, some of

26:30 the residents, the ANGAU [Australian and New Guinea Administrative Unit] people, that you know, white men was never considered a good carrier over the track with a load at all… but it was done. We got down to oh, just from memory, we've got it spelt out in our books in histories, but roughly twenty-five, thirty kilograms of our pack, our rations and six days' ammunition, about six days' supplies, rations, plus a number of

27:00 two inch mortar bombs, which we carried. But we couldn't carry any of the heavier mortars. And we couldn't carry any of the heavy machineguns, the Vickers machine guns. We only had our Brens and our grenades and our rifles, and Tommy guns, Thompson sub-machine guns. That's all we were able to

carry. Really it was

27:30 light arms really compared with what the Japanese had with mountain guns and heavy mortars and heavy machine guns they had. But we knew that we had a long supply line, it was going to take us, you know, possibly eight days or so in that area before we got to the stage where we'd meet the Japs. We knew there was an urgency

28:00 for us to get there, because we knew that the 39th Battalion, the militia battalion, had been sent over there were in trouble, and they'd been confronted by, certainly by more Japanese than intelligence had led the hierarchy to believe. But as it turned out, you know, the intelligence was just sort of, just incredibly

28:30 poor and inaccurate. It was told, even Colonel Key and myself who stayed behind to get the latest in intelligence reports, our battalion went ahead on the start of the trek, and we went to follow them about two or three hours later, and we caught them up before very long. But that latest report was that, they'd just received a

29:00 report that another fifteen hundred Japanese had landed in the Gona area. Before that I think fifteen hundred had landed, so altogether at that stage I think Brigadier Potts had made the comment in one of the books, there in his I think [(UNCLEAR)] book, so he said when he was talking to the battalion commanders, "Oh well, we'll just have to kill a few more Japs that's all." We had a, we had

29:30 eleven hundred, roughly eleven hundred in the 2/14th [Battalion] and the 2/16th,[Battalion] roughly five hundred and fifty of each, five hundred and forty-six of our battalion fellows. They were the fittest men, they were all rifle company men, few headquarters company men. All our carriers, platoon, from headquarter company were left behind in Moresby

30:00 for defence of Moresby in case of a seaborne landing. All our heavy mortars, one section of our mortars were sent over. Our – lots of our transport, our transport people were left behind. So you know, so it left us with five hundred and forty-six. And of that five hundred and forty-six there was not –

30:30 every one of them made it as far as Isurava eight days later concerned.

Tape 13

01:47 **It must be incredibly hard for anyone who hasn't been there to imagine what that walk must have been like. Can you describe it for me, what the conditions were like, to walk up there?**

02:00 There've been so many books written by many people on the conditions and the difficulties of the Kokoda Trail, or Track, which some of them have described it, you know, pretty, pretty well. But

02:30 unless you've walked it and under the conditions which we had to do it at the time, it's almost impossible to describe. We were all very fit, we were very fit, we had a great morale, each one of us. There was a tremendous morale in the battalion. But the first

03:00 two days or three days we had to shake our heads and just wonder what had happened, what we're doing or what in the world we'd come up against, because the combination of the weight that we had to carry, plus the fact that the track itself was just, it was the combination of slime, mud, tangled roots, rocks,

03:30 and there was no firm footing at all. We could, at times we could make one step and slip back two. And the steep grades that we had to encompass, not only going up, but then coming down. We'd be going down, had the weight on our backs and knees would take the jarring and it had such an impact. And

04:00 after the first day, you know, we'd start off in the morning and we'd start to perspire. We'd just be saturated with perspiration. And we, the first few hours, first hour or two, you know, the eyes on the first day or so, the eyes would sting from the salt that would come out in the perspiration. But after

04:30 that first day there was no more stinging of the eyes. But we had to find, with all the salt that was coming out of our bodies, we had to myself and a couple of members of the I Section, my I Section, and [(UNCLEAR)] or [(UNCLEAR)] [intelligence?] Section, we went ahead of the battalion on each day, so that we could arrive at the village where our destination, we could arrive there perhaps an hour or two hours before the main battalion.

05:00 But we'd have salt tablets organised there to hand out to the men as they came in to replace the salt that they'd lose. We'd clutch at trees; we chopped ourselves a stick that we could perhaps help ourselves a little bit with one stick, solid sort of pole or stick that we could save ourselves from a fall. But we

05:30 had many falls, there were some difficult areas to cross from the creeks and the rocks and negotiate perhaps a single log going across a bit of a torrent. In the afternoons, usually the rain came and then we'd become saturated, everything would be wet and most times we were not able to dry ourselves, we

had to sleep being wet.

06:00 It was just, the first two or three days we were really, we felt that something, we'd wonder ourselves whether we can possibly cope with it, and the same with our troops. Some of them were worse than others. But we wondered that we were perhaps feeling a little bit better, helped some of the others, perhaps took a little bit of his load or helped him up a difficult part of the track. But it was after the, I'd say

06:30 two to three days that we started to feel a little bit better. And by the time we reached Efogi, that later became known as Brigade Hill and Mission Ridge, at Efogi, this was the last village area where we could light a fire at night time, because it was on the south side of the Owen Stanleys,

07:00 and on the other side, well that's where the Japs were and confrontation was taking place. At Efogi we lit the fires and we had, we all felt by this stage that we'd overcome the difficulties of the track, and we could handle it, and our morale was sort of back to normal you might say. And the lighting of the fires and having

07:30 a bit of – our chefs and cooks being able to knock up a bit of a dish, hot dish with bully beef with perhaps some, a bit of dried vegetables, something mixed with it. They were able to have a decent meal and be reasonably warm, although we might have had a cape to protect us a little bit from the water and the warmth of the fires. And

08:00 I think the whole spirit of the battalion was colossal, and you know, just the morale was at its highest. That's where we had a few sing-alongs and things around the campfires. And I'll never forget Butch asking me to join him from battalion headquarters where I was, to his platoon, and I knew them all, because I'd been with them as a private and as a corporal.

08:30 And he asked me would I like to join them at this sing-along, because that was the last time we'd – and once we got over the mountain we wouldn't perhaps have another chance to get close together. And we were all having a great, singing some of the old Australian songs and, and Butch

09:00 just asked me whether I'd sing a couple of his old favourites that I used to sing. And I did. And I have mentioned this before, previously, on one occasion, but it was important to me because it was something that I did have a feeling when I was

09:30 singing, that something was… I think it was the 'Mountains of Mourne' I was singing, the memory is not all that good. I'm not sure if it was the 'Mountains of Mourne' or

10:00 'Mighty Lak' a Rose', but I know that during the singing that I had this premonition that something would happen to Butch and that he might – when we got over the mountains in the battle ahead

10:30 that I might lose him. It just didn't occur to me at the time that you know I might lose myself. But it was something that lived in my memory from that time. As I say, never dreaming that you know in eight days time that I would be holding his hand.

11:00 But the whole spirit of all those troops on that night I can remember particularly because there was a feeling that they'd conquered all the most difficult part of their assignment, the track and their weight and they proved themselves capable. And from that time on we had you know just as difficult a part, but they handled it extremely well. And when we got over the, up to Myola, and then fed forward from Myola,

11:30 company by company, piecemeal, to try and get to the Isurava where the 39th Battalion was holding out, that although the difficulties physically of the track were just as bad and sometimes even worse, that our fellas were just eager to get forward and

12:00 get at grips with them. We were bitterly disappointed, arriving at Myola, to find that the supplies, ammunition and food, were not sufficient for us to move forward as a battalion. There were supposed to be, you know, supplies for many days should have been dropped and were to have been dropped and had been stated that

12:30 they were there. But they weren't there and that was just one of the other things which our brigadier, Brigadier Potts, you know, had to overcome. So his job was to, his task was to capture Kokoda, but he couldn't do that with the – well he never could have done it. It was a mission, in retrospect, that was impossible because of the difference in

13:00 numbers and the difference in firepower. We were fed forward, a company at a time, as I said, because it was becoming a desperate situation for the 39th Battalion. And fortunately one company, our C Company, was able to arrive at Isurava on the 26th August, at the time when the forward elements – it'd only been the forward elements of the Japanese that had been confronting

13:30 the 39th up to that stage – but on the 26th he committed the 1st Battalion to the 26th [Battalion] and our C Company was able to take over, or to go and bolster the comparable company of the 39th[Battalion] And then our other companies arrived from then, the 27th and 28th [Battalions] and by the 27th we had all our companies there, and took over from the companies of the 39th Battalion

14:00 and they were held back in reserve.

What's your recollection of meeting those men from the 39th? What condition were they in? What did they feel about you arriving?

Well I still see one of them, a sergeant, who comes to our reunions every year in Brisbane. And he never fails, particularly after he's had a couple of beers,

14:30 never fails to say, "We felt that you were gods from heaven. You looked so comparatively clean and tall and big and strong and brown." And you know we felt that that it was just a salvation to them.

15:00 And they, as far as they were concerned, well they looked "ragged bloody heroes" as they were later to be called. They were, they'd been in and out of action, the difficulties of the track and the terrain, for several weeks, and they were pale and thin

15:30 and haggard and gaunt, and in rags you might say. But there was still a good spirit there. They had a really good spirit and a good attitude. They were, they hadn't received the training that our battalions had had, but this 39th Battalion had received more training, better training than any of the other militia battalions. And they had received a

16:00 bigger quantity of AIF officers and NCOs that had been transferred from our brigade to bolster the strength of the 39th [Battalion] and the other militia battalion. The 39th [Battalion] particularly had quite a number of them. But they did a good job. With the right leadership and the right conditions and the right atmosphere, they did a wonderful job under the

16:30 conditions that they had, that they were subjected to. They should never have been subjected to what they had to do. But that's the way it worked out and they stuck with us as a reserve and took part in some of the rearguard actions up until the time we got back to Efogi, Mission Ridge, when they were finally relieved.

Describe the

17:00 **first big battle of Isurava.**

I think that the description of the battle of Isurava has, it's been spelt out by Lex McAuley in 'Blood and Iron', by Osmar

17:30 White, it's been spelt out by Peter Dornan in his latest book. Peter Dornan has spent a great deal of time with many, many members of our battalion who were in different companies, situated in different areas of the battlefield. People like Alan Avery, who was a boyhood mate of

18:00 Bruce Kingsbury, who was awarded our Victoria Cross, China McCallum [Charles, or Charlie Reginald McCallum DCM] who was also recommended for a Victoria Cross, and was brought back down to a DCM [Distinguished Conduct Medal], he did a magnificent job. But there were many, many more of our fellows that did the sort of tasks that Bruce Kingsbury and China MacCallum did in the way of

18:30 confrontation with the Japanese in dealing with them, and meeting against odds of always that five, six and eight to one against them, and with superior arms against them. The heavy machine guns, heavy mortars and the mountain artillery. It was, the 26th and the 27th August were the

19:00 two days, the Japs actually had six battalions plus other supporting troops and the mountain troop, and engineers and support troops. One battalion had been sent around by the southern track leading from the junction of tracks at Alola which is just on the Moresby side of Isurava. And

19:30 this one battalion had, its objective was to go along there through the villages of Missima and Uberi and then cut the track somewhere near Alola, where brigade headquarters was and where our main headquarters. And if they managed to secure the track well, the lifeline of the 14th and the 39th

20:00 Battalion[s], who were forward of Alola would have been cut. A lifeline as far as getting more supplies up, ammunition, food, being able to get our wounded back through that access. That was the only alternative route back to our RAPs, [[Regimental Aid Posts] or our casualty clearing stations back along the track. So the 53rd Battalion, militia

20:30 battalion, which was the other one of the battalions of that 30th Brigade, of which the 39th [Battalion] was a member, they'd been sent around on that track to try and form a block, to hold them. Unfortunately they were less trained, far less trained than the 39th Battalion was. They were only lads of eighteen, some had been conscripted, more or less, it had been suggested that they'd been conscripted. But they had,

21:00 they were poorly led, there may have been one or two AIF officers amongst them, I'm not sure. But the long and short of it is that they weren't trained and they weren't equipped to handle any sort of task against the type of Japanese battalion that was going to confront them. With their heavy equipment, heavy machine and their, the experience, battle experience dating back to

21:30 1935 and '36 where they'd been fought. All these Japanese, some of them had fought through

Manchuria and China and then come down through all the island campaigns. So, with the 53rd, their CO and adjutant were killed, they'd gone through an area unexpectedly. Now at the moment the 2/16th followed us up, the company came from

22:00 Myola and they had two companies, were sent along that track with the 53rd Battalion. And they were able to – the 2/16th were able to virtually hold the Japanese on that from getting round on the other side and cutting a track behind us. So the 2/16th you know, played a very vital part in the success of our battalion, 14th and 39th, holding the Japs in the four days at Isurava,

22:30 at the battle of Isurava. And that's why time was the essence of the contract for the Japanese, because they only had supplies for a certain number of days. They'd expected to get into Moresby in, I think twelve days or something, from the time they left. And they knew that the further they went into the mountains and over the Owen Stanleys along the track, that their supply line would be extended

23:00 and they'd have extreme difficulty in maintaining it. They didn't have the cooperation or the support of villagers, or natives, to help them, although they did have natives. They did have, they brought over sometimes, you know, hundreds of Rabaul natives from their main depot to help with carrying of supplies and parts of their heavy machinery and guns

23:30 and their mortars, their mountain guns. It wasn't until the 27th [August] they started to probe to try and locate our positions. And then there were conflicts and there were some of our patrols forward that were forced – some were actually cut off. And then on the 28th

24:00 things started to happen and just a tremendous battle occurred. They started attacking in all areas, on our forward areas, on the west of the track and east of the track, came straight down the track and the high ground. B Company had the high ground feature on the west of the track and C Company, where Kingsbury was on the east side of the

24:30 track and south. And they tried everything on that day, the 28th and every attack was forced back, we knocked them back. If they broke through with their weapons and machine gun artillery and they managed to get through, well they were met with the bayonet and they were, many of them were killed in that way. Our casualties were not

25:00 extremely high until that stage. On the 29th August they committed another two battalions into that, against the other three, five battalions, or six battalions altogether including the one that was coming round the south were committed. And this, the force of numbers ultimately caused the sort of actions that occurred in C Company's area where [Lindsay] 'Teddy' Bear,

25:30 and Alan Avery and Bruce Kingsbury and C Section and those, had to do absolutely heroic deeds to just stop these suicidal attacks that were being made. There'd be twelve Japanese killed to every one of our casualties.

What was it like fighting in the jungle, or was that impossible to describe?

Well it was

26:00 extremely, there were only certain areas where it was sufficiently open to actually see a number of Japanese sort of coming at once. Most of the time it was, you just had to fire into the area and operate through a closed… Some of the areas there where Kingsbury and action took place, you know, it was so congested and so close, you know, that they were fighting almost toe to toe.

26:30 It was extremely difficult firing in the jungle. It was just – well the Thompson sub-machine and the use, when it was practical, the use of grenades and things were the only thing for instance up in 10 Platoon, Maurie Tracey's platoon area, which is the area

27:00 at high ground. They had a little bit of a view and they could throw grenades, you know, in amongst groups of Japanese and they caused, you know, complete massive casualties. And they'd bring their Bren guns into position and cover them extremely well and fire. But the Japs kept sort of charge, charge, charge on these various objectives that they were trying to capture the high ground or positions. They had

27:30 complete disregard of the loss of life as far as the Japanese were concerned. And so it was just a question of mowing them down, of trying, killing them as soon as, as quickly as they replaced them and put in another attack. And in the end they started to break through in different areas and it looked almost obvious that they had, had to break through, through sheer weight of gunfire

28:00 and weight of numbers, that we had to make the decision by the 30th, or the 29th August, to withdraw that night. And that's what we did, to another position, just about one thousand metres further back towards Alola.

How important was Kokoda to Australia?

Well, Kokoda was important,

28:30 for us to take Kokoda. Important, because that was the only place if we could have secured Kokoda, we

could have landed supplies. We could have flown the transport planes in, we could have flown more troops in, could have flown probably short, twenty-five pounders, some artillery in, sort of stuff in, which maybe

29:00 would have given us sufficient gun power and reinforcements to turn the tables on the Japanese. I say that maybe, because the Japanese were still tremendously strong at that stage and they had massive reinforcements available in Rabaul, and they had – well they had limited 'enableability' to get them over to

29:30 Gona and Buna. And they also had, they had a pretty strong air force which came over. In fact, initially they had a superior air power than we did in the early stages, because they knocked out transport planes in Moresby that were meant to, designed to bring the supplies up to Myola.

What was standing between Australia and the Japanese at that stage?

I guess

30:00 you'd say our navy – well I say, the American Navy, American Navy, and coupled with what ships Australia had, plus a minimum, minimum air force, and just the 7th Division, which consisted of the 25th, ,

30:30 21st Brigade, the 30th Militia Brigade, the 16th Brigade, and limited forces at Milne Bay. The 18th Brigade was located at Milne Bay, it was not much in Port Moresby at all. The 2/27th Battalion was held back at – that was our sister battalion – they were held back

31:00 in spite of repeated requests for them to be sent forward. When once we realised and appreciated that we had the complete incorrect intelligence, the fact that we were fighting against, instead of fifteen hundred Japs, three thousand Japs had been intimated initially, there were seventeen thousand Japs that had landed at Gona and Buna. And there were actually ten thousand, over ten thousand combat troops

31:30 that we were facing, facing us. We never had more than fifteen hundred troops at one stage, at any stage, available to confront the Japanese.

Tape 14

01:22 **Stan, with that kind of firepower was there against you? There must have been**

01:30 **terrible casualties?**

Oh, there were casualties, but they were, our casualties were much, much lower than the enemy casualties. We were very – we lost more casualties later on in the campaign, in the Battle of Isurava.

02:00 I mean we did lose quite a number of casualties, but then it was progressively later in the next, over the next couple of weeks, two or three weeks, that we suffered more because of the fact many were cut off. And because of wounded and having to try and look after wounded, many were cut off and had to make their way through the

02:30 jungle back to try and find their lines, into the battalion lines. We had to, had to lose casualties, there's no question about that. We lost – over the, until we were finally relieved at Ioribaiwa Ridge, we lost one hundred and six, one hundred and six were killed.

03:00 And there would be a lot more that were, a great deal more that were wounded. And many that subsequently, in the post-war years, that you know, died of injuries or sickness or, as a result of the war, of the particular campaigns in New Guinea. That was just Kokoda, and then of course we had Gona after that.

03:30 **Can you tell me what happened to Butch?**

Well, on the 29th August, late in the afternoon, after it would be probably approximately two o'clock, something in that area, I said to Colonel Key that

04:00 I wanted to go up to Butch's position, up, which I hadn't been able to get up there until that. He was on the higher ground to the west, on a feature that the Japanese were very keen to occupy, because it gave them a certain amount of overview of the whole battle area. I said I wanted to just check up to see how it's going and what's happening and whether they need any extra reinforcements or whether they can still hold.

04:30 And I was about, I suppose within fifty metres of their position, and I met one of three brothers who were in our battalion, two of them were members of Butch's platoon. Name was Tom Wilson, and he had just completely shattered his hand with a faulty [model] 39 grenade. They were bakelite grenades that they had

05:00 those days. When they threw them they, there was a little leaden pellet on the end of a tape, it had

unwound and when it unwound it had exploded, but they were not terribly effective. We basically, most of the time had Mills grenades, which were very good. Anyway this had blown up, it had prematurely exploded in his hand when he was about to throw it. And he didn't have any idea where he was going or what, where the RAP was,

05:30 battalion headquarters. So I just had to stop and make sure his hand was right, just put a dressing on it, and then take him down to RAP. And I was going to go straight back, Colonel Key said, "We've made a decision, we're going to, we've got to withdraw, they're coming through in certain areas. And we just have to make a, withdraw to a new position, re-establish the defence line. So will

06:00 you and Ralph Honner…" who was the CO of the 39th Battalion, who'd stayed with us. He wanted Ralph and I to go back and recce [reconnaissance] the position to withdraw to, and they'd be withdrawing late that afternoon, night. So unfortunately I couldn't go back straight to see Butch's position. I was about to got back there and I had to,

06:30 I had a number of, a couple of companies of the 53rd Battalion were in a position there. And I couldn't find their officers and I had to ask them to move, or direct them to move to a certain position because Ralph Honner and I decided that that was the most suitable area where we could defend. I had to draw my revolver too, to make them move in the end, because they were very, they were

07:00 uncooperative. They then, they quickly realised that I wasn't, you know, joking. The importance of the decision, why they had to move. And they did. We then some of our fellows came through, walking wounded. They told me that Butch had been shot, and –

07:30 but his men were bringing him out. And this was getting – by this time it was getting late in the afternoon. So I saw Don Duffy who was our medical officer, he was, had [(UNCLEAR)] just a little bit further back at this stage. And I told him, and he said, "Well Stan, as soon as he comes through, just tell them to put him down or get hold of me as soon as he comes through."

08:00 And he came through, his men carried him out under a great deal of difficulty, and one or two of the stretcher bearers actually, the people who were carrying him were shot, killed actually, bringing him out. But when he came out ultimately, saw Doc and we put him on the side of the track, and

08:30 I just – Doc gave him – I thanked Georgie Woodward and a few other mates who had done such a good job in getting him out. Actually they would never have left him there. Doc gave him an injection of morphine and had a good look at him. And he'd got a burst of machinegun fire through his tummy, and he was out distributing grenades

09:00 'round to his section and platoons at the time, and had run into this burst. And Doc said - just looked at me, Doc looked at me and said – it'd been indicated to me by the chaps coming through he'd been badly hit – so he said, "Stan you stay with him, stay with him." So I stayed with him from ten o'clock 'til four o'clock, Doc came back a few times, gave him more morphine and

09:30 we just talked. He was unconscious at times and other times he was good. He knew I was there and we held each other's hand and he – we talked, you know, [about] quite a few things,

10:00 and Mum and Dad and, our great days, and At four o'clock he died, and from that time onwards we buried him. We got the padre [who] was up there [he] did a little

10:30 ceremony and we put a little wooden cross with a mark there, and then we just had to carry on then with the day. The 30th August was a bad day for the battalion, because we formed the positions, new positions up and they all got back. There was still some of our sections that were cut off further forward surrounded by some pockets of Jap.

11:00 And we put C and D Companies were up on the west side of the track and A Company and B Company were further forward, and the 39th [Battalion] were in reserve. Then we got word then through,

11:30 that we'd fought off a number of attacks from the Japanese from that new position on the 30th, and then it was decided that it wasn't a suitable defensive position, we'd withdraw to . This time we knew that the decision had been made by Brigadier Potts that, you know, our initial objective of trying to capture Kokoda was impossible with the forces that were against us with what we had. Our main objective then was to

12:00 try and defend the track and keep ourselves between the Japanese and Port Moresby. And that's the sort of battle that we planned. Pottsy decided to, the only way to plan and operate the war from then onwards was to hold the ground and gradually whittle his forces away by establishing killing grounds, progressively back along the track.

12:30 And at any time he looked like using his superior forces to get, surround us and cut us out behind. We'd send out little patrols to either flank, and as soon as he looked like getting around, we'd withdraw to establish another killing ground further back. And each time he adopted the same tack, attacking our front, and in that process suffering a lot of casualties. And this went on

13:00 pretty well, but on that, 30th [August], on that afternoon, we tried to, when we were ordered to withdraw to Alola, brigade headquarters, and they were going back, it was decided to – when our troops

started to get a couple of stretcher bearers through there, they found the Jap had got behind and up on the west, the higher ground to the west of us, they were bringing fire to bear against the track, against our troops.

13:30 So we, really we were cut off from getting, making the withdrawal. Well at five o'clock we were to, the orders were given to five o'clock we'd make this withdrawal. But in order to clear the enemy and to make sure the withdrawal track was clear, it was decided to put an attack along parallel to the track on the western side with C and D Companies and clear the Japanese that had got behind in that area,

14:00 to stop them, clear the track. So at five o'clock, just at that psychological moment to withdraw, we were lined up, battalion headquarters were lined up ready with packs on, what have you, on the track. And C and D Company – I was present with Colonel Key when he gave the orders before C and D Company commanders, to them for this attack to take place.

14:30 And the attack, at the moment the attack went in, the Japanese launched a similar attack on the frontal and back on the other side, the lower side. The battalion headquarters was cut, it was sort of subjected to a cross fire from three, four different directions as we lined up on the track. There was,

15:00 it was suicide for anybody to stay on the track in that position there, there was no groundcover to take any groundcover, there was no tree cover to speak of other than the jungle. There was an incredible amount of firepower that came across the track and was just cutting trees and shrubs and everything down in its path. So everybody moved just south off the track. And I

15:30 went down with the RSM [Regimental Sergeant Major] and my [(UNCLEAR)] sergeant. We went about fifty yards, we had to go down about fifty yards, but at that stage we got a little bit of groundcover, and we stopped there and in the meantime the firing had subsided a bit. We decided that – and I picked up about eleven of our troops who were in

16:00 that area, including my RSM and my [(UNCLEAR)] sergeant, we decided we'd withdraw along this running parallel to the track there and take a line and bush bash out, cut our way through the jungle and the terrain, back to Alola where we knew this junction of the tracks was, the ammunition dump. And we did this, still it was hard going and terribly rough ravines and

16:30 it was in one of these that I actually crashed down and damaged my back. I got to a position where I felt we were pretty well below the spot where we had to withdraw to Alola, and decided to leave the party there that was in charge. Bill Lynn, our [(UNCLEAR)] sergeant, and Les Tipton and the RSM and myself, we went up, crept up onto the track, back up onto the track, moved along,

17:00 we weren't sure, it was two o'clock in the morning and there was a little bit of moonlight, everything was pretty quiet, but we weren't sure whether the Japs had got through there or not. And we crept along probably one hundred and fifty metres to where this ammunition dump, to the junction of the track was, which I knew and was familiar with, Alola. I got to the top of this rise and there was

17:30 about fifty Japs yabbering away all round this ammunition and supply dump, yabbering excitedly and so forth. So they were behind us, and cut our sort of access for our getaway route. So Les and I debated whether we'd toss a couple of grenades into them there. But I decided that we would, had a responsibility of getting the party

18:00 back, and out back to our troops. We left there with three wounded, walking wounded we were with in the party. So we went back, we grabbed about an hours sort of rest in the position which was safe, some distance down. Next day we cut off down to Eora Creek and crossed on a log, a bridge, picked up the CO – or not the CO – a company commander, George Wright, of the 2/16th

18:30 Battalion and his batman. They'd been cut off over there. He joined the party, but he was happy for me to keep control of the – because I was IO, I knew exactly the route I had to take out to get back. I'd been trained to march by the stars too, and we could occasionally see the stars. So it took us five days. We only had a roughly one, about an emergency ration

19:00 per man per day up there. So five days we took us to take this detour around in a semicircle and cut the track behind us. And I, on the fifth day came across a track on a ridge, which followed a ridge, and it was an alternative track which the 2/16th Battalion had, the two companies of theirs had been cut off from that area, they'd used that. I didn't know it was the 2nd, I wasn't sure if they were Japs or the 2nd, but I was going ahead.

19:30 I was setting a pretty fast pace because I knew that time was the essence of the contract, and if I didn't get, hit the main track first, well I could hit it behind the Japs or in front of them. Anyway, we happened to – so I moved ahead, I was about fifty metres ahead and Les Tipton behind – he was a funny character of a chap, and a wonderful guy, and he said, "Stan," he said, "You're going too fast and so forth, we can't keep up." I said, "Les, we've got to keep moving,

20:00 I've got to get back, time's important." At any rate, another, about another few hundred metres I was suddenly confronted by somebody in front of me, down below the slope. And I've got my rifle at the ready and we sort of challenged each other, and it's Alan Haddy – I don't know whether you've heard but there's a wonderful story about Alan Haddy, I've got his book, his 'Unrewarded Heroes,' he's earned the VC

20:30 three or four times, and he's a mate of mine. I met him on the 16th on the Aquitania going over initially, he did a great job in Syria, should have got the VC then. And he was bringing up the rearguard of this 2 Company, 2/16th. I said, "Alan, do you think you could drop off just a few cans of bully beef or something, my folks are pretty starving and only had five days." So he served me a pile of this stuff, we stopped and ate this and then we carried on with them, and

21:00 we got into Templeton's Crossing half an hour before the Japs attacked there. So fortunately all of my party except myself, I think – and I was quite fit and well – but they, I think most of them, most of them were evacuated because they were not – the wounded certainly were. From that time on we carried on the same pattern

21:30 of the fighting with the withdrawal action, until we got to Myola, and of course then we had time to have a bit of a bathe and a clean up, and our chiropodist would clean up our feet a bit, and so forth. And then we went, got to Efogi and we formed a battleground there at Efogi and Mission Ridge where the next major battle

22:00 took place over a few days. That's when the 2/27th Battalion joined us and the remnants of the 9th Battalion left us, and fortunately the 2/27th were fit, strong, able, five hundred odd plus. And they were, they took the frontal position on the ridge, Mission Ridge and bore the brunt of the frontal attacks of the Japanese.

22:30 But that's where, again, the Japanese by – it was suggested that a few of the villagers who were a little bit pro-Japanese or had been coopted or forced by the Japanese, they'd guided a battalion of the Japanese around on the wide flank and cut a line between the track behind, between brigade headquarters and the three forward battalions, 14th, 16th and 27th.

23:00 And this is again where we three companies – when I say companies, we were only about thirty or forty in the company and it's normally only a platoon strength – had to put in this attack against this Japanese, almost full strength Japanese battalion, they'd cut the line and ensconced themselves overnight, between brigade headquarters and were trying to clear the track. And that's where Claude and I and many of our –

23:30 China McCallum who was awarded the VC, recommended for the VC and had previously done a wonderful job at Isurava, and many of our other good troops and 2/16th boys also were killed in that, making that attack to try and clear the Japanese from holding that position. And they couldn't get through, some of them got through, Lofty Noble and others got through, but ultimately the brigade headquarters,

24:00 the [(UNCLEAR)], they held a track with brigade headquarters, and then the 14th, 16th and 27th made a detour on an alternative track which had been discovered two days earlier, back to Menari and that's, when we got into Menari. We were the first 2/14th, we were carrying stretchers, but the 2/27th were landed with the majority of the stretchers

24:30 and they brought up the rearguard. And they did a good job, but it caused a tremendous number of casualties on the Japanese in that battle at that time. They weakened them further. And gradually their supply line was being extended further and further. So they were having difficulty. Not only that but they'd, all the supplies that we'd left at Isurava and Myola, we'd taken time to puncture all the

25:00 cans of bully beef and food and so forth, so it was all contaminated, and the Japs got into all this, because they were out of rations and so they suffered a lot of dysentery and sickness and illness through eating, you know, contaminated rations. So at this stage, we got into Menari and I was

25:30 in the forward, one of the first up, and a last little high rise moving into Menari village. And I'll never forget coming up that last little ridge, you had your heads down looking up, and your pack on your back, and looking up here, and at just the top of the ridge here was a little Salvation Army sort of tarpaulin with supplies of coffee and Albert Moore with a

26:00 great pile of cigarettes and a pile of Cadbury's milk chocolates. And he said, he was going to hand these out to each man as he came up. I stopped with him while we handed out to the first fifty or sixty, and I helped him with it, and I'll never forget the expression on the faces of each fellow as they looked up and saw this – and one would take his hand out immediately for the packet of cigarettes, the other one would take the block of chocolate. The expressions on

26:30 their faces was just incredible. It was like manna from heaven. Albert Moore, you know, was loved by all of our people, because he was always up close to the battle front and giving a cheery word or a cup of coffee or something. So then we only got the 14th and the 16th into Menari and then the Japs would, the Australians, some of our rear echelon,

27:00 including Bill Russell our 2IC, who wrote the history. He brought a party of our people plus others up and they formed a defence position just forward of Menari, between the Mission Ridge and Menari, and so they held it, delayed the Japs there before they could get it. But it wasn't only a matter of hours before they were starting to bring fire onto Menari, so we had to withdraw to another position, we again had

27:30 Nauro and further back until ultimately we came a couple of day's time we came to Ioribaiwa Ridge.

That's where we held them for four days. After Menari they formed what was left of the 14th and the 16th into a composite battalion, roughly I'd say about two hundred strong at that stage, maybe a bit over two hundred, got the figures somewhere.

28:00 And then we fought them back there to Ioribaiwa, then we held the main position on the ridge at Ioribaiwa Ridge, we held that for four days. Our pits were dug and we were being, some of the pits were being picked off by their mountain guns firing across the valley, over open sites, and we lost quite a few of our fellows in the last few, four days there. In the meantime, the 25th Brigade had come up behind

28:30 and we were reinforcing. We had the 3rd militia battalion and joined and formed a position on one slope, one side of the ridge. And ultimately they couldn't advance from there and they ultimately decided the new brigade and the 16th Brigade joined there and they decided to withdraw to Imita Ridge, which they did do. We were – on the 16th September – we were relieved and

29:00 withdrawn and the 25th Brigade took over our positions. And we went back then to Koitaki or that area, Bidjuberi [?] and others joined us. Some of those who'd been cut off in the bush rejoined us, and we also, some came back out of the hospital. We got reinforcements, we got some three or four hundred –

29:30 we didn't get that many, we got a lot of reinforcements from Queensland, Queenslanders and others and we regrouped. Had roughly three weeks training to regroup, but we never got our strength up beyond about three hundred and fifty in that time.

When you went in, how many men did you start with on the Kokoda campaign and how many were left?

Five hundred and forty-six, and they were –

30:00 it was roughly seventy that we, were drawn out, that was joined by one of the other groups that were cut off that rejoined us then, so we had about one hundred and twenty. I think it's spelt out in the stuff that I've got there, but off the, off my head, I think it was roughly about one hundred and twenty.

Tape 15

00:54 **[General] Blamey's famous or infamous speech, what**

01:00 **part did you play in that?**

I've left with you a little, the paper, it's called the Koitaki Factor, and it was written by Ralph Honner, Colonel Ralph Honner. And he spelt it out very clearly

01:30 what was said, and the reaction it had on a great number of our troops that were survived. Myself personally, I was the adjutant at that time, I was IO over the [(UNCLEAR)] but I was made adjutant after we withdrew. In the few weeks that we regathered, I was adjutant of the battalion, and we

02:00 were re-equipped with new equipment, new outfits and uniforms, and the whole brigade, what was listed at that time. It was probably, instead of being say nearly between two and two and half thousand, it was more likely to be about a thousand to fifteen hundred strong, was lined up at Koitaki as a parade,

02:30 it'd been ordered by General Tom Blamey, and it was a great parade. They turned out well and they were well drilled and well disciplined, and they looked good, it was the feel, the atmosphere up there in the mountains in that area overlooking the plains. And we felt, you know, that we were going to get

03:00 complimented on the fact we'd saved Port Moresby and that we'd, the task - we'd sort of decimated the Japanese and turned them around the first time that had happened since the Japanese ended the war virtually. Instead of that he came out with this, with some unaccountable reason, you know, his lack of logic,

03:30 nobody seems to understand why he would do it or why he would choose the words that he did choose. But I was only ten metres from where he spoke, we had a fulcrum or a platform which he spoke, I was standing out in front of our battalion. And I could hear every word that he said quite clearly.

04:00 And you know, he inferred and then stated that we'd been beaten by inferior forces, and that we had not coped well with, we were lacking in sort of aggressive attitude or words to those effect. And that, he said, like the rabbit that runs, it gets shot

04:30 when it gets out of the burrow. These were words – it's all, that's from my recollection, but it – I don't particularly want to say any more, because I know the feeling. There was murmuring instead of the normal disciplinary steadiness, you could hear this shuffling and the murmuring and this sort of unhappiness

05:00 coming from the rear behind me, of all the troops. And there was almost a suggestion I've heard that people, that they were almost to reach the stage where they were almost ready to shoot him. But that's

hearsay, I didn't experience any of that. But I was most unhappy and very wild and really very, very, extremely angry, because he'd – I knew exactly that this was a job that

05:30 my brother and people like Maurie Tracey and Bruce Kingsbury and Teddy Bear and Charlie McCallum, all these boys, every one of the battalion had done. And the effect that they'd had on the Japanese and the Japs had been defeated by, his supply had been decimated through battle casualties and sickness and illness, right throughout the whole track, his line of supply had been so extended that he couldn't no longer maintain it, forced the withdrawal.

06:00 And I mean it's been said in history books that okay, he had the order from Guadalcanal that the troops couldn't handle it anymore; they were being withdrawn because they needed Guadalcanal. But there's no way in the world that the Japanese that were left there with the lack of supply line and everything else, could have made any impression, could have gone any further than they did at Ioribaiwa Ridge. No possibility that they could have.

06:30 So a lot of these comments are made by historians perhaps to justify some of the errors that were made by, in the higher army and political areas. I was enraged as so were many, many, many of our, I'd say probably all of them were. And they never forgave

07:00 Blamey for it. We were ordered, the officers were ordered afterwards to meet Blamey in the big marquee and there were six officers from our battalion that refused to go and attend that. And I was one of the six officers that refused. It has been said that [(UNCLEAR)] has been suggested that Blamey didn't say those words or he misconstrued them

07:30 or misstated them. There's no doubt in my mind, and in 'Blue' Steward's book, 'The Memoirs of a Regimental Medical Officer', the history of the 2/16th Battalion, he spelt out exactly the same. Peter Brune and Lex McAuley [historians] have all spelt out the same. And even Carlyon, who was his ADC [Aide de Camp]

08:00 who was standing alongside him, he said the selection of words were completely inadequate and he couldn't understand why he said these words.

You had buried your own brother and left him up there. How did you feel under those circumstances?

Oh well that was, that's what partly contributed to my bitterness and feelings against Blamey at the time. You know, I just

08:30 couldn't understand it. And the whole brigade, everybody in the brigade was just completely, oh, absolutely disgusted and almost horrified at the words that he used, because they knew them to be so inaccurate. And Blamey, at that time he had a mixed reputation, but from that time onwards as far as the brigades' concerned, in fact most of the

09:00 divisions, Australian divisions, he never got over, he was never forgiven really by the majority of the troops.

What were the repercussions of that speech in terms of the troop's future behaviour in battle?

Well it's been spelt out in this, Ralph Honner's, that I've left you, the Koitaki Factor, that there are

09:30 many officers and men of the battalion that when it came later, a few weeks later in Gona operations, where they were forced into making attacks there against Japanese that had had time, months and months to prepare a magnificent defensive position, pillboxes which were almost impregnable. They'd had great kapok

10:00 pads to put over their [(UNCLEAR)] and supplied, they had a great many sandbags and they had coconut trees on top of all this with a pillbox. [They] had them sited so that they, any direct attack against them or any attack against them, they'd be insulated by another pillbox. And there was no groundcover in which to approach them at all. The only way you could possibly kill them was to – if you were fortunate enough to drop a five hundred pound or a one thousand pound

10:30 bomb and make a direct hit on one of those pillboxes. Or by, at night time, pinpointing the exact position and perhaps getting a few patrols of brave men to go out and try and get a grenade in through some of the apertures or the openings of the grenade slits. That was about the only chance you had to do a killing and achieve destruction of them with a

11:00 minimum amount of casualties. But instead of that, the orders from higher up, hierarchy was time was the factor. They were all afraid that with the pretty strong force of reinforcement that the Japanese had at Rabaul, that they could feed over fresh forces to defeat what was left of the Australian forces, able to. So

11:30 I have bitter memories about that.

Were the troops themselves, not withstanding any orders that they had, were they trying to kind of prove something to the hierarchy?

Yeah, as I say, I got off the track there. There were, I think there were definitely some cases where officers and men, they were not going to retreat at any cost.

12:00 And they had no hope at all of achieving their objectives there, but they carried on, and as a result they lost their lives or were wounded to the stage where they were out of battle. And I don't think there's any question about that, there were many where this was done, if I can carry on and say for the first…

12:30 can I go into Gona or …?

Yes, sure, I want you to be able to make that connection between what Blamey and [General] MacArthur were saying and perhaps the degree of recklessness, if you like?

Well, see when we went, we were flown over, we were only – each of the three battalions were rebuilt or restrengthened,

13:00 some back from the bush cut off, others from the hospital, others were wounded, some reinforcements – we were flown back to Nadzab, not to Nadzab, we were flown back to Popondetta, and from there we moved to Dobodura and then Soputa and then on to Gona. In the meantime the 25th Brigade and the 16th Brigade, had been endeavouring, and the 3rd Battalion,

13:30 had been endeavouring to destroy the Japs that were in these pillboxes. Well they'd run out of, with the fight they'd had to pursue and had battles encountering some of the rear fights against the Japanese, both at Eora Creek and Templeton's Crossing was the first battles they had, and then later on a couple on the plains. But they'd,

14:00 the Japanese had withdrawn into their defensive position at Gona, Sanananda and Buna. Well by this time the 25th Brigade had weakened. They'd lost many in battle casualties, they'd lost many in sickness and wounded, and ultimately they weren't strong enough to take Gona, to capture the Gona position. So we were flown over to do that, do that job. And the

14:30 39th Battalion was later flown over too. They'd been reinforced up to full strength. And the first night we were sent in, the 14th Battalion, we were sent in to obtain a position on the south east of the Gona mission itself.

15:00 And it had to go in on that day, we arrived on the 28th November and the attack had to go in on the 29th. This was the orders from high up, and the 16th and 27th were going to put in an attack at virtually the same time. We moved in through to the area we were directed to, and the 25th Brigade scouts or patrol

15:30 had indicated that the area was all clear, and that was incorrect, incorrect information, intelligence. We'd sent out a couple of patrols to try and reconnaissance the route we had to take and to ensure there was nothing. Well one patrol had gone a little bit far

16:00 south, and not confronted anything. They came across a party of twenty Japs, but they didn't at that time, well they did ultimately kill them and destroy them, but they didn't get to the point where we were supposed to assemble for that night to make the attack on the following day. We moved in [(UNCLEAR)], the first few hundred metres were through shrub and stuff and after that we were going through swamp up to our, almost up to

16:30 our chests. We were taking a sig wire [signal wire] with us and by this time I pleaded with our CO, Colonel Challender at that stage, I said that our patrols haven't reported back. We've got no idea whether the Japs are occupying this position or not. Can't we get through to brigade headquarters and see if we can't

17:00 get, delay it. It was getting towards you know, dusk. Get permission to make a reconnaissance, proper reconnaissance, to make sure that we can pinpoint the Japanese positions, and be sure where they are. No, we had to go, we had to go ahead. We continued to move through the swamp and ultimately one company reported some Japs on the beach in front of them. And then they went ahead into,

17:30 they went straight ahead into these pillboxes, enfiladed pillbox positions and by this time it was just dark, dusk, and the Japs could see all our fellows coming through the light and this. We lost six of our best officers and forty of our other ranks killed in that one night, that ill-conceived attack without any reconnaissance, any pinpointing of the Jap position, of knowing, having any idea where the pillboxes were sited or

18:00 come. And that – then we were, we withdrew, we had to get the wounded out. Had a task of getting the wounded out, I was able to place each stretcher bearer on, given one of the fellows a hold of the sig wire to guide them through the dark and the swamp and get them out. And then we – next two days

18:30 we then moved further down the beach and got on to the beach and then moved actually firstly north, north west into their position. We made two further attacks there, still not being given time to try and get small patrols to try and pinpoint the positions of their pillboxes. Again, we lost

19:00 a good many casualties in those two days. They could pick us out, our fellows out, and Mocker Tracey was shot, he was the company commander and awarded the MC [Military Cross] at Isurava. He was

leading A Company in this. We lost many others in that time. Harry Saunders, the Aboriginal boy, and Morrie Valet [?], our rover from the footy team at Puckapunyal, and many of these others. I was only, I was

19:30 with the artillery OP [Observation Post], we were giving artillery support fire and trying to get mortar support fire on them. But ultimately we put a final charge in and I paraded myself to the brigadier and said, well can't we, we wasted, throwing in every man and his pack without giving us time to reconnaissance, and we were wasting lives, you know it gave us that time to get organised and pinpoint

20:00 some of the positions. And we went in and we made the attack and we captured the area and we've got pictures and the photographs, we got the battalion headquarters, almost the best part of the battalion. But we killed them all in the pillboxes and from that time onwards we were no longer ordered with time factor on our hands, it was so desperate, you've got to get victory, you've got to keep – well Gona didn't go 'til later on, 'til about

20:30 after December, you know, 'til well later on.

Who do you blame for those unnecessary casualties?

I think, I think probably if you look back, I'd say MacArthur and the hierarchy because they wanted a victory, they wanted an American victory, and they wanted a victory, to say Gona's gone. Or Buna's gone, they wanted to see Buna and Gona gone, because of the, that was the

21:00 ambition. That's in retrospect, looking back over all the evidence that was available, that seems to be the – I wouldn't know at the time except we knew from our military training and our know-how and experience that the tactics we were using, we couldn't help, couldn't help but lose you know a lot of men, a lot of casualties, which you know, we believed at the time even were unnecessary. Certainly in retrospect

21:30 were certainly unnecessary.

What were your feelings towards the Japanese at this stage, you spoke earlier about needing to get that sort of killer instinct – what was your state of mind by now?

Well, I mean we'd heard, we knew that they were fanatical fighters, that they were, they had a culture that they – it was great

22:00 to die for their country, for their Emperor and that they wouldn't, they wouldn't surrender, they would you know, fight to the death. And you had to, really you had to kill them and weed them out. You just couldn't afford to take any risks with them. So you had to be merciless and you had to make sure that you used every effort in your power to kill them, but it was, it was not

22:30 good to know that we were losing so many casualties ourselves when at that stage at Gona, it just didn't seem necessary when we could have killed them. From after those first three, four days, the first assaults, the casualties we suffered – sixty, probably, well altogether, all my casualties are spelt out over there,

23:00 we lost sixty, eighty or a hundred casualties. Many more through sickness and wounded. We were able to use our own tactics in dealing with the Japanese. Fresh reinforcements of Japanese were landed on the west of Gona,

23:30 and our battalion had just, after capturing on the position, the Japanese positions on the south and the east, we moved back and 39th came in and the 16th and 27th were still battling. We had to confront, we were asked to try and investigate the force that had been landed on the west of Gona, and a

24:00 patrol of fifty of our fellows under Bob Dougherty, our lieutenant, Bob Dougherty, he was selected and he went ahead and their forward scouts detected a couple of the Japanese sentries. And they dealt with them quietly and then he proceeded straight into attack, a party of roughly three hundred fresh Japanese that had been landed by submarine there. And he went in and in that attack they caused, inflicted ninety casualties on the Japanese and

24:30 they had six wounded themselves, six wounded in amongst his, of his fifty. He held the position there, the rest of our battalion went up the following day and joined that position, we formed a line there and the Japs subsequently withdrew back into Haddy's Village. Which, they had a perimeter defence there with the sea to their back, and by this time, by this stage, we'd

25:00 carried our forward patrols, fighting patrols forward of our position, killing a lot more Japs. Dougherty was responsible for killing more, his patrols, for killing more Japs, bringing a lot of ammunition and weapons back, captured weapons and stuff back, whittling Japs off the whole time. And he – 39th Battalion were then sent [to] Gona.

25:30 Gona was captured finally with the attack of the combined 16th, 17th a lot of artillery and supporting fire. And then the 39th Battalion was sent around our patrol, 14 Patrol led them into position there. Our forward sergeant was leading the patrol. He came across three of the main force, Japanese force that had apparently been bathing in a pool at the back or something and they had their towels,

26:00 carrying their towels and it happened to be the CO, their colonel, plus their 2IC and their adjutant, three key people in this group. And he sent word back to Ralph Honner who was behind him, “What’ll I do?” He said, “Shoot them.” And so Bobby shot the three of them with his Thompson submachine gun. And that was the, you know, the leaders of this particular group that

26:30 were there. Well for several days we, the 39th, a combination of the 39th and we 14th, the chaps that we were up against, they withdrew into join up the group that was in Haddy’s Village. And we had roughly, initially, you know, there were four or five hundred of the Japanese there, but ultimately we put [an] attack in on the final day and the final day we actually whittled them off the stage. There was only one Jap left alive when we went in to the final attack.

27:00 Bob Dougherty was killed in an earlier patrol. And Sergeant Truscott, who was one of our sergeants who took part in the successful attack on the east of Gona, he was sniped too, he was killed. But we only lost – in the whole of our operations after those first three days – something like nearly six weeks, eight weeks, ten weeks – we only lost about ten, twelve

27:30 casualties. And we killed something like over four hundred Japanese at that time, the battalion.

How did your parents find out about Butch?

Well they – we’d had letters from them

28:00 and from – I heard Mum and Dad had got a telegram, the fact to say that Butch was killed and I was missing in action on the one day. And they were of course devastated. And then they got a single telegram the next day to say that I’d reported back to the lines the next day, which was, they were pretty thankful. But I mean it

28:30 was devastating to them too and they reacted, but their letters still continued to come, and some pretty good letters.

Did you write to them about it?

Yeah, I’ve brought some of the letters with me there.

What did you tell them?

Well I wasn’t, I don’t think I could tell, I don’t think I told them, I couldn’t give them too much because it was all censored, but –

29:00 and I don’t think that I’ve got, I looked, went through those letters, I couldn’t find anywhere where I said that’s the other thing, that he did such a good job. And – but other things, but I probably expressed a little bit of bitterness in some of them.

Tape 16

00:45 **Stan, just moving on towards the end of the war, how did you hear about the end of the war? Where were you and how did you hear about it?**

01:00 I was in Morotai on Corps Headquarters when the Pacific War was finished. And I was, had the role of G2 operations. I’d been attending the senior tactical school at Beenleigh, down here, I’d come down from our unit, from the tablelands, and this was

01:30 a six week course, and we were at the end of the fifth week. The chief instructor at the college there got a signal from General Morshead at Corps Headquarters, that I was seconded from my unit to go up to Morotai on Corps Headquarters to participate in the battle of Borneo and Balikpapan and this sort of really horrified me because I was

02:00 attending. But anyway I had no option but to go along with the orders and when I got up to Morotai I paraded myself to General Morshead, and Phil Roden, my CO, he also put in an application for me to come back to the unit, as I’d been there from start to finish with the unit, and through every operation, campaign. I just didn’t want to miss the last one, Balikpapan.

02:30 Paraded myself to Morshead in Morotai and he wouldn’t have a bar of it unfortunately. He said, “I need you, I want you here on the operations board.” So I couldn’t, I was very upset and sorry about that, but I particularly

03:00 wanted to work with Phil Roden in the Balikpapan campaign. As they came through, battalions came through, a few days or weeks later, I saw Phil and he sort of tried again, but we didn’t have any success. And we were able to keep contact with one another, and I certainly had – at Corps Headquarters at Morotai,

03:30 was able to virtually help with the running of the battle there on the major planning board.

What about hearing about the end of the war?

Well that was then just, that's about a month, that was about a month after that I think. I was – we heard the news that VP [Victory in the Pacific] had been declared. I was – Brigadier Wells, who was G3, G1 operations,

04:00 he said, "Well," he said, "Bisset you're orderly officer tonight, because there could be troubles." Troubles, this was the VP and we had open air picture, films there at Morotai on the Peninsula, and so I had to put on my side arms and go parading around the place and be left out of all the fun. And there really was a bit of fun because

04:30 the people over at the open air theatre, they were apparently watching some sort of war film and when VP was announced through the – or over the microphone there at the film, a lot of soldiers all over the peninsula were firing off their guns. And

05:00 the people in the film show they were thinking that the Japs had landed on the peninsula. So I had to sort of temporarily, or just quell it, try and quieten down a panic that had set in. But about two o'clock in the morning he said, "Well you can be off duty now, it'll be all right." And in the meantime all the officers from the corps had gone down to the 2/5th and the 2/9th AGH [Australian General Hospital] which was just down a few hundred metres

05:30 down the peninsula. And the nursing – I had spent a few days, I got a coral ear infection there at one time through diving, and I knew quite a few of them down there, but they were having a great sort of wind-up and celebration party. And when I arrived there I was rather horrified to see what was going on. They were really celebrating in many ways, and I felt sort of stone cold sober

06:00 and – but I just spent a short time there and then, we came back. But it was a tremendous relief. But then I was – once that happened I was anxious to – you had to sort of wait your turn, but 'Bomber' Wells said, "Well you've been in long enough, you had so many days overseas on your record that if you can organise a flight back, do so." Well Bill Lynn, a chap that, he was over there on a different job and

06:30 he knew a couple of the American Liberator pilots. And he jumped me up with one of these two, he said, 'We'll give you a ride, we'll hitchhike you a ride, you can hitchhike." So we had a jeep with our gear, what we gear we had, who'd pull up at the end of the runway with the jeep, and I'll let the bomb bays down and as soon as you see the bomb bays come, rush over, put your stuff on board and hop in.

07:00 And that's what we did; the two of us went up in our shorts and summer dress up this bomb bay, the Liberators. We came back and landed at Darwin, we were up about – we froze, we were so cold in the – no [air]conditioning and all the time had the sort of thought that you might let the bomb bays open … and we'd drop down above Darwin somewhere. So that's how we got back to Darwin and then they went on to Brisbane from there,

07:30 and ultimately got back and discharged in Melbourne, you know, not so many weeks after the VP. But Phil Roden stayed on with the battalion he was responsible for, looking after some of the reconciliation and the rounding up of the prisoners and, in the Celebes sort of thing. He had a pretty responsible job,

08:00 and did a good job.

What about the reunion with your family?

Well that was, that was pretty emotional, and great. I had, on my final leave I had met my wife to be – or actually, no I – that's right I was married on my long leave, the final long leave I'd had from the tablelands, after the

08:30 Ramu Valley campaign, 1944, '45. And I had asked to go to and then with Mum and Dad I had spent a bit of time with them, made sure that they were happy. I saw quite a lot of them then, from then on.

How different were you

09:00 **from the man who'd gone to war?**

I was in a job with Vesteys, which was a very big organisation, big meat people; they had great enormous properties up in the north and in England. And I'd written to them and told them that I'd be leaving the army, and that I was just interested to know what job,

09:30 they were obliged to give me a job. I was in the costing department in Vesteys and I'd done accountancy and I'd also had been with an engineering firm… sorry…

10:00 Just temporarily sidetracked there …..

I was curious to know how different a man you were from the one who embarked on that ship five years earlier?

10:30 I was leading up to say that I'd written to this man, I felt that, I asked him about the job and he said well, he'd wrote me a letter back, and I was pretty good mates with him. He'd had a – he'd come from Sydney, he was the managing director of Vesteys in Sydney here – and he had a son that when I came over to play with the trials for the Wallabies and so forth, he had

11:00 brought his son along to the dressing room to meet me and so forth, and talk about it, and you know, I got on pretty well with him. And I wrote to him and said what sort of position and he said, “Well, obviously you’ve been away for two or three years, it’ll take you a while to get back into things.” And he said could only offer you a sort of a sub-manager of one of their smallgoods or something like that, at so much, you know, a week, which was pretty

11:30 negligible at that time. And I had told him that in during the army, period that I was in the army, I’d attended initially a four months officers cadet training school, which qualified, gave you a lot of qualifications for many things. I’d also attended a six week intelligence course which also covered a lot of things. I’d also attended a

12:00 signal course, which – three weeks – which helped considerably. I’d attended a Marist Brothers junior staff school at Brisbane here for a ten weeks course. I’d also attended a… but I’d also attended the Beenleigh Tactical School, so I’d done another school, apart from all the other experiences that I’d had of being leading man and

12:30 administrative details for the running of the battalion and the preparing of exercises and training of the battalion. I felt that the experience that I’d gained could be of considerable benefit to the organisation. I expected a, some sort of position that would warrant that I could prove myself and warrant adjustment.

13:00 But at any rate I didn’t proceed with that and I ultimately went, joined an engineering company, a job which I had with my brother-in-law, and became a secretary and director of the company, which started off with about eight people and finished up with over a hundred in them at that time. That was the company there, but as far as myself personally, I felt – well I

13:30 felt a pretty confident sort of person. And – but very bitter with certain memories, recollections of the war and things. Some things that were so unnecessary that we lost so many of my wonderful mates that it just left something a little bit bitter and also the need for observance

14:00 to be made of the errors of high command and in command generally of these things, in case there were any future wars I felt that there’s a lot of, an improvement. But I felt that we’d been successful in winning the war for Australia and that we felt proud. I still felt, I still felt a pretty keen relationship

14:30 with both Britain and with America, and our allies. I don’t know whether it affected me in any way. I felt the loss of Harold, and the fact it’s been with me ever since. I mean I know that many times when we have a reunion, when I meet some of his mates from his platoon and others that you know, it brings back memories. And the night time,

15:00 at some times on occasions it just does affect me, it’s always there, it’s got like a computer that your brain’s like a computer and I think it brings back pictures, vivid pictures sometimes, of things that happened, of good times and bad times. I think that’s about it Tim.

15:30 **Was it all worth it?**

I think that it was definitely, yeah, I think it was – I don’t think it was worth losing my brother, but on the other hand there were so many of my good mates and everybody else’s brothers and things. But there had to be causalities and I would probably prefer it to have been myself than

16:00 him. It was, but I felt that there was a great deal of faith in my attitude to the war and to the existence of a soldier. And I felt more and more convinced after I had the incident at Gona when I had [been] confronted by sort of a sniper

16:30 duel with three or four of the Japanese, that I managed to spot and hit a couple of them and one sniper got on to me and the first one went through my gaiter at the side there, the next one cut the cord on the top of my tin hat, the camouflage net on the top of my tin hat, and the next one went through the side of my eye. And it broke all the skin, it

17:00 was cut, but didn’t do any damage at all, I just needed a good band-aid to fix it. But it was enough to get me out from the recce position that I had. There was two of our fellows, both had got the MM [Military Medal] later, they were in a, went a bit just inland from the beach side. I’d crept out on to the side of the beach, and I could see this Jap position, and I

17:30 said, “They’re on to me, I’m getting out of here.” so I wormed like a snake out pretty quickly.

Someone was looking after you.

Yeah, yeah. I think that the thoughts of Mum and Dad, we had, they were great wonderful, wonderful Christians, and they were sort of

18:00 teetotallers and non-smokers and that sort of thing. And they were up and we, in the later years nothing would give my Dad greater pleasure, he had a tenor voice. We used to sing duets and nothing would be, I sang, we sang together in a choir at the church and nothing would give me greater pleasure than Mum, Dad, for us to walk over from Surrey Hills to the Presbyterian Church

18:30 there. The family on the odd occasion when we had the four boys and the girl in the, and our two

parents all in one line and singing together and going to the church. That used to thrill them to have us there when we were all sort of grown up, occasions.

Was there room for forgiveness after the war?

I don't think I could ever forgive

19:00 when I've heard, I didn't directly experience any of the atrocities that the Japanese did commit, but like some at Changi, but I've had some first hand stories I've had from Weary Dunlop that he's told me at two, three o'clock in the morning when we've been having a few drinks together. And I've heard from others, Mick Smith, who was in the 2/22nd Battalion

19:30 who were captured, or a lot of his mates were captured and he got out, but captured in Rabaul. And the atrocities there where they tied the, our men, the 2/22nd Battalion boys, they tied them up against trees and then their officer made them, used them as target practice, you know, still alive. And just bayoneted them while they were tied up on the trees and different parts of them used like. We did it with a straw

20:00 sack, a straw bag full of wheat or something, we'd have to use for targets. And practice our bayonet fighting with rifles. But they did this, but they – then they went beyond the pale by doing things, such things as, like cutting their penises off and then putting them in their mouths in front of them and that sort of thing. You know,

20:30 incredible things.

What would they do?

They cut their penises off and then put them, put it in their mouths in front of them. This is the actual truth, the story that happened in Rabaul to some of the 2/22nd boys. I don't see the reason of it, the purpose, but maybe it was just the innate

21:00 cruelty or so and so. But I mean I don't have the same feelings now against the Japanese. We – I believe it's the culture and by the Emperor existed then and I would hope that it never, that it has gone, because I know that the 39th, some of the 39th boys met some of the Japanese and have entertained them. They've dined together in a restaurant in Melbourne.

21:30 And I know that my wife and I did a trip down from, through the Rockies down through Salt Lake City and down that area, and that – when we were up at Jasper and Lake Louise, there was a, we went up onto the glacier and there was a special machine, they go up on the glacier,

22:00 and there was a group of Japanese with, obviously a tourist group with a leader and they had little supplies of stuff. But they went on the glacier and just Doreen and I were on it too. And when we got up the top of this glacier it was pretty cold and snowing and frozen. And anyway they unloaded quite a bit of stuff and a few bottles of Scotch whisky and other things, and they just pulled out a few and they had salmon and things. And they poured out a few

22:30 whiskies, and we were some distance away, and one of the Japanese looked over and may have seen me looking in their direction or something. And he came over and gave me a whisky, you know, it just made an impact on me. And my daughter and my granddaughter have spent a year over there in an exchange

23:00 with Japanese families.

Just at the very sort of closing stages of the war, there must have been a great weariness that had set in. I mean how did you manage to keep going?

I, well I felt that it was like a football match. No matter how tough it is or

23:30 how trying, I think you start the game and you're going to finish it to the end. And this was a battle and a war to be won, and I was going to be in it until I could no longer participate, and I had no desire to get out before I was forced out, either by injury or I was killed. And I think that applied to most of our fellows. We had joined up, we had

24:00 an objective to be achieved, it was to defeat the enemy and – but we tried to make sure that Australia was a free country and that our loved ones would survive, and we could go on from strength to strength and perhaps make it a war to end wars. I think that was predominant in most of our minds.

24:40 **INTERVIEW ENDS. Tape continues with memorabilia.**

25:00 **(Memorabilia)**

25:30 **(Memorabilia)**

26:00 **(Memorabilia)**

26:30 **(Memorabilia)**

27:00 **(Memorabilia)**

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31:00 **(Memorabilia)**

31:30 **(Memorabilia)**

32:00 **(Memorabilia)**

32:30 **(Memorabilia)**

33:00 **(Memorabilia)**

33:38 **Tape ends**