Australians at War Film Archive

Raymond Coombes (Jimmy) - Transcript of interview

Date of interview: 16th January 2004

http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/1224

Tape 1

00:46 **Right Jimmy as I said, we'd just like to start the interview by having you give us a brief overview of your life from the time you were born, through your service to a few years just post war, if you could just give us that in one sort of fairly condensed answer?**

Well

01:00 I was born at Forbes on the upper Hastings and I was the fourth son of a family of six boys. My father had a background very English. His parents migrated from England from Dorset and on my mother's side

01:30 Mum's family was Scotch, very Scotch and migrated and came to Australia and Dad's side of the family took up farming on the Hastings and Mum's people came from Wollongong to Bellingen and selected a property at Hides Creek

02:00 and that property, just digressing slightly, is still in the hands of the same family, Kettles, over a hundred years. When I was about three years old Dad moved to the Bellinger as he was a dairy farmer and rented a property at a place called Gordon Wall. That's where I grew up. I went to school there in a little country school

02:30 which was built on the edge of our property. 30 people, 30 pupils and one teacher and I left school when I was 13, there about and I worked on the farm with my father and my brothers until I was about

03:00 16 but in that time I'd had an accident with a, my brother accidentally shot me with a 22 rifle and the bullet went in my nose there and across my mouth and the lead is still there in my neck. That was when I was about 15, between 14 and 15. I survived, as you know, but it took me a long time to get over it.

03:30 In those days, we were a long way from the local hospital and no ambulances but Dad had a car and the neighbour wrapped my head up in a wet sheet and got me to hospital and tried to congeal the blood and that sort of thing but eventually I got over it and then there was nothing much going

04:00 for people of our age, back in the early 1930's and I had a dispute with my father one morning when we were milking at the cow bales and he showed me the gate so I went down to Mum and Mum said, "What's wrong?" I said, "Dad and I have had a fight," and, well we didn't actually fight but we did argue

04:30 so I took off so Mum gave me five shillings and I hopped on a cream lorry and I went into my uncles place, who had just taken up a farm just on the edge of Bellingen near the butter factory, because my cousin Morris, we were great mates and I just wanted somewhere to

05:00 put my head down I suppose and my uncle said, "Well you can work here with me, chipping thistles and working with Morris, for 10 shillings a week." Well I stayed there for a few months and then my uncle got me a job across the road with people by the name of Clements, Bill Clements and his wife and I worked there

05:30 on the farm doing, you know farm labouring for a pound a week and that was good money in those days cause you were able to look after yourself, buy your own clothes and you had a place to stay. You had food and you were able to cloth yourself. Well then I went from there to, he was a pretty hard boss that bloke

06:00 and went from there to Brownley's whom I knew from Mum's side of the family. They grew up together and that was Sam and Mrs Brownley and their daughter Rita. I was not sweet on Rita but however later in the

06:30 story we became close and eventually towards the end of the war, we were married. From there, while I was at that farm, I got sick of working there and I went from there to, worked for two brothers who were bachelors, Joyce brothers

07:00 and I was getting 25 shillings a week there and that was a lot of money and they were wonderful blokes, both gone now of course. I'd went to school with Terry, the youngest of the two brothers and we were great mates and it was from there that I enlisted in the army but before doing

07:30 so my mother and I went to Newcastle. I had saved up 12 pounds and paid my fare to Newcastle and we went down and stayed with Mum's sister in Newcastle and on New Year's Day

08:00 1940 we were in Sydney and I saw the first contingent of the 6th Division march through Sydney on their pre embarkation. From there I came home and I enlisted. I was only 17 but

08:30 the recruitment had closed so therefore I had to wait until I was finally called up in May 1940 and then from there I went into the army, after a problem, because my father had had a bad accident with his right

09:00 hand and he couldn't write. He had blood poisoning in his hand and it crippled his hand and my mother had to sign cheques and do all the signing and when I fronted up to the desk at Paddington, they queried the second signature and I was told to stand over there and I thought that was the end of it because I was very boyish. I was only 17 and very boyish. I hadn't shaved

09:30 and after a while the sergeant I s'pose he was, called me over and he said, "What's the idea of this?" and I explained to him and he said, and I had put my age up to 20 incidentally, and he said, "And you're not 20 either," and I said, "But I'm looking after myself. I'm earning my own living,"

10:00 and he sort of gave me a bit of a, I can remember it very distinctly. He looked at me again and grinned. He said, "Oh away you go," and then I got my regimental number and took the oath on the bible and I was in the army and I enjoyed every day of my army career. How much further do you want me to go than that? Keep going?

Maybe if you just give us a brief

10:30 **location by location account of, without going into too much detail, just location by location account?**

The chappies I went into the army with were a lot of north coast boys. They were from Tweed Heads to Newcastle. All good blokes, you know. Came from the Clarence, the Richmond, the Tweed and we, you know you sort of, they were good blokes. All country blokes, like yourself.

11:00 We had our first night in the Sydney showground standing on straw in the cattle pens I remember and next morning, one of the humorous sides of your early days, we were lining up for breakfast and it was burger or porridge as we call it and

11:30 you had a dixie and you put it out and they put the porridge in the dixie and you had a mug and they had, you had to say either 'black tea' or 'white tea' and we're all the queue and I came along, my turn and I put my dixie out, got my what's a name but the chappie in front of me, he, a sergeant by the name of

12:00 Barraclough, now I've never forgotten that name and he was bending over, he was dishing out the tea and this bloke in front of me he said, "Black tea," and Barraclough put white tea in and the bloke stepped back and kicked him in the backside and I thought, "Oh God," you know, and me only a kid, I didn't know what to do and the sergeant looked straight at me and I said, "It wasn't me sir," and that was my first incident I remember.

12:30 From there we went that day to Greta Camp and Greta was just opened and we were the first troops that occupied the wooden huts in Greta and that's where we did our initial training. I enjoyed everything

13:00 we did, I enjoyed. It was a break away from the dairy farms and you mixed with good blokes and I was able to have freedom. I had a beer and got drunk, you know, we really enjoyed life. There was a few thousand of us there I suppose

13:30 and the leave trains would come home on a Sunday night from Sydney, Newcastle, Maitland and the train would go on to Greta but then you had to get a taxi back to the camp but that soon stopped because when we got opposite the camp, somebody would pull the emergency cord and the train would stop and you'd just get out and you'd go straight up to your camp, save your taxi

14:00 fare. Well after a while, we were there about two months I s'pose, after a while the train used to automatically stop then. They didn't have to pull a cord. From there, we were then the 2nd reinforcements for the 6th Division and we had our final leave, which was a bit

14:30 traumatic for me, leaving Mum and my two brothers still going to school and Dad and that sort of thing and as I said I was only just 18 and never been away from home but once I got away, got on the train, I never looked back and we

15:00 went from there to, in the early hours of the morning by train to Darling Harbour and we boarded the

Aquitania and I was never very confident that I would make it until I got into my cabin on that ship and I knew that he couldn't get me back so from there we

15:30 went, we were out a few days and got to Adelaide and thinking that we would get leave, day or night's leave there at Adelaide but the troops prior to us, the 6th Division had played up badly, so no leave for us. However it almost caused a

16:00 riot on our ship. The old Brigadier that was in charge of the ship, the troops was a Pommy and I don't think they like Australians very well, but however he said he would go ashore and see what he could do about leave. Well within a very short time, by the time he got down

16:30 the gangplank and onto the lighter, or the, that was taking him to the shore, cases of oranges appeared and they pelted him with oranges. Well that was the end of the leave so anyhow after a few days at sea, they had a wet canteen and right down at the aft end of the ship. I can remember very distinctly,

17:00 with that many sweating bodies, spilt beer. When the ship rolled the beer would sloosh over that side and sloosh back that side but we enjoyed it. You could get a fire bucket or a dixie whatever it was, for two shillings and you'd go up on deck and you'd drink the beer out of the bucket. Well during one of these, one of the

17:30 episodes there a chappie had got, under the influence, he'd climbed up the, one of the, or tried to climb up one of the funnels of the aft of the ship and he got overcome with the fume and he crashed onto the deck. He was killed. I don't know who he was but next day we buried him at sea and that was the first casualty we'd had in our. Well we went from there

18:00 to Bombay and I remember the sergeant who was in charge of us was a chap by the name of Alf Bowen and Alf was a, you know a bit of a hard head but he encouraged myself and a bloke by the name of Vic Fogarty, he gave us two sergeants

18:30 shirts and we finished in the sergeants' mess and I drank gin and I can honestly say, I've never drank gin since, because I got that sick I thought I was going to die, but we had a days' leave at Bombay and played up. Had bullock cart run, derby's down the streets and was a day of fun. We all got back on the ship again anyhow and we transferred then into another smaller boat, the Orion

19:00 because of the more shallow draft to go through the Red Sea and we eventually finished at Suez and taken off there and went by train to Ismailia or Ismailia, across the Suez Canal at El Kantara and by train then to Palestine

19:30 which is Israel today and we were in a camp called Beit Jirja. Sometimes now on the, with the problems in Israel at the moment, a name Beit comes up so it was in that almost, it was very close to Gaza and

20:00 we spent a month or six weeks there off the boat and I can recall, if we want to, for the sake of talking I suppose, about some incidences there that I remember very distinctly and we were what they called the infantry training battalion, the ITB and I won't mention the captain's name but he was

20:30 in charge and he didn't have a very good reputation but he was one of the original 6th Division officers and we were on parade this morning, hundreds of us and the regimental sergeant major, chap by the name of Sanderson, brought us all to attention and

21:00 captain came out of his tent. I can see him now and looked us all over and then he gave the order, "Slope arms," so which we did and he looked around everywhere and he said, "One man spoilt the whole show," and as clear as a bell

21:30 in the background, I don't know who said it, this chap said, "And that was you, you old bastard." Well that was one incident. Before we went to join the Battalion, we were on parade again and we were being inspected by Sir Thomas Blamey who was GOC [General Officer Commanding] Australian troops in the Middle East

22:00 and he stopped right in front of me and I had lost a puggaree off my hat and he asked me why I didn't have a puggaree and I said, "I have lost it sir," and he turned to the ADC [aide de camp] and he said, "See that this soldier gets another puggaree, captain."

22:30 Anything like that would happen to me as an individual. I'd be the one that'd be sorted out so then we went on a route march, only a few days after we got off the ship too. We were all pretty raw and we were to march out of camp and just come

23:00 a semi circle around the camp and come back by lunch time so no water bottles or anything like that. It was, you know in the desert and the camps were built on the main Gaza, Tel Aviv Road. There was Kilo 89, Beit Jirja, Julis and Barbara

23:30 and they're all similar in design however after a long time we'd been marching, the captain passed word back that, "We were marching into camp, to put on a good show, slope arms," and believe it or not we marched into the wrong camp. It was Barbara that we marched into. We had another five miles to march to get into our own camp so that's how, and they used to call him Boomerang Billy because

24:00 he used to get people lost. Well that was an incident but anyhow we eventually were sorted out and we were taken in drafts to join the battalion who were at Amiriya in Egypt and I was in the second draft

24:30 and when I arrived at the camp late in the afternoon, that's one time that I felt isolated. I was lonely. I was only a boy, all my mates that I'd been, joined up with and associated with had been split up amongst everywhere and I was just an individual and I didn't know

25:00 anyone and I remember in the late afternoon I thought to myself, "I'm a long way from home," but however I came up to this, I was told to go to that tent, No 1 Section, 16 Platoon. I didn't know a soul and I stood at the tent door for a while and all these chaps,

25:30 it was late in the afternoon, were sitting on their gear and no one said, "Gidday," or anything like that but one chap and his name was Ron Diamond and Ron said, "Space here mate, sit down here," and from that day it was the two of the greatest, or the greatest friendship of two people

26:00 during a war and that was my friend Ron Diamond and he put out his hand. I remember him saying, "The name's Diamond, Ron Diamond," so we went through the war together and Ron finished up getting commissioned. Unfortunately I get a bit upset when I think about Ron because he was a great mate and he died with cancer, lung cancer a few years ago

26:30 and we kept in touch with one another. He was a genuine chap. On numerous occasions we nearly got skittled but we just seemed to get out of it but that's another side of the story.

27:00 We were then, it was getting time to sort of move up to the front however I had to front the company commander, Captain Henry, Gordon Henry, to, because I was too young and along with another chap by the name of Bobby Davidson so when we

27:30 fronted up to him he said, "I was too young and immature to go up." Bobby never said anything but I thought, "Well I've got to speak up." I said, "Well sir I've never missed a duty, done my guard, I've never fallen out on manoeuvres, parades," and he said, "Oh well, away you go," so eventually we moved up to

28:00 the desert to begin the campaign at Bardia. Now I remember that was Friday the 13th of December, 1940 yes and thinking back

28:30 you never worried about what was going to happen to you. You just sort of fell in with the mob and you just sort of followed on. We moved up by train as far as a place called Buq Buq and from Buq Buq we moved to Salum and that, you could see the remnants then of some of the

29:00 spoils or war, burnt out trucks and artillery pieces smashed and bits of equipment and things like that and we stayed, we bivouacked that night at Salum and we had to move up the next night to, what they call, up the escarpment

29:30 and you had to go up this, what they call Hell Fire. It was spelt H A L A F Y A but got nicknamed Hell Fire Pass because it was like walking up the wall and I was in 16 Platoon and no one wanted to carry the anti tank rifle. It was 56 pounds

30:00 plus your own equipment. You had 50 rounds of 303 ammunition, a couple of grenades, your rifle and your haversack with half blanket and things like that, couple of pairs of socks and toothbrush but it all mounted up so I said to our section leader, Leo Myers, "Leo, you take my rifle,"

30:30 and I said, "And give me that bloody gun," so off I went and I took off and I took it to the top. I got there before the platoon was and it was a very cold night but I was sweating when I got to the top but I wouldn't let it beat me. I got there and waited for the platoon. We moved from there then through Fort Capuzzo and

31:00 on to take up our defences outside Bardia. We relieved another battalion. I can't remember what we relieved now without looking up the history and that's where we spent Christmas 1940,

31:30 eating sand. But we were given on Christmas Eve, late in the afternoon or in the evening, we got our comfort fund parcels with, it had Christmas cake and cream and little tin of peaches and packet of cigarettes and it was great and

32:00 but water, water was a problem in those places. There was just no water and even to this day I drink very little water because I, sort of was water conscious. I've seen people come to blows over spilling a half a cup of water and but at night we would get a hot meal

32:30 and we spent couple of weeks in that area but we were doing standing patrols also and it was bitterly cold in December, bitterly cold and you'd go out at night just as dark was approaching and we had to guard artillery observation posts

33:00 and when you got out say five hundred or a thousand yards, you had to lay there in that position until almost daylight before you could, and give yourself time to get back to your own trenches and in that cold, and I mean, it was cold. From there we were pulled back for a

33:30 brief letup before the final attack on Bardia and our commanding Officer, Colonel Chilton, had done a lot of reconnaissance with the I section

34:00 and they'd built a sand map in a cave of all the areas that our battalion was to attack so we were briefed. We more or less had an idea in our mind what we were supposed to achieve. The morning or the day of the attack

34:30 we moved out by truck to an area and then debussed and we marched then to the start line and through columns of tanks and Bren carriers and other attached troops and it was a rather, everything was quiet. No one spoke.

35:00 There was no activity on the front, no bombs going off or shells. Eventually we were put into our area and then at a given time there was guns, I believe 500 artillery pieces opened up as one and we started to move forward.

35:30 I never, ever thought anything would happen to me. It was just something that you were trained to do and you just went along with it. Well when we approached the wire, there was a tank trapped there, huge tank trapped but the engineers had blown a gap in it and

36:00 we had one infantry tank per company and they were 25 tonne tanks with four inch steel on the sides with a two pounder gun and machine guns which were a great help but once we broke through the wire we overcame the first post very quickly. There was only about half a dozen Dagos in it and they gave up

36:30 fairly quickly. Well we moved on again and that's where I saw the first of our blokes get hit and he was a chap by the name of Alan Moxon. A piece of shrapnel had cut into the calf of his leg, huge wound and I was only a short distance from him and a chap, Ted Boland that was with us,

37:00 Ted was a, you know he was a pretty rough shearer from out Narrabri, Moree somewhere and he raced over and he didn't put a bandage on him. He just undid a field dressing and stuffed it into the hole in his leg. Alan survived and he finished up at Coffs Harbour as

37:30 Town Clerk, but he never came back to the unit. Well there was a couple of others got hit with bullets, Leo Myers and Brian Gervin, with flesh wounds and that sort of thing. Well we kept moving forward cause there was that much,

38:00 well when we moved on further and we came up against a artillery post and a machine gun post which was

38:30 a major obstacle and our platoon commander was a sergeant, Joe Coleman. He came from Nambucca Heads and early in the part, because I came from Bellingen and Joe came from Nambucca, he said to me, before we went into Bardia,

39:00 "Jimmy, you'll be my runner." He said, "I'll look after you", 'cause Joe was an Englishman, a Pom but a good one and he said, "I'll look after you," so when we got pinned down by this post, Joe said, "We want tank support. Will you run and contact Captain Henry

39:30 to get tank support?" so the others were laying out spread out and I dashed off across the desert about a thousand yards I suppose and contacted Captain Henry and said, "We needed tank support. Sergeant Coleman needs tank support," and got back or

40:00 almost back to where we were and there was Jack McAlennie and Ronnie Diamond and Brian and all these chappies were laid out on the ground, Joe Coleman and I just got with I s'pose wouldn't be 20 yards I s'pose and this huge explosion, huge explosion and when the

40:30 dust and the smoke settled and shook ourselves and got, I remember Ronnie looking up and sort of shaking himself and I can see him just a few yards from me and I looked and what was Joe Coleman, was two legs. That's all that was left of him, blew him to smithereens.

41:00 End of tape.

Tape 2

00:44 **You've mentioned that your father was a dairy farmer and that he came up to the Bellingen area, Hides Farm and your mother and her parents had been living in the area. How did they actually meet?**

01:00 Mum actually, reared on the farm with her sisters and brothers but to get employment, you know earn their own living, Mum went to work as a house maid at a hotel in the Hastings area and that's how she

01:30 met Dad.

Was it a hotel like a pub hotel?

Yeah in a pub yes that's right, yeah. She was probably, you know making beds or things like that, that sort of thing and that's how they come to meet and Mum was interested in horses and my father was a great horseman. He, in those days

02:00 like horses were the thing. Mum and Dad had an association with horses, you know. They used to call them bridle races in those days where they'd have picnic days and they would race and that's how, Mum was a good horsewoman and Dad was and that's how they came together, yes.

And he'd learnt his dairy farming skills through his father?

02:30 Yes, yes, they were a dairy farming family on Dad's side of the family yes.

And so they were married and had three boys and then you were the fourth to come along?

Yes, yes. The two eldest were twins, then Keith next to me and then

03:00 I was the fourth and then, of the six boys now there are only three of us left. I'll be 82 in March and my brother Gordon, who lives at Nowra, he just turned 80 in October and Mervyn, my youngest brother, he'll be 78 and that will be on the 4th of next month, so the three eldest

03:30 have gone and my brother Keith was killed in an accident, a motor accident at Berry, so there's only the three of us left.

And life must have been pretty difficult for a young family out on a dairy farm? It's hard work isn't it?

It was, it was. People don't realise. Like no one had any money and because we lived on a farm we

04:00 had a distinct advantage over other people because at least we had milk and vegetables and Mum made her own bread and you, you know that was part of your living. We always had a motor car. Dad brought the first Dodge Six

04:30 Tourer and we were able to go to the beach once a year, down to Urunga or North Beach and that was a day excursion. You would get up early in the morning and do the milking and you'd get away down to the beach and you'd have a swim and have dinner and

05:00 we'd meet the other members of Mum's family and have a picnic day and come home to milk and but everyone had to get in. We all had our jobs. You had to work. Mum helped in the cow yard because some of us kids, we were too young

05:30 so it was, you know they were hard times, very hard times. The Depression, we, if people only realised today just what people of our parents went through to rear a family

06:00 I don't think they would ever, they could never possibly realise. A lot of our clothes were hand me down's from other members of our cousins, that's right.

And did your mum ever teach any of the boys to do a bit of needlework?

No, no. Mum used to do all that. She could sew and knit

06:30 and she was a good cook. She made a beautiful Christmas cake and I still miss Mum's Christmas cakes. She was dedicated to us kids. She never put one in front of the other in favouritism. Dad was a bit hard. You had to tow the line or you copped it. A smack over the ear or a belt round the backside

07:00 and you knew, you were disciplined and we never swore in front of our parents. We never gave them cheek but if they could hear us, you know we probably did, but they wouldn't hear it so I mean we were brought up to behave ourselves.

Was that important? Was the farm a dangerous space apart from your brothers with guns, was it a dangerous place to grow up?

07:30 Well just depends how you look at it. I don't think there was a tree we couldn't climb or a river we couldn't swim in. There was a river right round our place. We'd go mountaineering up the back of our place was a mountain and we'd go up there chasing wallabies and kangaroos and

08:00 you had one day off. On a Sunday Dad would say, "Well you can have the day off today, as long as you're home to milk in the afternoon," so, you know but we all, we found our own way of putting our life together and

08:30 there was very little sport because communication in those days, you either had a horse or shanks as pony and I think we had one pushbike between the six of us so if you went anywhere you would have to do it very hard.

09:00 There are things when you think back. Like as I said, we were six boys and our neighbours, a couple of boys next door and a couple of moonlit nights I remember and the potty calves would be running round

the house paddock. We'd hop our bed window and go and get the, catch the calves and

09:30 ride them around the paddocks in the moonlight. Mum knew we were doing those things but Dad never woke up but they're the things that you amused yourself and that sort of thing and you got your way through life that way.

How many head of cattle did you have on the farm?

We would milk 40 cows which was a fairly ordinary, you know type dairy farm

10:00 in those days. There wasn't many big farms. I remember we had pigs of course and all work was done by horses. There was no tractors or anything like that and Dad was a hard worker. He would start early of a morning like and he'd call me. He'd walk past my door and say, "Jim," and I'd

10:30 be out of bed. I'd go and get the cows in and Dad would set the dairy up, Mum would get up and she would make them morning tea and she would come up, bring the morning tea up. The bales would have been started milking and that sort of thing. We had our own cows to milk. I had so many to milk and Oz had so many to milk and so forth and that's how we, and Gordon

11:00 had so many to milk and Mum had her cows and Dad had his cows, that sort of thing.

Can you explain for the sake of people who don't know and certainly I guess in future generations, there'll be even fewer, just what is the technique that you use for milking a cow?

Well that's a hard one because it was something that

11:30 well, you handed down I think from your parents. The sensation of milking a cow, it's like learning to walk. Once you do it, you never forget it but some people would never be able to milk a cow but it just came natural to you.

Can you actually explain?

Well just [showing action] like that

12:00 **So is there a squeeze and a tug, is that right?**

Yeah, squeeze yeah.

Squeeze and tug, and you would have pails beneath you?

Yes you'd have a bucket like and you'd hold the bucket in your knees, underneath the side of the cow and you went like that, yeah. You wouldn't understand that sort of thing?

I've seen

12:30 **them today and they've got a whole bunch of little metal suckers on the bottom and it's all done by machine isn't it?**

Well yes it's all done machine wise but machines, we were still, when I went away to the war, we were still milking by hand everywhere and milking machines didn't come in until, you know around the 1940's really. There might have been an odd set of machines here and there

13:00 but very, very, very few.

Now would you be responsible for separating the cream from the milk?

Yes, yes well the milk was poured into a big vat and the separator was set and you had to know how to set the separator up properly and it

13:30 in lots of cases you had to wind a handle and Dad was a bit more mechanised. We had a, when the power went through, we were able to put electricity through and we had a little engine that used to drive the separator

14:00 and you just separated the milk from the cream and the cream was picked up Monday's, Wednesday's and Fridays by the cream lorries. You had to take it to the side of the road and put it in the cream stand and the cream lorry would pick it up. The separated milk would then go to the pigs and calves and

14:30 butter would have been, I think in those days about nine pence per pound and bacon or pigs were about sixpence per pound so if you got a cheque for a hundred pound, that was a lot of money, it was yeah.

And in terms of schooling, you mentioned there was a school just on the edge of your property

15:00 **with about 30 kids. Did that cover from sort of kindergarten, first grade through to about sixth grade?**

Well you started school when you were six and right through to sixth class and that was the end of the schooling. The next school was the Bellingen school

15:30 which was out of reach of people out where we were. There was a school at Gordon Wall and there was

a school at Glen Heifer and one at Valerie and one at Hides Creek and one at Boggy Creek and one at Thora. Now they were all little public schools with around about between 20 and 30 pupils

16:00 with the one teacher and once you got to, if you went to sit for an intermediate, it was a special class was, that was up to the teacher himself as to

16:30 whether, incidentally I never got that far. I only went to QC and then I had a job to pass that too but education wasn't as important as earning a living unfortunately. The average person, either boy or girl, they left school

17:00 was to get a job, to earn their own living and become independent and that's what you set yourself out to do because there was no Tech College for training or there was no, there wasn't much employment and as I said, I worked on a dairy farm but I was employed and I was lucky to be employed

17:30 because there were a lot of people who weren't and I remember very distinctly the people that were tramming the roads that would call to Mum and Mum would give them some bread or give them a meal or something like that and then they'd thank them and were grateful for that and then they'd move on then to Dorrigo

18:00 or somewhere like that and they weren't, there was no money handed out. It was a chit, where you went and you handed that over to the grocery, but the chappie that was on the dole as they called it, that's how they, you operated. Like I often wonder how people would go today because

18:30 it was pretty tough, very tough and like as I said, the local dance, when we were starting to know ourselves, we'd go to the local dance and Mum would give us two shillings and how ever she ever financed us I don't know, God bless her

19:00 but she never, I don't know, she did it but that two shillings, that was a shilling to go in and a sixpence for a chocolate waltz and then sixpence for a buy in. That's all you had, two shillings.

Now you said education wasn't as important as it was in later times. What about religion, was religion important to your family, in the school teachings and at home?

19:30 Yes in those days we would have a minister would come round once a month. I remember one of the ministers was Reverend Palmer. He was a big man and he would give us a bible lesson on a scripture lesson on a certain day and he would travel around various schools in the district

20:00 and that was the, and we had an old church on our property too. Mum used to send us to church but we never, ever got in there. You're going to laugh. When I think about it, Mum would be standing on the verandah at home and she could see where the church was, right up in the paddock. It was a long, way away

20:30 and we'd get up to almost to the door and we'd duck under the church and very seldom we ever got in the church. We'd get roused on when we got home of course but

Was religion important to your father and mother? Were they religious people?

Mum was. Dad didn't worry much. Yeah Mum was

21:00 she, you know she was very church conscious and she always made a point of going to church because her background, the Kettles, were Methodists and Presbyterians rather and they were, you know, but we were Church of England, the Coombes' naturally and

21:30 it didn't worry us so very much. Even in the war years we had to attend church parades and that sort of thing. They were, a lot of stories and various stories about that. When you talk about schools, one thing that was taught in our schools

22:00 from the time you started, was your allegiance to the crown. As you went into school, you stood to attention and you recited the allegiance to the thing and that was done very day.

Could you recite that for us now? Do you still remember it?

No I can't now I don't think. Wait a minute till I think about it.

22:30 No I might think of it later on, but anyhow.

Allegiance to the King was it at that point?

Yeah allegiance to the king, yes, and, "I honour my God, I serve my King, I salute my flag and God save the King." That was it yeah, that was it yeah. You had to say it every day yeah, my word and

23:00 **You would have celebrated Empire Day and that sort of thing?**

Yes Empire Day was a school picnic and that was a really, a big event in the school, was Empire Day and where all the different kids competed in different sports and that sort of thing and it was run by the teacher and he would have assistance probably from his wife and

23:30 odd parent, but not that many but no the teachers were very, very conscious on the Empire Day and so yeah, we had that sort of early grounding of the importance of who you were, yeah.

24:00 **Did you have history lessons at school?**

Yes.

Did you cover things like World War I? Did you have much of a sense of what had occurred at that time?

Not really no. No not really. It was more about what Sir Francis Drake did or somebody else and that sort of thing, that history lessons. My main grounding on World War I was from Mum's brother

24:30 my uncle Alec who served in the First World War but probably that's where I inherited my heart of wanting to be a soldier, yeah.

Was Anzac Day an important day in your youth?

Yes we were all assembled at the school and

25:00 given a brief Anzac service and the teacher would give you a lesson or an instruction on what Anzac Day was about but not as much as it is today, though. Not as much as it is today.

Had your father been involved in any way in the?

No, Dad

25:30 was not, he was at the age where he would have been, in the First World War he would have been out of that category. Whether he was too young or yes he would have been too young or too old to, but he, I don't think he liked me joining at the time but when the time came, Dad was very, very

26:00 good and, you know he sort of very helpful in lots of ways. What else do you want to know?

Growing up on a farm and as you said, you were swimming in creeks and running in fields and doing mountaineering up the back, it's kind of in a lot of ways it's an ideal

26:30 **training for a young soldier. Did you handle the weapons very often? Did you handle the guns or shanghai's and that sort of thing?**

Yes we had shanghai's and like, after the accident, Dad always had a gun at home. It was an orchard gun they called it,

27:00 a four hundred and ten shot gun but that was taboo. We would never touch that but how Keith inherited that little old rifle that we had, I forget now but the police came and took the rifle and that was the end of the story. We never had any more guns around our place.

Could you tell us the story of how that happened, how your brother shot you through the nose?

Well we had been

27:30 Keith and I, like there was six boys. The twins were mates, Keith and I were mates and then Gordon and Mervyn, the two youngies, they were mates. Now if I got in a blue, Keith would take my part and that sort of thing and that's how we operated but we never, ever had any fights much with one another. Bits of tiffs and that sort of thing but we were pretty, got on

28:00 well together as a family but we'd been working with Dad out on the farm and we'd come in for dinner, for lunch. Mum had called us in and we'd come in and Dad was sitting at the table starting his lunch and Keith and I

28:30 went into the bedroom. The old house is still there and I was sitting over near the window on a chair and Keith was just inside the door, my brother and he was fiddling round with this rifle and I had a towel. I'd just washed my face and that sort of thing just before we got in for lunch see. Keith had done the same and we'd just walked in around and I just had this towel on my lap there and I sort of,

29:00 I s'pose I was just sort of looking at him or at whatever he was doing and that sort of thing and he just put the rifle up a couple of times like that and, like no one took any notice and then it was on his lap, from memory, and it went off and it hit me and I had this towel and blood spurted out. I was conscious all the time

29:30 put the towel up to my face and Mum had just walked out of the kitchen to fill the kettle from the tank outside and I come out with the blood gleaming out of me and Dad took one look at me and took off and he run to the neighbour, who, the name of Maxie Hicks who was,

30:00 he could do first aid and it was a fair way away. I s'pose a quarter of a mile to the next farm and Mr Hicks saw Dad coming and knew there was trouble and he wasn't a well man himself. He had a lot of kidney troubles, Mr Hicks and he took off and he come and in the meantime Mum had sort of got hold of

30:30 me and steadied me up and got me round on the side verandah. I can remember all this and I know my head was spinning and next minute, next thing I remember Mr Hicks was there and I remember his saying,

31:00 he used to always call Mum 'Mrs'. "Get a bloody towel, get a bloody sheet Mrs, get a bloody sheet," so Mum got a sheet and wet it and Maxie wrapped that round my head to try and congeal the blood I s'pose, I remember and Dad got the car out and we had to go to Bellingen which was about 10 mile

31:30 and Maxie sat in the back seat holding me up, my head up and the towel, the wet sheet wrapped around my head and one of Maxie's sons took off in his car to the school teacher's house who had a phone

32:00 and phoned the doctor so we took off in the car and we crossed the river. It was shallow luckily cause it was summer time and the doctor was coming out

32:30 and went past but they got me to hospital and I remember Maxie carried me into the ward and sisters were, two sisters were there and I was in a mess cause I'd just come out of the paddock and I was dirty and that sort of thing and they actually they wanted to lay me down and Maxie said, "No, you've got to sit him up."

33:00 I remember that. Well I think I lost consciousness then. I don't remember much for a day or, or no next day I think I might have come to but in the meantime of course the police arrived out and Sergeant Ophir was his name and he questioned Keith and took the rifle.

33:30 **Poor old Keith must have been distraught?**

Well yes he, I remember him, he, when I sort of came to, he came into the hospital and that sort of thing and he was talking to me and I lost my voice, the shock and it was 12 months before I got my voice back and now that's why I have a little bit of a croaky sort of a problem now because it

34:00 the bullet, it seared the artery there in my neck and took a piece out of the larynx there in, so it was a close go yeah.

And there's a bit of lead in there somewhere still?

It's still there yeah. Well the doctor said, Doctor Elliott the doctor and he said, "It'll never move," and it's got a bit of a story to it.

34:30 I had to go to Concord a few years ago because I had this problem. They thought I might have had a bit of a stroke and when they x-rayed my head they saw this, you can still see the mark going up there in my, it's all that mark and it's still, they wanted to know all about it and I …

Wouldn't want to try and get on a plane to America, put it that way mate. You'd be setting off all the alarms?

Well yeah, I could only,

35:00 two or three years ago I had to go down to Coffs Harbour for a bit of a brain scan and they, you could still see the trace of the bullet going over there and they couldn't, they were amazed that I'd survived but it was about 12 months before I properly recovered because I lost a lot of blood and I was never very strong but it never

35:30 affected me army wise. I mean I was always bit of a skinny bloke. Well I took after Dad's side of the family but in hindsight I suppose I was lucky. I wasn't meant to be, and I've had a few hits one way and another since then.

But your childhood did prepare you to be able to just live and cope

36:00 **with pain in a lot of ways? Was that just a part of life in those days? Was dealing with physical ailments and pain?**

Yes, yes like I'm pleased you mentioned that. In our days if you had a stone bruise or you had a boil, that sort of thing, you didn't go off running to doctors, that sort of thing.

36:30 I can remember Mum and Dad at night, Dad with a razor paring the stone bruises as he called it, then letting the puss out of it and easing the pain and that sort of thing, with my brother in the bed next door, you know and that sort of thing and you didn't, medically I think you put up with

37:00 a lot, rather than consult the doctor because as I said, communications, like to knock off work at the farm and spend a day to see the doctor. It wasn't on. You just sort of put up with it and hoped that you'd get better the next day so that was the way it was. I think you were tougher, yes. You had to be.

37:30 You had to be to survive and if you let yourself get down well too bad.

But you generally were all very fit and generally healthy from the lifestyle you were living on the farm?

Yes, yes. It was a good life. Like I mean you had good food. The

38:00 we'd kill our own, kill a beast very now and then and share it with the neighbours. In the corn growing there was plenty of mud eye to eat and you had, in summer time you had watermelons and if you didn't have them on your place you went to the neighbour and raided the melon patches and got two melons and you

38:30 you knew where every peach tree was or plum tree somewhere in the bush and that sort of thing and on our farm we had orange trees and plum trees and peaches and that sort of thing and you could grow things without having to spray them. There was no, you know, at night time

39:00 you'd get up in the plum trees and eat the plums because you couldn't see the grubs so but it was a healthy lifestyle yeah and I've, all us boys, there wasn't a lot of sickness. Keith, my brother, he had a bad accident and broke his arm when we were fooling around in a willow tree

39:30 and he fell out of the top of the willow tree and broke his left arm here and the doctors wanted to take it off but Dad encouraged them to continue it but it never, ever, he could never ever straighten it but it never developed like his right hand but he still could use it but apart from that, my other brothers were, you know

40:00 quite healthy, still are.

Tape 3

00:49 **Jimmy when you finished school, you were about 12 years old as I understand it, and went to work on the farm full time. Did you have increased responsibility at that time?**

No

01:00 no you just did the work that was, you milked cows. You did farming generally. You worked with the owner of the farm and lived with the family, sort of thing so you didn't have any responsibility in the running of the farm at all. It was the

01:30 boss so you just went along and did what he said to do whether you liked it or whether you didn't. It was a job.

And was it around that age that you'd start socialising going to dances and that sort of thing?

Yes, yes when I started to earn my own money I was able to go to the pictures. I brought my

02:00 first suit which was a serge suit for five pounds and into the deal was a spare pair of trousers. You got two pair of trousers and a suit for five pound and that was a big thing to be able to dress up in my own, and look the part and I brought a leather coat

02:30 which was a real big deal. I think I paid 10 pound for it. That was a lot of money but I'd saved up and those days I didn't drink much because you were out in the country and you didn't go to town very often so you saved your money and course when I went into the army, Keith inherited my suit and my leather

03:00 coat but I always got myself well dressed and cause as far as going to the dances, I was a bit shy, where my brothers, they were up front. They'd go and pick up a girl and go for a dance and I'd stand back but Mum used to

03:30 tell me I was always like that because when I was a little feller, she said if they got visitors, I'd sidle around and I'd standing right alongside Mum, keeping close to Mum and I was always shy and I never had a girlfriend before I went into the army. I had no interest.

04:00 My first wife and, later it was, we went to school together but we were only just friends and but I kept in touch with her during the war and that sort of thing. I would write to her, you know from (UNCLEAR) and different places overseas and when I came home, we just sort of

04:30 went out couple of times and that sort of thing and well, then I you know I thought well, "This is, Rita was for me," but before the war, no it never entered my head about girls or, but, or dancing, like I couldn't dance. I'd go to the dances but I wouldn't, you know I wouldn't take much part in it

05:00 **We've heard that dances were also a good spot for blues? The guys used to like a bit of fisticuffs at the dances?**

Well yes the country dances was a place of amusement and some bloke would be friendly with the other feller's girl and it would finish up

05:30 a bit of a Donnybrook but all went outside. It wasn't in the hall or anything like that but they'd get a ring around and then the fisticuffs would be on and damn me, if, after they'd had a bit of a blue, they'd

put their arm around one another and walk away, was no animosity sort of thing but they had to have that little bit of a, you know go at one another so but

06:00 the, as I said, communication, getting from place to place was a problem. People that lived in Bellingen, of course that was a regular thing to go to the pictures two or three nights a week and they could dance a couple of times a week but out in the country where we were, that sort of life didn't exist. You either had to ride a horse ten mile or pushbike and

06:30 gravel roads, not bitumen roads. Well it wasn't, it didn't encourage you to get about much and furthermore you had to be at work next day. You couldn't go out at night because you had to look after your job. You had to look after your job and to do that you had to be willing and able to work every day and you couldn't go and sit in the shade

07:00 or anything like that. You had to work and that is the whole thing. You had to work if you wanted to survive.

Just a question particularly related to the cows? Did the cows need to be milked? Was there something, an adverse affect for them if they weren't milked every day?

Yes, yes they had to be milked twice a day, morning and night and yes, or they automatically

07:30 would dry up and well you needed to look after your stock because that was your living. That's where you got your money and like it's hard to explain in this respect. A hundred pound was a lot of money

08:00 and a herd of cows that you owned or Dad owned I suppose in all, it'd only be worth three or four hundred pound, but that was a lot. Dad was a, my father was a, as I said a good farmer, a real good farmer and he had pure bred cattle, Guernsey cattle and he had a

08:30 stud of Guernsey cattle and we showed our cattle at the local show, the Bellingen show and Dad took championship prizes with his cattle. He had a stud piggery where he ran stud pigs and sent them as far as Victoria and those sort of,

09:00 and for five guineas or two guineas for a pig and that was good money and his horses, his draft horses were always fed, rugged in the winter and groomed. You daren't put a bridle or a collar on a horse unless you groomed it and

09:30 his stock horses that we had on the farm were always looked after and as I said, he was a real methodical farmer. All his equipment that he used, like his ploughs, his hoes, his harness and

10:00 all that sort of thing was always kept in good order. He never had sloppy fences on the farm and he, farming was his life. I couldn't say the same about myself.

Jim could I ask you about the argument or the dispute that saw you leave the farm?

Yes well pleased you mentioned that.

10:30 We came to Grafton for a jacaranda, that would be in November, some time in November. I remember we came up here with the Kettle family, that's Mum's brother and we had a day here

11:00 in Grafton, the jacaranda's and well we went home and next morning we had, in the dairy, in the carry yards and Dad was, I didn't notice but Dad was cranky. He used to get like that and

11:30 I just said to him, you know, "When are we going to start digging the spuds?" We had a paddock of potatoes and he turned around, "What the bloody hell's it got to do with you?" or something like that see and with that, he said, "Get out of my bloody," he sort of made a charge at me see and I thought, "Gees," I wasn't going to hit my father, that sort of thing and I got a shock really and, yeah, "Get to buggery," he said and

12:00 I said, well, I didn't answer him back. I just got out of the yards and off and said, "Hooroo," and I went down and as I told you. Mum said, "What's happened?" I said, "Oh Dad kicked me out." "Oh yeah," like that but I never spoke to my father for a long time after that.

And what was it? He just had a bad day? There was obviously something else going on?

Yeah just a bad day

12:30 and when, in hindsight, that was the best turn he ever did me, cause I got on my own feet didn't I? And that's where I started my life.

I wanted to ask you that yeah, if you look at that as a?

I started my own life. I got out. I was independent. It was hard. I mean I had nowhere to go but I wasn't coming back home. I was determined that I'd never come back home and I didn't.

13:00 **Had the, had your older brothers all moved on?**

Yes, eldest brother he'd gone out working of his own accord and my other brother was with my uncle.

Keith if I remember rightly, he was still at home and the two boys, they were youngest like but I was just, I was a misfit at that stage. I could be done without sort of thing so

13:30 but that changed the course of my life and when you think of it, if Dad hadn't of done that, I'd probably have stuck around home and I might never have made the army so that's something I can thank Dad for.

I want to just jump through those couple of years where you were working on your uncle's farm and making your own living and come up to

14:00 **the trip down to Sydney and when you came down and saw that first embarkation march. Can you tell me about that day?**

Well we went from Newcastle down to Sydney. Mum and her sister, Aunty Mary and we stayed at The People's Palace

14:30 stayed overnight at The People's Palace and then on New Year's Day we went out to the Sydney Showground and saw the Highland gathering cause Mum was Scotch and Grandma was Scotch. They were around and Grandma was with us, Mum's mother, Grandma and being an old Scotch lady, you could hardly understand her she was so Scotch, so broad and

15:00 it was on our way to the showground that the AIF was marching through Sydney and I recognised two chappies in the march. One was a bloke by the name of Viv McNally, who used to work for my uncle and a chap by the name of Billy Fuller and Billy Fuller was the, drove the cream lorry around our area picking up the

15:30 cream and, digressing a little, Billy Fuller finished up a prisoner of war in Germany. He was one of the first captured, Australians captured in the desert by the Italians, in the first push. He was on an isolated post and he finished the war and he came home OK but

16:00 and my cousin from Newcastle, Eric Hamilton, he was in that first draft too and he went away with the first draft, the 6th Division on signals and when we came back from Sydney to Aunty Mary's

16:30 Eric had been in the militia and he had a uniform and all that and that was right up my alley. I really liked, you know seeing all this paraphernalia that he had, you know uniform that sort of thing and that cemented my idea that I was going to get into the army. I was going to get there somehow.

To digress just a few months, can you tell me about the day of the outbreak of war and where you were, who you were with

17:00 **and what the initial reactions were?**

Yes well yes. I had left Brownley's where I said Rita was and went to work for people on the next farm. I'm pleased you brought that up and

17:30 I met up with a chap and we took on a job of contract brushing. We went to do this big paddock of brushing and we were going to get ten pound each, a lot of money. Mrs Rose was going to look after us. Like she was going to feed us and that sort of thing and we'd just stay

18:00 there and so, I can't think of the chap's name now, but we did this brushing contract and I remember the night or the time that the war was declared and we were sitting in front of a, an ear up to an old battery set wireless,

18:30 heard the declaration of war and I don't think I thought very gravely about what was going to happen or anything like that because I was too young. I was only 17, just 17 and I just sort of thought it was out of the question as far as I was concerned,

19:00 war. I never gave myself a thought until I went to Sydney with that first trip with Mum and that's where I got

Did you understand much about the politics behind the war?

No, no. When you raise that subject

19:30 and war, to me it was an adventure. Now whilst I'm not anti British or anti anyone, I do believe that

20:00 what brought me into it was adventure. I wasn't going to be any hero or anything like that but from the environment that I was living in and the way I was going, that gave, I could see that was something different. I was going to get somewhere. I was going to get out of where I was. I was going to do something and I, that's what,

20:30 I s'pose there was a certain amount of patriotism but not as strong as the adventure and it was an adventure and I loved every minute of it.

The sense of patriotism, although less than the adventure, was that more directed towards the Australian nation, or a sense of the Empire?

Sense of the Empire, yes, the Empire yes.

21:00 I always was and always will be very strong British oriented. I am very, very strong from that point of view. It's something that I am proud of the fact that I am a true Britisher, I am and I have always admired

21:30 England and the British troops and sailors and airmen all through the war and I really, no one can, I hate to hear people condemn them, really I do. It's just something that I've inherited and I'm proud of.

22:00 **So between New Years Day 1940 when you saw the troops marching through the street, you went back to Newcastle and you said, saw your brother's militia uniforms and that sort of thing. What was your next step towards pursuing your goal of joining the AIF?**

Well I came home and I had to write away then to army department

22:30 in Paddington to get enlistment papers because where I was there was no drill hall or no facility to enlist. You had to write, which I did and Mum countersigned my papers and I got my enlistment papers back and I was working with Joyce Brothers then and

What sort of conversation did you have with your mum

23:00 **about asking her to sign the papers? Did she express any concerns? Did you have to tell her why you?**

Mum wasn't real happy about it. She wasn't real happy about it but she said, "Well I'll do it for you," and it was something that always was in the back of my mind to take care of myself

23:30 for Mum because if anything ever happened to me, I remember Mum saying to me, "You know if anything ever happens to you, they'll all blame me, you know," and I never forgot that and I always took care of myself, for Mum, God bless her. She yeah she was,

24:00 she made, she changed my life and I'm always proud of that, very good.

And did you remain, just to jump a little bit ahead, did you remain in correspondence with her throughout the war?

I never missed a week with writing to Mum. There were times when we were say in Greece or New Guinea or somewhere, I always got a letter from Mum every week

24:30 and I always wrote to Mum and when I'm going with my first wife and the letters came, Mum's letter was the first to be opened and I never forgot my Mum and when I actually went into the army, as I said, things got tough and I thought the world of my mother and

25:00 we were getting five shillings a day and on embarkations we went to six shillings a day and I made an allotment before I left of two shillings a day to my mother and said, "Mum if you ever need some money, it's there and you use it." She didn't but it was there when I came home

25:30 but I made that allotment for mother in case she might need some money.

That must have been a really, I don't know, symbolically important for you as well, another stage in your growing up. You're beyond being independent there. You're actually giving back to your mum?

Yes but there was, I s'pose I

26:00 realised too that, you know I was putting Mum at a disadvantage by signing the papers. If anything did happen to me, I was conscious of the fact that, you know it would always be something that Mum would have to bear and fortunately I survived

26:30 but it was Mum that gave me the break in my life.

I guess in a sense though also as a 17 year old, that's an important step in your manhood isn't it, to be a provider as well?

Yes, yes. I suppose I was

27:00 a careful person because I, after I left home, I knew I had to look after myself. There was no one there for me, only me and I always remembered that.

Did you clear things up with your dad before you took

27:30 **off?**

Yes I remember, I'm pleased you mentioned that cause it was something I was going to say. As I said Dad, when we had that argument, and I had little to do with my father after that, but when I got my enlistment papers and my call-up, they sent then rail warrant to you for your

28:00 train trip to Sydney and Terry Joyce, where I was working he was taking me into town and I was staying

the night at the hotel and then catch the bus the next morning to go down to catch the train at Raleigh and as I walked down from the house, Dad met me half way down the hill and put his arms round me

28:30 and he just said, from memory, “Good luck son,” and that brought Dad and I back together again so I came home on, came back home on leave, Dad was always there to meet me and that sort of thing. We got on real well and then when

29:00 the final leave and he got the car out and I had to say goodbye to Mum and to my brothers. I can see Mum now and Gordon and Mervyn

29:30 standing at the side of the house and Dad waiting at the car and I looked back and that’s the last I saw of Mum and I got in the car and I was a bit upset and we drove down the farm next, or the old chap I was telling you about that saved me when I got shot, he came out to say goodbye to me and I was real upset but when I got away from there, I was right.

30:00 Got down to the station and we had to wait for the train and I was quite all right. Well that’s when Dad and I met up with another chap with his son there, John Hutchison, a mate of mine who died just recently, his father was there with him and Dad put his arms around me and kissed me

30:30 and said, “Good luck son.” Once I got in the train I was, felt, I felt different. It was hard leaving home at that age and I was associated with

31:00 men and I mean men, married men and a lot older than I am. I’ll show you a photo of them later and I was only a boy, just 18 and I’d never been away from home. When I went to Sydney with Mum the first time, that was the first time I’d ever been on a train. I didn’t know what a train looked like

31:30 so it was a big thing, at that age but once, I said, I got my foot on that ship there was no holding me from then on. I went on.

That farewell, you certainly had a lot to get home safely for didn’t you?

I did yeah. I did, you know particularly for Mum.

32:00 You know I thought, “Well I won’t let you down Mum,” but

So your father farewelled you, you’re on the train, you came down to the showgrounds?

Yes then we came back to Greta. That was after our final leave, back to Greta

32:30 and then it was break camp. You burnt the, you had straw palliasses and that sort of thing and you packed your gear up. You were issued with sea kitbags and you put your greatcoat in it and you know other things and that sort of thing and you were ready to go and on the train and in the early hours of the morning and

33:00 it was all excitement. We were on our way and then we cleared the Sydney Heads and never a thought in my mind as to whether I’d ever get back or not. Thought, “This is life,” and I covered a lot of ground in my times.

Did you feel that you’d been adequately

33:30 **trained?**

No, no not when we left. You only basic, you, basically you learnt which was your left and which was your right. You learnt to rough it, you know sleeping on the floor. You got to be able to mix with men and, you know

34:00 it was, that was, but it all come natural to me somehow. I had no problems with mixing with the blokes and that sort of thing. I well remember a chappie by the name of Sam Roberts. Sam, he and I were great mates and he came from Tweed Heads,

34:30 Murwillumbah and we shared the cabin on the Aquitania. There was four in a cabin and Sam and I, we were mates, about the same age. Unfortunately he was badly wounded in Bardia and died of wounds, Sam and it was later in the war, on the Atherton Tablelands, that his younger brother joined him

35:00 and I met up with his youngest brother, yeah Sammie Roberts but he and I were buddies you know and great mates but getting back to when I first went down, when I got called up and that was the first trip. That’s something that I’d forgotten about. I was standing on Raleigh station on my own and the train

35:30 pulled in and there’s a whole mob of blokes and they said, “You going to enlist?” “Yeah,” and they didn’t open the door of the dogbox. They pulled me through the door and I finished up in the carriage. There was Billy McLaren and Bill England, Siddy Philp, Vic Plater and that sort of thing all from the

36:00 Clarence. I’d never, ever met them but we still, we were, you know, went different ways through the war and finished up together always great mates but that was my introduction into the business and well, from then on you just followed the mob yeah so once I got that part over, I was all right, yeah.

What date

36:30 **did you embark on the Aquitania and leave Sydney?**

I can't, exactly the date. It was August 1940. I remember it was August 1940.

Were you aware of developments of the war in Europe? Had you heard of what Germany had been doing, their tactics, their successes?

No, no, no. We didn't know when we were leaving of course, where we were going or anything like that but there was always rumours and that sort of thing and we knew that the AIF

37:00 was in the Middle East so we probably had a good idea that that's where we would be destined for.

Had you heard about the fall of France to Germany?

Yes, yes we knew all about that part of it but in our convoy was, you know, there was the Aquitania, the Mauritania, the Empress of Britain. I can't remember the exact names of the

37:30 warships and that sort of thing but it was, you know it was, you were part of it. You were part of it and you were going to the war. It was a great adventure.

38:00 **Did many crowds come down to farewell you from Sydney Harbour?**

Yes, yes I mean it was supposed to be a secret move, you know but there was people lined up right out to the heads and cheering us on our way.

38:30 I mean we made enough noise on the train going down anyhow to wake the dead. I mean you can't keep a thousand chaps quiet and that sort of thing so they were making plenty of noise so, it was supposed to be a secret move initially but at that time it wasn't any great real danger of any attacks and that sort of thing. I mean although we were escorted by warships and that in the convoys, that sort of thing the event

39:00 went off pretty, you know without any problems so leaving Australia didn't need any top secret problems.

You didn't get a farewell parade of your own?

No, no, no we didn't.

Did that disappoint you?

No, no, no, no that didn't disappoint as far as we

39:30 were concerned. It was, you just went along with the system and it was part of the, of what was happening.

Tape 4

00:47 **Jimmy, if you could share a little bit about Greta with us?**

Yes I did mention that Greta was the, a new camp

01:00 It had only just been established and it was a good camp. It had wooden huts and it was just a short distance out of the little township of Greta, right on the railway line and that's where we did our basic training, around the hills there. The food was good. It was

01:30 winter time, May, June, July but it was quite pleasant. We, I'd just like to mention about the little township. I s'pose it had a population of a matter of a couple of hundred. Mightn't have been many more than that but it had one hotel

02:00 and when we went there, around the top of the bar used to be the spirits and that sort of thing which didn't last very long because the hands were coming over and picking up that sort of thing, so everything was put down below, but that hotel would have made a fortune because

02:30 it wasn't game to close because they'd have torn it apart. It was open 24 hours a day, seven days a week. There was always somebody in that pub and whilst there was liberal leave, everybody wasn't on duty at the same time so there was someone in that pub all the time and well

03:00 you know we'd march through it from time to time on exercises and the people were always out and cheering us on and all that sort of thing and we were then split up into companies and

03:30 to formulate what they called the 2nd reinforcements of the 6th Division. We, in our hut there would be 30 blokes all sleeping alongside on the floor but it was clean and everything was, the sanitation was

good.

04:00 They didn't have a wet canteen. They had a canteen there but it, wet canteens, what they called wet canteens was beer. It wasn't allowed at that stage. It was easy to get into down to the station, get on the train and go to Maitland and I'd have a nice leave

04:30 in Maitland, got in a few problems there one way and another with the Provos [Provosts – military police] arresting you and bringing you back to camp because you'd overstayed and there was a little place up the road further, Branxton and you could go up there on a Sunday and get a beer behind the locked doors and that sort of thing but it was a good area.

05:00 Digressing slightly, a few years ago I saw a little article in one of the Reveilles I think and a person was writing in and asking, "Had anyone been in the camp when it was established?"

05:30 so I wrote to the person and I got a nice letter back. I think I've still got it at home somewhere and told them about Greta camp and how these things took place from time to time and how many chappies had went away from there and some of them never came back, however

06:00 they were doing a, it was to go into this historical society. They've got an area there that they've created some of the history of Greta camp. Well after the military, rather, before I get that far, they established then what they called a camp alongside at the Silver City. It was built out of tin and

06:30 that was the Pioneer Battalion went in there but the camp we were in was the wooden huts, was quite, we were a bit aloof really. Our standard was higher than that of the Silver City and it turned, in later years, into a migrant camp and I went back through that way from

07:00 Sydney, no Newcastle, with my wife and two kids 25 years after I had called into the pub, and had a beer. Course there was, things in the pub had changed a bit in those times but I have fond memories of Greta. It was the beginning of a

07:30 big adventure and we did eventually come back to that camp when we came back from the Middle East. We went to, after we had our leave, we were to report back to

08:00 camp just out of Sydney, I can't think of it now. I'll think of it later and we marched through Sydney and after the march was finished we went out to Greta and we were there for two weeks before we were moved to New Guinea from Greta, was still the same

08:30 place, yeah.

So during the earlier days, you mentioned before a story of one of the soldiers kicking the sergeant up the backside. Was there more of that kind of stuff?

No that chappie was very quickly discharged. I mean he was a little bit mentally deficient I would say and no, there was no

09:00 problems after that. That was just that one incident. I remembered that because it was such a shock to me and I s'pose as a kid and wondering what the hell was going to happen to, what was just going on cause I didn't expect that sort of thing but anyhow no, there was no incidences that I can remember. That was an isolated incident because generally speaking, although, with all due respects

09:30 Australians had a self discipline in themselves. They knew when they, how far they could go and further to that, it was important to remember too, that we were volunteers. We weren't there because we had to be there. We were volunteers and because of that, I think it made the soldier or the person a better person

10:00 If you didn't like the system, well get out of it but by and large the, 98 percent of the people who were volunteers were good soldiers and I think that speaks well of the Australian forces generally.

Training exercises, what sort

10:30 **of things were you doing at Greta?**

Well we were doing parade drill, you know left, right, left, right, about turn, left turn, right turn and we would do little dummy exercises with, out going to capture a clump of bushes and that sort of thing and jumping in and out of

11:00 holes and long route marches, getting you used to carrying your gear and we only had Lewis guns then, was no Bren guns, was only Lewis guns and the old First World War Lee Enfield .303. They were still old rifles and

11:30 but it was, basically it was there to get you into the army way of life and be, like roll call, be on parade and timing and that sort of thing. That was part of your basic training. You knew that reveille would be at six o'clock

12:00 and you had to be up and you had to be dressed or shaved or whatever it was and you had to be, your breakfast at a certain time, you had to be on the main parade at x number of time, whatever time it was.

There was a chappie, he's still around, Sandy Clarke. Sandy used to, he had a girlfriend down in Greta.

12:30 Digressing a little bit, but Sandy would come home late at night and he was always late getting on the parade and he used to go to bed fully dressed. Well we didn't have pyjamas much in those days but he'd go to bed fully dressed so he'd, and he knew when his name was going to be called on the roll and he'd just be there just at the time, did it every day, yeah, Sandy Clarke. He finished up a prisoner of war in Germany, yeah.

13:00 **Were there accidents with armaments on the rifle range and?**

No, no not there no, no. They were very, very careful. They took us to Adamstown rifle range for a shoot and those instructors that were handling the situation were very, very conscious of accidents.

13:30 That was the first shoot I'd had out of a 303 and I got a bruised shoulder, it flattened, it was very, very hard but once you got to use it properly it was all right but and then we practised grenade throwing but not with live grenades. They were dummy grenades and that's the sort of basic training that we were doing. You were taught to

14:00 strip a Lewis gun and put it together and continue firing with it but no live ammunition. It was all practice but it was actually formulating you into a unit

14:30 so to prepare you for better things.

And finally, discipline at the camp. What sort of disciplinary action did officers or sergeants take upon men?

Well I can't

15:00 recall any incidents of, where people were brought before the authorities for over stepping the mark and in the early part

15:30 you accepted it. You accepted it. Discipline wasn't that hard but it was just, "Obey the rules," and there was no problem. If you obeyed the rules, there was no problem. There was no one, a few blokes might have overstayed their leave a little bit, that sort of thing but that was, they were isolated cases

16:00 and you'd get probably some pack drill. That was in the early stages. That was, you know you'd have to front up and you had to march up and down in the same place for half an hour or something like that but there wasn't much of that. Discipline was not a, it never was really, that I can recall that through my

16:30 army career, that discipline was a major issue, as far as the unit that I was associated with.

Now the boat trip over, you were on the Aquitania? You were saying there was one accident of a fellow falling off. What other things sort of went on, on the ship, training wise, practical jokes?

PT and marching

17:00 up and down. See, the Aquitania was a 54,000 toner and there was a fair bit of room and you had boat drill, lectures and actually the ship itself was a beautiful ship and interior was, you had church parades and you went into the big auditorium for the church parades and

17:30 as I said lectures and there was something doing all the time. You had to keep the troops occupied but, and fair bit of drinking.

Could you talk me through, one at a time, those three things? Firstly boat drill, what is boat drill and how did it operate?

Well you had to, you had your water wings as we called them

18:00 and you had to carry that with you at all times. That was slung over your shoulder and the boat drill was you had to assemble opposite the boat on a certain deck and line up and that sort of thing and you'd go through the routine of what, to lower the boats and that sort of thing and the order and how

18:30 you had to get there. That was what it consisted of really. Everybody had to do that and that was done quite frequently because naturally with a few hundred people on the one ship, you had to have a standard of behaviour when it come to any emergency so

19:00 boat drill was very important on your trip overseas.

Was boat drill just called at any time or there were set times to practise?

It was set times, yeah set times, boat drill yes. There was never an emergency sort of thing that I can remember anyhow. It was just that you had to be at the assembly at a certain

19:30 time and line up in your columns of three and you'd be getting lectured by the crew on the ship of what was the procedure, the right procedure in the case of emergency and yeah, that's about it.

You mentioned lectures? What sort of lectures were you receiving?

20:00 Well a lot of the lectures was on hygiene, venereal diseases because we were going into a country, or going into countries that we weren't accustomed to so it was important to make sure that the troops were aware of what they could be confronted with

20:30 when they were on leave and at a loose end and you would, there was not much I s'pose in the way of, there was a lot of leisure time on the ship but

21:00 we would have a boxing competition and there was two swimming pools there and that sort of thing and you spent a lot of time there but boxing was something that created interest amongst the troops because it was competitive. My friend Frank Archibald, who was a full blooded aboriginal, I hope I've got

21:30 a chance to say something about him later, he was a good middle weight boxer and we'd get there and barrack for Archie and, you know that's the sort of thing that seemed to help the boredom of ship life and course

22:00 you had your playing cards and was no gambling at that stage and that sort of thing but you found something to do and it was, you still had your commanding Officer, like your company commander and your platoon commander and your section commander and because you're on the ship didn't mean to say it was an open misere. You still

22:30 had that sense of being under control.

How did you fare in the boxing?

I didn't go in the boxing, no I was never a boxer, no.

And you mentioned earlier, when your mum sent you off as a young lad to church, you used to skip round the corner. Church parade, did fellers do that or did you get involved or?

In the army or?

On the ship, when you went to?

23:00 Yes you had, as I said you had your church parades every Sunday, my word and, you know they were, the RC's would have there and the Protestants would have theirs and that sort of thing. That was compulsory. You had to attend church parade, my word and you couldn't get out of it cause they'd round you up anyhow and you had to

23:30 appear so yes that was yes, church parades yeah.

What did the fellers think of church parade?

Well I think they took it all in their stride. You know it was something that you had to do and you did it so but later on like if you're talking about church parades generally, there was a lot of funny things happened from time to time on church parades

24:00 but …

Such as?

Well when, for instance I could say that when we were in the, we come back from Greece and church parade on Sunday. I'll never forget it and my mate Ronnie Diamond said, "We're going to church Jimmy?" and I said, "Well how can we get out of it?" He said, "Well we'll," he said, "We'll

24:30 duck down to the showers," so we did and we got caught so the next Sunday the church parade, we stood out as conscientious objectors and that was all right so they took us on a five mile route march. There was about a hundred of us, so that stopped that.

25:00 They had ways of getting round it, had ways of getting round it, yeah.

And other things with church parade?

Well some of the church parades, some of the ministers were very good, you know. Some of them were boring but

25:30 I think that you, what they did didn't do anyone any harm. It was part of discipline, part of discipline. That's something that you, you were there. You had to fall in line or otherwise you, there was another way around it, so it was part of your self discipline.

26:00 **So when you arrived at Colombo, you mentioned earlier that there were cart races and things like that? Can you tell me about some of those things?**

Well there was a group of us, Sid Phelp, Bill England, Ian McLaren, that's some of them I can think of. We hit the decks running in Colombo,

26:30 Bombay rather and it was the most filthiest place you could ever imagine. Like things that we never saw. Natives laying asleep under trees and under palms and that sort of thing on the side of the road and like no toilets and half naked kids and beggars and the

27:00 some of the larrikins, I wasn't in this lot but some of them were. When we were going down this street and, you know there was a hell of a commotion way up the street and you could see them coming and there's these two bullocks flat out and about 10 niggers in the muddy, whooping it up and they're galloping down the bloody main street and people running, natives going left, right and bloody centre.

27:30 We went to a, there was, that was only one of the many things that took place and of course these beggars they were, you know trying to get money out of anything sort of thing and blokes would, you know wouldn't give them anything, turn them round and kick them in the backside and then we went down to a place called Grant Road. It was a slum

28:00 of Bombay. Actually Bombay is quite a nice city but this was a slum and there was the prostitutes in cages, lined up by the hundreds, not very encouraging I can say. Not me at 18 years of age anyhow but it was something that you saw on the other side of the world

28:30 and something that we'd never dreamt of in our time so we did sight seeing during the day and in some parts of it, like Bombay was quite a nice place. There was like huge influence of English speaking people there that had big palatial flats, units and that sort of thing in the

29:00 more civilised area and nice parks and it was, you know quite a nice city but we had the day, put in the day there. I was very sick though from all the gin I drank the night before but anyhow I made it back to the ship and no one was left

29:30 behind. Then when we left Bombay, as I said we transferred onto another smaller ship, with a battalion of New Zealanders and that's where we finished the journey then to Port Said.

Just in respect to Bombay, the prostitutes and stuff, did many of the fellers actually get caught with VD?

One feller, that I remember. He was in our mob

30:00 Do you have to put this on tape? Now what was his name? Alice, we nicknamed him Alice that's right and he was a bit, you know, well you wouldn't say really retarded but he was just not the full quid and Alice, when we were issued

30:30 then with what they called Bombay bloomers. It was a shorts and they come down just sort of round your knees, you know. Tropical dress it was and when Alice sat down his belongings would be sticking out the side. He was well swung, put it that way. Alice, when we saw him he was in one of these cages with these what's a name but by the time he got to the Middle East, he was the first one

31:00 to finish up in the VD Hospital. Alice was his name but I don't know what his, yeah.

Were you automatically medically discharged if you got?

No they had special hospitals in the Middle East and in those days they had to go under a very rigorous treatment and they were away from the camp for

31:30 up to two months before they were returned again, before they were given the clearance to come back but there was, that was the only isolated case that I can remember but that of course, later on when you got into the Middle East there was quite a bit of it, hospitals full there and they had to wear distinctive uniforms. You know those that had, were

32:00 under treatment for VD they had to wear red ties or blue trousers or something like that see and you'd say, "Oh yes, well that", I s'pose it was a deterrent but there wasn't, it wasn't for the want of the emphasis being placed on the problems of VD. The people, the troops should have been well aware of what they were

32:30 letting themselves into.

Then the ship you took from Bombay or Colombo to Palestine, what was that called?

The Orion.

So what was that like travelling over, opposed to the Aquitania, were they different?

Well yes in the Aquitania we had cabins and on the Orion we had hammocks and you had your hammock slung

33:00 in the mess deck. The mess tables were underneath and you slept in these hammocks over the top and in the morning you just rolled your hammock up and that was your mess deck, yeah so but it was a nice little ship, nice clean little ship and you never saw much of the crew or anything like that. They never interfered with the troops and

33:30 when you're talking about Bombay, back there it was like, out would come the natives in little rowing boats, skips and that sort of thing and you'd throw pennies in the water and they'd dive in and you can see them. They'd pick up the pennies and that sort of thing and then we'd be bartering with the natives. They'd come

34:00 out with fruit like tropical fruits, bananas and pineapples and paw paw's all that sort of thing and the idea was you put the money in a little container and you dropped it down the boat and then put so much in it and that sort of thing and take the money out and then you'd pull it back see. There was some funny things went on

34:30 and if you didn't get the right thing you'd get a bucket of water and throw it over. They'd throw buckets of water over them and that sort of thing and that was part of the, that was the humorous side of it but they'd be there, dozens of them, you know in these little, selling stuff and that sort of thing, yeah

35:00 and everybody was George, called everybody George. Like the natives, you'd go to talk to them and, "George", everybody, no matter where you were it was George. The Arabs or the Indians or the, whatever they were, it was 'George'. That was it. Everybody got that nickname 'George'.

35:30 **And just on the boats, was there air conditioning and?**

No.

Was it uncomfortable?

Well not really no. Like I'll put it to you this way, going through the equator in the Indian Ocean well you were just in a pair of shorts. You didn't have a shirt or anything like that on you know but

36:00 it was pretty hot and pretty stuffy and you got out on the decks but course there was blackouts and that sort of thing you'd get no lights or anything like that but self preservation, I can't get the word. You didn't light a cigarette up or anything like that, you know

36:30 but the meals were always good on the ships and …

What sort of things did you eat?

Well stews and salads and that sort of thing and like stewed meats and stewed, baked beans, all that

37:00 sort of thing but on the Aquitania there was plenty of booze but wasn't so much on the Orion. I mean the Orion was a little bit more secluded.

So once you arrived at Palestine what training camp did you go into?

Beet Jirja.

37:30 We arrived at Port Said, went by train to El Kantara, crossed the Canal at Ismailia and then by train to El Majdal in Palestine and into camp at Beit Jirja,

38:00 which was very close to Gaza and that's where we started to get split up to go, you know out to the battalion, sent to the battalion which was in Egypt. At Beit Jirja it had, you know running, pipe water and

38:30 they had wells and there was orange orchards and, you know those places. It wasn't a bad camp, bit dusty and that sort of thing but wasn't a bad camp though just the same and grapes grew there in, they just run along the ground and, you know plenty of grapes and things like that. Beautiful oranges, Jaffa oranges and used to, there was plenty of that sort of thing.

39:00 You could buy them off the wogs or pinch them off the wogs, yeah and we had leave there when we got there, you know into Jerusalem which was quite exciting, and into Tel Aviv. We spent, you know time from, different days you were given leave and you had to tow the mark properly.

39:30 You had to be properly dressed and you had to behave yourself otherwise you didn't get on leave but there wasn't an abundance of leave but still it was, you did see some of the sights around the place so it was quite, Palestine was quite an interesting place. When you

40:00 look back at the old bibles and that sort of thing, it's all there, particularly Jerusalem, I thought was, when you think of what's happening there now, what a shame because the Jews and the Arabs were at one another's throats then, 1940.

Tape 5

00:42 **The Arabs, I understand that they used to pinch and steal stuff from you?**

Yeah they were the greatest thieves that ever

01:00 was or ever will be because as the saying is, “They could pinch your socks without taking your shoes off”, they were that good. I can relate a couple of incidences with the Arabs. We,

01:30 when we were, when we arrived, you had to be very careful to secure your arms, your rifles so you had to, the centre pole in your tent, they were what they call EPIP tents and you had the, you had all your rifles circular and you had a chain going right through the trigger guards

02:00 and that’s where your rifles were kept every night and you couldn’t have them alongside you because they’d thieve them and there was an incident when we came back from Greece. This is quite true. There was four sergeants in a tent in their own lines but segregated from the rest of the battalion and the Arabs came there one night and they

02:30 took the tent off the blokes and they woke up the next morning with the sun shining in their eyes. They took the tent, they were thieves. I had a watch I took off an Italian prisoner and it had no glass in it. Beautiful, big silver watch it was and I had it all packed up to send home to Mum

03:00 in a little box in my haversack and I slept in the second, or on the second, we were on like bed boards, you know just a board. There was a bloke there and I’m here and another bloke and so forth and I had that in my haversack alongside my bed there and

03:30 we had, you had the fly that was going around, opener that was going around the tent on all those securely pegged down and I woke up one morning, my haversacks gone and my watch and there was a bloke in the same tent. Hardy was his name, killer pup and he was

04:00 writing a diary and it was a good diary. In civil life he was a street photographer. He was an uncanny, rather a cluey old bloke and he was writing this diary and he kept it, he religiously kept this diary right through and he had that under his head on the pillow in his haversack. They got that and he never knew it. They were the greatest

04:30 thieves ever and they’d take blankets but there were things we did too like they weren’t the only thieves either. They’d come around the camp selling oranges, lemonade

05:00 oranges, they’d say, “Orange, lemonade,” and we’d say, “Righto.” Two or three of us would crowd round the wog and we’d buy two oranges and pinch six and there was in our platoon, a bloke, he was always short of money and

05:30 he sold a wog this blanket and off went the wog with the blanket. He went about 200 yards and another, one of our blokes stuck him up and took the blanket back off him again, got his money back so they, you know but they were. They were the greatest thieves. You couldn’t allow them in the camp but they’d get in there somehow and you couldn’t trust them.

What happened when you caught

06:00 **one of them?**

Well we were a bit as much at fault as them so you couldn’t do much. You couldn’t go and report it to the company commander could you? So we’d just give them a kick in the arse and boot them out of the camp, tell them not to come back. That’s all you could do but they’d be back the next day, trying to sell you or stayed around in the camp waiting for an opportunity to come and pinch something. They’re no better now.

06:30 I’ve got no time for the Arabs. I’ve got no time for them at all.

And so training while you were in Palestine?

Yes well that was, see it was only a short time before I went up, there was two phases in that. When we first arrived in the Middle East, well there was basically nothing, only administration because

07:00 we were ready to go up to the unit but when we come back from Greece, well we did a period in that camp, Julis, which was alongside Beit Jirja that we did a bit of training there, after we came back, when we were reforming again see and we did a couple of exercises cross country to sea

07:30 and had a bivouac on the beach at Rehovot and but not intensive training. The intensive training that we did was in Egypt prior to going up to the desert. The first contingent that went over, they would have done more than what we did because we were

08:00 ready to join the battalion see but we were the second reinforcements but it was basically administration that period that we were there.

So Egypt, can you share with me the intensive training that you were doing there?

Yes Egypt wherever you looked was sand, more sand and more sand

08:30 and we would leave camp on a, say a Monday and you would get back to your camp again about the weekend and you were doing exercises such as planning attacks on a objective, a mountain, hills or

whatever

09:00 and you had to, you marched. There was no transport. You marched and you dug weapon pits. You would spend like you'd take up a defensive position. Say that you've got to attack a feature 2,000 yards away and your company had to dig in see, so you're in a defensive position and you had to dig this weapon pit and you had to dig it to the right

09:30 depth. If it was rocky, you'd spend half the night digging, had to be done. Part of discipline and next morning when you moved on, you had to fill it in again. The wogs used to make sure you filled it in so yeah, so you know that was intensive training and it was pretty hard work so but it

10:00 did prepared you for what was to come. You had to have that. You had to have that training. You had to have that discipline, that you had to, you knew that you had to protect yourself and the only way to do it, you had to dig the holes and you spent half the night digging and then you had to do your shift of the guard. It was just like being in the field. You'd have to do two on and four off so

10:30 you'd be sitting up for two hours and then wake your mate up and he'd go on and that sort of thing but that was, and the whole unit would move as a unit. The division would, you had, your attached troops, your artillery, your machine gunners, your carriers. Like Jack Alrick was a carrier see, that, the whole thing was moving. You were training, intensive training until such time as

11:00 the authorities was sufficiently satisfied that you were well enough trained to take the next step, to go into action.

Did you go up Battalion against Battalion in skirmishes?

Yes, yes one would be the enemy and the other would be the attacking force and you'd use smoke bombs and things like that, you know and overrun their positions and things like that but

11:30 it was all done in the form of training but it was intensive training.

How would you determine if you'd shot one of?

Well there were umpires and the umpire would have a band on his arm and he would move up with the attacking troops and he'd just touch you and you'd stop there. That's, down you'd

12:00 go and the idea then was to drive the rifle, bayonet in the ground, rifle up and that was signal to the stretcher bearers, there was a wounded man there. Then you'd knock somebody else out and that sort of thing but that was how you did your training, yeah. Had it all worked out, yeah, seems silly now but, well, it saved a lot of lives.

Now you mentioned that you'd just actually been assigned

12:30 **to your platoon and company and Ron you met. Did you start to get to know other fellers at that stage?**

Yes, yes there was in that particular camp, the camp was very dispersed because the Italians had bombed Alexandria harbour and we were only about 12 kilometres from Alexandria at a place called Amiriya and

13:00 our section, 1 Section there and 2 Section near, 500 yards away and 3 Section, the area, the whole area was over a huge area, was no showers or anything like that there, but just a place in the desert and yes, Leo Myers

13:30 was our section leader and there was Louis Pelton, Slim Johnson, George Morris, Frank O'Driscoll. Frank used to live down here a bit. Brian Gervin, Tom Marshall, you know. I will say that Ron and Leo Myers, we were all, you know, you were

14:00 only there probably a couple of days and you got to know each other and that sort of thing. It was up to yourself. If you wanted to be standoffish, well you got nowhere so I mean you just made, you finished up as mates and like you shared things and like I remember Slim Johnson and George Morris clearing off one night

14:30 went Ack Willy [absent without leave] into Alexandria and we covered for them, you know, so that's the sort of thing you did. We shouldn't have done it but we did, they didn't get caught that time. They got next time and at that stage AWL [absent without leave] was a very severe offence and it meant 28

15:00 days detention under the Pommies in a detention centre. Two of my mates, like Slim Johnson and George Morris, they did a couple of stunts in there and were told that they could tell you about what happened in the detention, is what's happening over in Guantanamo Bay or whatever it is, now. It was only a joke to

15:30 what they had to go through but still.

What did they say?

Like they would, Slim's, right they were Pommy Redcaps. They were Pommies and they had reveille. You had to be up at a certain time and dressed and shaved, one minute

16:00 and like you'd have the lather on, and right, then certain time on the latrines, whether you're finished or not. Then daily exercise, get a big garbage bin and you had to polish that so they could shave in it. Break rock over in the corner there. When you've got it all done, shift it over there. When you've got it over there

16:30 shift it back there. Nearly broke their heart and at the double so not too many blokes broke the rules.

Men came back broken from that?

I can't remember any that did although there was, you know you'll hear things but I do believe that there was a bloke was going for his second term and he committed suicide before he would go back again. That was what was told by the chappie that,

17:00 yeah it was, they were very severe, probably Redcaps yeah so if you stepped out of line you met a, that's why I say it made good soldiers of a lot of people.

Feller's would all try and get back at them or play up on them or during, just, leave?

How do you mean?

Play pranks on them and cause disputes and troubles with the Redcaps?

17:30 No, no there was no redress for the Redcaps. Yes there was brawls. If they could get at them, our blokes would dish them up. For instance, when we came out of the desert, there was Ted Boland, Alan Baker

18:00 and myself. We had a nice leave in Alexandria and we had a day and a night's leave. We had to be home by 12 o'clock, that's right. We had to catch the train back by 12 so we had the days leave and we, you know went in and out of places and the bar and around. Alex was quite a nice place.

18:30 It was a big naval base too, a lot of English sailors and soldiers and that sort of thing there, one of the headquarters. Anyway we finished up in this café this night with these three sheilas and the score was you brought them drinks and they were getting so much commission or whatever it was. Well we thought we'd have a

19:00 sheila for the night and anyhow they got a lot of, like we had a bit of money when we come out of the desert. You know we had a few quid, nowhere to spend it up there and we were better paid than the Pommies so we had six bob a day and it was good money and we were buying these drinks and that sort of thing and, you know having a great time and

19:30 they decided that they would go and powder their nose. They never come back so this Ted Boland he was, as I say a shearer from out Narrabri somewhere like that. Big, rough bugger he was too. He got a DCM and he put on a blew and he started to, like I was only a bloody kid and that sort of thing but I was still in it I s'pose with the rest of them and the next minute four Redcaps

20:00 appeared at the bloody doorway. End of story so they just come and grabbed us and bundled us into, but they were on a mission. We had to return to camp because that's when we got the word, had to get mobilised to go to Greece but it was no questions asked, into the bloody paddy wagon and back to camp, bang. That was the end of the story. No sheilas,

20:30 yeah. That was part of life. Yeah Ted had a mate who got killed in Greece.

So you were sharing a bit before about Bardia? You left Egypt obviously, training camp, and went to Bardia? You started sharing

21:00 **really about the start of the whole campaign. Can you just talk us through now the action there?**

Well as I said we went, we moved. I'm going to start from the start line. We were all aware of the objectives that we had to take, by the sand map that was

21:30 we were shown and you had in your mind just what, where you had to go and the distance you had to go etcetera because it'd all been photographed by reconnaissance plane and all put down on a mud map and well we moved up to the start line and when I say the start line, like the First Battalion's there, Second Battalion there,

22:00 Third Battalion there and we're on a united front. We were in reserve and I s'pose we would have been a thousand yards from the actual wire entanglements and the tank trap and the tank trap was something about eight feet deep by about 12 foot wide, so the tanks couldn't, so at a given, everything was zeroed at the given time.

22:30 They came, it was bitterly cold and everything was quiet, no one talking and they came around with a rum issue.

23:00 Anyhow they had this issue of rum and I'd never drink rum. I never drank rum and 'phoo' when I took a mouthful of it, it nearly burnt my gizzard out, you know but that was to, you know get your feeling back so, and you had a zero hour where

23:30 the artillery was one bang, and the infantry started to move off. Well then shortly the shells started coming the other way of course and the infantry moved forward and were a creeping barrage. Our guns were firing in front of us, lobbying shells in front of us, a creeping barrage they call it and the infantry were moved up as one and tanks and transport, the ambulances, stretcher bearers

24:00 and you got to the wire and the engineers had blown gaps through the wire entanglements and our tanks broke through and got over and there was that much dust and smoke and shells and screams and bloody blokes yelling out and

24:30 it was on and when you think back now, you think to yourself, "Wonder how I got through that?" and I said, it's only that Alan Moxon had got, was the first bloke I really saw

25:00 hit. He had a piece out of his leg. Ted fixed him up and we moved on, kept moving on at a small, a steady pace because you couldn't go too fast because you'd run in your own shells so the attack was in full swing. Well then we got, took the first

25:30 obstacle, captured them and then we moved onto the second one and was about 10 or 12 blokes in that, got, they surrendered so we kept moving and then we come to this third one. It was the, our main objective of our platoon and that's where Joe Coleman, the sergeant, put us to ground

26:00 and sent me as runner across to company Headquarters and to contact Captain Henry, that we wanted tank support, for him to divert a tank, we only had one tank per company and, which I did and it was across the open ground, wasn't a stick or a straw anywhere and

26:30 run both ways and I got back within about 10 or 15 yards and as I said, that huge explosion and I jumped into a bit of a weapon pit and Ronnie was laying on, I could see him when the dust cleared and we sort of come to our senses and we looked around and all I saw was two legs. That was Joe

27:00 that's all that was left of him so we sorted ourselves out a bit and got on our feet and then we charged the post. It sort of, you know somebody sang out, "Let's get going," or, "Get out of this," or something like that and we charged the post and we raced up to it and I'll never forget it. There was Dagos running everywhere

27:30 like you had your rifle this way and I fronted a little Dago. I didn't know whether to shoot him, stab him and you know what I did? I took his hat off as a souvenir. That's right, that's right but I never moved from here and I've often thought about that. I thought, "Poor little bugger. I can't kill him," and they surrendered. A couple of them had been killed and their officer

28:00 had been hit in the arm and we captured that post. Must have been about 20 of them there I s'pose and then we moved on a bit further towards our objective and come across another chap from Lismore by the name of Sargeant. Lieutenant Sargeant was his name. He'd been hit in the chest and been killed and we moved

28:30 up onto our what was our objective, the main gun post on the Bardia, Tobruk Road which was a bitumen road and that's where we had to, that was to consolidate. We had to stop there and that was our objective in the first day so we got there and there was a few

29:00 Dagos killed around there, around the gun emplacements and Ronnie and I were on the Bren and we were in a weapon pit or sangar, built up with stone and they opened up on us and made us take cover smartly. Well things quietened down and we were in our

29:30 position. We had reached our objective, Don Company so I just got up and just sort of walked over towards this culvert, there was a culvert. There was a dead Dago up on the top of the culvert and Jack Walring knows about this and as I got close, somebody put his head out from under this culvert

30:00 and I fired a bullet, you know at the entrance to the what's a name and thought, you know, next minute out come bloody Italians with their hands up. Well Ted Boland and a few of us, we all got together and we captured all those fellers and sent them off back, you know disarmed them and

30:30 some of them wanted to fight. Some don't want to fight. We went back to our positions and then we camped there that night, bivouacked there that night and next morning we were to move off for the final capture of Bardia. That was only the first day. We were to move off the next morning and I didn't know until I was talking to Jack the other day, but he was in the

31:00 carrier just the other side of that road and we moved, we started to move and a shell landed in our area and I remember Captain Henry saying, no, our sergeant major, Danny Campbell, saying, "Get a move on, get a move on," and there was a bloke by the name of Harry Plunkett from Taree. He was in a weapon pit

31:30 five yards or less from where I was and he was putting his gear on, his haversack on and the next shell landed right at his feet, blew both his legs off. He used to carry a dictionary, Harry. His number was

32:00 I think. Mine was 15377 so we went in the same day but he was in the same section I was in, Harry Plunkett. He was studying for a law degree or something like that but he was always a very quiet bloke and he used to sit in the tent when we were playing cards and that sort of thing. He'd be reading books and that sort of thing and blew both his legs off, like killed him of course

32:30 and then we moved on. Got out of that area pretty quick then and we moved on down towards Bardia town and a few blokes had been killed on the way out of another battalion and we never struck anything till we got right to the, in the afternoon we got right to the last fort on the top of Bardia

33:00 village and we had to attack this fort. They were forts and that was Don Company and as we, it was open, as bare as that and course they opened up on us but luckily we had a Matilda tank with us and we got within about 500 yards of it I s'pose and

33:30 few bullets whizzing around but he pumped a few shells into him, into the fort and they surrendered so that was the last, that was the capture of Bardia because the other battalion, part of the battalion had cut the town so that was the end of that so we spent then, went down into the

34:00 little harbour, around Bardia harbour and we had a lot of prisoners that we were guarding all night. We had to be up all night guarding them and we, next morning we, the prisoners were taken away and our company commander let us relax a bit and we had a bit of a swim in the Mediterranean and

34:30 got out of some of our clothes into Dago clothes and that sort of thing and washed our clothes and we spent a day or two there and then we had to get a truck and about four or five of us had to go back over the area and pick up the dead blokes, the blokes that had been killed and Harry

35:00 was one of them that we picked up and Sargeant and a couple of others. We loaded them onto trucks and boots hanging out, that sort of thing and they were taken back then into Egypt and we went with trucks and that sort of thing, getting bodies off the trucks and the engineers

35:30 were digging graves for them. You know they were just so deep and burying them. Well when we came back to our bivouac area that night, the next morning we had to go with an Italian working party and pick up their dead and we just buried them where they were.

Were you issued with any protective clothing

36:00 **gloves?**

No, no.

Was that horrific, picking up?

I never noticed it. It was part of your training. You expected it. I mean I knew Harry well because I'd been with him for a few months, you know from camp and that sort of thing but Harry, it didn't mean a great, I mean

36:30 you just went on. If you stopped and brooded over, you wouldn't have gone on so no, you just, it was just something that you did. I never gave it, I can't remember. I never gave it a second thought. Like I remember one of the chaps that was with us he said, he just run his hands, he said, "We could have cut his up leg there and up there." He said, "He would have lived." He said, "We could have stumped him or something like that,"

37:00 and you just threw him up in the truck, yeah.

So I mean you weren't just picking up bodies, you were picking up bits and pieces of?

Well Joe Coleman, we put his two legs in a sandbag. That's all that was Joe. That's all that was left of Joe, was two sandbags, had his legs in two sandbags. Harry Plunkett

37:30 was there with not a mark on him and both his legs were blown off. He was, you know he was full, he had a greatcoat on and his uniform and that sort of thing and his hat was still on his head so, but it's, yeah it was just something that, I wasn't callous or anything

38:00 like that but it's just part of life.

Not to labour this too much but a couple of times you were quite close to shells landing, killing both these fellows. Did parts of their body actually hit you?

Not so much me as Ronnie Diamond. Ronnie Diamond he had bits of meat on his uniform and his tin hat cause he was closer to what he was.

38:30 I would have been about another 15 feet or 20 feet away from where Ronnie was, but Harry Plunkett, no Harry, his legs were in the trench see and it landed in the trench and it's, the explosion's come up and apart from his legs gone, you couldn't see anything wrong with Harry so, but I think one of my fears was of something like that happening, either stepping on a mine or an explosion.

39:00 A bullet is clean but to get your legs or your arms blown off is something I used to think about but I'd just like to mention this. Sergeant Coleman, said he came from Nambucca Heads, somehow his wife, I've got a photo I'll show you later, got in touch with me

39:30 when she knew we came back from the Middle East and I arranged to meet her in Sydney in front of the People's Palace. She wanted to know what happened to Joe and she came that day with a picnic basket and the two kiddies.

40:00 I'll show you the photo, the two kiddies. We went up into Hyde Park and we sat down and had lunch and I had to tell her what happened to Joe. She had a photo of his grave that they sent to her and I spent the day with Mrs Coleman and the two kids and left them at the People's Palace and I've never been in touch with her since

40:30 but in Nambucca Heads Services Club, his name is the second name on their honour board, A A Coleman and incidentally she, Joe was a farmer and she was looking after the farm and she got two Italian prisoners of war to look after the farm, help on the farm. She finished up marrying one.

41:00 That's right, that's right.

Did you tell her what actually did happen to Joe?

I did. She wanted to know. She wanted to know did he suffer? I said, "He wouldn't have known what hit him." He wouldn't have known.

Tape 6

00:44 **Right Jimmy we finished off the story talking about the cleanup operation that was required after Bardia. Did you return to Amiriya or did you continue onwards to Tobruk?**

No we went from Bardia, we were pulled back for about a week

01:00 in a backward area and then we proceeded to take up defences outside Tobruk, as Tobruk was the next on the agenda.

Was your unit in any way involved in reinforcing Bardia, the garrisons at Bardia?

No, no we were withdrawn. The infantry were withdrawn and

01:30 other units, I don't know what other units they would be, they take over that area and the 6th division and the 16th and 17th and 19th Brigades moved on, on to Tobruk.

And for you personally, can you give us an idea of what your morale was like? On the one hand you'd had quite a convincing victory but on the other hand of course you'd been exposed

02:00 **to some of the more traumatic elements of warfare? What was your personal state of mind after Bardia?**

I just thought that, you know we were, had done well and we had a victory under our belt and the next one could be probably easier still because

02:30 I make this point. Your first action is your best because you don't know what's going to happen. The second one, you're a bit more cautious so, you know walking into the unknown in the first instance is something that's hard to explain because

03:00 you don't know how you're going to react for a minute once you come under fire but Tobruk, I never had a second thought about Tobruk. I thought, "Well it'll be another victory," which it was.

And what were your thoughts about the Italians at this point? Did you assume that you were going to face a similar sort of surrender and willingness as you pushed through the desert?

More or less, mind you

03:30 in Bardia there were pockets of pretty stiff resistance from the Italians. They did put up a fight in certain areas. They didn't all just put up their hands and give in straight away but they did, like they killed a lot of blokes so I mean they were fair dinkum but Tobruk

04:00 on the other hand was a different proposition. There was no big tank trap or defences of that nature. It was more spread out over a larger area and protected by landmines. They had big areas of landmines and tanks dug in with just the turret and machine guns out which looked as though they

04:30 would cause problems but they were quickly overcome by huge barrages of artillery and that, you know soon got over that one.

I'll just ask you, once the Bardia battle was finished and the general cleanup had occurred,

did you acquire a whole bunch of Italian equipment? Did you come across weapons and transport vehicles?

05:00 Yes we had Italian trucks and Italian motorbikes and we had one of their automatic weapons, the Breda, similar to what our Bren gun was, the Breda. We did acquire some small calibre, you know weaponry, plenty of revolvers

05:30 and but by and large, a lot of trucks which, you know was very good to have on our side because we were never over done with transport at that particular stage because we're talking about a period in the Middle East when equipment was very, very scarce. The Middle East at that time, as I remember

06:00 was held on a shoestring budget, not a lot of troops and not a lot of equipment and so everything that you could put back into action again, they did and they used it to success throughout the Tobruk campaign.

Were you impressed with the quality of

06:30 **their weaponry and the transport vehicles?**

Not really no, no. It was a bit shoddy as compared with the British armour and artillery. Yes, they weren't as well equipped as what we were I would say. Mind you, they seemed to have plenty of it

07:00 but in the hands of say the Germans for instance, it would have been a different story. They lacked, the Italians lacked a lot of will. I think they were badly led which was fortunate I s'pose for us, in a sense. Where we were

07:30 well led. We had good officers, good commanders and they went about their task of war with great determination and won through the day.

The leadership then had the strong confidence of the men?

Yes, yes we were lucky. We had

08:00 Sir Frederick Chilton who was our CO and Major General Allen was the GOC, Sir Iven MacKay I should say. Sir Iven MacKay was GOC of 6th Divi and they were very prominent commanders in their time and most other battalions had well trained and officers who had served in

08:30 the First World War and they knew what their business was about so we were lucky. We had good officers.

Now you said that you camped down for a week before heading onto Tobruk? Where did you set up camp and what did you spend that week doing?

We just, you pulled back into an area. We were out of range with artillery and you just bivouacked on the top of the ground

09:00 sort of thing, just laid on a, might have dug a bit of a weapon pit, get out of the wind and that sort of thing and there was not much you could do, just only keep under cover as much as you possibly could and keep out of sight from aircraft and that sort of thing so it was, there was nowhere to go. It was just a desert. Left, right, centre there was all desert so that's all you did.

09:30 You just put in your time, bloody sit around playing cards or talking to one another and, you know just having a rest.

Did you see enemy or allied aircraft over the Bardia area in that week?

Not a great deal no, no. No you'd see an occasional spotting plane. That was all. There was very, very little air activity. There was very little air activity in that, at that particular time in the Middle East anywhere. There was no fighters or, you know bombers

10:00 like there, occasionally you would see the Italians come over with a bomber but they'd scoot off pretty well, that sort of thing but there was very little air activity at that particular stage.

Can you talk a little bit about the conditions that you were facing there in the desert in terms of the weather, the wind?

Yes, yes that's an interesting point.

10:30 At night, bitterly cold, wind would go right through you. You only had your uniform and some woollen underclothing and your greatcoat like an overcoat and we did get issued with what they called a leather jerkin. It was just a short vest

11:00 with leather. That kept the wind out pretty well. Then sandstorms. You've never seen anything like it. It would blow and the dust would swirl and you would, you just couldn't move anywhere. It was just like night

11:30 and the sand and the dust would get into everything and your ears and your eyes and your food and you

name it. It played up with your Bren guns because of the sand and grit and it was a very, you know very uncomfortable and most of all, cold.

12:00 You had no protection from the wind, only huddle up and put your back towards the wind and sort of put up, and you couldn't go and get behind a tree or under a bush or anything like that. There was nothing there, just desert.

What was required in terms of weapon maintenance? Could you tell me what you personally had to do?

Well I mainly had a rifle

12:30 but with our machine guns, well we'd wrap them up in a blanket or something like that during the night, if they weren't on fixed lines and that sort of thing. You had to protect them so that you could have them operational at a minute's notice, to keep the sand out of them so whatever you could scrounge to cover the working parts. You would wrap

13:00 them up to keep the dust, keep them in operational order. It was always an ongoing thing. It was hard to, from the point of view of an infantryman, to have his weapons in order particularly in the desert. It was bad.

How would you go about cleaning your .303?

Well you just, you had normal cleaning gear and that sort of thing you had to pull through and

13:30 you couldn't use, you never had oil. You had a little bit of graphite but you had to be careful with that because the sand would, you know stick to it and that sort of thing. The old rifle, it was a bolt action so you only had to move it once and you had

14:00 it in operation but a Bren gun, where you had to depend upon the gasses to operate the work, it had to fire and move quickly to get it operational so those that had Bren guns were constantly trying to keep them in operation and being so cold, that graphite

14:30 would get heavy so therefore slow the movement down. Once you got the first shot away, well it would operate all right, but you had to get that first shot away. If you didn't, look out.

And at this stage, were you feeling quite comfortable with your .303?

Yes, yes they were a great weapon. A tank could run over it and you could pick it up and defend yourself with it. They were great, they were yeah.

15:00 There were a bit heavy, a bit cumbersome but they were, I think they more than paid for themselves in the 303 was a better rifle.

And were you feeling confident in terms of your accuracy and your ability to use the .303?

Yeah, yes that's right yes, they were, yes it was your best friend. You had to look after it, yeah.

I heard they were held pretty close

15:30 **to the body during the night?**

Well yes you kept them, yes my word. You kept them pretty close to you and not even arms length away. You kept, they were with you, alongside you, that's where you kept it, my word. Course in those days you didn't sleep much either.

And at any point did you and Ron or any of the lads talk about those that had been lost in the initial Bardia

16:00 **assault?**

I don't think so. You know I don't think, I s'pose I shouldn't say it, but you didn't, they just weren't there and you accepted it. You expected that sort of thing. If somebody was going to get, not going to be there at roll call and

16:30 if you stopped to ponder and worry about it, well you were defeating your purpose as a soldier so it was something you accepted. When you got back to normal camp, well very seldom anybody's name was mentioned or, you know, you just went on again.

17:00 Somebody else was there to take their place so it was a good thing not to become over friendly with anyone because I would say then that you would probably feel the impact of not having your mate with you and it was part of your,

17:30 of being an infantryman. You had to expect those things. From the point of view of an infantryman, he was a unique person. He was never allowed to get comfortable, settled into a place.

18:00 Once you did the army had some way of disturbing your peace so you got moved on or your tent got

shifted or something like that. You never was able to get sort of comfortable and you had to look after yourself, carry your own gear and maintain it and

18:30 you never know when you might need some little thing so you carried your home on your back in your haversack and that was what you, an infantryman is all about. Now the artillery or the motor transport, they had some other way but the infantryman had nothing. He had himself and the clothes he stood up in and the equipment that he wore and he had to look after that

19:00 and otherwise if he didn't, well it might be, he might find that because he'd neglected something, it might cost him his life.

Jimmy you raise a really interesting point there. On the one hand, you've got this sense of mateship and camaraderie and that's almost the iconic vision that we have

19:30 **of the diggers, is their closeness and their reliance on one another but on the other hand, you talk about this need to keep some sort of distance there so you're not too attached, in case you lose people. That's an interesting juggling act or balancing act?**

Yes, yes it is. To explain that, let me think.

20:00 When, being in the field and being in camp was, you know was like chalk and cheese. Being in the field you depended on your mate, in lots of cases, being with you because it gave you that inner sense of not being on your own.

20:30 In camp that's where the probably the fellowship amongst diggers or soldiers came into being. Hard to compare the two, like for instance, I say about my friend Ron Diamond, my mate Ron Diamond. We were close but

21:00 if anything had happened to Ron, I would have just went on and I s'pose he would have done the same with me but we were inseparable when it came back to camp and that sort of thing. We did all our things together and that sort of thing but I don't think anything, anyone in existence in the armed forces are as close together as infantrymen are. I'll make this point because

21:30 you live together, you went on leave together, you got drunk together, you played two-up together, you slept in the same tent, slept with one another in the cold and you became attached to one another in that respect.

22:00 For instance some of those chappies that I went into the army with in 1940, I saw them probably every other day except when you're on leave, for the next four and a half years and, you know it was an inner bond that you created with your mates and

22:30 if you were in the navy or the air force or something like that, they got shifted from here to there and that sort of thing but in the infantry, you lived with one another. You were there every day. You saw one another every day, unless you got transferred or something like that so therefore you created a great friendship.

23:00 See for instance that photo. That's when I first went into the army. That's where we were taken before we went on leave. Well all those chappies were my mates and some of them still are. That bond is still there, 60 odd years, some of those blokes and we meet one another now and we put our arms round one another and we laugh and go on and, you know we think it's great.

23:30 I don't know whether it exists in other parts of the services but in, I'm referring to the army and the infantry. I don't think there's a greater mateship and friendship exists in that, of infantry soldiers.

And yet there is as you say, almost an emotional discipline that you have to learn, to be disciplined with your emotions and not to become too attached?

Yes, yes, yes.

Can I, to jump just ahead briefly while we're on the topic, was that difficult

24:00 **then in the years following the war, to be not so disciplined with your emotions and to be able to I guess open up more and be more, less controlled with your emotions in terms of having family and that sort of thing?**

Yes I'd say that if you wanted to sort of carry on your army style, I think you'd make life very difficult

24:30 for yourself. I think you had to adopt a different attitude and move on and which was what I think most of them did. It was great to go to reunions and meet one another. Hell, would we have

25:00 a great old time and laugh. War never came into it. It was what we did, the pranks we got up to, the shortcuts we took and that was the sort of thing that. We're,

25:30 servicemen I s'pose are unique in that respect. They created that bondship, bonding with one another and cause you served in, particularly Second World War blokes and that sort of thing, if I met a chap down the street and you were talking to him and you might say something about the services and he'd

say he was in the 2/3rd, “Oh yeah 2/3rd Battalion,” or, “So and so.” “Oh yeah

26:00 I remember so and so and so and so,” and straight away you’ve found a mate and that’s what it’s all about, yeah so in our ordinary civilian life, well I don’t think you would become that close but it’s just that bonding of your service and I s’pose it exists with other, like the Vietnam chappies, they stick

26:30 together and that sort of thing but we’re, you know fading out now. I’m one of the youngest of our group at my age. Most of them are 85, 86 but I cherish the fact that I made a lot of good mates in the army. I could honestly say that I never fell out with anyone and

27:00 I was a sergeant and I had to exercise my authority at times but you did it with a little bit of finesse and that sort of thing. You always got the best out of the bloke if you went the right way about it and that’s what leadership and friendship is about. They respected you too.

Jimmy, I have one more question for you on this tangent of thought and that is when

27:30 **you’re going into battle and you’re having to adopt this emotional control and emotional discipline and again I guess leaving the army and coming back into normal life, that’s something that the army couldn’t train you with, that’s something that they didn’t have a manual for, there wasn’t someone to show you. That’s something that you had to do yourself. How challenging was that process for you to take that on yourself and to learn to be able to do that?**

Well

28:00 for me for when I came out, like out of the army and that sort of thing and all the years it brought up and more years I didn’t have any difficulty in adjusting myself back to normal, I missed my mates yes but

28:30 not to the degree that I would get emotional about it or anything like that. I found that that’s behind me and from here I move on and I do get sometimes you, in your quieter moments

29:00 I think of all my mates, those that are not here and those that have passed on but I don’t let it bother me. I might be different than other people but I don’t let it worry me.

It surprises me in the other direction

29:30 **though. When you first went in there, you struck me as a very sensitive young man at 17 when you sort of?**

Yeah.

When you spoke about your mother and father you were quite emotional and genuinely moved by it?

Yes I was yes.

To be able to go then into cutting it off and to be able to be detached from seeing your mates fall, that strikes me as being a really difficult thing to have to control yourself and to put yourself through?

Well

30:00 I would say that was all to do with your training. It was all to do with your training. If you took your training to heart and you knew the purpose that you were there for, you didn’t have to get emotional about family or anything like that. You had to be the individual and you had to be strong in yourself

30:30 and that’s the way I put it. You had to be strong in yourself. I mean yes I did get emotional about Mum and Dad and that sort of thing, yes but and sometimes I think of some of my mates but I knew I had to be strong in myself if I wanted to continue in the army because there was no room for people who’s nerves, let the nerves get the best of them, that sort of thing. You just had to

31:00 put it behind you and you had to move on and when you were in the field and that sort of thing you were an individual. You had to look after yourself. If Joe Blow that got knocked over there and that sort of thing, you’re not going to run over to him and cry over his body. You’re just going to say, “Well I’m pleased it’s not me, I’ll move that way,” sort of thing, you know so

31:30 it’s an individual sort of a situation where you had to be strong within yourself to get you through some of the periods in your life but it’s a pity that more people haven’t had service of some description, including yourself, young people. I think it’s the greatest thing that ever happened to young people is do

32:00 a line of service within the, in the armed forces because it gives you that sense of comradeship and fellowship and I think that it gives you another outlook in life. If you go to the, work in the same job and same thing

32:30 and that sort of thing all your life, life would be dull but I was lucky. A war happened and I was in it and

I don’t regret it and I’d do the same thing again if it ever happened again because I think from what I was at the beginning in 1940 to what I was in 1945

33:00 it made a man of me. I honestly do. Forget all the hardship and I think that I, I often quite that. I say, “I’m lucky.” At my stage in life, before the war I was just working on a dairy farm doing nothing and I finished up as a sergeant in control of 40 blokes and

33:30 just a farm boy from the bush and I thought that was quite an achievement and I enjoyed it.

Thank you very much for those answers, insightful, thank you. Moving back now into the desert. You’ve been in camp for a week, recuperating and getting ready for the next stage of the movement. Can you walk me through your movement up to Tobruk?

Well

34:00 as I said we’d come up and we took up, when we moved up from that bivouac area which wasn’t a camp. It was just a, laid out in the desert, we moved up to Tobruk and a similar situation there. Our company or battalion, we had our objective which was passed on from the company commander down to the platoon commanders and

34:30 platoon commanders down to the section commanders and we knew exactly what, where we had to go, how many yards it was before we come onto this gun post and we, when the, we were in a reserve position between the two battalions and between the two

35:00 companies and our objective was, after we got so many thousand yards, we were to take an anti aircraft post, which was on the main Bardia, Tobruk Road and we advanced towards it and we run into two or three different machine gun posts and

35:30 after a short skirmish and a few rounds fired and that sort of thing, they gave in and we had passed this particular post with about five blokes, Italians, in it who had surrendered but a chap by the name of Rocky Maxwell, our CSM [Company Sergeant Major] was coming in

36:00 behind us with company Headquarters and he opened up on these chappies and they opened up back on him so Ronnie and I and George Morris, he had the Bren and Ronnie and I, we run back about a hundred yards and George opened up with the

36:30 Bren and they fired at us. They missed me but they hit Ronnie in the webbing pouch and exploded a couple of bullets in his webbing pouch and knocked him over. George, as I said, with the Bren, he killed a couple of them and that was that but it wasn’t the Italians fault. They had surrendered but Rocky done the damage. Anyhow

37:00 that was that, that happened. Then we moved on and as we approached this gun, it was an anti aircraft gun and they fired a missile and you could see it coming, low trajectory along the top of the ground and it was supposed to go up in the air but they were using it against the infantry and it went through us. You could see it coming and you could get away from it

37:30 and it exploded five hundred yards behind us or somewhere. A long distance anyhow so that was nothing. We didn’t take any notice of it but the next one they fired, you could see it coming, it exploded amongst us and it shortened the fuse, see and she went, “Wang,” and well we bit the dust and that sort of thing. Fortunately it never hit anyone and we gathered ourselves up very

38:00 quickly and run and overcame it before it fired another one so that was our objective. We captured that. That was Don Company’s objective. We captured that, had machine guns around it and that sort of thing and they surrendered. Well our next move then, we were to move on towards the harbour, not a very nice experience because we had to go through this minefield

38:30 and there were tanks dug in, gun turret high and we had to march single file through this for about a mile through this minefield but fortunately you held your nerve. You kept one behind the other and we got through it without casualties and we came onto another post that

39:00 had been blasted out by the artillery and there was several Italians killed there and the guns were all busted up and we, that was the end of that part of it. Other battalions and others had closed in on Tobruk and Tobruk surrendered rather quickly. There was not a lot happening at Tobruk. It gave in pretty quickly

39:30 so then we moved, the same day we moved down into the little township of Tobruk and we bivouacked the night on the edge of the little township and next day we were moved onto the coast because all hostilities in that area had finished. The Italians

40:00 that were captured, brings into another part of the occupation of Tobruk. We had about 30,000 prisoners and they had a compound. They had already had a compound built, which was about probably an acre with high wire and we had

40:30 all these Dagos in it. Well then we were seconded as a company to go and guard the prisoners in Tobruk.

Tape 7

00:46 **OK mate we're back rolling again. You'd just taken us up to the point where your unit, where your company had been assigned to guard the Italian POWs in Tobruk?**

Well as I said

01:00 there was about 30,000 Italians all in this area and no water. The water had to be brought from Mersa Matruh which was 500, a thousand kilometres away because the Italians had salted the wells as they retreated, what wells there were, so that water had to be, and

01:30 the, we were assigned to guarding these prisoners and get the water to them and in the midst, we were only there a couple of days and a huge dust storm broke out, huge and you couldn't see hand in front of you. You had, you know scarves and whatever right up

02:00 round your eyes and that sort of thing and you couldn't tell who was friend or foe and all you could do was in, the water tank would come into the compound and you had to stand there with rifle and bayonet to keep them away from charging that and fire your rifles in the air to, you know to keep them back and where possible you had some cotton wool and you could wet it and

02:30 push it into their mouth. That's all you could give them. You couldn't give them a drink of water because there wasn't enough to go around and I mean some awful fights and things went on there amongst themselves and I remember a bloke, Captain Porter and a bloke Harold Young from Taree, and as I said we were walking round, you'd fire your rifle up in the air and cause you couldn't see who was who and this Harold Young, Subi

03:00 Young, he fired this rifle about that far from Bob Porter's ear and old Bob swung round and give him a backhander. He frightened the hell out of old Bob but there the sort of things that happened but as time went on, we were there about a month I s'pose, we were able to get them

03:30 out of the compound and down to Tobruk onto warships and take them back to Alexandria where they went off to various places, India and Australia, wherever they went, England or what, but you'd start off from the camp and you'd have a Bren gun mounted in a truck at the front and a Bren gun mounted at the back and 2,000 prisoners between you

04:00 and you would march them, they had to march then from the compound to Tobruk and that went on for, whenever the ships could come in see, as soon as they could get rid of them and you'd get them down onto the docks and onto lighters and out onto the destroyers and take then them out onto the troop ship or whatever it was, destroyers, away they'd go.

04:30 Well that's where I learnt to count in Italian, "uno, due, tre, quattro, cinque, sei, sette, otto, nove, dieci," count up to 10 see and you'd go into the compound and you'd line them up and you'd say, "cinque, cinque", see that was six, see they had sixes and so you could and some of them could speak English

05:00 The odd one could speak English, not a lot of them and we, it was an interesting part of our prelude in Tobruk and eventually we got them down to the stage where they had made themselves a bit comfortable in the compound and got bits of

05:30 shelters up and they were scrounging a bit of tucker and things like that and they'd go out into the battleground and scrounge stuff and come back into the camp, you know. Yeah this is right and we'd let them back in and sometimes you'd give them a kick in the backside and threaten to bayonet them and all this sort of thing, playing up with them and when their numbers got down, you'd go in and sing out, "Who

06:00 wants to go to Australia, who wants to go to Australia?" If you mentioned the word Australia and they'd rush you but if you said anything else they wouldn't take any notice, but Australia, they were going to go to Australia and we had a little fellow by the name of El Fredo, he was an American Italian and he was in Boston when

06:30 he was seconded into the army. He'd gone over to Boston to see his mother and his sister, that's right. No he was in Italy to get his mother and his sister and he got called into the army and he told us he didn't want to fight and he told us that he, soon as ever he heard that the

07:00 Australian army was attacking, he said, "I put up my hands and sat in the corner of my trench and waited till the Aussies came," and but he used to clean our rifles for us and our Bren and sleep in the same, alongside us in the barracks that we were in and cook our meals for us, spaghetti and tomato pie and that sort of thing. He was a good little bloke and when we had to leave

07:30 the area and come back to Mersa Matruh he wanted to come with us, right or wrong and we couldn't take him so he cried, begged of us and so we, one of our chaps took him down to company Headquarters and there was an air force squadron in Tobruk

08:00 not far away so they got him down there and got him a job as an interpreter with the air force. I don't know whatever happened to El Fredo but he was a good little bloke but I must tell you one thing about when we were in Tobruk. I think this is well worth recording cause I've got a chap coming up very shortly, his father was involved in this and he's got a part of a St Georgia.

08:30 That was a battle cruiser sunk by the RAF in Tobruk harbour and while we were at that compound, when we had days off, well we'd skittle down to the harbour and there were ships wrecked there and that, sort of around the place. Well this St Georgia was a battle cruiser and it had been half submerged in Tobruk harbour

09:00 and there was Roger Rumen, Dot Cross, Cec Herdigan and myself. Roger Rumen was an old Belgian. He could speak French so we got a little rowing boat and we had a lot of revolvers and knickknacks and we rode out on the St Georgia and we climbed up the hull on the boat

09:30 scrounging to see what we could scrounge off the ship and next minute or shortly after, a motorboat pulled up with about six Pommy ship's police, arrested us and took us back to the English navy ship that was in there, a Pommy navy ship and it was HMS Terror. It

10:00 used to fire 15 inch guns, a little flat bottomed monitor boat. It used to go along the coast and shell inland and we were arrested and we're getting up on the deck of this ship and arguing with one another and the ship's officer bellowed out an order and bloody near fell overboard with fright. Anyhow we sold them a couple of revolvers

10:30 and they took us down to their canteen and gave us a meal, put us on the motorboat and sent us back. Now this Cec Herdigan's son is at Young. No not Young, yeah it might be Young and he's coming up shortly and he's still got a portion of the old compass off the what's a name that his

11:00 father kept as a souvenir. Anyhow

And this is a St Georgia?

Yes St Georgia, the, it was a battle cruiser and in old photo's you'll see it. It was still smoking, was still a bit of smoke coming out of it. They're silly things you did, but anyhow the captain of the warship signalled our

11:30 company commander and told us to keep our blokes at home or they might get into trouble, yeah.

Jimmy it sounded like the Australians and the Italians got on quite well or quite amicably in, when you were guarding them in the compound?

Yes, yeah we never had any problems with them no.

Did that change the way you felt about them in terms of thinking of them as an enemy?

No I don't think so.

12:00 No it, I think it's a code within your services, once you become non combatant, I think there's a certain amount of respect that comes between both parties. Like, they're helpless and you're the boss. If you behave yourself you won't get touched

12:30 see. See when you take Jack Alrick and those blokes, those prisoners and that sort of thing, it was mutual respect between service people.

It reminds me somewhat of the country dances you were talking about when the boys would go outside and belt each other round and then toddle off inside with their arms around each other?

Yeah, yeah, yeah like if they'd have like to arm themselves, they could have run over us in no time because like old Roger

13:00 and I, we'd be on guard at the main entrance to the compound and we'd be talking away to them just with our rifles like over our shoulder and leaning on the gate post and talking away to them. A couple of them had been out here in the, some celebrations in the Italian navy and said they'd been in Sydney and Melbourne and Hobart, those that could speak English cause

13:30 Roger could speak French and some of them could speak French and that sort of thing. They'd have a great old yak. No you wouldn't think we were enemies.

Do you know how they went about fixing the wells that had been salted?

No I don't know, no. See we were withdrawn so I don't know what happened after that, after we were withdrawn out of the desert. See we stayed there at Tobruk. The 19th Brigade then went onto Benghazi and they took Benghazi

14:00 and we were withdrawn and we came back and the 7th Division took over from us and we got back to go to Greece then and then the 9th Divi took over from the 7th sort of thing so there was just a swap round. The situation at that particular

14:30 time when, Tobruk was about as far as our equipment would allow us to go. The tanks were nearly done and the supplies were limited. Wavell who was GOC of the Middle East, he was stretched to his very limit because there wasn't many troops in the Middle East at that time and

15:00 withdrawing the 6th Division and sending it to Greece, which was a huge mistake, all that equipment that we took with us to Greece, finished in Greece and there was nothing when we came back. That's another story.

From Tobruk were you put onto trucks and taken back to Amiriya?

Yeah we were put on trucks and no, yes we were put on trucks and brought back to Amiriya.

15:30 We come back to camp, back at Amiriya, for a few days, yeah before we went, before we had, and that was the finish. Tobruk was the finish of the 6th Division. After that we were withdrawn and came back to Mersa Matruh and we were issued with new uniforms there. The uniform that we left Amiriya with in December we still had on in March when we got back there, the same gear

16:00 and we were issued with new uniforms and before we went on leave in Alexandria.

I have one more question for you back in Tobruk and that related to how you found your way through the minefield in single file?

Well the engineers would go ahead, went ahead of us with mine detectors and they would, plotted the track through and you had to follow that track.

Were they similar to the sort of metal detector you might see someone on the beach with?

Yeah

16:30 yeah, mine detector yeah. That's what got us through the minefield but it was rather eerie. You know it was, you had like, keep your wits about you. Take the wrong step either way you could have stepped on one, so and that was a fear.

So you had a couple of days in Amiriya and then you said you were left off on leave into Alexandria?

Yeah we had a night's leave or a day and a night's leave in Alexandria.

17:00 **Could you describe Alexandria at that time?**

Well Alexandria was a naval base and there was a cosmopolitan type troops there, South Africans, Pommies, Australians. Some labour, like Gold Coast natives, you know battalions, working battalions and it was a pretty

17:30 well it was a chief naval base, chief army headquarters, Alexandria. The army, the whole army corps headquarters was in Alexandria and it was a nice city, Alex. It never got knocked about much at all by the Italians or anything like that.

18:00 It was quite a nice, modern city.

And what did one do when they were on leave in Alexandria?

Well I went to the night spots and wandered around and, you know just drinking what booze you could get and trying to chat up some sheilas and things like that.

18:30 You never had much time because we were only there about a few hours and we were hustled back to camp to get on the boat back to, head for Greece.

Were there sanctioned brothels in Alexandria?

Yes Sister Street. Yes we did a session down there. It was funny and Ted Boland and all that so we got thrown out of there too and that was on Ted Boland's plate but they were

19:00 mostly French girls and not bad looking sorts amongst them, some of them, yeah. That was part of growing up too, yeah.

And were they, as I was asking, are these sanctioned by the army? Were they ones that were considered safe or?

Yeah well they were, see prostitution

19:30 in those countries was a profession and they had to be registered so anyone that wanted to have their sex satisfactions, was advised to go to those places by the army because they had regular medical inspections etcetera and don't pick anyone up off the street because they'd be all, you know the Arabs and Jews and that sort of thing, they were bad

20:00 so if anyone wanted to relieve themselves, that was the place to go so and they were advised by the authorities to do that.

Can you tell me about your first trip there?

Yes I did. As I said there was Ted Boland, Alan Baker and myself. We went into this place and I'll never forget it. As I said

20:30 I was an innocent boy and Ted wasn't but he grabbed hold of this young girl. She was only little, skinny piece and well we called Ted Boland 'Horsy' because he was armed like a horse and he got this little girl in the room and next minute there's a bloody squeal and a scrambling in what's a name and she

21:00 wouldn't have him on because he was too big. That's why we got kicked out. We got thrown out. We always laugh, "Fancy going into a brothel and we got kicked out. They wouldn't have us."

So your attempt to lose your virginity was foiled by Ted's?

By Ted Boland, yeah.

Ted the horse?

Yeah Ted, yeah Horsy Boland and gees he was massive, yeah.

21:30 **So that wouldn't have done any harm to his reputation I wouldn't have thought?**

No, no, no well Ted was a man who, you know he was, as I said I was 18. Ted was, he would be a man about 30 then yeah. I had my 19th birthday on the way to Greece yeah so, on the 21st of March. On the second day out from Alexandria

22:00 I had my 19th birthday.

Do you remember the number and variety of ships that were in harbour when you were in Alexandria?

Well the Free French fleet was there. It had been commandeered by the British navy and there was quite, the harbour was quite

22:30 full of capital ships and the aircraft carrier, I think Eagle and it was from there, when the convoy, when our convoy was to leave to go to Greece, we were delayed so many hours or days because the battle of Matapan was on

23:00 and that's where the English navy destroyed the Italian navy, which then gave us the free ride over to Greece so we were held up in Alex until that part of the battle was over.

And Italian aircraft still weren't a major concern at this point?

No, no when they came over, they'd be

23:30 35,000 feet up. They weren't very brave.

So tell me about embarking? What ship did you board and tell me about the convoy leaving?

Well when we came from Amiriya in the night and we arrived down to Alexandria on the docks, believe it or not

24:00 there was no ship there to take us so we spent all day on the docks and then late in the afternoon a ship came in and they took a load of donkeys off, dozens and dozens of donkeys. Who went on? The Aussies and the Bankura was the name of it.

24:30 An Indian crew and English officers so we were crammed onto that and luckily Ronnie and I, we had the Bren gun so we were able to stop on the aft end of the

25:00 little deck and the Bankura was only a little tub and but we were, the others were crammed into the ship and I mean crammed in, cause we didn't know where we were headed for, had no idea so the convoy took off and had a New Zealand cruiser I think the Black Prince and a couple of destroyers,

25:30 two or three other smaller boats, little oil tanker and we headed for Greece and the second day out, the Italians, that was my birthday, the Italians raided us. Come out the clouds, swooped on the convoy and we, opened up on us and somebody,

26:00 some officer called out from the bridge, "Don't fire, they're Blenheims." "Blenheims be buggered," they said and next minute "boom, boom, boom" they dropped some little bombs and they hit this little lighter and it caught on fire. Well that's the only time that I thought well you know, if they hit us, we're gone because the waves were breaking over that low we were in the water

26:30 but next morning, next day we arrived in Athens and what a beautiful sight. Green trees, green grass, flowers. People coming from the desert, you've got no idea. So they took us off the ship and

27:00 by truck out to a big park, Daphni 2. It was a big, beautiful place and there was tents pitched there for us but we were there for a few days and but it was lovely, you know green grass and I remember this Belgian we had with us

27:30 Roger. As I said he could speak French and Ronnie and I used to like boiled eggs and this Sunday afternoon we had bits of trinkets taken off Dagos, watches and you name it, so we got Roger to go with us and we went round the camp because things over in Greece then weren't very good. There was no food.

28:00 You know it was a very poor country, no money and we bartered away the trinkets that we had, for eggs and I s'pose we finished up with about a dozen and we come home and put a billy on the fire outside our tent and cooked and ate the bloody lot and I loved them. I still, when I have a boiled egg now I think of Ronnie. I say to Margaret

28:30 or she'll say to me, "I s'pose you're thinking of Ronnie?" "Yeah, Ronnie and the boiled eggs," so Roger could speak French see and he could do all the talking for us. Well we had a day's leave in Athens and Ronnie and I and Frankie Archibald, he was a full-blooded Abo [Aboriginal], he was our mate

29:00 and we went on this day's leave and you were only allowed one pound sterling but you finished up with a fistful of paper money, drachmas, not much coinage and well we wandered around Athens and got, getting hungry and

29:30 Ronnie was always hungry and we were looking for somewhere to eat and eventually we went past this cafe and I looked in the place and I said, "We'll go in here Ronnie." "No, no," he said. There was officers in there with, you know brass and all that sort of thing, English officers and Greek officers and Ronnie said, "It'll cost us too much."

30:00 Anyhow we eventually got in there and we sat down in the corner and cause we couldn't speak Greek and we trying to make this girl understand that we wanted some steak and eggs and anyhow an English officer came over and he sent the thing, the girl and that sort of thing and Ronnie wanted to go to the toilet and so he waved down,

30:30 this waiter said, "Down the back," you know. He went down the back and he come straight back and I said to him, "What's the go, what's wrong?" He said, "There's a woman in there," and I said to one of, this officer he come over and that's a custom of theirs. She was an attendant and you went in and did your business and she'd come out and gave you a towel and

31:00 soap and you washed your hands and you paid her so much and Ronnie, we got that sorted out. So we got our meal and we're sitting down to eat the meals and mind you I was ignorant too and the table was beautifully set up and they had finger bowls, you know around the table and course

31:30 having Ronnie with us, being an abo, and us Australians, the only ones there, we were centre of attention naturally and we're sort of talking and going on and that sort of thing and Ronnie sort of looked around and here's Archie with a finger bowl up, drinking out of it. Well bloody hell, "Jesus Christ," he said, "Archie, don't do that." We often laughed about that,

32:00 poor old Frank, yeah.

Frank was your mate who was a good boxer who actually came over from Australia with you?

Yeah, yeah he was our mate right through. Anyhow

Could I just ask you, did he face any sort of racism within the unit?

No he was nature's gentleman. He never drank, he never smoked. I never saw him

32:30 want to pick a fight with anyone. He was loved by everybody, Frank and digressing a little bit, there is a street in Kempsey. Now he was killed in New Guinea, come to that later and they named a street in his honour. They did that a few years ago for those that were air force and army blokes that were killed

33:00 and they named streets and Frank has had a name, the Archibald Street in Kempsey. Anyhow we just sort of sauntered around Greece and up the Metropolis and that sort of thing and got a taxi and cab back home to camp and a couple of days after, well it was on a train, cattle trucks, well that

33:30 or freight trucks from Athens to Larisa and we, I don't know how long we were on the train but there was no room much. There was no seats or anything. You were just laying, stretched out on the floor and I remember my platoon commander, Andy Watson said to me, I remember him saying through the night, "Christ sake Coombes, can you get your bloody feet

34:00 out of my face?" He wasn't a bad bloke.

When you were in Greece were you able to get any sense of what was going on in the broader war? Was there news services on at the time?

No at that particular stage, Germany wasn't at war with Greece. It was a political stunt between Churchill

34:30 and the Greek honouring the Greek government support and we, Germany declared war when we were on the train more or less moving up to the Yugoslavian border so it was a whole political, you'd have to

read

35:00 to know all about the politics that was involved in this and in the first place, General Wavell, he didn't want the 6th Division taken away from the Middle East but Churchill promised the Greek government support and we were sacrificed. We were a division of 10,000 troops that were sacrificed for something that we never, ever had a chance of doing any good.

35:30 We lost all our equipment, guns, trucks, men. In our battalion there was 178 I think were taken prisoner of war, some killed and we come back, luckily a few of us got out, a depleted battalion, well a depleted division really.

As far as you were concerned, were you told at the time that you were there to defend Greece against the

36:00 **Italians or were you told nothing?**

No, against the Germans yeah. That's what we were there for.

But what were you told at the time? Did you know that, were you given any reason for being in Greece or did you think?

No not really no, no, no not really. It was purely a futile, we had no possible chance of ever defeating a German army, spread over the front that we were over.

At the time though were you concerned

36:30 **about being in Greece?**

Not really no not really. It's just another thing that you, well you did what you were there to do and that was it.

So you went on train from Athens to Larisa? Did you stop and spend any time in Larisa?

No we were taken by truck then, from Larisa up to Veria and camped for about a week

37:00 and we were inoculated there because we were heading for action and then we were taken by truck again further up almost on the Yugoslavian border and on a clear day you can look right across the mountains, you can see Salonika. It was in Yugoslavia and

37:30 from then on it's very hard to piece together what, where we marched, what we did and how we did it because there was no transport from then on and we had to march from place to place and it was snowing and we had to carry our gear and we had, the only means of transport we had was donkeys

38:00 to carry our heavy equipment like mortars and anti tank rifles and things like that and you were carrying as much equipment as you could yourself and it was sleeting and it was snow and it was cold and you were hungry and your equipment was biting into your shoulders. You had raw shoulders from wet equipment and chafing

38:30 but you went from point A to point B across rivers and by punt and up the mountainside and down the other side and it's a long story.

Jimmy what were the inoculations that you were given?

That was for tetanus if you got wounded. Yeah, that was tetanus.

And were you given any extra clothing

39:00 **to deal with the cold or the snow?**

No only just what we left Alexandria in, greatcoats and uniform, more or less the same uniform and greatcoats. A lot of them dumped their greatcoats because they got too, they got wet and heavy and I think I dumped mine. Yeah I didn't get back on the ship with it anyhow, I remember that and see we had no, we couldn't dig in anywhere. We had no picks and no

39:30 shovels anything like that. We're fighting on the top of the ground. It was …

And that would have been your first experience of snow wouldn't it?

Yes, no we had a bout in Syria. We were in Syria for a few months and that's where we struck a blizzard there but the Greek campaign was a very hard campaign and

40:00 the uncertainty of it was you were in a strange country, you didn't know where you were and you didn't know what was happening. You just went from place to place because you were told to do so, and decimated a whole division.

Tape 8

00:58 **Jimmy the Division is moving through,**

01:00 **along the Yugoslav border up in northern Greece and you were just saying, you weren't too sure what you were facing, where you were, what was happening? Could you tell us at what point you became aware that the Germans were in fact invading?**

Well we got to this point, as I said right up on the border, on the Aliakmon River, which was on the border between Yugoslavia and Greece and we were to take up a defensive position

01:30 in the high country overlooking this village and this river and a bridge across this river and we were told that the Germans had invaded, were invading Greece and it was, got our equipment up onto the, into the hills.

02:00 They were half mountains I s'pose and we got into defensive positions and we did have a few tools at that particular stage that we'd carried up the mountains on donkeys and things like that and we were ready to defend this road. See coming into Greece from Bulgaria and Yugoslavia

02:30 there was three passes and mountainous passes. The New Zealanders held one on the coast, the 19th Brigade held the one in the middle and the 16th Brigade, we held the one on the left flank if I remember rightly and the 17th Brigade would have been in reserve and it was late in the afternoon and in

03:00 the distance with the naked eye, you could see German transport approaching this bridge, on motorbikes and trucks, cause the bridge was blown and during that afternoon then the engineers blew two great gaps in the road below us so that there was no way that, they had to come up over the hills which we were defending if they, but

03:30 they didn't. They stopped at the bridge, which was probably, it was a few miles away but you could by the naked eye. You could see the Germans in the distance so we were told then, late, we had to move back from that area and we moved back into the village and to do that we had to set

04:00 booby traps in grenade boxes and things like that. If the Germans come up through there we would destroy our blankets and things like that you know, which we did and we moved back to the village and we were only back there a short time and we were told to go back and reoccupied our positions.

04:30 Well we had the booby traps and that sort of thing, wasn't very comfortable and then you wouldn't want to know, a short time later, we were to move out and we were to move back to the village and down to the road. It was snowing then, sleeting. We were moved down to the road and we were just having cold bully beef and biscuits

05:00 and we were told to get as much rest as we could because we would have to move out at a minute's notice and we had, I still had my greatcoat then I remember and I curled up under a bit of a bush and it was snowing and sleeting and

05:30 about two o'clock in the morning my platoon commander, Andy Watson kicked me in the boot, said, "Get up, we've moving out," so we got up and got down on the road and we marched that night along the slippery, frozen road over

06:00 a mountain, single file and the next morning we came down onto the Aliakmon River and we went across it by punt but the engineers had a cup of hot cocoa for us at that, there in the morning and it was beautiful and we crossed over that punt eventually and there's a,

06:30 I'll just show you.

You actually crossed into Yugoslavia?

No, no, no we were heading back. We were heading

Sorry, you were in Yugoslavia and you were coming back?

Yeah, yeah.

So I thought that you and the Germans were on either side of the river?

Yeah, yeah the Germans were on the Yugoslavia side and we were on the Greek side.

07:00 There's the photo where we crossed, that's, I would have been amongst them I s'pose there. That's where we crossed it with the punt.

But were you actually, sorry in Yugoslavia and you were retreating?

No, no we were in Greece then.

And were you crossing there over

07:30 **into Yugoslavia?**

No, no we were retreating.

You were in Yugoslavia and you were retreating back into Greece?

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

OK I'm sorry. I didn't know that you actually ever made it into Yugoslavia.

No we didn't. We were about five miles from Yugoslavia.

OK?

Yes that same, yes about five mile.

Sorry I was getting confused cause I thought the river was the border?

Yes this was part of the Aliakmon see and we,

08:00 when, we picked up trucks somewhere and they took us back through Larisa and took us out to an area which we were defending the Pinios River. It's another river.

08:30 The Germans were on the Yugoslavia side and we were on the Greek side and we got there at some time in the late afternoon and we were spread out along the top of this long ridge to defend, stop the Germans from crossing the river

09:00 about 800 yards we were on the high ground looking down onto the river, and the little village, Parapotamos on our left and the river was a fairly deep river and Ron had been sick but he'd caught up to me there and I was having, we got in position. We were just laying on top of the ground, buggered

09:30 and I, Ron woke me up about, some hour in the morning and said, "Jimmy we've got to move down to the river. The Germans are across the other side of the river." Our patrol had run into trouble across the other side of the river so we

10:00 moved down there, the whole company and this patrol had shot up a German patrol on the other side and killed a German and the other blokes escaped. Our blokes swam back across the river and got away and whilst we were down on the river, Captain Henry, our company commander, wanted the identification

10:30 taken off the dead German for Intelligence to know what German troops we were up against. He was a fanatical sort of bloke, Henry, good commander but anyhow he called for volunteers to row a boat and muggins me, I volunteered.

11:00 I said, "I can row a boat sir", so, "Right." There was a little boat there so got in this boat and there was a bloke, Tommy Jones and John Brown, ''Pinhead'' Brown. They came with me and I started to row out and they said to me, "You can't bloody row a boat," so I got them across the other side anyhow and we scrambled up the bank on the other side and hid the boat and

11:30 it was a moonlit night and I could see the German flat on his back about a good hundred yards away I s'pose and anyhow as we approached him, he was laying back, you know and they said, "God don't go near him, he's grinning at us." I said, "He's passed bloody grinning," so he was a young, blond German. He'd been

12:00 shot and I took his tunic off him cause he had his flashes on his arm and I had to cut the belt off him cause I couldn't undo his belt. I cut it with my Jack knife and got the tunic off him and we got back in the boat and scrambled across back and gave Henry the tunic, then the whole company moved back up to the high ground again and

12:30 Tommy Jones finished up a prisoner of war and 'Pinhead' Brown finished up, a bloke mugged him at Harold Park races years and years after the war and killed him but anyhow that's beside the story. We moved back up to the top and it was daylight

13:00 and the Germans started to come out of the hills, the Yugoslavia side, in single file and I got the donkey and filled, got our water bottles because we had no water and I went down to the village which was all the way down around the village, and I filled the water bottles up and to this day I often think about it. There were Germans in the village because I can remember their light grey coats,

13:30 uniforms, long coats and they were spotting me, where I was going because by the time I got back up there they started to move more at us and Ronnie and I got the Bren and we went down the side of the hill just slightly

14:00 and we started firing at the, Ronnie was using a Bren and I was using the rifle, at the Germans that were coming single file cause we had no mortars or anything like that. We only had rifles, we had nothing and Tommy guns and the, we fired a few bursts and that sort of thing and Ronnie was, we were making them run anyhow. We could see them running when we fired. Next minute,

14:30 you wouldn't want to know, they spotted us. They opened up on us and to this day, or before Ronnie and after the war and that sort of thing we used to talk about it. I said, "Ronnie, I think that was the closest we ever were because they had us in their sight with a machine gun", a Spandau, which was equal to

our Vickers and they peppered our area but it was just going over our backs, that's all and Ronnie said, "Jesus Christ," and

15:00 he took off and I think I was too bloody frightened to get up, to be honest but I laid doggo [feigned death] and they opened up again and they were hitting the ground where Ronnie was, because we were a few feet apart, then I took off and the two sections had gone down to try and stop them further down. They got, that's where Alan Baker was killed and Watson was wounded and other fellers got knocked about and we held onto that

15:30 position for most of the day but the Germans eventually were able to get right round the other side of us and cutting us off and our company commander sent word by runner to pull back, come back to company Headquarters, pull his, you know his company back so this is the one about

16:00 Frankie Archibald, so we were gathering up bit of gear that we had and Ronnie said to me, "Where's Archie, where's Archie?" I said, "Ronnie the last time I saw Archie, he was only hitting the ground here and there." He was gone like bloody, gone like buggery. I said, "You won't catch Archie for a while." Anyhow we pulled back and well I don't know if

16:30 you want me to go on but it's a long part of the story from there on but we pulled back and I was left with another chap to, any stragglers, tell them they had to rendezvous back at another, where the company was forming up and it got late in the afternoon and I said to John, this is John Hutchison. I said, "John

17:00 go and find out what's going on because," I said, "it's getting towards dark and no one's contacted us so I don't know what's going on," so I sent John back and shortly after one of our Bren carriers come along with the sergeant and a couple of blokes in it and they said, "What are you doing here?" and I said, "Well I've got to wait here to guide anyone back," and they said, "You'd better get on this carrier because if you,

17:30 there's no one out there, only Germans, so you'd better get on this carrier and come back with us," so that's what I, got on the carrier, went back with them and we, the Germans started to close in on us because the tanks had crossed, our little infantry tanks, they'd crossed the river and they started to play hell amongst the infantry so as it got, as I said, dark the two tanks

18:00 come down this road and we were sort of Ronnie and I and a couple of other blokes were taking up defensive positions, you know sort of trying to front up. I don't know what we hoped to do and next thing a tank finished amongst us and run over two blokes, a bloke by the name of Bluey Dunn and Ken Cameron.

18:30 Bluey Dunn survived after the tank even ran over him, took the skin off him and he got killed in the Owen Stanley and Ken Cameron was taken prisoner of war, his legs were run over, his legs and he had to get help and he eventually had to give in and

19:00 the Germans got him and he finished the war in Germany. Well there was a hell of a mix up. The transport came in and we had to get what transport we could get and get on it

19:30 because the Germans were all amongst us. You didn't know who was bloody who. Tracer bullets and I got on this truck on the tailboard with a bloke, old Jim Gallagher and a couple of other blokes and we went about hundred, 200 yards, it was night time, dark, no lights and all a dirt track

20:00 and there was a chap standing on the side of the truck, helping guide the driver and the driver panicked I think and next thing, truck coming the other way knocked this bloke off and skittled him and so I got up on the side of the truck and went along, done a couple hundred yards I s'pose and I stopped the truck and I said, "Hang on."

20:30 There was a fork in the road and I didn't know which way to bloody take it, you know and I thought, I came back to the truck driver and said, "Just go straight along but keep over to the left because there's a ditch on our right," and I think he panicked and that sort of thing. Next thing, arse over went the truck, about 30 blokes on it. Killed one bloke and we finished up, the others were disappearing. I don't know what happened to them and there was old Jim Gallagher and another bloke

21:00 and myself. Yeah there was only three of us, might have been four of us and so I said to them, "I'll carry the", we had a Bren gun and I said, "I'll carry the weapons," and they took this other poor fellow that was, hurt his back. They were half carrying him and half dragging him and I don't know, we walked, we went for quite a long time and you could hear the German

21:30 tanks but they'd stopped and they were firing intermittently everywhere and that sort of thing and we got onto the side of the road and we could see a vehicle coming with dipped lights. See we didn't know whether it was German or what it was but anyhow we plucked up enough courage and old Jim, as I said he was a hard old feller, he bailed it up

22:00 and it was a Ford Chev car which the army had and as he opened the door, the light came on and I can remember seeing two red braided officers in the back and a captain in the front and the driver and old Jim said to them, "We're all right. Take this injured fellow because we can't help him,

22:30 take him," and this captain, I've got a good memory, this captain said, "We haven't got room," and old Jim just reached in the door and had him hold by the front of the shirt and pulled him out and he said, "Well I'll make bloody room," so they did take the bloke. I don't know whatever happened to him, that sort of thing, so we started off walking again towards Larisa but the paratroopers had been dropped there in the afternoon and there was fighting going on

23:00 there. You could see the tracer bullets and that, explosions and then another truck arrived and it was a New Zealand truck with a lot of kitchen equipment on it, dixies and that sort of thing and there was a bloke and a driver and we pulled it up and to get up on it, you know and this, to make room, throwing a bit of the gear off

23:30 this bloody bugger, driver stopped the truck and said, "Get off you bastards," you know and old Jim said, he put them on the knuckle and said, well we scrounged up on that truck and we spent all night on that truck and we didn't get into Larisa. We had to skirt round through a swamp and that sort of thing. Eventually we got back on the main road

24:00 about daylight next morning. How we got there I don't know. It was night time. Then we travelled. We travelled all day, old Jim and I and we met up with part of our own convoy in dribs and drabs here and there. Louis Dunn was, I saw him on the truck, bloke with all the skin off him, that got run over and we finished that night in a

24:30 New Zealand camp and, as I said, I was only a boy and Jim was a harder lump or big lump of a shearer and I was sticking to Jim cause he was getting me through and we got back and we pinched a couple of blankets and slept under a New Zealand truck in this camp. Next morning we got up

25:00 and lined up with the Kiwi's and had a bit of burgoo and a bit of breakfast with them and went round with a truck and picked up the odds and sods Australians and old Jim went one way and I teamed up with Ronnie. I found Ronnie somewhere and teamed up with him and he and I then kept together for two or three days, jumping from one truck to another

25:30 going back towards Athens which was what, we didn't know what was happening, just we had to go and eventually we got back to a place called Volos and that's where they were sort of making another stand and bringing a few, a few troops were congregating there and the Greek army then was retreating from Albania and we were disarming them as they came back and we started off with half a dozen rifles and then finished up with a pile of rifles like that and later on made our

26:00 way back to Athens. Well we spent few days there and course the Germans were still around the Larisa area and we were quite a, you know couple of hundred miles towards Athens down the road and word came through then that all allied forces

26:30 were to evacuate. The Greek government had capitulated to the German government and that was when the political thing come into it so we had to get out. So then it was, mustering any transport we could get and we were a long, long, long way from any evacuation point, right up the north of Greece

27:00 and we would travel at night as much as we could in bits of convoys but it was slow and we'd hide up in our trucks during the day because German Stukas and fighters were bombing the roads and machine gunning everything they saw and we were having problems, you know and eventually, I don't know how long that took now.

27:30 We got back to Corinth and that's where all this equipment, guns and trucks and you name it, had congregated but couldn't be done anything with and we were to be evacuated from there but something happened so we were taken then down right to the south of Greece

28:00 at a place called Kalamata and we congregated there in this afternoon and during the night we were put onto a destroyer HMS Hero. The flotilla of destroyers was commanded by Lord Louis Mountbatten

28:30 and he was on the Waterhen and we were on the destroyer the Hero and we were crammed in there like sardines but they took us out to a ship so far off, standing off, the Dilwarra and you had to walk from the destroyer up a plank about that wide

29:00 up onto the deck of the what's a name with the bit of gear that you had. We still had the Bren, Ronnie and I, and got onto the Dilwarra and again we were lucky because we had the Bren and we went onto anti aircraft just behind the bridge, little area just behind the bridge and next morning we were off Crete

29:30 and there was such confusion in Crete that word came through from Alexandria that we were to head back to Alexandria. On that particular night, I believe, something like 6,000 troops were evacuated from Greece and we were lucky enough to be part of it. About

30:00 eight o'clock the next morning we were sort of thinking how lucky we were and we were onboard ship, steaming off the Greek coast. Over came one lone plane. Wasn't ours of course. Within a short time, I don't know how long, there was about 30 of them, all with black crosses on them.

30:30 High level bombers, Stukas, over our convoy, and there was the Costa Rica, the Dilwarra, they were troop ships and there was the destroyer Black Prince, the Ajax and then there was two or three destroyers. There'd be Waterhen and Phoebe and those, all that flotilla protecting the convoy

31:00 and I remember very distinctly the, like we were firing the planes with Bren guns and looking up at this plane and you could see the bomb doors open and you'd see these big black things hanging, then they'd come down and went across the back of the ship

31:30 and then it hit it. I thought that was curtains.

Did you open fire with the Bren guns or were they too high?

Yes, no, no, no well you had a go at them yeah. You could nearly touch them sort of thing and anyhow we survived that but the Costa Rica was only, well the distance across the water is hard to tell but it was only a few hundred yards across the

32:00 and it got hit close and it started to take water in and we could see all this. See the planes couldn't stay over the convoy very long. They dropped their eggs and they had to go because the closest base was Larisa and there was no close base and fuel wise they had to get back to Larisa otherwise, so they couldn't stay over the convoy very long. They dropped their eggs and took off.

32:30 They shot down quite a number of, well I wouldn't say quite a number, but three or four of the Stukas, the dive bombers were coming in at the armed ships and we had a grandstand view of all that was happening and we, the Costa Rica, that right. They run a destroyer in alongside it and the

33:00 chaps, you could see them jumping off the decks of the Costa Rica onto the decks of the warship, which wasn't very far and I don't know whether they took them to Alex or whether they finished up on Crete but I think a lot of them finished up on Crete. We were just off Crete so and then later in the afternoon, Ronnie had gone down below for something

33:30 to the toilet or some bloody thing and John Hutchison, my other mate, I had him rearming the magazines, where you had a tracer bullet and an armour piercing bullet and a HE [high explosive] bullet and he was rearming the magazine and I was having a bit of a doze under a lifeboat because it was hot and we'd been up all, you know all days and that mostly and

34:00 I sort of woke up and I could, all of a sudden, there's a plane and it's coming straight out of the sun. They used to dive out of the sun so you couldn't see them and it's coming straight for the ship and I jumped up and grabbed the Bren and I, as he come towards me I opened up on him and went, "Rooooo," right round see and what I did, I put a lot of bullets in the back of the bridge.

34:30 Luckily he released the bomb, it went through rigging of the ship and exploded about 200 yards in front of us and that was the end of the air raids. Next day we were clear but when we got back to Alex and we had to, the Pom's made us clean up all the empty shells we had on the deck and I heard them say, "I that plane machine

35:00 gunned us as it went past." I never said a word. Yeah, so I shot up the ship so we finished up back in Alexandria and we were unloading off the, coming off the, disembarking off the Dilwarra and there was a Cinesound

35:30 in those days, picture of the evacuees coming off and there was one of Frankie Archibald stepping onto the gangplank in Alexandria when we come back. We went from there by truck out to, back to Amiriya and there was just a tent flies up and I remember they had bottles of beer there

36:00 for us and some bully beef and some biscuits and we're all that tired and buggered and I met my cousin that I was telling you about in Newcastle. He didn't know I was in the army and I didn't know he was in Greece either and we met at this what's a name and we camped, we got in under the fly of the tent and we slept alongside each other and

36:30 then the next day we were put onto a train and back to Palestine.

Jimmy, had there been any attempt to reorganise you into your battalions when in Greece or was it too chaotic? Was it just?

It was too chaotic. See what happened, when they split up, somebody gave an order, everybody for themselves and like they just disappeared

37:00 and you had to then, as an individual, find your best way. There was no leadership. It was only for old Jim Gallagher, I probably would have got, I don't know what would have happened cause old Jim sort of, him and I kept together sort of thing and it was only initiative that got us out of it, otherwise, should have been a prisoner of war but

Were you getting any news? Did you receive any news about those that had been taken prisoner in Greece or in Crete?

No, no, no

37:30 didn't know.

At what point did you realise, get together, or were you reunited as a battalion and you could realise who had made it and who hadn't?

When we got back to Julis, back to, a few of them started to come back through Turkey and the CO came back and Andy Watson came back and a few of them, they started to drift back and but we were depleted to such a degree at that stage and I'll make this point.

38:00 Things were so bad in the Middle East, the Syrian campaign had just begun and we brought our LMG [light machine gun] back, our Bren gun. We had to give it to the 2/3rd Battalion and we had our old gun. We called it 'Diddums'. We had it cut in the butt, Diddums. We had to give Diddums to the 2/3rd because they didn't have

38:30 enough weapons to go and they fought in the Syrian campaign, where we didn't have the numbers. Now people don't realise how serious matters were at that particular time in the war. England was on its back foot and then it took us quite a long time to be reinforced from Australia. Some of the chappies that joined us

39:00 just after we come back from Greece, were supposed to go to Malaya. Some blokes, mates of mine from Bellingen, Taylor brothers and those sort of, they were to go to Malaya but they were diverted as reinforcements for the 6th Division in the Middle East.

And you'd been on the back foot for the first time? Did that change again the way that you were viewing your wartime experience or did it change morale?

Not really no, as I

39:30 said, it's something you accepted. Certainly we were on a high but when you come back, you just, you know it was a bad experience and it was an uncomfortable thought in Greece that, like you couldn't understand their language. You couldn't understand their streets or their road signs and things like that

40:00 and you were, you know all you could do is sort of go south, just go, keep moving south and that sort of thing but anyhow that's another thing that happened so that was, then we went to Syria.

Tape 9

00:45 **Jimmy during that story you mentioned about two blokes getting run over by a tank? How did that actually happen?**

Well when we fell back in the first position, we were told

01:00 that we had to make a stand so the infantry lined up straight across like that, with a rifle, against tanks and that was it so I mean we had nothing else, only Bren gun and rifles so that's what it was all about and I honestly think that the German

01:30 himself didn't realise that he was running over the top of some of our blokes because it was just on dark if you understand and the visibility was minimal so I think they had advanced so quickly, the tanks, ahead of their infantry, which was part of their blitzkrieg tactics to harass the

02:00 you know the infantry and they did a good job of it too.

So who on earth gave the orders to stand and fight, do you know?

Chap by the name of Colonel Lamb, yeah Colonel Lamb. He was, I don't know who he belonged to, but he was the one that stood up and said, "No further. This is where we stop," so that's what we did and but Ronnie

02:30 and I were a bit lucky. We were a little bit further back and we had the protection of a, part of a railway line and we were able to take a bit of cover, down a bit, you know, had a bit of protection.

03:00 **So after that you ended up in Palestine and you were heading towards Syria?**

We did our period in Palestine just while this regrouping and a few of our chaps were transferred to another battalion.

03:30 Our mate John Hutchison from Armidale, he was sent to the 2/1st Battalion but, cause he was a Corporal. Ronnie and I and John we were Corporals, were made Acting Corporals over in Greece and but we were able to spend a bit of time in Palestine

04:00 and I remember I went on, I don't know, three or four days of leave they gave us and that was an excursion type trip. See we had a bit of money in our pay books and the bus took off from Beit Jirja, went to Jerusalem, Tel Aviv,

04:30 up through Dead Sea, up to Haifa and back down the coast to Netanya, which I've seen on the news from time to time and back to our camp. It was about three days I think but it was, they so that was quite good

05:00 and then our next move then, the 2/3rd Battalion had come out practically unscathed out of Greece and they were then seconded with the 7th Division and did the Syrian campaign

05:30 against the Vichy French. Well we didn't go up to Syria, well we went to Syria as a garrison battalion and we were camped just outside Damascus, somewhere near the Golan Heights

06:00 and we spent it would be Christmas 1941 just outside Damascus and we dug the fences and put up a lot of barbed wire and survived a blizzard and I mean a

06:30 blizzard but hadn't had snow for 40 years, but we brought it on and eventually we were taken into Damascus itself into the barracks and looking after army headquarters etcetera, etcetera which was quite good. You know you had

07:00 night leave and that sort of thing. It was quite a good period of time. Well then it was about that time I think the Japanese started to make their presence felt and whether Darwin was bombed at that time, or Pearl Harbour, I can't remember now but anyhow we were withdrawn then from

07:30 Syria. That campaign had finished. They'd overrun the Vichy French and that sort of thing, came under British control and we were taken back to Palestine, back to Julis and then we were only there a short time when we were brought

08:00 down to Port Said and said goodbye to the wogs and, dear fellows, and they were glad to see us go too I think and we came back to, actually the whole brigade, the 16th Brigade with attached troops, like

08:30 a hospital unit etcetera, we were bound for Java but Java had fallen so a political set up happened there and Menzies was trying to get, no Curtin was trying to get the Australians back and they brought us back as far as Ceylon

09:00 which would have been disaster because we arrived in Ceylon and we, our equipment like trucks and artillery and all that sort of thing was still on the boats, the troops were unloaded and the Japanese raided Colombo

09:30 and their invasion force was only miles off Ceylon and we would have gone in the bag because we had nothing to fight with did we? So we made camp out of Colombo in a rubber plantation and Easter 1941 the Japanese tried to raid Colombo

10:00 and in the meantime they'd switched a Spitfire squadron from India to Colombo and there was a big dogfight over the top of our camp. We could see it all. They shot the Japanese bombers down because they come over unescorted. They shot them all down. Well we spent about three months there I s'pose. We did a bit of jungle training, not a lot.

10:30 It was, we didn't over work ourselves but it was very hot and we dug the fences and things like, all that sort of thing but and when we left there we were, came back to Melbourne and that was in August '41 so we came out of the, we came out of

11:00 Syria in the cold. We came to Ceylon in the heat. We came from Ceylon in August and never saw the sun for a week, cold and we were only a month in Australia then we were back in New Guinea so we had our

11:30 40 days leave. I'll mention this, in those days you had to change trains in Albury or something because of the gauge and I was a country bloke and only ever been in Sydney with Mum once and when we got back to Sydney, the other, all my mates, they lived in Sydney. They disappeared and they got on trains, but I

12:00 couldn't get a train to the north coast until late in the afternoon or five o'clock or whatever it might be see. So I didn't know anything about Sydney and I spent all day on Central Railway Station and late in the afternoon I plucked up enough courage to walk down to Hotel Sydney, but I kept Central Station in my sight because I didn't want to get lost and miss

12:30 the train, right. I came home and had my leave and we went back to camp and we marched through Sydney and went back to camp at Greta and we were there for only a short time when the big push was on in New Guinea and we were bundled on a train

13:00 up to Brisbane, onto boats and over to Port Moresby. We went to a camp, Koitaki and there we were able to dye most of our clothes into jungle greens and took off on the Owen Stanley,

13:30 an experience that will ever be remembered. We weren't, you'd say, fully trained for jungle warfare to the extent that the Japanese were for instance but we had to make the best of what we had. Now the situation in New Guinea at that time was the 7th Division had taken a hammering on the Owen Stanley.

14:00 A couple of militia battalions were wiped out and the Japanese were advancing over the Owen Stanley.

We were then moved up to relieve the 7th Division battalions and we took over from them at Templeton's Crossing but I'll always, I have this in the back of my mind. I think

14:30 a campaign that need not have been fought because the Japanese had no way of taking Port Moresby by land. They were defeated at Milne Bay. They were defeated in the Coral Sea, in the first instance, so they retreated back to Rabaul and whilst we fought that campaign, lost heavily

15:00 in officers and men, there was no way that the Japanese, in my opinion, could have done any harm but they pursued them over the ranges and caused the worst misery that a person could be put into with

15:30 sickness, casualties and conditions, hunger. You name it, it was there. Of all campaigns, the Owen Stanley campaign would be the worst campaign fought by any Australian force, the 6th and the 7th Division. However …

Let me ask

16:00 **you did receive, you said, a little bit of jungle training?**

In Ceylon.

At Ceylon, what was it?

Nothing to what we had to endure over there, nothing compared because there was roads over in Ceylon that you could go on. There was nothing in the Owen Stanley, only a track, one behind the other.

Were you issued with new weapons besides the 303?

No, no we had. That's another thing. We had no weaponry. We still had

16:30 Tommy guns and Tommy guns were useless in climatic, wet conditions. Half the time they wouldn't fire. We had no mortars because the supplies were dropped by air and a mortar bomb takes two set backs to explode. When they were dropped by air, they were getting their first

17:00 set back and when they were punched in the barrel they were getting the second and they exploded, killing everybody so mortars were out. The only bombs that they had was, the early stages, where they each carried so many, the mortar platoon so we actually fought that campaign over the Owen Stanley with rifles and Bren guns. We didn't have any artillery. We had nothing.

17:30 On the other hand the Japanese had a mountain gun, they had mortars, cause they were carrying their stuff and they were fanatics in the jungle.

They were equipped with rifles as well, or they had?

They had a service rifle but it was lighter than ours more adaptable to the conditions than our 303 was. It was a pretty heavy rifle

18:00 **The machine gun that didn't always work, what was that called again?**

The Tommy gun?

Tommy gun, why did that not work on occasions?

Well the Thompson sub machine had a snub nosed bullet and very heavy in weight so

18:30 therefore when a bullet hits an article, if its an elongated bullet it will pierce it and go through it. If it's a snub nose, it will deflect it see so they weren't suitable for jungle fighting. So anyhow

19:00 and our equipment, like we only had a ground sheet that we had in the Western Desert. We had no protection against the elements, the weather, like the rain and it rained and it rained and rained. Everything was wet. You were wet all day, all night and

19:30 no food and casualties. It was probably the worst you could possibly think of. I mean in the desert or anywhere like that, if you got hit you got picked up and that sort of thing. In the jungle, you laid there, lucky to survive and

20:00 our first encounter was at Templeton's Crossing. We took over from the 25th Brigade and whilst we made a little bit of ground, when I say we made a little bit of ground, we might have gone 500 or a thousand yards but it would cost 30 lives for that to gain because

20:30 wherever you moved in the jungle, they, you were a sitting duck. They were dug in, in weapon pits and you were on top of the ground and as you moved, well you copped it and they were, the Japanese were good soldiers. I'll say that. They never gave in. They

21:00 would not surrender and they fought to the death so it was probably the hardest campaign fought by the Australian soldiers because we weren't, I'm sure, weren't prepared for that type of warfare.

Can you talk me through the first engagement, what actually happened

21:30 **when you arrived, what you did?**

Well when we arrived at the position, like the 25th Brigade they were in position so we were brought up to take over their weapon pits and like we were told there's so many gun posts on that feature and we have to push them off that

22:00 feature so it was a forward attack, a frontal attack and after you'd gone so many yards, the casualties were so heavy, you'd stop the attack. Well the next move was then to try and encircle them but by the time you got round, engage them here in the front, try to encircle them, it was days because getting through the jungle

22:30 it was not very easy and well we just walked into a blaze of fixed machine gun positions that was hard to, and they just dropped people, just as easy as that, you know.

So initially it was a frontal assault?

23:00 **I take it, it was a walk forward and you were a breadth wide?**

Well you tried to, you know creep up here and there. There was there chappies. There was Bill Kelly, Teddy Jamison, Billy Johnson. I think it was four altogether and they went nearer to the set up. They hadn't been in action at all

23:30 and during this attack, one fellow said, Kelly I think said, "I think I can see them," and Jamison and Johno, they come creeping along. Bang, opened up, got the lot of them. Killed Bill, Johno died of wounds, think Johno died the next morning or that night, three see.

24:00 They were only 50 yards away from each other, it's not as though you're any distance. You were only 50 yards away and sometimes less than that so they just waited till, you know they got their target and there was just, that was it.

Was there any cover on the initial frontal attack to hide behind logs or shrubs or?

Well not really. There was very little

24:30 coverage. In the, in that particular attack it was sort of heavy undergrowth. You couldn't see them but they could see you because they're sitting looking for you and you can't see them and when they opened up, like they sighted their guns and it would be under sort of a leafy branch and have a gun poking out like that and you're moving around here

25:00 you know, you're a sitting duck and it was attack and perseverance. The fight went on all day and trying to make ground by moving different companies around and next morning the Japanese had pulled out, thank goodness and they took up another position

25:30 further back and then that's what they did. They leapfrogged going back and we lost four officers that day, four platoon commanders and I can't remember just how many, about 12 or 15 in the unit was killed. You just, it was just murder. That's more than we lost at Bardia so

26:00 **So where were you? Were you one of the men in the frontal assault or did you go round?**

Yeah I had a section in the front but no, I sort of kept pretty low and I was in the right place at the right time. Then later on I got hit because I was

26:30 more or less standing up, moving up to the front, because I was exposed and I got hit in the leg. Had I been laying down, I wouldn't have got hit so it was sort of a thing that you had to, by attacking, you were vulnerable and you're

27:00 but if you had to try and push them out of position, you had to keep pushing forward and they were deadly, they were.

So after that initial attack in the Tablelands was it?

No in the Owen Stanley.

So that next day, did you keep pursuing them forward or what happened?

No the next day, see we did that

27:30 attack. Well the 2/3rd Battalion would take over. They'd be the lead battalion and they would pursue them back and when the Japanese would hold up again at another position, do the same thing. The 2/3rd would attack and they'd try to push them out or to cause the most problem but they would hold them and then

28:00 they would pull back. Then the next day the 2/1st Battalion would take over and that's how you went and eventually got down to the other side of the ranges but on the mountains, see you're up on a spur. There's nowhere you can sort of manoeuvre round without a lot of difficulty because it was jungle and you were

28:30 well no numbers of men because, like if we'd have had artillery that you could strike with or things like that, but we didn't have it. You couldn't get the guns there. You were up on top of the mountains. You were thousands of feet up and the conditions, the mud and the rain, and,

29:00 so casualties were a big problem. People were suffering, bullet wounds and shrapnel wounds and dysentery and malaria and all those elements.

29:30 It was probably one, as I said, a terrific campaign but I don't think it ever should have happened. That's my opinion. I think they should have, if they'd have sat back, the Japanese would have retreated back over the ranges but we lost, I think our brigade lost something like 500. There was more killed on that campaign than there was killed in the whole Vietnam or by

30:00 Australians. I mean that's how the casualties were so I mean and you had to carry everything. You had to depend on the natives to bring out medical supplies, take the wounded back, your food, which was practically non existent. You were living off berries you picked up off the ground and

30:30 you just couldn't cope and supplies were dropped by air out of a plane into the jungle and the recovery was practically, well 10 percent, yeah and ammunition was dropped and half of it was, had to be all sorted because it was bent. You know the bullets were bent

31:00 but they weren't defeated.

You mentioned food firstly and you mentioned a bit of berries and things like that? What were you eating each night?

Lots of times, nothing. You were given a tin of bully beef per man per day

31:30 perhaps and when you're in a forward position, you just live on a bit of bully, cold bully. If you're in a reserve position, you could light a fire and you could

32:00 roast your bully beef and you would scrounge green paw paw's, green bananas and there was certain berries you could pick, cause the natives would show you, artichokes. Dad used to feed them to the pigs and I found this artichoke patch and dug up these artichokes, little white things and you'd cook them and mash them up

32:30 with bully beef and have a stew. If you're in a reserve position you'd get through but anyone in the front, well you couldn't light a fire so you just had a mouthful of bully, not too much of it so it was, things improved once we got down off the other side, got down off the ranges but it was when you

33:00 were up in the highlands, was where all the problems.

You said you could have sort of a spoonful of bully when you were in the front, why not much more?

Well you couldn't carry much. See you could carry half a dozen tins of bully, it'd be all right but you couldn't get that much because there was, like a few thousand troops and supplies had to be carted from

33:30 the dropping areas by the natives, the Fuzzy Wuzzies and they were trying to keep up and they had to carry, like ammunition and they had to carry medical supplies and all this sort of thing and food so, you know it was one of those situations where you just had to try to exist best you can.

Do you know what the Japanese were eating and whether they were lighting fires?

34:00 Rice, they lived on rice. Now a Japanese, that was his staple diet. A handful of rice and he could go for a couple of days but we couldn't. We came onto a place at, on the Kumusi River at Wairopi and we were able to capture, you know liberal supplies of rice there and it was bloody beautiful

34:30 and we were able to light fires there and that because the Japanese had disappeared out of the area and we had to cross this river, the Kumusi and took some time to get over there so we were able to light fires and cook up rice and that sort of thing and it was quite, you know quite a break.

35:00 There, it wasn't very nice.

Were there night patrols by both the Australians and the Japanese?

No, once darkness came, whole activities shut down because it was too dark. You couldn't see but you had to have 100 percent guard, like you never slept.

35:30 There were two of you in a, like you'd dig a hole, a weapon pit and you'd sit back to back so if one feller went, dozed off the other feller would sort of come forward and wake him up and that sort of thing and that's how you sort of, and you would, it was in a perimeter defence where you could touch one another, like that, in the jungle cause you couldn't see your hand in front of you.

So it wasn't a case where one slept and

36:00 **the other one watched?**

Well in some cases it could be yeah, yeah but not always because just depends on what position you were in but, and all that tended to weaken your constitution too. Lack of sleep and lack of food and the

36:30 humid conditions, it all had a huge effect on your fighting ability.

Can I just ask this in respect to toilets and stuff? Was there an area in which you were meant to go?

No just go off into the bush anywhere yes. No there was nothing like that

37:00 See there was no camps. The Japanese had a few camps here and there but their hygiene was none. They did things that no human being would think of. For instance

37:30 one creek that we crossed up in the mountains, there was a Japanese soldier buried in the waterway. He probably died with cholera so anyone that drank that water, that's the sort of thing that they would do and in their little bit of a camp they had,

38:00 which we come across, there was no toilets dug or trenches dug and that sort of thing so and we had to go over that sort of ground and it was creating problems. We came onto a camp where they'd evacuated and there was two

38:30 Malay natives dead, in a bit of a hut thing. They were left there to decompose and that sort of thing but for all that we contacted the Japs in October and we were still more or less off and on

39:00 in contact with them to Sanananda and that was in December. That's when I was evacuated in December, just before Christmas, with malaria and the battalion was withdrawn on the same day and there was nearly 800 of us started out from Moresby and 63 made it back to Moresby and that was, yeah.

Tape 10

01:11 **First let me ask you just about the Greek story. What was it you just said to me?**

Well I played golf with a couple of mates and we'd often talk about, you know they'd ask me about my army days and that sort of thing, carry on like

01:30 in humour and this chappie said, I said to him, "You know over in Greece, things were hard, and that sort of thing. People were starving and that sort of thing." I said, "You know, you could get a nookie over there for a tin of bully beef and they'd give you two eggs change." He still laughs about that, yeah.

Just on

02:00 **that subject of, I guess finding your luck, you didn't have much luck in Alexandria? Did you have any luck?**

No I wouldn't come into that sorts of thing in those places anyhow so, might have made up for it later, but not there. I found it very distasteful.

Coming back now to the subject of the Owen Stanleys, just in respect to the Japanese and what they did with the bodies,

02:30 **you saw the body in the water, not to cloud it too badly, but do you think that that was good soldiership from their point of view, that you couldn't drink the water because of what they'd done?**

Yes I believe if you can defeat an enemy, you'll find, you know some way to try and cause as much disruption as you can but I wouldn't think that our, like civilised people, as I

03:00 consider ourselves, would, there for an instance now we came across two Malay natives, not a stitch on them, starved. Now I saw these with my own eyes and a skeleton, two skeletons with skin drawn over them, that's what they were.

03:30 They'd been hamstrung and left to die at the side of the track because they became probably sick and of no use, so that's what they did so eventually they were put out of their misery by troops behind us but they were the sort of

04:00 things that they did. Now they had packhorses. When we got down onto the flat country, round the Kokoda area and they'd shoot a horse in a stream and they'd cut its tongue out and its liver, that they'd live on and leave that to decompose in the waterways. Now that's the sort of things

04:30 that they would do. For all that campaign, I saw one live Japanese. He'd been taken a prisoner somehow but he wanted to be killed, cause he was walking along and he'd just fall down in the mud and that and the chaps that had hold of him would stand him up and give him a boot and to,

05:00 you know get along a bit further and he'd lay down. He didn't want to be alive. He wanted to be killed and that's the only live Japanese, I heard them, the day I got hit, they were so close that you could hear them talking and some of them could speak English. They were calling out to Doug Foster, Sergeant Foster, as well as what you could. That was to confuse

05:30 us because we were attacking their position and that's how close the contact was on that Owen Stanley. You were so close to one another that, and the slightest move you made, they had you.

So in that particular situation where they were calling out the sergeant's name, how did you find out, A, it was the Japanese and what did you do about it?

Well you could hear by the,

06:00 probably a little in the lingo, you know, "Sergeant Foster, Sergeant Foster," sort of thing and but they were in a position dug in underneath a log as a weapon pit where you couldn't get at them so they were fanatics.

So there would have been occasions that you could or you did get at them?

06:30 **Can you tell me about one or two of those situations?**

Yes, well there at Sanananda, well they attacked us, you know very severely on this particular afternoon. We'd come onto an area

07:00 on the Sanananda track after we'd, you know come down off the mountains and we were, it was flat country and late in the afternoon we, C and D company were doing a diversion around to try and get behind them and A and B company were on the other side of the

07:30 track trying to do a pincer, come in behind and late in the afternoon we came onto this little hut and there was about eight Japanese, all sitting round hot rice and we sort of edged our way up and close to them and something happened

08:00 and I don't think we finished up getting many of them but we got a couple of them and then they tried to counter attack to get that rice because that was THE rations and they were sort of coming in on us and not a lot of them but enough and there was a hell of a fire fight going on but

08:30 we shot, but you didn't know you'd killed anyone because after a few days you could smell them out in front of you, that sort of thing and they did get a few of ours too but then when these, the fire fights' over, that we called them, you could hear them yabbering and you could hear them chopping, chop, chop, chop business, you know, building bunkers and that sort of thing

09:00 but you could hear them but you couldn't see them, cause the jungle would be a help, that sort of thing but they said they were little fellows but they weren't all little fellows either. They were pretty big lumps of blokes a couple that you saw that were dead but when they buried their dead

09:30 you'd only see one grave. I don't know how many bodies would be in it so they had, up to all the tricks. They were up to all the tricks that they did to confuse, you know the opposition and they talk about health.

10:00 You had to have a temperature of a hundred and three before anyone could be evacuated for malaria, a hundred and three and you were more or less delirious before you, you know. See we lost in Sanananda, my company commander was Jack Blamey. He was a nephew

10:30 of Sir Thomas Blamey's. A good bloke Jack and Athol Bosgard, both company commanders there, they were killed and we lost I'd say in that area, C and D company we lost about 12 with, you know snipers. Frankie Archibald was killed, a bloke by the name of Frank Butt and Noel Humphries,

11:00 Harry Honeywell, Verco, they were, a lot of them were up in, Japs were up in trees, out and we were down on the flat and they could fire down into the trenches, through the head so if they'd have put on a frontal attack, we would have never been able to hold them because

11:30 they were, we never had sufficient, you know strength in our troops but we did hold on until we were relieved by fresh troops and the Americans joined us there. The 2/28th and oh no, 128th and 126th Regiments of the Yanks but they were as useless as tits on a bull

12:00 so

Why?

Lack of leadership. They had no initiative. They had the firepower and that sort of thing but they were regular army fellows, not marines and they didn't seem to have the initiative or leadership, like they wouldn't get up

12:30 and have a go, like wouldn't move forward and if you've going to have to take a position, you've got to move forward. You've got to get up and have a go.

Jimmy can I ask, did the Japanese leave booby traps behind and those sorts of things?

I never witnessed any of that. I could honestly say that

13:00 I didn't at any time come across anything that you would say, when I say that, for instance there was areas where you had to hang onto something to get over rooty ground or slippery or something like that and you'd put your hand out and touch a vine or something like that and that would rattle and then they'd fire at the bottom of that.

13:30 They had that sort of thing, shaking a bush and that sort of thing. They'd fire at the bottom because they knew there was somebody to do that and that's sort of, they were jungle fighters. They knew what they were doing and they, as I say, they lived on the smell of an oil rag, just a handful of rice and that would, their staple diet and

14:00 medically I don't think they had any, never, ever saw much evidence of any medical equipment or anything or medicines or anything like that. Once they left an area, they left very little for anyone coming behind, only little stinking bloody excreta and things like that. That was, dirty buggers.

14:30 **You mentioned the fact that you only ever saw one prisoner?**

Yeah.

Was that partly due to the fact that obviously the Japanese chose not to surrender generally?

Yeah.

Or was it also partly the fact that some of the Australians may have shot them?

No I think it would be fair to say that he must have been surprised somehow to be captured

15:00 because that was something that they would never do, was be captured. They'd die before they were captured but they would, each individual Japanese soldier was issued with a little cane basket about that deep

15:30 and about that long and it was his belief that he was to die for the whatever he was and their remains, he was to be cremated and that was to be sent back to the shrine in Tokyo. Now he carried that in his equipment like we carried standard equipment. That was part of his equipment. That was his belief. Because they were such

16:00 fanatical fighters, is because they were fanatics. They weren't Christians and that was their belief, to die for their country and that they did, rather than surrender.

Given the intensity of it all, were there Australians maybe who

16:30 **had even just joined the battalion who became so overwhelmed by the situation that they, there was self inflicted wounds and things like that?**

One instance that I remember very clearly, I won't mention any names. At Oivi, we'd just come off the mountains

17:00 down onto the main track, Kokoda and we were heading towards Popondetta and the forward company, I think B company was leading company

17:30 and I was in D Company and we were, just come to this position and there was firing up ahead of us and a couple were coming back wounded and we were just sort of laying on our gear, laying back on our gear resting and

18:00 a long, long line of us. Captain Blamey, I was alongside of him and the others were laying out and there was, these casualties were coming back and all of a sudden there was an explosion, like a rifle exploded and we thought it was, you know an ambush, sniper

18:30 and I jumped up and yelled out, you know grabbed the rifle and anyhow, sort of everybody got into position, just like magic and then I heard this whimper and I said, "Man hit here, man hit, stretcher bearer here, man hit," and Blamey crawled up to where I was. He said,

19:00 and there was this bloke and I said, "Where?" and he looked. He pointed at his foot and I said, "Oh bloody hell," and Blamey came up and he said, I thought he was going to job him, but he said, "Jimmy, for Christ sake take his gear off him and piss him off out of the, get rid of him," but what had happened, he'd fired the rifle

19:30 and it went between his toes and only skinned them. Anyhow they sent him off but it was years after, you know I met him out here one day, one July time at the races and a bloke brought him up to me and introduced him. He said, "Do you know this chappie?" I said, "Yes I know him." I said, "I think he knows me too," that's all, I let it go. I didn't say anything and there was another chap by the name of Ballard.

20:00 He was from Maitland and when we were at Sanananda he cracked up, he went, his nerves got the best of him. He was in a bad way. Apart from that, I can't remember anyone else had any problems. I s'pose

we all felt like it but we didn't get round to it.

The feller whose nerves cracked up, what happened there, what was?

Well he was taken

20:30 escorted back by medical orderly back to Battalion Headquarters and well I don't know what happened to him after that. I never, all I know, he came from Maitland and I've never seen him or heard of him since. I knew his name was Ballard, I can't remember now.

What was the sign though, that you realised his nerves were cracking up?

Well

21:00 he would get up and yell out and scream and shaking and, you know crying and that sort of thing. You could see that he was, if he put on an act, it was a bloody good one but anyhow he was taken care of and ushered back to Battalion Headquarters and I don't know what happened to him after that so

21:30 you can understand a person cracking up because I will say this, that in that area there that we were at Sanananda, in hindsight, not being dramatic or anything like that but I never thought I would survive. I didn't think I would come out of New Guinea. I'm honest about that because

22:00 you, there was no way that you could survive. There was so many blokes getting, you know knocked off one at a time with snipers and that sort of thing and you were exposed. There was a case where in a position that I was in, at the back of, in the reserve part of the platoon

22:30 and there was two Americans, an officer and his batman and this batman was sort of exposing himself to the elements and we were a bit further down towards near the creek and I kept saying to him, "Look mate, keep your bloody head down." I said, "They can see you up in those trees"

23:00 and he was building a bombproof shelter. He was going to survive this here war and he was going back to the United States and I used to say to him, "Well keep your bloody head down," so anyhow he got this, he dug this hole at the base of this big old Moreton Bay fig tree, or a tree like that and he dug this bloody hole and he put branches over it and that sort of thing and

23:30 dirt over the top of it and he was just about finishing off, over came a mortar bomb, bang, right at his feet and killed him and the officer got, well last I saw of him, part of his belly was coming out. Blood was pouring out of his belly. I don't know whether he lived or not and so that was the end of them so this other couple of Yanks that were there.

24:00 He was still there the next morning, this poor bugger laying on the there and I said to them, "You'd better do something with him cause," I said, "He'll start to smell in a couple of days." "No Aussie," he said, "We can't do that," and I said, "Well you'd better do something with him," so I said, "Dig the bloody hole." I said, "I'll put him in it"

24:30 so he dug the hole and I just wrapped the fellow up in his tent, a shelter half they called it, wrapped his body up, you know and just laid him in the trench, covered him over. "God Aussie," they said, "We could not do that", yeah so they were leaving him laying on top of the ground.

25:00 **Just so I get the timeline right, you came down from the Owen Stanleys to Sanananda and you did battle there? Where did you go from that point?**

Well that's where our battalion was relieved. An American battalion came in there and

25:30 some of our own troops, the 6th Australian Division Cavalry, they turned them into infantry because there was no tanks or that sort of thing being used so fresh troops and they made them into infantry and the day I was evacuated they came in, in nice clean

26:00 jungle greens and that sort of thing and we were in rags and I, you had to, you couldn't get carried out. You had to be walked and I had a temperature and I think a couple of other blokes and I think we had to walk about two mile back to where the aid post was and I got back there and the next morning, stretcher bearer, Dick

26:30 Blackford, he give me a sponge over and that sort of thing and helped me onto a, we had a bit of transport then a Jeep it was then and took me back to Soputa and there was an airstrip there and the Americans were landing

27:00 the old biscuit bombers, DC-3 there and they were taking off wounded and casualties and that sort of thing and whilst I was there, there was a few of us had congregated there, Captain Buckley, one of our unit fellows, there was a few of us, the Japanese bombed the hospital, the field hospital at Soputa

27:30 and killed some, two surgeons that had done magnificent work on the Owen Stanley and they were killed in that air raid. They claim, well since the war and that sort of thing, that it was done in reprisal for the Australians had bombed or machine-gunned

28:00 some of their wounded that were leaving the Buna area a couple of days before us. I mean so that was a reprisal and that sort of thing but it killed quite a number of blokes, bombed the hospital. Well the same day, no the next day, think it was now, the next day, a DC-3 came in and

28:30 about six or eight of us were able to get on it and we flew back over the Owen Stanleys, was a bit better than walking over it and flew back over the Owen Stanleys and landed at Jackson's Drome and I went into hospital and I was there Christmas 1942 and had Christmas in hospital.

29:00 I was there for about two weeks I think and I was treated for malaria and when I was discharged I came back to Koitaki, the camp where we left from originally and my mate, Ronnie Diamond, was there to meet me and he was about to get his commission

29:30 and my brother was over there from, that I didn't know, but he had come over as a reinforcement and there was a Christmas cake there from Mum for Christmas. Mum had sent me the Christmas cake, it caught up with me and Ron took me to where my brother was and I met him, we had a bit of a talk and that sort of thing

30:00 and Ron helped me back to my camp and that sort of thing. The next day we were to come on the, leave New Guinea, go back to Australia on leave and Roger Rumen and old Jim Gallagher, they helped me carry my gear, what bit of gear I had,

30:30 back to the truck because I was, you know you're sick from malaria and that sort of thing, you're always sick and anyhow we all were on trucks and we come back to near Jackson's Drome and supposed to be heading from the boat. Next thing the convoy was stopped and we all had to get off the truck and it was, course everybody was oafing

31:00 about having to, what was going on and they tried to form a parade on a bit of open ground, a few acres of ground and Major General Allen who was GOC 6th Divvy until he was relieved by General Vasey, that was a turmoil within the army set up and he said, put over an announcement that

31:30 "I don't want a parade. I can tell these boys what I want to tell them, from the top of this truck," and he stood up on the top of an army truck and said what a great job we had done and he was proud to be associated with them and he'd been relieved of his command but he still thought highly of the 6th Division, blah, blah, blah. "Now get on the trucks and have a good leave," and that sort of thing and we got back and onto the docks at Port Moresby and

32:00 on the ship and my mate Ronnie Diamond's commission had come through but he still come to make sure that I was all right and I came home on the ship. Ron got a commission. He came home and he got married. He never got malaria, Ron and after

32:30 I, I didn't finish my leave. I was back in Concord Hospital. I spent quite a long time there and rehabilitation and that sort of thing and I finished up going to convalesce at Lady Gowrie Convalescent Home at Gordon, this place that belonged to Woolcott Forbes, beautiful place. A big black marble bath

33:00 set in the room with water coming out of the lion's mouth. It was heaven but I played up and that, that key there, that's when I had my 21st birthday and that's where I got drunk down at Dolly's place. That's the reason for that key and I got kicked out of the, next morning I got kicked out of the place for being drunk and playing up and I finished up back at

33:30 Ingleburn, back at the camp there. And I hadn't finished my leave and I came home and finished my leave and then back to the showground and probably about June I was seconded back to the battalion again, back to the Atherton Tablelands, where the battalion had been reformed and was reinforced and

34:00 Ron was the platoon commander in C Company and I was a sergeant in D Company and after we finished parade one afternoon and that sort of thing, I'd go up to Ronnie's tent, flop on his bunk and Ronnie would come up and I'd get up off the bunk and he'd say, "No, no stop there Jimmy." Ron would sit in the corner and I'd be on his bunk. He was a good mate, he was a great

34:30 mate and he, and I stayed in the battalion for another 12 months and we got leave and I decided I'd, think I'd had enough of the army and I fell in love with my first wife and

35:00 I decided that enough was enough and I think I'd have put Mum through enough too and when I told her that I thought I was getting out of the army, I think Mum was pleased and Dad wanted me to take the farm over and I was discharged in October 1944 and

35:30 then on, I worked on the farm for a couple of years. Rita and I got married but we only stayed on the farm for about two years. I didn't like it and I went and got a job with some army mates. The war was over then and they were in the 2/1st Battalion, butchering and I worked for them

36:00 for eight or nine years. They taught me butchering and slaughtering and I was a good slaughterman and I went from there to another butcher for experience and I brought a milk run for 500 pound, borrowed the money and my son was born then, Peter. That was about,

36:30 we were married five years I worked that milk run and two o'clock of a morning, finished at eight

o’clock of a morning and I’d then go and work in a grocery store and delivering groceries round town.

37:00 From there, I kept that run for about eight or nine years I s’pose and I sold it out for 5,000 pound. That was a lot of money back in ’49, ’50, no later than that

37:30 and I built a house in Bellingen, only lived in it 12 months and unfortunately there was a few problems at home so I just sold everything up and moved to Grafton and my wife died 30 years ago this Christmas, Christmas Day and I

38:00 have a son Peter who has three daughters, and a daughter who lives at Goondiwindi. She has two girls and a boy. They’re both divorced but quite happy. Margaret and I, she was a war widow and we’ve been married almost, about 29 years

38:30 and she lost her husband with heart attack and that’s where I am today and I was lucky with Margaret because she’s a wonderful person and looks after me very well and I look after her and she’s worth it.

Can I take you back again to New Guinea, just in respect to some of the well, firstly your aboriginal mate

39:00 Frank Archibald?

Tape 11

01:07 **Your mate Archie, you mentioned earlier that he’d got killed, what happened?**

Well we were at Sanananda and as I said we were doing an encircling movement, C and D Company to try and cut the Japanese off on the main Sanananda

01:30 track and we came into this position late in the afternoon and after initial attack on the Japanese, 16 Platoon was to move across this creek and take up a defensive position and Archie was part of it and as I said, I was in 17 at that time and I was

02:00 in the reserve part, few yards back from the creek and Archie was moving and a few of his mates, up forward of me and he’d lost his tin hat and he said to me, “Jimmy,” he said, “I’ve lost my tin hat.” He said, “Can you get me a tin hat and get it up to me?”

02:30 and I said, “Here Archie, you take mine and I’ll get one, you take mine.” “No, no,” he said, “You get me one,” and that’s the last I spoke to Archie. The very next day a sniper got him through the head because he was carrying the Bren, the snipers in, through the tree shot him in the head. That was the end of Archie. He was a great mate and a good fellow

03:00 and he never lacked in his duty or, I think we’re all frightened but I think Archie was probably a little bit more than we were but he never gave in. He was a really top person. I’ve met members of his family. They live at Armidale and

03:30 he is written up somewhere in the photo area of the War Memorial in Canberra also. They were doing a thesis on Aboriginals. See that bloke Tommy Dickson, that’s how that photo, he is an Abo from

04:00 Woolloomooloo Tommy and he died here a few years ago so anything to do with the aboriginals, they were finding out as much as they could about their involvement in the Second World War, yeah.

So you weren’t with Archie at the time when he got hit?

No, no he was forward of me, about another hundred yards

04:30 in front of me and but I spoke to him that, in the afternoon before, when he moved up there yeah.

And if he had got a tin helmet, would that have helped?

I don’t think so cause the steel helmets weren’t, like, just the angle. If even the sniper were in the trees and they were firing down it would be direct. I doubt whether it would have saved him just the same.

05:00 You don’t know, but anyhow.

In respect of the snipers themselves in the trees, weren’t they therefore easy targets if they were up?

Well you would fire into the trees but you wouldn’t know whether you hit them or not and they were picking off, a bloke Bluey Paterson, he was getting water from the bit of a creek, bending over and a sniper hit him,

05:30 in the nuts as a matter of fact and he lost one through it but funny thing, I met him at a reunion at Newcastle after the war and course when I saw him, I just sort of laughed and he said, “I know what

you're laughing about," he said, "but I've proved myself." He said, "I've got two kids", yeah, yeah, Bluey Paterson.

06:00 They were, there was, I was brought from that reserve position up to a forward position because a bloke by the name of Frank Butts, there was Frank Butts, Chicka Po, Harry Burke, were in this trench

06:30 and Frank Butt was a short, thickset chappie and he had diarrhoea and their trench was dug this way and there was a log that way and they could crawl in underneath the log to get over that side,

07:00 on the other side of the log and he got taken short and he said, "Bugger it. I'll run the risk. I'll jump over the log." As he stood up, they got him, through the head, fell over the other side of the log, dead. So I was

07:30 the Corporal, I'm standing up from there, moved up there to that position and next day or a couple of days after we were, there was a hate session. They were firing at us and we were firing at them and a bullet hit the log within inches of my steel helmet, because the noise

08:00 it made, the impact it made, nearly deafened me and my head must have gone just a little bit above that log. You couldn't move. They had you. See they were sitting up in the tree with a periscopic sights and they were deadly so you had to keep below the what's a name and I think that was probably one of the

08:30 narrowest squeaks I had because he had me in his sights really, yeah. He just went a little bit into the log.

Given Archie's death, were you at all emotionally moved at that point?

No, no you just said, "Well Archie was killed," and that was it. That's, as I said earlier, if you were

09:00 to stop and dwell on those sort of things, you would never move on. There was no purpose in, it's just something that, I don't know, you expected it I s'pose, as long as it didn't happen to you.

Given all that, are there things though, after war, nightmares that came your way because of what you'd seen and heard?

09:30 **Q**

I can't honestly say that I was moved in any great respect. I do have occasionally, going back years and that I, in my dreams I'm either getting chased by a German or a, but I always seem to get away but it's something that does come back to you in

10:00 your dreams or I dream that I'm in, back in the services giving orders and things like that but I like to sit down sometimes with another army buddy and we have a talk. We don't talk about the war but

10:30 we might make some comment about you knew somebody or somebody that you knew was killed or something. You don't, I might be unusual. People say I am sometimes but I don't let it get the best of me.

11:00 I think a lot about it, I do, about things that happened to you and things that, where you were but it just goes away. I don't let the thing sort of worry me to any

11:30 great extent. As I said earlier, if I had to do it, I'd do it all over again.

Some of the fellers at Tobruk had mentioned that the flies were just horrific there?

Yes that would be right. They were in a situation, see when we were there it was

12:00 winter time, no flies. They were there in the summer time and there would be flies, yeah.

My question is, in New Guinea during your time there, what pests and animals were irritating as you were moving through?

There was no, there was at Sanananda some wild pigs and they would tear into a couple of the bodies out the front you could, they would stir them up

12:30 but insects, negate. One of the most deadly was the scrub typhus, whether it was a bug or what it was but those that were inflicted

13:00 with scrub typhus, very few survived. An instance of that, when I was in Concord Hospital I was being treated for malaria and there was a young Victorian across the room from me and he was quite all right, like

13:30 we could sit up and talk to one another across the room and then a sister used to get us up of a morning and after we had our breakfast and that sort of thing and get us out into the sun because you were anaemic from the treatment and that sort of thing and this morning, this young fellow didn't want to get up

14:00 and the sister said, “You’ve got to get up,” and he said, “I don’t feel well enough.” I can remember him saying it and she said, “Well I’ll wait till the doctor comes,” and the doctor was doing his rounds and I was back in my bed and the doctor took one look at him and he got this needle and the bloke had his

14:30 feet out of the blankets and he just went, pushed this needle into the blokes foot and the bloke never moved and he turned round and he said, “There you are,” he said, “Scrub typhus,” he said and the bloke was conscious and that sort of thing. He said, “He’ll be dead in a week,” and he was right. They brought his mother and his sister

15:00 up from Melbourne. He was a Victorian and he never got out of his bed. Scrub typhus was something that you had and there was no antidote for it and they didn’t know what caused it. Apparently it was some little flea thing or some little bug in the jungle and it got into something in your blood streams and you become sort of paralysed gradually and

15:30 not too many survived it. Malaria, you had a chance but not scrub typhus. That was probably one of the killers. When I said to you that nearly 800 of us left Port Moresby, only 63 come back. If you took the number of casualties

16:00 through sickness, like malaria and that sort of thing, it was far greater than those that were killed or wounded because at that time there was little known about malaria and you just had to, you got it and you put up with it.

16:30 **Were you given any preventative sort of medication before you actually hit New Guinea or during New Guinea in respect?**

No, no not even quinine, no, nothing at all. Certainly they’ve come a long way now with Atebrin

17:00 and I had like I copped it in New Guinea and I s’pose I went home on leave and I used to keep having relapses. Poor old Mum, she thought I was going to die I think and there was no treatment at the local hospital so you had to get to Sydney so

17:30 Mum took me into town and the bloke, Stan Barnes and Bill Tate and I all malaria affected, we got on a train at home and the guard whom we knew, he just put us in a dogbox carriage and locked the carriage and said, “Right, one on each seat and one on the floor,” and we travelled to Sydney. Well by the time I got to Sydney

18:00 we had to report to the showground and I reported into the showground and there was a queue up from here to kingdom come and I just flaked out. I went out to it anyhow. I couldn’t make, get up to the desk and they put me in a casualty clearing place there and out to Concord and

18:30 from then on I was treated and I was pretty good after that. I went back to the Atherton Tablelands and I was going to do a, I was doing instructing. Ron was the, Ron Diamond was the OC of the little business so he got me to be his chief instructor and

19:00 I said to him, “Well I had a bit of malaria yesterday Ronnie.” That was on the Sunday. I said, “I’d better go and report to the RAP [Regimental Aid Post].” Well I finished up in hospital and that would have been in 1943 and I can’t remember ever having a problem with malaria since because there was some new treatment they put you on and I could honestly say

19:30 that I probably cleared it up, yeah so but it, and just now while we’ve got this, I’ve had good health. I’ve got emphysema, I’ve got airways disease

20:00 and only just three weeks ago I got the shock of my life. I got a touch of pneumonia, that’s why I’ve been, and I’m still not recovered from it yet, as you can see. I’m on a very strict, some kind of tablets that I’ve got to be very careful what I take because they make me woozy and that sort of thing

20:30 but hopefully I’ll get over this in another week or two. I’d like to feel healthier than what I am at the moment.

Just coming back to New Guinea a little bit more. Chaplains, I mean you talked earlier about services and stuff like that? Can you tell me about the involvement that the Chaplains may have had?

Yes

21:00 that’s a very good point you brought that up. I’m pleased you did. There was an RC [Roman Catholic] padre. I have never forgotten his name. His name was Father Glover, Padre Glover, a young man and there was Padre Read, a Church of England minister. I could show you a photo of him.

21:30 I’ll deal with Padre Read. When we had that go in at Templeton’s Crossing and, as I said, Snow Johnson died overnight and I went back to the OM or where he was in this bit of a tent and he was dead and the

22:00 orderly that was looking after these three blokes, four blokes, he said, “Will you take Snowy Johnson’s, his wallet and his watch,” and I said, “All right,” so I took his watch and his wallet and he had 30 shillings in his wallet and a photo of his

22:30 Mum and Dad and his sister and he had it wrapped up in a little bit of plastic so I kept that and after some time I caught up with Padre Read and I gave it to him. I said, “You have more chance

23:00 of getting this back to his parents than I would”, cause I was a soldier, I didn’t expect I would make it, which he did, which he took off me so during my time that I was in Concord being treated, one afternoon I had been sleeping and I woke up and this man was sitting alongside my bed, a grey headed man

23:30 and he apologised that he might have woke me up and he told me who he was. He said, “I believe you knew my son Snowy Johnson.” I said, “Yes I did,” and I was, you know, “He died,” and that sort of thing, “Yeah,” and I said, “Sir, did you

24:00 get his personal belongings, his watch and his wallet?” He said, “No I didn’t.” That Padre Read never, ever got that back, that’s right. He never, ever got it back. Now he didn’t last too long in the army because he was a bit of a controversial bloke. I think he got a bowler hat eventually but Padre Glover

24:30 yeah, that’s what they used to say, got a bowler hat. Padre Glover was an RC padre and he carried a rifle and he was challenged by somebody on the Owen Stanley and said, “Why should you be carrying a rifle Padre?” He said those fellers out there they don’t look to see what I’m carrying here.” He said, “So he said. I’ve got this and I’ll defend myself if I’ve got to,” but,

25:00 you know before we went, like if we knew there was a stoush coming off, like we were going to take, or attacking a certain position there was an opportunity to have a little bit of a church service, Padre Glover would have it and the RCs would go there but it didn’t stop them. They still got killed just the same but, you know he was up there with the troops and he was helping the wounded and that sort of thing. He was there all the time

25:30 and then later in the war, on the Atherton Tablelands, he was still the RC padre for the 2nd Battalion and I had to go and bring a couple of chaps that were doing detention at Yungaburra back to camp and I had to pick up a Jeep up at Brigade Headquarters and go out to the detention centre and pick

26:00 these chaps up and go to the ration depot and somewhere else and somewhere else and Padre Glover happened to be, I didn’t know him personally, but he happened to be there when I got the Jeep and he said, “Where are you going?” and I told him what, “Oh,” he said, “I’ll go for the ride.” “Righto sir,” so he sat in the truck. He did all the business. He went and got the prisoners for me and he was a real, real top chap and years after the war

26:30 he went back to New Guinea as a missionary and he was killed in an air crash but he was a top bloke, Padre Glover, never, ever forgotten him, yeah.

Do you know what Read, how he came into conflict with the army?

I don’t know. He

27:00 all we know was that he was cashiered out of the army because of his attitude and he was not very well liked.

That’s all right, I’ll have a look at that?

No I just want to show you this one, it won’t take a minute.

27:30 There, that’s him there and he’s talking to a wounded bloke.

Yep so do you know what other run ins he

28:00 **had with the fellers?**

No only with Bluey Paterson but when Blue was wounded he was talking to him and he said, “Well that’s what you get for fighting in wars.” That was his sympathy for Bluey, I remember that.

Sorry, what happened there?

He just said to Bluey, when Bluey was, you know been wounded where he was and that sort of thing and he was laying on the stretcher, Padre Read said to him, “That’s what you get for fighting in wars.”

28:30 Don’t you get me?

I’m shocked. I do get it

That’s what he did, yeah.

But was he opposed to war himself?

Apparently he was. As I said, I had no personal contact with the person but I do know that he got, what they call a bowler hat. He was kicked out because of his attitude towards, you know soldiers at war and that sort of thing, yeah.

29:00 **A lot of fellers spoke really highly of the Salvation Army?**

Now you've got a good subject, a really good subject. The Salvation Army and they were everywhere and at some of the most unusual places and an organisation, there is no equal. Not Red Cross, nothing,

29:30 Legacy or anything else, the Salvation Army. I'll give you an instance, wherever we were in camp, wherever we were, the Sallies had an interest and when we were on the Owen Stanleys and I mean up in the mountains

30:00 on this particular occasion we were climbing up the side of this mountain. It was pouring rain and mud and everybody was jiggered and you wouldn't want to know, under a bit of a tent fly and ground sheet, as we filed passed

30:30 what did we have? A hot cup of cocoa and an arrowroot biscuit, supplied by the Salvation Army. That's what I say. They were absolutely, like, anyone that was participating in that area will always remember what the Salvation Army did for the troops, no matter where it was. If you went into hospital

31:00 they were there. If you were in camp, you had an iron provided or you had writing paper or you had amenities and that sort of thing, the Sallies. I contribute to Legacy and I contribute to the Salvation Army and the Red Cross but the Salvation Army, undisputable. They are on the top of the list.

31:30 They were marvellous, really marvellous and they still do wonderful work in peacetime.

Are there other stories of what the Salvation Army did during either Tobruk or Bardia or New Guinea?

Well I can't be honest and recall any, probably they

32:00 were but we mightn't have been in a position but when we went into army camp and that sort of thing in the first place, the Salvation Army were, you know there to have facilities. I would imagine they would have it at Tobruk

32:30 but I remember that one very, very distinctly and I'll never, never forget it. That cup of coffee, cup of cocoa it was on top of the Owen Stanley's.

Just on the Salvation Army, they were also, or they are also,

33:00 **a religious group. Did any religion come from them?**

No, no, no, no.

Given the boys are facing life and death situations, did any men find God during their service?

No I don't, I could honestly say, the only thing that I

33:30 can say is about the RC's. There were some hard headed blokes in the army. Now take for instance, on the Atherton Tablelands where there was in our camp, there was a bloke like Ceri Roach was a tough footballer and there was

34:00 quite a number of them and they would drink and they'd fight and play up and play two-up and carry on but when it come to Sunday they would go to church and without being organised, they would be, and they would have to go to another unit lines which would be probably a mile away but

34:30 if you went and did a roll call early in the morning, at reveille, the RC's would be at the church, not so the other side, the other side of the picture but and no one condemned them for it or anything like that. I mean that was their belief and

35:00 that sort of thing and no one interfered with their religious beliefs but people that you wouldn't, really wouldn't expect them to be like that but they were, you know. It was something that we used to say, "That when the number comes up though it doesn't save them though just the same."

And just one more question clearing up something you

35:30 **mentioned ages ago, about a captain in Palestine who wasn't much good?**

Yeah.

What happened to him? Did he follow you into Bardia and Tobruk and?

No he never, actually he was one of the most senior captains in the army and he never saw a shot fired in anger. He always finished up in administrative posts and that sort of thing and many years ago

36:00 there was a bus tour come through Grafton, and out at the Services Club and damn me if Billy was on it and I went up and shook hands with him and he remembered me. "Coons," he'd say and he was quite delighted that we made, and a couple of other blokes were in the battalion, from the battalion at the time and I went and got them and, you know we come round and had a beer

36:30 with him and that sort of thing. He was on a bus tour and that brings me to the point, they tried to shoot him in Syria. Yeah well a couple of blokes got 12 months jail for that, on bloody Arak or something and got a bit under their tail so they decided to

37:00 take it out on poor old Billy and they went after him with a Bren gun and anyhow they missed him but bloke by the name of Vic Toms, Ray White and another bloke. Vic Toms got 12 months and he finished up,

37:30 he was in jail when we left the Middle East and when the Alamein push was on, they brought all those blokes out of jail, that sort of thing and put them into service and Vic lost a leg at Alamein and he was an athlete in his own right, Vic.

So why did they go after

38:00 **this captain in the first place?**

They just had a set on him I, they just, it was things that happened in the army. You know I don't think they had any real malice or purpose but it was something, "We'll get rid of old Billy," that sort of thing and that's what they'd do, you know. They were full of turps and

38:30 there wasn't many instances of that sort of thing but there was an occasion where things got out of hand and because grog or, you know. Some people react differently than others with drink and Billy, poor old Billy. He was a harmless, poor old fellow. He wouldn't do anyone any harm. He was actually, I think he finished up

39:00 a barrister or he was a solicitor I know and he did all legal things from time to time and he finished up a barrister or something like that after the war.

Were there situations where fellers tried to settle score with one another during battle?

No, no, no actually a group of men

39:30 young men, from all walks of life, there was very little malice at all between individuals. You might have a dispute over two-up or something but it would be over and done with and when it come to, if you, you know are moving up or that sort of thing, that was all forgotten about, like

40:00 you never carried any real grudge against the other feller. You might dislike him but you avoided him, that sort of thing because there was means of punishing people if they, you know, it comes back to the word discipline.

Tape 12

01:03 **Jimmy I just wanted to clear up with you the nature of the training or what your involvement was on the Atherton Tablelands in '43?**

Well we did, after New Guinea we were a depleted force and

01:30 we had to start again really and we absorbed a militia battalion, the 39th and as they came over to us they were given NX numbers like and made into AIF. A good lot of blokes and to bring us back to strength

02:00 so then training had to start on, we did a lot of training in the jungle around Canungra, not Canungra, on the Atherton Tablelands. It was just as heavy jungle as what we encountered in New Guinea

02:30 and to bring the raw troops up to what to expect and how to live and how to look after themselves in the jungle circumstances. So that was a period of nearly 18 months before they,

03:00 and there was no, at that time the war had moved on and the Americans, you know were heading for Japan. New Guinea was more or less being isolated but we still had to, a few islands like Borneo and north of New Guinea around Aitape, Wewak

03:30 so an intensive training program was conducted in jungle warfare, jungle tactics. It was an ongoing thing to, because lessons was being learnt by other units in other places and that was passed on to suit training exercises.

Is this actually when you become a special instructor under

04:00 **Ray Diamond?**

Well I had done a number of schools on weapon training and squad drill etcetera and I think I probably was up amongst some of the, you know the good instructors

04:30 because I was interested in what I was doing and I was seconded to the 2/48th Battalion for about four months. That was the Diver Derrick VC [Victoria Cross], his battalion, as an instructor when they come back from the Ramu Valley and teaching NCOs and that sort of thing the rudiments of army life and

05:00 I had fair experience because I had been fortunate enough to be able to attend, you know different schools for NCOs and I had done an intensive course on the Tablelands under Colonel Charles Green. He was a chief instructor of this school on the Atherton Tablelands

05:30 and I was one of the pupils and he, I think he took a bit of a personal interest in me because of my enthusiasm I suppose and he did recommend me for a commission but at that particular time, if you, to gain a commission, you had to leave the unit and go to Cowra

06:00 to the officers training school and you never went back to the unit. You were put into another unit somewhere and when I fronted the CO he said, well I had the option of staying in the unit as I was or going for a commission and at that particular time in the war

06:30 I thought it wasn't worthwhile. I wanted to stick with the unit so I didn't take up the option and I had ideas that, you know the war was coming to an end and that sort of thing but I had a good platoon.

07:00 I had 18 Platoon and I, there was a competition in the battalion involving all platoons throughout the rifle companies, competing for the best platoon in the battalion and

07:30 as I say, this platoon that I had, they had been a pretty good platoon one way and another and they had been trained by sapper Tanner, Lieutenant Tanner who was killed in New Guinea but he was

08:00 real good on parade ground drill etcetera. However we were nominated in the competition and the CO was the judge of the battalion and we paraded on the parade ground and each platoon had to go through your certain drill and you had to, even your

08:30 clothes, the way you were dressed and the equipment and all that sort of thing and you had to do certain drill and we won it, 18 Platoon so, but you had to have the chappies with you. Like if they weren't behind you, well

09:00 your job was pretty difficult and probably my long experience in the army at that time that I was able to get round our chaps the right way and they always performed well for me so I did, you know I used to do sort of weapon training, sort of instruct on the Bren. How to strip it and how to put it together

09:30 and all that sort of business.

Did you think, was it important for you, given that you'd been so young when you first came in and coming in as a reinforcement, did you have a special interest in training the younger guys and taking an interest in new guys coming into the unit? Was that an important role for you?

Yes it was. Yes I think it was, you didn't adopt the, "Old soldier," act at all. No,

10:00 that was probably one of the worst things that you could possibly do, is bring in new recruits and sort of come the, "Old soldier," act. Immediately that would cause a problem and if you went along with them and got them on your side and you didn't quote where you'd been and that sort of thing.

10:30 I think they were appreciative of the fact that they were being taught and by somebody with experience and I think that was very, it was a very important part of new recruits coming into the unit, to have

11:00 the confidence in the person that was delivering the message.

I reckon you would have been a good instructor?

Well.

Were you able to return to a level of physical conditioning that you'd had before malaria?

Say that again?

I was just wondering if,

11:30 **after you'd recovered from your bout of malaria, whether you were ever able to reach the same levels of fitness that you'd had at your peak?**

Yes, yes I honestly think that once the treatment, if you took the treatment that you were to undertake, there's no reason why

12:00 you couldn't make a full recovery. I don't know whether you should put this on tape or not. This is, you were talking about malaria but I told you about the two eggs but I'll tell you this one too. See while I was in Sydney I got friendly with this girl, the people that I used to stay with in Marrickville. Thelma Kelly was her name.

12:30 Her name's on that key there and she was a nice sort and I s'pose I was a bit fond of her but it was when I was, had been undergoing malarial treatment. I felt as though I was impotent so I plucked up

enough courage to go to this doctor at Ingleburn

13:00 and strangely, I thought, “Oh well Thelma would be wondering.” I wasn’t very enthusiastic with her and that sort of thing so I went in and the doctor said, “Well, what can I do for you son?” and I tried to explain to him and he said, “What you’re trying to tell me soldier, you find it hard to get an erection?”

13:30 and I said, “Yes,” and he said, “You’re blaming your malarial treatment?” and I said, “Well I thought it might have something to do with it sir.” And he said, “If you feel that well,” he said, “I think it’s time you went back to your battalion,” and he just marked my papers ‘To be demobbed and put out, back in the battalion’ so that’s what, that’s where I got it and I never got

14:00 back to see Thelma again and that’s one for the books, yeah.

That’s a great story and did you ever hear of any link between the two?

They believe, I believe that if you’re taking Atebrin, Atebrin was something that would retard your sexual desires and that sort of thing but

14:30 that, once you got off the Atebrin, I think that was, you know things returned to normal.

While we’re on the topic of girls as well I guess I’d just like to move to, I think I got this right, that you had returned home for a period of leave when you began to think that maybe you’d had enough of the army life?

Yes.

Can you tell me about that leave and what went on during that period that made you start to question what you were doing?

Yes well

15:00 we had been on the Atherton Tablelands. I’d gone back I s’pose well over 12 months and it was getting to the stage where I was a senior sergeant in our unit and we’d absorbed other units and there was no way that I

15:30 sort of could get advancement, you know the CSM [Company Sergeant Major] of the company or anything like that and I was getting a bit browned off so you were, like on battalion guard or

16:00 because it had to be done properly so I was doing guard duty every, or once a month or something like that and it was just, you know not what the purpose that I’d joined the army for because to be sergeant of the guard you had to, you know, it was a real big thing. You had to front up at battalion headquarters with the squad and

16:30 not your own squad and that sort of thing and go through the paces and then sit up all night in the guard tent, do the rosters and things like that and it was, you were getting bored so I, when we came, no we’d had some leave. We’d been given a few days’ leave in Cairns, that’s right. I made a note of that. The

17:00 idea was that there was no home leave and the division decided that they would send a company of each battalion for a weeks’ leave in Cairns and we would be billeted at a hostel type thing which

17:30 was quite a good idea so Don Company was the first from the battalion to take this option and I might say we were the last but we had a wail of a time but we fell foul of the Provos

18:00 on the last day of the leave and it caused a big problem in Cairns. It held up the traffic in the main street of Cairns, arguing with the Provos and I was sort of senior NCO at the time and eventually was, got them out of

18:30 the road onto the trucks and back to the battalion. Next day I fronted the OC and I was in trouble for inciting the riot. It wasn’t my fault. I was trying to quieten it down. Well the instruction came out from division then, all leave was cancelled. That was the finish of it. We started and that was the end of it and then I got that bout of malaria

19:00 and I thought well, there was no movement at all of any troops, Australian troops so when I went on leave I decided that, I was talking to my father and that sort of thing and Dad was wanting to go off the farm. The two brothers had been there all through the war and that sort of thing and I thought, “Oh well it

19:30 might be a good opportunity.” It was a nice farm and that sort of thing and I, as I said, I was very fond of my first wife and that sort of thing and we decided that it might be a good idea if I give the army away and come back home so that was what I think probably

20:00 my wife, then wife, it was her influence that gave me, and further to that, she was engaged to another person but I still won the day and so when you think back, in

20:30 hindsight, I might have gave up my army career for my marriage.

Jimmy hadn't you signed onto the AIF with a duration of the conflict and 12 months thereafter?

Yes, when you took the oath on the bible

21:00 it was for the duration and six months thereafter if required and that was the oath you took but as the war progressed and things changed, they were wanting to get people back into the workforce and there was,

21:30 in certain industries and particularly the rural industry, you know so there was, all my father had to do was put in a claim to the local authority and the process was done to, and at that time, like a lot of people were coming out. Like

22:00 there were banana growers and pineapple growers and dairy farmers and you name it, they were coming out, coming out in the hundreds as a matter of fact so I thought I'd be, at that particular time I thought well, whilst I liked the army, I reckoned I'd had enough, you know and

22:30 I thought I'd come home and Rita and I would eventually get married, so that was it, yeah.

There must have been a degree of sadness at leaving your battalion up there on the Tablelands?

Yes when, you know you shook hands with chaps that you'd been, and said, "Well I'm off," and that sort of thing

23:00 it was like anything else. I thought, "I'll put that behind me and move on," which is what I did and I didn't, to be honest, I didn't fancy going back to New Guinea again. Although I had no thoughts that they weren't going to go back

23:30 cause I came out in October and they left in December but I thought one stint in New Guinea, if you survived that, you were pretty damn lucky, particularly health wise. As far as getting skittled, well that was

24:00 something that I never thought about but I think malaria and that sort of thing, you probably would have got over there and got malaria again and so that's one of the reasons I thought, "Well look after, you've done your share and it's time to call it a day."

That's quite a poetic return to the farm, for you to go back with the idea of taking over the farm,

24:30 **having I guess left under the circumstances that you had when you were 16?**

Yes.

Must be a sense of coming full circle in a way?

That's right yes but when, as I said, when I come back to the farm, I took on too big a thing. I thought I, you know I thought I could handle that sort of thing but it was a big farm and

25:00 there was only Rita and I and the first year that we were there, we had a massive flood and it took all the power so we had to milk 80 cows by hand, the two of us and my father couldn't get out and my brother couldn't get out to help me because the road was cut and we

25:30 worked all day and got them done eventually. Well by next morning we were up very early and started to do the milking and all the power had been washed down, fences washed down into a mess and recovered from that. Dad eventually got out but we were

26:00 milking by hand because the power wasn't restored and my brother came out, that wasn't too bad and then the next, we had a drought. Well things got, a dry time after the floods and I thought to myself, "Well this is not for me"

26:30 and I did put in for a job on the PMG as they called it then, Telstra or Telecom. I went to a preliminary exam and, as a linesman, and filled in the necessary papers of application and was successful

27:00 and I was at that time working with Taylor brothers as a butcher. I'd left the farm but the butcher's wages was six pound a week and the linesman on the PMG was about four pounds a week so naturally I stayed where I was with butchering and

27:30 I never regretted it because it was a trade that I took up and I liked butchering and I worked in butcher shops until I retired when I was 60. I did have a stint as a barman for 12 months. I liked that. I really liked that,

28:00 at the Grafton Services Club and the money was good. You got plenty of overtime and I was earning 70 pound a week, with your overtime, and that and that was big money back in about 1956, '58 thereabouts so

28:30 but I, because the family was, Peter and Sue were getting to the stage where they needed a little bit more Dad around the place, because you'd work long hours at the club and when it came weekends, I couldn't go swimming or fishing with them and things like that because I was always too tired, so I was offered the job of manager

29:00 at one of the main butcher shops here in Prince Street and I dropped money and took that on and I built the business up and I had 12 butchers working for me. I was the manager and made a huge success of it but anyhow then I decided when Peter got older and that sort of thing and we went into business in our own, the two of us and we worked together for 20 years

29:30 and as two mates and we still are.

How supportive was the army or the government in terms of reintegration I guess back into the community? Were they supportive in terms of jobs or helping you to?

Well yes, yes by all means. When you came out you could have, you had the option of a war service loan home

30:00 at the five percent interest loan. You could have taken up any other trade that you wished to but the average person, I don't think he took advantage of that. We did have

30:30 a Returned Soldier preference. That's how I got the job as a barman at the club because I was a returned soldier and there was a First World War soldier on the door who said, "I should have preference because I was a returned soldier," but you could have gone into any government job, like the railway or the Telecom or

31:00 Tramways or, you know any of that. I did think about the police force. I thought hard about the police force. I was encouraged by my late father in law, he'd been in a government job,

31:30 because I had the basic training of, you know knowing what discipline and that sort of thing was about and I thought often about it but the pay then in the Public Service was very poor. You were better working for an individual, which is what I did.

You must have accumulated quite a valuable

32:00 **nest egg from your war service, had you not, in terms of your pay?**

Yes when I came out of the army, with my deferred pay and my little money that I'd put away at two shillings a day, and deferred pay, I had just under 500 pounds which was a fortune

32:30 and I was able to get married and, you know we had enough money to buy our furniture and set ourselves up in a home and that sort of thing so yes that was quite a, I remember the, old Bob Dawson at the Commercial Bank when the money came through and I met him one day and he said

33:00 you know, "I had a nice little bit of money in the bank there," and that sort of thing, yes so yeah that was quite a good bit of money in those days.

So yeah I guess it was a valuable tool in terms of you setting up the next stage of your life and?

Yes that's right yes. It was a good start, you know to be able to furnish your own place, buy your

33:30 furniture and that sort of thing, start off with not having to pay it off or anything like that and yeah it was a good start really.

And was the farm sold?

No Dad was leasing the farm and that's another thing you bring me to point. I had the option of buying that place and I could have brought it through the Land Settlement Scheme.

34:00 17,000 pound the lady wanted for the farm, which was incredible amount of money. I did look into it and you could have, the Repatriation Department, through the Land Settlement Scheme would have

34:30 been able to provide me with the money but it was too big a gamble. A friend of mine, John Hutchison, he was from Armidale and they had land ballots in different places and he put in for a block of land at Yarrowitch

35:00 and he won it and John finished up with a 500 acre block with a very nominal rent, about a hundred pound a year and John made himself a fortune but John had experience in sheep and cattle and that sort of thing and I was looking at a dairy farm and that sort of thing, which wasn't as lucrative as that sort of thing, but there were things available. The

35:30 government was making provision for people who were coming out of the services and most particularly they had the preference of government jobs, which was a, you know a big portion of rehabilitation for the average person.

36:00 See a lot of the chappies that I know, they were, you know they finished up in government jobs and they finished, superannuation all came into it. They're all pretty wealthy people today in a sense of speaking, whereas I opted to do my own thing and I'm well down the scale to what they are. See that's just the difference so anyhow, I was a person

36:30 I think I wanted to do my own thing. I wanted to be able to make my own decisions and do it the way I wanted it done and I'm a bit like my father that way. No matter what the cost was, in physically or otherwise, make a decision and be able to do it.

How important

37:00 **have associations like the RSL or other associations that you may have been involved in, been in your life since the war?**

Well I'd been, I could honestly say that I've been associated in some form or another in public life for over 50 years. I was

37:30 President of the Bellingen RSL for a few years and was the instigator of obtaining a club license and buying a block of land and building a club. That was my first start. I was on hall committees, memorial hall committees, ambulance committees. I moved here to Grafton, I became involved in the

38:00 Grafton Services Club for 25 years and Margaret and I, we were involved in the Army Cadets. We run housie every Saturday night raising funds, sponsored by the RSL, but they didn't put any money in. We had to raise the funds and we were able to see

38:30 quite a number of cadets go through the, and finish up with army careers. It was a well worth exercise. We were about nine years doing that every Saturday night, along with a couple of other people, friends of ours. I joined Legacy in 1981 and

39:00 three times President. I've been on all the committees like fund raising committees and the appeals and you name it and I was 13 years President of our local social golf club and

39:30 I'm the instigator of, along with another chap, the purchase of this building because we could see that there was a future in this building and that sort of thing. It was a big gamble that we had to get over to the other people but I think our persuasive ways that we

40:00 were able to accumulate an asset that will be here for a long time and if it hadn't been I think for a couple of us we wouldn't have been as privileged as what we are today.

Tape 13

00:44 **Jimmy I'd just like to start this tape by just asking you, so you've mentioned all the different associations that you've had and the different clubs you've been in. What is it about that work that is important to you?**

I feel that I'm helping people.

01:00 I felt that I was doing something worthwhile, not sitting at home and doing nothing. I wanted to do something with my life and I followed ex service personnel

01:30 ventures and I feel that I'm, I was set out to do things of that nature, to help people and which I consider that I've done my part and now that I'm involved in Legacy I've

02:00 I'm very, very strong on that point because we are looking after the widows of ex servicemen and I feel very, very strong about Legacy. Sometimes I feel to myself, well I'm getting too old for that but I don't want to give up and let somebody else come in and probably ruin it, because we are a very, very updated Legacy club.

02:30 I've really been enthusiastic about what I've done with RSL wise and Legacy and the cadets and that sort of thing and you've got people that come up to you now, the younger generation that you put through the cadets and that sort of thing and still call you Mr Coombes and that sort of thing, you know. That's quite good. I think

03:00 you've achieved something.

Has it been important for you to remain involved with people who you went through those great experiences with and that are able to relate to the experiences that you did have?

Say that again?

So I guess just particularly through the RSL and war related organisations, is it important for you to remain involved with people who understood what you went through and what the experiences were that you had?

Yes, yes I think it is yes. I

03:30 really do. I think it's, I think trying to get the message through to people that life wasn't easy in our time of life compared with what it is today. What we have achieved

04:00 and what I've achieved, it hasn't been easy. I've put a lot of time and a lot of thought and a bit of money, that sort of thing, into to it. I've never had that much but I hope that people that, along the line have benefited by what I've done and

04:30 without having, you know a real praise for myself, but I do believe that I set a path for others to follow, that would make themselves better citizens if they were to adopt what I've achieved.

What lessons did you learn from your wartime experiences that have stayed with you?

05:00 Be tough. To survive you have to be tough and it gave me a complete different attitude to the boy that left the dairy farm. It matured me. I became a man overnight

05:30 and I was able to mix with top brass or I could slum with the other class but I always kept myself as a respectable citizen and I respect other people the same

06:00 way and I hopefully think that if I'm respected as I respect other people and I think that my army career, if you like to put it, has made the person that I,

06:30 I'm probably putting tickets on myself, but it probably made me the person that I am and I've achieved a great deal more than I thought that I would in my time of life so I'm proud of it.

You've pointed out some very clear changes that it had on you personally? Did you notice changes that World War II had on Australia as a society

07:00 **or as a culture?**

Yes I think it liberated people, from this point of view. People became more

07:30 conscious of the fact that we are, live in a lucky country and it's the achievements of the armed services or forces that they were able to do this and we were

08:00 when I said liberated people, like women going into the workforce and they became more independent but there are things I don't agree with and one thing is women in the armed forces. That's a

08:30 no-no. I think there is a place for men and there is a place for women. I don't agree with women police. I'm very strong on that. I think that it's not the place for them and when you see on these TV, the girls in Iraq and places like that, that's not right. That's not what it's about, in my opinion.

09:00 I think that we, when I saw we liberated a lot of things because of the war, I didn't think that we would go to the extent that I would see girls in the armed forces or in our police force and I don't think that's a place for them. I'm very strong about that.

And I guess, just finally, I guess I'd like to give you the opportunity to

09:30 **say anything, any final thoughts you'd like to share with future generations about your experiences or about the nature of warfare?**

Well no one wins in war, no one, either side whatever it might be but there are ways and means of settling disputes and I think that

10:00 war is a last resort because there are so many individuals that can be involved in war and getting to the Iraq business, I do think that the coalition forces went in too soon. I think that they should have had

10:30 more diplomatic relationship before they went for the big bust but, and there'll always be conflicts, always be conflicts but it's not going to solve anything. When you look at the situation in the world today, the world

11:00 is mixed, very, very mixed because there is fighting breaking out in almost every country in the world and what are they going to achieve? The Second World War had to happen, yes it had to happen

11:30 because one country became so much stronger than the other but now in today's age, I believe that the world that's fully armed has more chance of being a peaceful world than one nation being stronger than the other and I think that they

12:00 should draw the line and look after the third world countries instead of throwing millions of dollars in bombs and whatnot around in the Middle East and places, what they're doing. I believe that a world fully armed is a world of peace but when one

12:30 power gets greater than the other, that's when we have problems.

Jimmy, thank you so much for taking so much time with us mate, I really appreciate it.

I hope I haven’t been a bore.

Not at all, particularly given your chest, I really appreciate the time you’ve taken for us mate.

INTERVIEW ENDS