

Australians at War Film Archive

Colin McRostie - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:40 **Can you give me a summary of the major points in your life?**

Born April 1920.

01:00 In Adelaide. At a few months old I went with my parents to a farm which the family owned and had let, 15 miles outside of Mount Gambier. And it was a mixed farm. And this was my home until I came down to

01:30 Adelaide to school in 1933. Things were prosperous in the farming years, early 1920's but then the Depression set in about 1929 to 1932 and things were pretty tough. Because farm hands were very

02:00 short immediately after the First World War, because many young fellows who would normally be working on farms had been killed during the First World War. There was a scheme adopted in Australia whereby young Englishmen were brought out to Australia as farm hands. It was known as the Barnardo's Scheme. And we had one of these lads working on the farm. He was absolutely raw as

02:30 far as farm work was concerned but the family took him under its wing. Not only my mother and father but the rest of the family too. My grandparents. And he worked for my father for 4 years then his parents wanted him to go back to England. This was in the middle of the Depression. He couldn't get a job and he joined the Coldstream Guards, one of the

03:00 King's elite guards. And he corresponded with us and kept in touch while he was there, sending us children's cigarette cards. And we had wonderful sets of cigarette cards, which were quite valuable really. He got them of course from the barracks in Buckingham Palace

03:30 and where he was on duty as a guardsman. He was you know, with one of those big, black hats on. And he was a big, tall fellow, well over 6 feet. He played a big part in my memories of those years. The other things I remember is my brother's birth. I was only three and a half but I remember being taken to

04:00 to the hospital to see my mother and told to come around the other side of the bed and, "See what I've got here," bit. And it was my brother. He was born three and a half years younger than me. I went to a school down at Glencoe, 15 miles outside of Mount Gambier. Which would be

04:30 25 kilometres in today's talk. And in those years we didn't have a car. It was horse and sulky. And I've got a photo here somewhere that I can show you of my mother, father and me sitting in between them in the sulky about to go to Mount Gambier and my mother very pregnant.

05:00 My brother hadn't been born. And this must have been 1924. The same year the English boy came to work for us. And then I can remember too at about the same time my grandfather on my mother's side dying and

05:30 being left home with a girl who used to work for my mother and father. About 1932 I'd completed my State School education. And I'd done pretty well and what was I going to do? And my aunt, in Brougham Place, North

06:00 Adelaide, took me under her wing and I lived with her for 20 years. It was a huge house, Brougham Place: 12 rooms and a great stables and lofts and all sorts of things. And it was a very, very lonely life for me. It was just her and her maid. And I only

06:30 saw her at dinnertime, at night. And the house was, as I said, a huge place. And I made friends with a few of the people around the place but then I had to go to school, to Scotch [College] by tram every day, right through the city. Threepence a ticket each way by tram or a month's pass. And

07:00 I had 4 years at Scotch and then I went to work.

We'll go back to the very beginning again. So if we can just do a brief summary

07:30 **up to where you are now.**

Well I had 4 years at Scotch. I matriculated and my parents wanted me to do medicine. My aunt, who was most probably the one who paid for most of my education,

08:00 she didn't want me to do medicine. She reckoned it wasn't manly enough to be a doctor. And so I got a job with Fauldings. And at the same time I went to the university and was doing

08:30 Science part-time. I did a few subjects, the Science course. And a lot of subjects at night. It was pretty tough going, part-time doing Science. It was all right for the minor subjects but for the bigger ones; physics and chemistry it was

09:00 darn near impossible. My mates were in the AMF [Australian Military Forces]. And I joined the Engineers with them. And that's where I got my first touch of army life I suppose. It was very, very interesting,

09:30 the Engineers. I can still, I think, set an explosion. And knew all about throwing bridges across the Murray at Long Island. And blowing down trees and digging slit trenches and dugouts and goodness knows what. It was all very good training for a young fellow. But I did omit to say I joined the

10:00 Cadets while I was at school. I was a cadet at school. And I was a late developer as they describe small boys at 15 and 16. And I was very small at that age. And joining the cadets, I was issued with a 303 rifle. And we used to go down to Dean Rifle Range at Port Adelaide

10:30 and do our shoot a couple of times. And I well remember taking my cap off and putting my cap in my shirt to stop the recoil and the kick from the rifle. And I can remember crawling back about 6 or 8 inches after firing each shot. I was shoved back so I had to crawl forward again.

11:00 It was following these rifle shoots at Port Adelaide that I had a somewhat bruised shoulder. And then in beginning of 1940 I joined the AIF [Australian Imperial Force]. And because I had a

11:30 chemical knowledge and because I had worked in Fauldings', down at the analytical control laboratory. And I had been seconded in the militia at times to do tests on recruits for the AIF. And that was the reason I was put in the

12:00 Field Ambulance. Because I had a bit of chemical, medicinal knowledge. In the army I had 5 campaigns. I went to the Middle East in December 1940, and I'll come to that in detail later.

12:30 And then I had a North African campaign. And then following that the Syrian Campaign, when we were against the Vichy French and the French Foreign Legion. That's a story in itself. Following that Japan

13:00 came into the war in 1941, December 1941. And we were headed out of the Middle East for Singapore.

13:30 Singapore fell. We headed back towards Java. Java fell, we headed up towards Rangoon and Burma. Burma, Rangoon fell. We then turned around and went back to Colombo to reprovision. Then

14:00 from there back to Australia. I'll detail a bit more of that later. Then in August 1942 I was in Kokoda, I was in the Maroubra Force. A special force that were the first ones, first battalions,

14:30 the 2/14th and 39th battalion, I was attached to. And we were pushed right back. Details later. Then in 1943 I was in the 70th advance up the

15:00 Ramu Valley, up to the Finnisteres. That was another campaign. We were airborne. There was lots over there. Then finally, in the war, I was in the landing at Balikpapan, where we waded ashore at Balikpapan in Borneo. And there again, that was my 5th campaign. And

15:30 those that had served as I had in 5 years virtually were given the option of discharge, which I took in October, November 1945. Now you want a brief summary I take it of what happened after the war? Well I

16:00 went back to Fauldings. And this was the days of penicillin coming into vogue. And I was made production supervisor of the Fauldings' production of penicillin. And this job

16:30 lasted, oh maybe 18 months because Fauldings could not compete with big overseas companies in the manufacture of penicillin at a competitive price. I was production manager at Fauldings for many years.

17:00 In those same years I was in the Apex Club of Adelaide, I was in Rostrum. I used to go snow skiing up to Mount Buffalo, Falls Creek every year for about 8 years. Our daughter, who was at school, she used to come of course and we used to have a great

17:30 time snow skiing. Further? With Fauldings I used to go up, fly up to Leigh Creek and that area spotting

- 18:00 outcrops of magnesite, which Fauldings used for the manufacture of Epsom Salts. And Epsom Salts was not only used for medicinal purposes, also used for tanning industry and fertiliser.
- 18:30 When we used to fly up there with a company that had the chartered air company in Adelaide. And having spotted and marked on the map, I used to have to be the navigator, and spotting
- 19:00 and marking on the map the crops. And with your head down watching a map and your head up watching the horizon and trig points on the hills it makes you rather airsick. Not that I was actually sick but I felt a bit squeamish. Having spotted and marked them on the map
- 19:30 I'd then have to go back to Leigh Creek and get a 4-wheel vehicle and go out and peg these things. Now on several occasions I used to have to take fellas from Fauldings. I might add we only
- 20:00 took these jobs on in the wintertime. In the middle of summer out from Witchelina Station right out onto Woomera it was very, very hot. And you kept away from that job during the summer. Tried to work it that I only did it in the wintertime.
- 20:30 And then a plane would come and meet us on the Witchelina Station strip and fly us back to Adelaide. But some of those strips were rarely used and they were dug up with rabbits and foxes and before the planes came in to take us out again we had to do the strip over, filling in all the rough
- 21:00 holes. I left Fauldings in 1978 and went to Fauldings' opposition as Operations Manager. And that's when I finished up my working life
- 21:30 with G-Chem Co-op. In the meantime, in those last years my daughter did nursing and she trained at the children's hospital and wanted to do further certificates,
- 22:00 wanted to do midwifery but couldn't do it here in South Australia (they're not prolific enough). There are not enough babies being born. So we bought a place up in Queensland with a view to finally retiring up there. And during the years we used to go backwards and forwards from Brisbane to the place up there, which we've now disposed of. And that brings you pretty well up to where I am now.
- 22:30 **That brings us to now?**
- Pretty much.
- Thank you for that. Can you tell me about your childhood memories down on the farm?**
- Well I suppose my memories don't go back further than when I was three and a half. And I can remember
- 23:00 the odd thing. For instance, my brother as a very, very small baby boy. So as he's three and a half years younger than me that's virtually my first memory. And then I can remember, as I previously said, the death of my grandfather.
- 23:30 He died, I understand it, only 64 and it was a cancer job. On the farm it was a good life, a good upbringing for a small boy.
- Do you remember what you got up to on the farm?**
- Oh we used to collect sparrows' eggs and birds' eggs. And I used to,
- 24:00 goldfinches, which you don't see nowadays. Goldfinches used to nest and I'd take the nest with the young ones in it and put them in a cage at the spot where the nest was taken from. And the mother birds used to feed the young ones through the bars of the cage
- 24:30 and so we used to rear goldfinches. And greenfinches similarly. Later I can remember being sent to Sunday School. I take it I went to Sunday School before I went to school. And I was being donkeyed on a bike when I was only a small boy
- 25:00 of about 4 or 5; and my foot slipped somehow into the front spokes of the bike, tore the skin right off, right down to the bone on my ankle. I've still got the scar. But my mother had been a nurse and anything like that happened she attended to without having medical treatment or stitches.
- 25:30 Later I can remember being given a horse by my uncle and it was a creamy pony. And I understand it cost a guinea [1 pound, 1 shilling]. That's what it cost, this cream pony. It was a bit flighty.
- 26:00 It wasn't properly castrated and there were still some tendons left in there, which made it a much more spirited horse. We were not allowed to put a saddle on it. We had to ride it with a surcingle and a bag, held on with a surcingle. We used to get
- 26:30 bucked off it quite a few times. And in fact it got so bad we didn't ride it. But this uncle that gave me it, he was quite a character. His property actually was at Nelson on the Glenelg River. And
- 27:00 he used to partake of whisky in no small quantity. And this was years before, obviously before we had a

motorcar. And he had a horse, buggy and pair. He would jump in his buggy

27:30 and the horses would take him home 20 odd miles to his property at Nelson. He was a real character. Can always remember he used to drive stock past our place when he was well into his 70's, down our road, which was not a main road it was just

28:00 grass. Where a lot of the locals used to graze their stock because it was good dry grass and clover on it and it was costing them nothing to just graze stock on it. And this Uncle George used to come in and have a cup of tea with my mother,

28:30 who was of course his niece. Now I come back to the English fellow, the Barnado's boy.

What was his first name?

Robinson. It was always Robbie and I can't think of his right name. And he used to send photos of himself in

29:00 this great black hat arrangement. And a very interesting fellow. And made more interesting because he was a keen photographer. And, this is in 1925, with no electricity on our farm, no generator and everything was kerosene lamps

29:30 and candles. And he used to take photos, develop and print them. And I've got here lots and lots of photos of that era taken by him, which is a good record of a lifer on the farm at that time.

Where did he do all his developing?

In his bedroom,

30:00 he just used to close the door of his bedroom. And I can still see him with a kerosene lamp developing and doing his photos.

It was an unusual hobby to have.

Yes. Yes he was an interesting fellow.

30:30 He was friendly with a girl in Australia who, while he was in the Coldstream Guards she made other arrangements. And he married an English girl and their daughter was an airhostess on British Airways. And

31:00 of course those girls were looking for, airway companies get discount fees and fares. And she came out to Australia and stayed with us but she was very, very heavy going. She had no real interest in us. She was obviously being sent out to case us over before, then

31:30 he came out later. He was pretty hard going then. He was in his 70's and he was a strict teetotal. And when I had people here and had a few drinks he, he stayed here. He didn't approve of alcoholic beverages. And I used to have tennis parties here.

32:00 **What were your mum and dad like? Your mum sounds interesting, she had a profession.**

She never practised nursing after she trained at the Adelaide Hospital. My father, he was always a farmer right from his early years. He went to school

32:30 here in town. Went to the school that preceded Scotch, Kiah College. And then he went and worked as sort of a jackeroo on an uncle's property up at Renda Park, Morgan. And then from there he went down the south east and he worked.

33:00 And I suppose that's where he met my mother, initially. He was a good farmer. He was a very good farmer. But of course in the Depression years being a good farmer didn't mean very much. When milk was threepence a gallon and eggs were twopence a dozen and potatoes, which we used

33:30 to grow or he used to grow were twenty-seven and six [27 shillings 6 pence] a ton. Which is the same price that you'd pay for a bag of sugar. So they were really tough years. And during those years the farmhand that we had, the live-in farmhand, he got 15 shillings or a pound a week.

34:00 **How did the family survive the Depression?**

Well we seemed to grow our own vegetables, fowls. And I suppose we used to pay one and six or one and three for a leg of lamb I seem to recall. But they survived.

34:30 **Did you have many swagmen come through? People looking for work?**

Yes there were swagmen. We were about three-quarters of a mile off the main road, which was the Princess Highway. And when I was at school I can always remember 'swaggies' going during lunch. It was this time that you'd see the swaggies going along the road with their

35:00 billy dangling from their roll, their bed roll over their shoulders and back. And the billy dangling on the

end of it. And I do remember my mother giving them a cup of tea and some

35:30 bread and butter or something like that. And of course we could see the swaggie down by the woodshed. Of course it was all wood stove, kitchens, wood stove. I can still see the swaggie sitting down by the woodheap partaking of what my mother had given him.

So people used to help

36:00 **each other out?**

No I don't think there was much. I don't think there was any charity between families. I don't think food was handed around. We used to have to catch a rooster.

36:30 And sometimes we'd have a cockerel or a rooster for Sunday's lunch. That was a big deal. My father didn't like rabbit, although I do recall occasionally we'd have rabbit. And I can also see hanging up on the back veranda, a hare.

37:00 Hares had to be caught and hung for a few days before being eaten. Thinking of rabbits and hares,

37:30 my father supplied the traps, rabbit traps. And the farmhand would trap rabbits and skin them and that sale of the skins went to the

38:00 farmhand.

And you went to school in that area?

Yes I went to school at Glencoe State School. And there was about 100 there at that school. It was a fairly close-knit

38:30 community. There seemed to be lots of children. It was a dairying area, as I said earlier. Mixed farming was wheat, oats, potatoes. Pretty intensive. It was very fertile land. Adjacent, still in

39:00 that volcanic area where if you put your finger in the ground it would grow.

Was your brother at school with you there?

Yes he was at school. He came down to Scotch too. We didn't live together. He didn't

39:30 live with his old maid aunt at North Adelaide, as I did. She was a very unusual old girl in many ways. I became very attached to her. When her father died in 1917 she went overseas and she was overseas for 12 years without coming back to Australia. She spent

40:00 some years in Kashmir, where she could live cheaper than she could here in Australia with her income. She lived in Switzerland. She went all over the world. She used to play the piano and she had a grand

40:30 piano that she play every night in this huge house and you could hear it wafting through the house. She didn't have a telephone in the place, didn't have a wireless in the place. If I had to ring anyone I had to go down to the corner shop and ring from there.

Tape 2

00:43 **Can you tell us about the time you went to senior school?**

Yes. I used to have to catch the tram from Ward Street North Adelaide which

01:00 was the house that I stayed in, my Aunt's. It went right through from Brown Place right through to Ward Street and I used to go out the back gate into Ward Street and catch the tram on the Ward Street, O'Connell Street corner. That would go right through the city and I would get out at the Mitcham Post Office.

01:30 Do you know where the post office is there on the end of Prince's Road? At secondary school I played football for the Seconds and I played cricket. There were quite a few interesting fellas in the class with me. (UNCLEAR) Jacobs.

02:00 Jacobs being the judge fella. I did quite well at school but I had a couple of teachers who had me snouted [picked on me] which sort of ruined my academic performance.

02:30 Instead of teaching me, they snouted me. Then the last couple of years at school my aunt bought a house in the hills, at Stirling which she occupied during the summer months and I used to then

03:00 catch the train from Mount Lofty Railway Station down to Clapham and go to school, catch the train and go up to the hills again. The hills are delightful up there in the summer time and the walk up through Cutting Road from Aine Street in Stirling to the

- 03:30 Mount Lofty Railway Station is a delightful walk in the cool of the late afternoon. I would have to leave fairly early in the morning but in the morning on the train it was down hill and the train only took a few minutes going down...double or more going up. And on the subject of trains,
- 04:00 when I was at Scotch I used to go home for my holidays which meant catching the narrow gauge train from Adelaide down to Mount Gambier. Then I had to change trains at Wolseley, from the broad gauge to the narrow gauge
- 04:30 from Wolseley to Mount Gambier. That was an old steam train. They were always steam trains. I knew every railway station from here to Mount Gambier. I could rattle them off in right sequence because I had done that trip so often. Then it would take 12 hours. I would catch
- 05:00 the train at 8 o'clock in the morning and travel all day and get down to Mount Gambier where my parents would meet me in the dark on the Mount Gambier Railway Station.

Did you still enjoy going home?

Yes. Initially of course I looked forward to it very much.

- 05:30 Later I missed a couple of times going home for the school holidays. I went to Port Lincoln with some of my school mates, who incidentally, one was killed during the war in action.

06:00 Can you tell us about joining the Cadets?

Yes. I joined the cadets I suppose when I was 14. The .303 rifle stood as high as I did I think. I think I was a corporal in the cadets.

- 06:30 It was I suppose good training in many ways. I never availed myself of the experience when I joined the army. I don't think I even told them I had been in the cadets.

Why had you joined the cadets Colin?

It was the thing to do. It was the thing to do. All

- 07:00 the boys, with a few exceptions joined the cadets. One night a week, a Monday night, for about an hour we would attend drill. We had drilling in the cadets. We would have to clean our rifles and have them expected and...
- 07:30 I haven't really thought much about my cadet life. Following the cadets, life in the militia, as I said before, it was very interesting and good training. We did camps at Murray Bridge on
- 08:00 Long Island, and we used to build Bailey bridges from the southern bank of the River Murray onto Long Island. We used to throw Bailey bridges over those wash outs at Kanmantoo. We did
- 08:30 camps at Oakbank. We slept in the Oakbank grandstands. Those years too, I bought a little car for 15 pounds which
- 09:00 gave me a lot of mechanical practice, keeping it going.

A car?

Yes it was an Amilcar. It was about a 1925 Grand Sports Amilcar. We used to take it out to Buckland Park, north of Adelaide and race it Sundays against

- 09:30 Morris 8/40s. And it was simplicity itself, the engine. You could lose the timing and re-time it in a matter of a few minutes. It had a fixed differential which meant that instead of differentiating, wheeling around corners, it would
- 10:00 scuff one wheel as it went around the corner.

Did you enjoy that time in the militia?

Yes I thoroughly enjoyed it. It was good practice, good training. I suppose I had 2 years in the militia. 1938-1939 in the militia and from there I joined the army in 1940.

10:30 And had you finished school?

Yes I had finished school at the end of 1936 and I was going to the University part time doing chemistry and a couple of other subjects. After the war which I haven't mentioned, I did

- 11:00 a management course. It took me 8 years doing a subject every year, and following doing that I did all the course that was available at that time, and after I had completed the 8 subjects, I was lecturing at the School of Mines, or as it was then, the School of Technology....I was lecturing at night for a couple

- 11:30 of years which was very good practice. I was also at the time, as I previously said, in Apex and I was in Rostrum. Rostrum was a lunch time thing that I used to attend every week or every fortnight.

Colin, could you tell us about your enlistment

12:00 **at the time?**

Yes I enlisted at the beginning of June 1940, and because I had worked at Fauldings I was put in the Field Ambulance. Now a Field Ambulance...let me make it quite clear, is a field unit. In other words, you're in the field. You're not in the

12:30 base hospital. You're basically not doing hospital work.

So it's very dangerous?

I suppose it is yes. It was at times. I joined the army as I said at the beginning of June 1940 and I was at Woodside

13:00 Training Camp for almost 6 months. During that period, I was doing first aid training and all sorts of training on first aid and treatment of wounds and compound fractures and

13:30 all these things. These were part of our training. Later in the army I made myself available for work away from the unit. When I go through my army records

14:00 I spent a lot of time with infantry battalions, field engineers and I got to know a lot of the fellas in the infantry. They're the fellas I have so much respect for. For their fortitude and their endurance

14:30 and what they did and had to do.

Were you enjoying the medical side of your training at the beginning?

Yes I suppose. It was all art of my training. It was interesting in its way, yes.

15:00 **And you were being trained in arms use as well?**

Yes we were expected to know arms, and in fact we were armed. During the Kokoda campaign we had to be armed. We had hand grenades. I didn't carry a rifle. I just carried a couple of hand grenades in each pouch

15:30 for a definite reason...one for me and one for if I got stuck. This was an official order that we had to be armed in the very sticky battles in the Kokoda campaign.

16:00 You were asking about my enlistment. Well having had 6 months at Woodside training, we were very anxious to get overseas and at last it arrived. It was December 1940.

16:30 We were entrained and we went to Melbourne. We embarked on the Mauritania which was one of the big luxury ships, at Station Pier in Melbourne. We sailed late in the afternoon.

17:00 We sailed around Port Philip Bay until dark and then we went out to sea and we went right due south around the eastern and southern end of Tasmania and met up with the Aquitania; the Dominion Monarch, and other very big ships...and the Queen Mary. We met

17:30 up with them well south of Tasmania. Way down in the high latitudes south and then in convoy we moved across the Southern Ocean to Fremantle.

What did you know about where you were going? How much did you know about this Second World War that was unravelling?

18:00 We certainly weren't told the finer details. At the time we didn't know. We could only work it out by seeing in what direction we were going. For instance, we knew we were pretty far south because it was so darn cold. We were very

18:30 cold and this was in the middle of summer. It was very cold as we sailed across the Southern Ocean. Then we headed north west and anchored off Perth. We had a day's leave in Perth and re-embarked and sailed from there with all these other ships, big ships...

19:00 as I said, The Queen Mary, The Dominion Monarch, Aquitania. They were all in our convoy and we sailed to Colombo. Colombo has no wharfage. The ships anchor out in the harbour, side by side like that with

19:30 each ship tied to the one running parallel with it. And we had leave. We got back onto an English troop ship. The English troop ship was the Devonshire, and after having a cabin, second class cabin on the Mauritania which was luxurious with private bathroom

20:00 and porthole and very comfortable really. We then embarked on the Devonshire, the English troop ship where we were crowded in to the extent that people slept on the mess tables,

20:30 under the mess tables, swinging in the pipes on hammocks above the mess tables. So actually there

were three layers of troops. Hammocks, table tops and under the tables, and you had to live in those quarters with only a limited allowance of time to go up on deck.

Was it hygienic Colin?

21:00 Well yes I suppose, but it was smelly because of all the troops on all these troop decks. There was so many of them so no, it wasn't very hygienic.

No fresh air because you were below the water?

Yes, you were below the water level.

21:30 The trip on this Devonshire from Colombo, we went across the Arabian Sea and then up the Red Sea to Port Suez.

22:00 From there up the Suez Canal, through Ismalia where there's a huge lake, and then on to Port Said.

22:30 From Port Said out into the Mediterranean and then went like blazes [rapidly] in this ship to the Palestinian and Egyptian coast to Haifa. That took just one night I think.

23:00 The whole ship was shuddering all night because of she was full powered ahead. We were in the Mediterranean which of course was really a battle zone. There were German planes doing a lot of reconnaissance and flying over.

In the Mediterranean?

Yes. We anchored off

23:30 Haifa and there were ships sunk in the harbour at Haifa. Reputedly...see at that time the migrant intake of... refugees from Europe were flooding into...as it was known then, Palestine.

24:00 A lot of them, to get ashore, they sank their ships in the harbour and just swam ashore because there were restrictions of who were allowed ashore.

Were there Japanese submarines at that point?

No, Japan wasn't in the war at that time. But there were German submarines in the Mediterranean of course.

24:30 We then disembarked from this Devonshire troop ship. We went ashore, onto a train and we were going south on this troop train down the middle of Palestine to a camping area just a little north of Gaza.

25:00 It was very picturesque. We were doing this as the sun was setting and all this was new. There's a lot of Arab country in there. The Arabs ploughing and tilling their ground with a combination of donkeys and

25:30 camels. It was most funny to see a camel and a donkey hitched together, as a pair....like a pair of horses. A pair...a donkey and a camel pulling a plough. This was on the coastal plain of Palestine

26:00 and we went right south.

Can I just ask you what your impressions were of Colombo?

Colombo was entirely new to us. We went ashore. We wandered around the town and some of the fellas bought souvenirs

26:30 of elephants, brassware. We went out to a renowned spot, the 'Galle Force Green' where the British troops were stationed nearby.

27:00 Well yes, it was new to us all. Snake charmers sneaking up to you and they would take the lid of their basket and a snake jumps out at you. All of this surprise and activity. Then some went out to

27:30 Mount Lavinia I think was the name of the tourist spot along the coast. I'll tell you a story about Colombo later in regard to a certain fellow. But anyway it was new and of course then we had that trip back from Colombo up to Haifa.

28:00 In Palestine I got myself an extra job away from the unit. It was to go down to Suez

28:30 with a team of drivers to pick up trucks from Port Suez. There we travelled right across in the train right across over the Sinai through Beersheba where the Light Horse fought in the First World War, right down to El-Kantara, across the floating bridge

29:00 at El-Kantara onto another train running on the southern side of the canal down to Suez. And then taking the First Aid truck on the trip back from Port Suez with all the other trucks. We had to travel right across the Sinai Desert back to the

29:30 army ordnance truck parks in Palestine. Across the Sinai it was sand dune country with bitumen in lots

of places just about covered with the sand that drifted across it,

- 30:00 and quite wavy because of the sand dunes. Away to the left was one of the ridges of the Sinai Ranges. The Sinai Desert apparently is on a huge plateau, and the mountains to the
- 30:30 south, not unlike the Flinders Ranges, and the colours and the sun in the early morning and sunset were really beautiful. The trip across the Sinai was interesting because of a few things that I'll always remember.
- 31:00 We had our water and we used to tip petrol into the sand, set it alight and boil our water on the fire off the sand. Our tins of M&V [Meat and Vegetables], we'd fire onto the manifold of the car
- 31:30 to heat them up. Where the exhaust came out of the engine we'd wire the tins of M&V onto the manifold, so we had hot M&V. And then during the end of the trip we went through Beersheba and I think there was a
- 32:00 huge cemetery there which we went by. We went through Gaza up to the Army Ordnance Depot. The Australians were in camps right from Gaza right up...20 or 30 miles up along that road.
- 32:30 Well while in Palestine I availed myself of quite a few trips. One trip was advertised within the unit. It was a trip up to the hills of Galilee to the Sea of Galilee
- 33:00 and it was in April, spring time over there. It was incredible. Those hills were absolutely covered with wild flowers. They might have been wild flowers there but they were the same flowers that we have in our gardens. Petunias, Phlox, Zinnias. All those annual flowers were covering those hills of Galilee. It was
- 33:30 really a beautiful sight. I went down to the Sea of Galilee and I've got photos here somewhere of myself and a couple of other fellas sitting at a café on the Sea of Galilee having a few beers. Also I went on trips to Jerusalem and saw all the usual tourist places around Jerusalem. the Holy Sepulchre, the Church of the
- 34:00 Nativity, the Garden of Gethsemane. All those places. I must say I was most unimpressed by the absolute affluence of these places. The
- 34:30 Church of the Holy Sepulchre. The jewels and the rubies and the sapphires, emeralds, all over the statute of the Virgin Mary. And each religion had their own little section in those places.

When you were talking earlier about the

- 35:00 **refugees fleeing Europe, were they Jewish people?**

Yes they were Jews.

What was the feeling at that time...

They were escaping the Nazis, Hitler.

And the people around Jerusalem, were they aware of what was going on?

Oh yes. Jerusalem is Jews and Arabs...

- 35:30 they were then. The Way of the Cross...all those back streets of Jerusalem were Jews and Arabs together.

So the Jewish people were fleeing Europe trying to get back to...?

They were fleeing to get away from the German persecution.

Were they trying to...?

They were settling into the settlement.

- 36:00 While I was in Palestine, the Plain of Armageddon...the Battle of Armageddon was going to be the last big battle of the world...and that plain which runs from Haifa to Mount Tiberias right down to the West Bank is a beautiful plain, and we were camped at a place called Afula
- 36:30 where gum trees had been planted and the Jews had started a kibbutz. There were these kibbutzim right over the plain which was just like a patchwork carpet when you stood on some high ground.
- 37:00 They were communes. Just like the communes up at Lismore in New South Wales.

Did you get a chance to speak to any of the refugees?

Oh yes. We used to go over to them. A friend of mine, Gordon Pickover who is the father of H.G. Neilson I might add, he was really intrigued with the

- 37:30 kibbutz. And he still corresponds with some of the people in these Kibbutz. He does a fair bit of travelling and in 1969 he went to Palestine and he tried to visit the place where we
- 38:00 were camped - the Plain of Armageddon. He was walking up the road from the village and a Jewish patrol stopped and wanted to know what he was doing, who he was and all about him. This was a few days before that Six Day War in '69. They arrested him, took him back, stripped him and interrogated him for hours.
- 38:30 He eventually was released but he said he had a rather sticky time because he was looked suspicious to them.
- Did you speak with anyone who had fled Europe?**
- They all had. The occupants of these Kibbutzim
- 39:00 had all fled Europe. They were Polish Jews and German Jews.
- What stories were they able to tell you about Europe?**
- Oh, that's 60 years ago. But we spoke with them and most of them spoke English quite well.
- 39:30 They were right down on the floor of this huge plain and of course the hills around were occupied by Arabs and they could shell these kibbutz. And I can now come back to my aunt in Adelaide. She
- 40:00 engaged a refugee Jewish girl as a maid about 1938 or 1939. There were a lot of Jews coming to Australia at that time fleeing Europe.

Tape 3

- 00:37 **You were camping in this area for some time but then you moved on to the North African campaign?**
- Yes. Our base camp at that time was in Dimra in southern Palestine, as it was then. Israel.
- 01:00 I then got my job of doing a school on blood transfusion. I had to go down to El-Kantara on the Suez Canal and this was about the time that the big campaigns were happening in North Africa.
- 01:30 There were lots and lots of Italian POWs [Prisoners of War] being taken back and put in camps along the Suez Canal. I did a blood transfusion at an Australian General Hospital at El-Kantara.
- 02:00 I was only there for about 4 or 5 days. While I was there there was a bit of activity on the Suez Canal. The Germans were dropping magnetic bombs into the Canal. They did not go off when they hit the water. They sank but
- 02:30 were set for when boats went over; the fifth one would blow up. Or what ever they had set. And up and down the Canal, Wellington bombers with big magnetic rings from wing tip to wing tip, tail to nose. A big magnetic ring and they would fly up and down the Canal subjecting the Canal
- 03:00 to magnetic attraction to blow up these magnetic mines. And at night, a couple of times when I was down there, there were huge explosions at night when the Germans had dropped their magnetic bombs but they had missed the Canal and it landed on land and it had gone up with a tremendous explosion. All this was
- 03:30 about less than a mile from where I was. I nearly killed myself at El-Kantara.
- What happened?**
- I went to the back streets of the village. There was a café and we were drinking supposedly gin. It was a gin bottle but God knows what was in it. And I...
- 04:00 I really got a bait.
- Maybe you should have had a blood transfusion after that?**
- I was nearly beyond it I think.
- So you learnt to do blood transfusions at El-Kantara?**
- Yes. I then went back to the unit and if the Field Ambulance ever had to put...as we did in campaigns,
- 04:30 sometimes..... I had to put a transfusion on a fella to send him back to base.
- What was your first instance of having to do that?**
- It's interesting you should bring it up. It was Roden Cutler who was the Governor of New South Wales.

He lost a leg. He got a VC [Victoria Cross] for it. He was dragged into us at a place called Latani River in Syria. His leg was hanging.

- 05:00 We cleaned it up, put a transfusion into him and put him back onto the ambulance and he was taken back to the base hospital somewhere in Israel or Palestine. That was the first time and I was dragged out...it was about 4 o'clock in the morning. You've heard of Roden Cutler? He got a VC for it.
- 05:30 Anyway to get back to the chronological sequence of things. At about this time the Germans were running over Greece. They were just running through Greece and our unit was taken from Palestine with the view of going to Greece. Our advance party
- 06:00 actually, there were 2 or 3 of them. They were sent on ahead to go to Greece. But in the meantime the Germans came down from the Western Desert, down through...as far as Bardia I think it was. So instead of us going to Greece we were diverted up along the north coast

06:30 of Africa to a place where we established at Mersa Matruh. Our ambulances were running from this place up to Bardia, collecting wounded and bringing them back, fixing up a bit and sending them back towards Alexandria and Cairo.

07:00 This operation lasted...well in April we were at Mersa Matruh. The beginning of June we were up in Palestine again about to invade Syria.

Just getting back to Mersa Matruh, that was a pretty big base...

- 07:30 Yes it was. It was...the Egyptian army had a well established barracks underground there. They had barracks and they all had underground portions to them. It was a terribly, terribly hot spot. But when the weather was good it was beautiful. The Mediterranean was crystal clear. There was a villa there where Teddie the Prince of Wales at that time and Mrs Simpson
- 08:00 were supposed to have occupied. But when the weather was hot, the tears in your eyes couldn't keep pace with the evaporation in your eyes. You'd pass water and the water didn't hit the ground because it would have evaporated before it got there.

Did the Australian troops adapt their uniform to that kind of heat?

No. We wore shorts

- 08:30 at that time. And the dust was quite incredible. At a staging post just by the pyramids, the dust was so intense that we had to have a rope from our camping area...there was a staging camp there...we had to have a rope from our big tent...they were called EPIP tents [English
- 09:00 Pattern, Indian Product]. We had to have a rope from there to the latrine because the dust was so thick. You could get lost over that 100 yards, absolutely lost in the dust.

There must have been times when the troops were out fighting in the desert and weren't able to see what they were...

Yes that's right. It was quite impossible to see.

- 09:30 **And how were you getting your supplies into Mersa Matruh?**

There was a rail from Cairo up that north coast. I think it ended at Mersa Matruh. The supplies were coming in by rail.

Does that include blood?

I don't know. I wasn't involved with any bloodery [transfusions] there.

Did you get rations while you were there? How did they arrive?

We were pretty well supplied at Mersa Matruh because of the rail head.

- 10:00 They had supplies coming in by rail. There was no hard ration stuff. A kitchen and a cook house and all that. I think so.

Can you tell me the story about the soldiers lining up for their beer and cigarettes?

That was at Mersa Matruh.

- 10:30 Yes, at Mersa Matruh we were given a pack of cigarettes a day, I think it was, and a lot of young soldiers, myself included I suppose, we were issued with cigarettes. Wild Woodbine and Players cigarettes we used to have. We used to get a bottle of beer...or two bottles a week or something.
- 11:00 And when this beer was issued there would be a queue for a hell of a distance and on a couple of occasions, the Italian planes, you could just see them away in the distance, just a spot in the sky flying over and there were a few bombs dropped around,

11:30 but the troops stuck to their position. They wanted a beer and wouldn't vacate their place in the queue.

So they wouldn't lose their place no matter what?

Yes.

So you were then sent from Mersa Matruh...

From Mersa Matruh...I might add that a lot of our people, fellas used to have to go out and

12:00 shovel up, and I mean shovel up troops that were blown up on mine fields. There were mine fields all along that border of Libya and Egypt.

Set by which army?

German mines.

And you were part of the crew that had to go out and do this?

Yes.

12:30 It was a shovel job. A lot of them you had to pick them up with a shovel really. I remember a mate of mine coming back. He was as white as a sheet. He was out with a fella by the name of 'Diddy' Canole and they had to go out and pick up someone. They took a shovel out and an engineer who had something to find where they were.

13:00 They went out and picked up this fella who got blown up and our fellow with the shovel did what he was supposed to and dropped the shovel as a force of habit. He had finished with it so he dropped it right on a mine but it didn't go off. But he said it had frightened hell out of him.

13:30 But fortunately nothing happened.

So you had to get behind a shovel on occasion?

Yes I've been out in the mine fields but I don't really remember shovelling.

And were the bodies buried in the desert?

No, no. They had bits blown off you know. Legs and feet. A mine generally blows off legs or feet or other body parts.

14:00 **What did you do...did you bury the limbs?**

No we took them back.

That was a terrible job for a young man to have?

Yep. What else was there?. Well anyway, from that position, that was when Tobruk got surrounded and things were happening there.

14:30 Greece had fallen. Crete was being invaded and things were really grim.

What was the mood of the soldiers around that time?

They just took it in their stride I think. They weren't terrified. No, they weren't talking much about it. But they would keep up with the news on

15:00 the radio with 'Lily Marlene' [popular German song].

And what did you hear of Rommel?

He was very much respected by our troops.

Why was he so respected?

I don't know. He was a bloody good general even though he was on the other side. I think he struck their imagination I think.

15:30 He didn't have any background as Hitler did of brutality. He wasn't associated with any of those terrible concentration camps.

So there was some honour attached to what he was doing?

Yes.

16:00 Anyway that was Tobruk. Things were looking grim. We were then moved...changed ends in other words. Instead of being in a defence position in North Africa we were then moved right back to do an invasion of Syria because the Germans were thought to be coming down through Greece, through Turkey

16:30 and down through Syria and Palestine. My mate, young Jimmy Dewer he got off of Crete in a submarine. They drew straws as to who was going to get off and Jim got off. That same fella...I have a lot of time for Jim. He was

17:00 very young. About 17 when he joined. He was sent as a cook to Greece and Crete and after the war he joined Burns Philip and went to Nauru and did an accountancy degree and became the Director

17:30 Secretary of BHP [Broken Hill Proprietary] Shipping.

So he got around. So he went off to Greece and you headed off towards Syria?

Yes we went back up across the Nile...I don't know much about Cairo and Alexandria because we only passed over that beautiful bridge

18:00 with the beautiful pillars with the things on the ends of them. Back up to Afula. That where I got to Afula again. But in so doing, the day we went there it was terribly hot and we were in steel tray trucks and the heat was absolutely unbearable, and I was keeling over. Every time

18:30 I stood up I would keel over because of the heat. Anyway we moved up through...I think we moved through Ismalia and along the Sweet Water Canal which runs from the Nile into the Suez Canal. You've got to keep away from those canals in Egypt because they've got bilharzia. It's a disease,

19:00 a snail born disease. They have a life cycle which includes a worm which burrows through the feet and gets into the blood stream and perforates the bladder. These snails...they have a hatching process and the eggs come out and they finish up a snail,

19:30 and you can catch this if you swim or wash.

Did any of the soldiers get it?

Yes some of the soldiers got it during the war. I have forgotten the other name for it but bilharzia is the correct name for it. Anyway from there we went right through Palestine, from where we had camped some months before to Afula and we camped and stayed

20:00 at Afula for a few days in preparation for the invasion of Syria.

How did you prepare for that? Was there ongoing training?

No, we were supposed to be fully trained. We were fully trained. We stayed in the

20:30 olive grove as I remember. Just out of sight in this olive grove because you could shelter underneath the trees and maybe be camouflaged underneath the olive trees. And then I was attached to the 21st Infantry Brigade which had the coastal advance up the coast of Syria.

21:00 The 25th Brigade had the centre area where Cutler was wounded, and the far eastern side, the Damascus side, they were English and Indian troops. So this big prong moved up Syria.

So where were you in this, on the seaboard or ...

21:30 The seaboard. We moved up the coast through Tyre...there was no resistance at Tyre at all. Then up to...over the Latani River. The bridge was blown up and the engineers had put a floating bridge over the Latani River. And I've got in there, a photo of our establishment

22:00 in one of those books. There again I nearly came to grief with landmines. The Latani River comes down from Mount Herman way up in the mountains to the east, and Mount Herman is a snow clouded one. The water is crystal clear and beautiful

22:30 and the mouth of the river into the sea is sandy. I and a couple of other fellas went for a walk down there and it was all landmined. Luckily for me we didn't come to grief but we were foolish for doing it.

You must have had someone looking after you?

Yes, old 'Huey' [God].

23:00 Where are we now?

So you were about to cross the river?

Yes. We established a dressing station. An advanced dressing station and our ambulance fellas were collecting the wounded from up in the hills and along the coast. And that was where the 2/27th Battalion, the South Australian Battalion

23:30 were engaged in battle charges at the Dahmour River.

They did a good job there didn't they?

Yes very good. Bill Williams, a mate of mine who I used to go to Port Lincoln with when I was at school,

he got killed there. No, I don't know of anyone else, but there was lots of wounded there.

24:00 **They would then be brought back to you where you had set up the dressing station?**

Yes, or our fellas brought them back from the front line to our dressing station.

How were you coping with the injuries?

Well you have to get rid of them quick. You can't muck around. And there was an ambulance running but our ambulance only ran from the Regimental Aid Post to the dressing station. Then other ambulance

24:30 took them from the Dressing Station back to Palestine to Haifa or somewhere.

Were there doctors working with you at the dressing station?

Yes. A couple of doctors, yes.

And what were you doing?

Well I was on the transfusion part of it. I was checking their...matching blood and setting up transfusions.

How did you keep the blood? Because there wasn't any refrigeration?

25:00 It was coming up from Israel in ice boxes. I might as well tell you now. We had a terrible catastrophe with blood that we were getting from Palestine. It was bottled with Indian rubber stoppers which we had had before and it was all right. This

25:30 lot, we had a couple of fellas die immediately that they had it. There was a hell of an investigation. It was found that the Jewish blood that we were getting, which was taken in Israel and bottled with these Indian rubber stoppers. The blood had been contaminated to such an extent it was fatal.

26:00 **How was it contaminated?**

The sulphur in the manufacture of the Indian rubber.

But you hadn't had problems with that before?

No, not before.

A bit strange?

Yes. It was a different batch of stoppers or something.

That must have broken your heart?

Yes it did. I can remember the names of the fellas who lost their lives. It was quite an investigation about it.

26:30 And it's written up in a couple of those books I've got there. The doctor was Noel Bonner one of Adelaide's doctors. And he was a pioneer of blood transfusions. He was one of the original South Australian fellas who did a lot of work on blood transfusions.

So you were working with some of the best then?

Yes.

27:00 But it wasn't always doing it. See we could set up and put a blood transfusion on a fellow in an ambulance. In the ambulance there would be something to hang the blood container from and the fella would be on the stretcher wounded underneath it and away they'd go.

It would be a fairly rough ride in the ambulance?

27:30 Well the roads weren't bad. See this was a major road. But yes it would be rough.

So how long were you positioned at the dressing station?

Well only a few days. Only a few days and then we had to go forward again. We went to a building near Sidon

28:00 from there. Yes it was very...well I don't know. Things happened so quickly. And the wounded...when we got set up at Sidon, they were thick and fast and our ambulance

28:30 and stretcher bearers were bringing them in from Dahmour and everywhere. It was thick and fast. And I might add, we had a lot of trouble with gas gangrene.

29:00 Now gas gangrene stays in the ground for thousands of years. They find gas gangrene in Egyptian mummies who have been mummified for years and years. And because the Middle East has been cultivated with animal manures, it was alive with gas gangrene.

How would you catch that?

A deep wound that

29:30 had been contaminated with dirt. It was terribly smelling stuff. Something I haven't told you. We were fighting the French Foreign Legion. They were tough characters.

This was in Syria?

In Syria because the French...these French Foreign Legion fellas had come from North Africa,

30:00 Morocco and those French colonies. When we were at, yes I think it was there. I saw a French Foreign Legionnaire was just like a sheet of brown paper. Gas gangrene had got right through his back. The smell is something you would never forget once you have smelt it.

30:30 And he was alive...he was with us for a couple of days before we got rid of him. But he was still alive and kicking. Now that's Syria. A civilisation, an old civilisation greatly cultivated, full of gas gangrene.

31:00 **How did you treat that or was it impossible?**

Damn near impossible. There was a gas gangrene serum or injection, but it's a long time ago. And now compare that with New Guinea, gas gangrene unknown because there was not the cultivation.

Not the conditions?

No.

And so was this a real problem for the

31:30 **Australian infantry?**

Oh yes. The Australian with a deep wound had to be got onto very quickly and brought back to base hospital and irrigated or whatever. I don't know. It was certainly a major problem.

So you're in Sidon now?

We're in Sidon now.

32:00 And in Sidon again we were underneath the guns. The artillery was over the top of it. Our artillery behind us firing over the top of us onto the Dahmour River, and the hills on the Beirut side of the river... and our fellas had to climb this cliff and dislodge the

32:30 French on the high ground on the other side of the river.

So you would have seen all that?

Yes. I did see it at times. Then after that I was detached from

33:00 my unit and went with the 2/16th Battalion. I was in their regimental aid post. I went with the 2/16th Battalion where there was a cease fire. There was a cease fire arrangement with the French.

Was this further north now?

Yes, further north but only a little bit. Well just a little bit north of

33:30 Dahmour River. We went back into the hills with razor hairpin bends, where the trucks had to back and fill three or four times to get round these corners away up into the hills, to then come down on the seaward side again and into Beirut.

34:00 Well I went into Beirut with the 2/16th Battalion and I was with the R.A.P in the 2/16th Battalion in Beirut. Now this was initially a ceasefire, but all our troops when the ceasefire happened...it was not official...

What was that about?

.....they stopped fire to take it further to an armistice and then to a peace. But a ceasefire is the

34:30 first stage of it. And all the fellas I was with, they all shot through from their lines into Beirut because Beirut was the Equatorial Paris. Anyway we all go into Beirut and here's this ceasefire, and here we are with the French Foreign Legion and big black Senegalese and

35:00 French troops from Vietnam and the Far East. We were all jumbled up together and drinking and the authorities were absolutely horrified about what would happen. Anyway it didn't.

It would have been a fairly wild time though?

Oh yes.

And you were talking to the French?

Yes.

35:30 I learnt French at school and I could talk French when I had a few grogs, but I couldn't talk very well when I was sober.

So one minute you're all shooting at each other and the next you're drinking together?

Yes virtually. And this was an absolute horrifying situation...

To the authorities?

Yes to the authorities.

So what did you talk about with the French?

Oh I don't know.

36:00 I don't know.

What was your impression of the Foreign Legion?

They were tough characters. They were generally much older than us. They were older fellas.

Now when you say older what does that mean?

Well maybe 28 to 35.

Old fellas?

Yes.

Because you were about how old?

Well that was 1941, so I was 21.

36:30 So that was...then I was in Beirut in the Regimental Aid Post for a week or ten days. I was getting leave, and we were in the French barracks right in the middle of Beirut. Black and white marble floor, beds, mattresses, but

37:00 the mattresses...underneath every mattress was bloody bed bugs. So we didn't sleep in the beds, we slept on the black and white tiled floors because we were horrified by the French and their bed bugs.

Was this cease fire because of France's position in the war?

37:30 Yes. The Vichy French went over to the Germans and it was the Vichy French, including the French Foreign Legion or some of them who we were fighting. See they turned traitor. The Vichy French arm of the French army,

38:00 they were on the side of the Germans and Italians. Anyway, we were right in the middle of town and we were only a few hundred yards from the main seaside restaurant area, and they were all waiters in dinner

38:30 suits and orchestras and you know, it was a big deal for us fellas who had come out of the Western Desert.

It sounds like paradise?

It was. We had a memorable time as it were.

Were you mixing with locals as well?

Yes.

39:00 We mixed with the locals.

Did you meet any women?

Yes there were women there. They generally had hangers on....fellas with them. But anyway it was all very interesting.

What was your strongest impression of that time?

Well,

39:30 Beirut was known as the French Equatorial Paris. It was supposed to be the most civilised French town outside of France. There was a big university there, operas and all sorts of activities. Then I went back to my unit again

40:00 and was with them for...I don't know, it must have been 2 or 3 month I suppose. Now an interesting thing happened here. A lot of these French troops that we were fighting were evacuated. They were sent back to France

40:30 and we were up in the hills above Beirut ...and the French were using this area...it was like the Blue Mountains to Sydney. There were beautiful villas and houses and hotels up in the hills.

Tape 4

00:39 **You were telling us about being just outside Beirut in the hills there.**

Well, where we were camped we were in a big, old villa really. And the French troops that were being repatriated back to France, they were Vichy French actually and

01:00 we were repatriating them. We were marching down the road. And I've forgotten what nationality they were. Well we spied this fellow going down the street with a

01:30 donkey and a keg on it. And we had a fellow in our unit, his name was Thompson from Warooka over on York Peninsula. He was a real character and he was you know pretty keen on, well we reckon

02:00 this must have been cognac. Anyway in the middle of the night he sneaks down and finds the keg and rolls it back up to our camp. And we put it in a bag or he did. Put it in a big, hessian bag with stones and dropped it in a big tank dam arrangement. Put a bit of hose, just the hose out of the garden. Put a hole in it

02:30 and put the hose into the hole and stuck this bag with this keg in it into this big tank. Anyway the whole of the unit were mostly John Bull [full - drunk]. For weeks after that the officers couldn't work out where the grog was coming from. But that same fellow

03:00 on another occasion. I got the job, remember I was up on the Atherton Tablelands, going out and buying and killing a beast, steer or something for our kitchen. We had to pay for it, buy it from the local place

03:30 whatever it was. And this fellow Thompson, that same fella that got the keg of cognac. We were in Queensland with brumbies, wild brumbies. We used to round these up. And the quietest ones used to break it in and then we used to have horse races at a place called Mount Garnet. And anyway

04:00 on this occasion, me going out with a big, 3-tonne truck to get a beast. This fella Thompson came with us. And we had a horse, one of the horses on the back. Would go very slowly with the horse being bridled and tied behind. We got out in the scrub and Thompson gets on this horse. And it was up in this volcanic country with lots of big boulders in the high grass.

04:30 And Thompson gets on this horse and we cut out a beast and brought it into this yard, there were yards then belonging to the house, with a tripod scaffolding. Shot the beast and then strung it up and cleaned it. But in cutting

05:00 it out of the mob, this beast, this fella riding this horse flat out through this high grass where you couldn't see these boulders and such. I found it quite horrifying if he came off or whether the horse would fall in the high grass. Anyway that was Thompson.

He was a bit of a wild man?

He really was.

So after Beirut, where did you go from there?

Beirut up into the hills to Alayh or

05:30 Adh Dhunaybah. They were two villages up in the hills. And this was on the main road, I think if I remember correctly, on the main road between Beirut and Damascus. Anyway we went on leave to Damascus. And Damascus was a very interesting town with bazaars and the

06:00 big mosque. We had to take off our boots to go into the mosque. And the bazaar had, there's stuff around here that I bought in those bazaars, upstairs in the hall there's some brass work that I bought in the Middle East, in the bazaar in Damascus. A very, very ancient old town. And it was purely Arabic.

06:30 And another place we went to and I can't quite remember whether we were went to it from Beirut or where we got to it. It was an old Roman city, Ba'albek. Where they had the ruins of the old temples and the columns were marble

07:00 and granite pillars, fluted. And the stone had come from Aswan, way up in the bottom end of the Nile. And had been dragged up the Nile Valley, the Nile River, over the mountains and erected. Three of these sections you know in the ruins of this temple way out in the desert of, well getting out towards

07:30 Jordan. But very, very interesting and very, very delicate bunches of grapes on the pillars and the stone work. Very, very intriguing. And that was Damascus, the destination of another day's leave. Anyway after, I don't know how long we were at

- 08:00 Adh Dhunaybah. But while we were there we had to do army training with mules. Now these mules they had previously had Cypriot muleteers on it. They'd had
- 08:30 worked them before. And we had to learn how to handle them, how to carry wounded on them and how to handle them generally. But we objected strongly to this because we reckoned most of the Cypriots were always reputed to have 'crabs'. And we didn't
- 09:00 like riding the mules after the Cypriots had been riding them.

It would have been pretty uncomfortable.

Yes, oh we had to ride them bareback I think. Anyway we didn't like the idea of catching the crabs.

Why did they want you to utilise the mules? Was this mountainous territory?

Oh yes. Mountainous. The mountains of Syria are quite,

- 09:30 10,000 feet is the height of Mount Lebanon. And it was just about permanent snow along that ridge and Mount Arafat through to up in Turkey; there's a ridge there. I had a lot to do with that later and in a moment I'll tell you about that. But we had to do training with mules and we weren't very impressed with following the Cypriot
- 10:00 fellas with their Pardiculosis Pubis is the Latin name for crabs.

And they spread quite easily don't they?

Well see, there's Pardiculosis Capitus, Pardiculosis Scabies (whatever they are) the one around the hands and Pardiculosis Pubis is the ones you

- 10:30 get in your pubic hair. Anyway, that's in passing.

So there was a lot of scratching going on?

Yes. Anyway from there the unit moved up to Tripoli, that's up the coast. Up the coast about half way between Beirut and Turkey.

Did you take the mules?

No, no.

- 11:00 We left those behind. See, there's two Tripolis. There's Tripoli, North Africa and there's Tripoli, Syria. This is Tripoli Syria, I'm talking about. And it's right on the Mediterranean coast. And really. I think it's the start of the road to Tiberius. Bible talks of the road to Tiberius and it goes up the
- 11:30 Mediterranean to Turkey, into Turkey. And the field ambulance we domiciled in a great old building. And they were taking in, not wounded because the war had finished in Syria at this stage, but they were taking in fellas with malaria and so forth.
- 12:00 Well that's when I got myself out of it and I went with the engineers as a first aid unit, with a company of engineers who were putting in. And I had to have an ambulance and I was running between the Mediterranean and Aleppo, right along the Turkish border. And these
- 12:30 engineers were putting in tunnels underneath the roads coming out of Turkey because we thought the Germans were going to come down having taken Greece, they'd come through Turkey into Syria and pincer movement into the canals. It was canal area. And this was beautiful country again. We had to go and
- 13:00 visited, call on groups of engineers putting in these roadblocks. One of our base camps was at a place called Baniyas. It was right on the Mediterranean, a little village. And we were camped in a graveyard on high ground, overlooking the
- 13:30 Mediterranean and the village on the coast.

It must have been very beautiful.

It really was. Really quite beautiful. And in this graveyard was, I think, a lot of Muslim-type dead buried there. We were camped right in amongst the headstones. And there were oak trees and acorns all around. There were a lot of acorns on the ground.

- 14:00 And I can see these little squirrels with their tails in the air collecting the acorns and running into holes around the bottom, base of the oak trees. They were gnarled and knotty and there were little holes. The squirrels were carting these acorns down these little holes.
- 14:30 It was really a delightful spot as I say.

How did you feel though sleeping with the dead?

Oh that's all right. As long as they don't rattle. I don't like it when they rattle. Those rattles don't sound good.

So you were part of the unit that was there to set up the roadblocks?

Yeah, that's right. And on Sunday night we were invited to

15:00 go and have Sunday night's tea with the headman of the village. And it was quite interesting really. Raw fowls' eggs in vinegar and tomatoes, cucumbers and raw fowls' eggs in vinegar. And you take out

15:30 what you want with your fingers and eat. And drink arak, which is exactly the same, really, as Ouzo. It's a very highly aniseed alcohol, potent as hell. Very potent. And very strongly tasting of aniseed. And we used to have our Sunday night's tea with the local village head, which was quite an event really.

16:00 He was, you know, in his headgear. He was Arab. Anyway that was that.

What were you doing during the day there?

Driving along the road between the Mediterranean and Aleppo. Right up over the mountains to do it. There were lots and lots of rivers and streams up there. You were up,

16:30 I suppose you were up 5 or 6,000 feet. Beautiful ravines and silver birch. It was silver birch forest. And we were doing this in about September, October

17:00 so they were all in autumn tints, autumn leaves.

You must have forgotten sometimes that you were in a war.

Yeah. That's right. And up there, we did camp too in tents, whenever it was too far to go back ... but we didn't always camp in the graveyard bit.

17:30 We camped in tents, where the engineers had their tents set up and we slept in there. It was cold as hell. And we used to have to put newspapers or bits of paper between the blankets to help keep us warm. And at night jackals, mobs of jackals in the hills. They were pretty wild, ragged sort of hills

18:00 and there'd be mobs of jackals that would come in a sniff around the tent, looking for our food. And they'd be right against, right up close to tent. And one would howl they'd all howl. Very strange and somewhat scary.

You wouldn't forget that noise.

No. And then there were actually wolves up there in those mountains because they're quite, you know, rugged and uninhabited.

18:30 And wild pigs. Big wild boar I saw that they shot and dragged in. The Mohammedans couldn't have eaten it. Anyway it was dragged in. I could see it outside the tent. And the darn thing was laying on the ground. It was damn near as big as a table. It was a huge thing. And you hear the wolves in the distance,

19:00 up there too.

And no rumblings from the Germans?

No. The Germans were away up in Greece still at that time. They hadn't come. There were supposed to be small groups of Germans trying to woo the Turks but, no.

And the Turkish people were happy to have you there?

Well we didn't see them.

19:30 They weren't very happy actually. I'll never forget, on one occasion I got a bullet overhead from the Turkish side. It was my fault really. I was standing very close to the border post and I didn't think there was anyone around and I was urinating. And next thing I know there was a bullet over my head.

20:00 I saw a post, a Turkish Post, way up along the road a bit. He'd obviously seen me and said, well you know, "You cheeky bugger. I'll get rid of you."

That would have been a sad way to die.

Yeah. Anyway.

So you finished doing the roadblocks up near the border?

Yeah, well I went on leave at Aleppo a couple of times. And then I

20:30 drove down, we drove down, from Aleppo down through Homs and Hama, which were out on the plains between Syria and Iraq. I suppose it was in Jordan. They were very interesting old towns. And then back over the hills again to Baniyas again and then up again and around.

21:00 It was quite a round trip, which you know we enjoyed riding.

You didn't really have to look over your shoulder for the enemy at that stage did you?

No. The road building up there was interesting. They were all young girls working on the roads: cracking stone and picking up lumps of stones and putting them on the make a road foundation.

21:30 **Was there any interaction between the troops and the young girls?**

Well there would have if you gave them half the opportunity, the girls.

The girls were interested?

Yeah.

How did you know?

Well, we gave some a ride once in the ambulance. And they were a bit smelly I tell you. They weren't

22:00 too good but anyway. You know, you could tell.

They were flirting.

Yeah that's right. And they were about 16 or something like that.

And the men behaved themselves?

Oh yes. No there was only three of us: the two drivers and myself. And it would have been very foolish to be involved in anything like that.

22:30 So that was the end of my Syrian bit. And about that time I used to go back to my unit to get my mail about once a fortnight. And to see what's on the notice board. And on the notice board was an

23:00 offer to the troops of a trip to Aswan. This was a hell of a long way from Syria. And Aswan is the Valley of the Kings way back from the Nile in Egypt. And you had to pay for it. I think I sent home for it, for the money.

23:30 But in the meantime Japan came into the war.

You didn't get to see the Valley of the Kings?

No. Very shortly after that we were packed up. I went back to the unit and fortunately I did because if I'd stayed with that engineer crowd I would have walked off the boat in Java straight

24:00 into Jap POW.

That's what happened to them?

That's what happened to them. It was the 2/6th Fuel Company Engineers and they went straight from the ship, off the ship straight into the Jap. And Jesus I was lucky.

Did you find out later how things went?

Yeah I found out later what happened to them. You know, I'd made quite a few mates and so forth.

Did they all survive the

24:30 **camp?**

I don't know. I never heard anything. but I remember there was a fellow Bell, he was a corporal in that engineer corps, I never heard of him again. Anyway,

You went on a different ship.

I, then we packed up our unit. Back at Tripoli

25:00 we were packed up and we were moved right down the coast. I forgotten quite how we got to Suez. But we got to Suez on the bottom end of the Suez Canal. The Suez Canal, you know, was built in 1869 and Ferdinand de Lesseps was the Frenchman who surveyed it and was

25:30 the principal builder of it. And his monument is on the breakwater of Port Said, right out on the pier. Like the monument on the breakwater at Victor Harbour is like the monument on the breakwater at Suez Canal with de Lesseps.

It must have been fascinating for a boy from the country seeing all of those sights.

26:00 Yeah. And I took an interest. A lot of fellas, they wouldn't know anything. Wouldn't take any notice of it all.

Bit you knew about it and you learnt a little bit more about it.

I made a point in finding out about it. Possibly I got all of this business about travel from my aunt because she was such a traveller.

26:30 We went right down from Tripoli, we virtually went from there right down Syria, Lebanon, Israel, Egypt, Suez Canal and then we embarked. At that time we were embarking to go to Singapore. Well to start with we were going to drive

27:00 overland. From the Middle East we were all lined up, packed up and everything to drive overland from Middle East to Singapore. Then it was changed. We were going to go by ship.

Was this all the troops, or were some troops going to stay in North Africa?

The 9th Division stayed in North Africa. We were the 7th Division and we were going to be returned home.

27:30 In Suez, I can never differentiate between Port Suez and Port Tewfik. They were side by side and whenever we had what I don't know. Except there was very much a target for the Germans because it was the mouth of, the bottom end of the Suez Canal.

A lot of activity going on?

Oh yes. Anyway the ship that

28:00 we got on there was the Isle de France. The number one ship of the French tourist trade. Beautiful ship. And we were in a cabin for 8 people. Eight people in our cabin and it was quite luxurious. And we sailed from there on the Isle de France across the

28:30 Arabian Sea to Bombay, which is now called Mumbai. There we got off and went ashore on leave. And we had a day's leave in Bombay.

29:00 Now Bombay is a beautiful big city with lots of, at that time, lots of beautiful architecture. The Gateway to India went into the wharf. The main square, got beautiful classical-type buildings. And very much a commercial, especially in the banking world. Bombay is the centre of Indian banking.

29:30 **Interesting that you describe those things because we've heard a lot of other descriptions that were all about the prostitutes.**

Yes, well there was too. There was Grant Road. They mentioned that I suppose. Yeah I'd forgotten about that. Yes, you didn't get out of the blasted taxi in Grant Road, you'd get yourself 'cut' very smartly. Yes. They were in cages, that's right.

You weren't tempted?

30:00 Oh Christ no. Jesus no. You'd have to have bloody no brains at all.

Apparently there were a lot of people with no brains.

Not for me. Anyway at Bombay I got a taxi and the taxi drove me down Grant Road. That's right they drove us,

30:30 There were a couple of other fellas with me, out to the Terrace Islands where they dispose of the bodies. The Parsee Cult try to whiten their offspring's blood. And they are the

31:00 wealthiest and the most ambitious of all the Indian cults. And they dispose of their bodies, their dead, they feed them to the vultures. Have you heard this? And they put the body on the scaffolding over the big lime pit

31:30 arrangement. And the vultures are terrible looking things with great hooks and skinny necks and great bills on them, pick the bodies clean and the bones drop through into the great pits of lime. And that's the Tower of Silence at Bombay.

32:00 Yes. I've got some stuff upstairs. Some brass and silver and copper.

So you got out and saw quite a few of the sights while you were on that short leave didn't you?

Oh yes. Yes. I made full use of the whole time. Of

32:30 wanting to see things. I saw the laundry and the bridges and the Gateway of India and all those things I saw.

What did you think of the Indian people? What impression did they make on you?

They were somewhat aloof. Yeah. They've got very fine features some of them. Very fine features. If they were only white.

33:00 **So from Bombay where did you go?**

From Bombay we got on the Kosciusko, a Polish ship, a coal burner. And I was with the 16th Battalion again. And we headed out of Bombay, headed for Java because Singapore had already fallen.

33:30 We headed for Java. We got off, I think we got just off of Java and one night at 2 o'clock in the morning some of the fellas saw things from up on deck. There was a lot of flashing and it seemed like gunfire ahead. And all at once, we were all in the holds of the ship, we were sleeping side by side down in the holds.

34:00 And at 2 o'clock in the morning the ship changed direction. It had been going like this, then like that. All us poor silly cows in the holds all rolled to one side, you know, the other side. And then we headed zigzagging all the time up the Bay of Bengal.

What did you think was going on? Because if you're down in the hold you wouldn't have known

34:30 **would you?**

No. We didn't know but we knew direction. As soon as it was daylight we knew whether we were going north, south, east or west. See you only have to put your watch at 12 o'clock to the sun and half way between that and the hour hand gives you due North. Anyway we went way up into the Bay of Bengal and Curtin and MacArthur

35:00 had a big blue [dispute] about where we were to be used, but Rangoon fell.

Were you heading for Burma?

We were heading for Rangoon. And Rangoon is somewhere in Burma and Rangoon fell. Java had fallen.

So obviously it's like a domino effect.

Yes. We were getting there and they fell. We were getting to Rangoon and then Burma fell.

35:30 Then we headed back to Colombo this time to reprovision. And here we're anchored side by side in the harbour at Colombo and the lighters are coming out and delivering your provisions to carry on.

How many men

36:00 **were on the ship?**

Well I think there must have been somewhere in the vicinity, one battalion would have been 800. Our unit, there would have been at least 100 of our unit. They split the Field Ambulance up. We were split up. There were about 20 ships in the convoy. And the convoy was doing this the whole way across the Indian Ocean.

And where did MacArthur think that you should go?

He wanted us

36:30 I don't know. I don't know.

And did Curtin want you to come home?

Oh yes. He was screaming for us to come home. Anyway....

So that would have been a massive loss if that convoy had been attacked.

Oh yes. There were all sorts of funny old ships amongst it. Now when I say funny old ships, the ship we were on, the Kosciusko, the Polacks [Poles] mutinied.

Where did that happen?

In the middle of the Indian Ocean.

37:00 They mutinied. And all the crew were put in the brig and the 2/16th Battalion, which came from Western Australia with a lot fellows coming from the Kalgoorlie area of Western Australia. They'd been shovelling all their lives there. They shovelled the ship from thereon forth.

Why did the Polish people mutiny?

I don't know.

37:30 But they were just discontented because they wanted to go I don't know, somewhere else.

But they'd had enough?

They'd had enough of it.

Could these ships have defended themselves?

No not themselves. There was a battle cruiser in the convoy. And I think it was the Shropshire. I wouldn't be absolutely sure of that. But there was a battle cruiser

- 38:00 amongst them. And there were lots of corvettes. When I say lots, there were 2 or 3 corvettes and there may have been a destroyer. Remember it was a big convoy. It was 20 or so. And our fellas were spread out, our unit, our ambulance fellas were spread up between all of these troop ships.
- And there were no attacks made on that convoy?**
- No. No we got through without any trouble.
- 38:30 **Apart from the mutiny.**
- Yeah. You got absolutely sick of being at sea. And the tucker [food] was something ghastly: salted kidneys out of barrels. Brine barrels with kidneys and ugh! And the bread,
- 39:00 you could get it like that, roll it up and bounce it like a tennis ball. Ugh!
- Did you have to take any tablets for scurvy or anything?**
- I can't remember. I don't think so. I don't think we did.
- So what period do you estimate you were at sea for?**
- I've got it in my diary there.
- 39:30 **Are we talking weeks or are we talking months?**
- Well we're talking about a fortnight I should think. 3 weeks maybe. Yeah, it must have been 3 weeks zigzagging around the Indian Ocean.
- You're lucky no one caught you.**
- Oh yes. Anyway we eventually got to Fremantle and pulled in at the wharf in Fremantle. And Jesus,
- 40:00 you know.....
- A big welcome.**
- Yeah. We all felt the same way.
- Proud?**
- No. Just so glad to be home.
- You'd all seen a hell of a lot hadn't you?**
- Yeah.
- 40:30 No one was game to look at the other fella in the eye, if you understand what I mean. And anyway, from there I was with the 2/16th Battalion and they were all Western Australians.

Tape 5

- 00:41 **And then you headed off for Adelaide?**
- No, well the ship that
- 01:00 I was on, the Kosciusko, all the fellas I was with, the 2/16th that, as I told you, most of them were Western Australians. And they all shot through and didn't come back to the ship when they were supposed to. So they were all AWL [Absent Without Leave] But the ship left and came right to
- 01:30 Adelaide. At pulled in at Port Adelaide, not out at harbour. And she was only a little ship really. Very small.
- Who was manning the ship if the Kalgoorlie guys had gone AWL?**
- I don't know. Oh some of the 16th Battalion, their re-enforcements, for
- 02:00 instance might have been from other States but they originally were Western Australians. And they'd been through a couple of campaigns in the Middle East so they would have been shorter in number. They would have had some of them being replaced with re-enforcements. And where are we now? We're in Adelaide. I don't remember much about it. I remember pulling into the wharf at Port Adelaide and I think
- 02:30 it was somewhere near the fisherman's wharf down at Port Adelaide, by that bridge. And I remember quite clearly grizzling because I had to pay twopenny for an Advertiser instead of penny-halfpenny as they were before I went away. I always remember that. The silly things you remember.

Did your mum and dad come and see you?

No. No. Anyway we were moved down to

03:00 opposite Dawes Road on the southern side of Dawes Road, where the high school and church are now, that was all vacant paddocks. Quite bare. And all the auto-gyros used to take off from there. And we were camped there. A lot of fellas were billeted. I went back to my aunt at

03:30 North Adelaide for a couple of days. And then I went down the south-east. And I copped malaria. I had, had malaria in Syria. And I got a recurrence, when I got back to Adelaide and I got some leave. And I went down to Mount Gambia

04:00 and I got a severe malarial rigour and I shivered and shaked like a dog passing razorblades. Shook the whole house.

Mum and dad must have been worried for you.

Oh they were. My father, of all people he was quite upset. And then when I had to catch the train

04:30 back from Mount Gambier to come down here to the hospital, I think he caught the train with me. Because I remember him. I went out by bus and got off the bus at Dawes Road and he got out with me and I said, "No, you needn't come in with me." And I know he was very upset when he said goodbye to me. What was I then? Twenty-two

05:00 I suppose.

Still a baby.

Yeah. Before we left the Middle East to come back, on that Isle de France. We were brought up to full strength so we were leaving the Middle East with full-strength personnel. We got a young

05:30 fellow allocated to us. I better not mention his name but he was very much underage. A little red-headed Jewish boy. And when we got to Colombo he jumped from one boat to another in Colombo Harbour, where there's no wharfage.

06:00 The ships anchor side by side together. He jumped from one ship to another until he found some officer on duty on one of the ships to let him get down the ladder into a bumboat in the harbour. He and my mate Brian Wise (and I've got a letter there from Brian Wise telling me the story) they had a couple of girls way in the mountains of Colombo, Ceylon

06:30 (as it was then). And they went ashore, got up to see these girls, had arranged for someone to wake them up to go back to the boat who didn't wake them up. And they were away up there and they had to hitchhike back. Eventually got back and they

07:00 were jumping one boat to another and they were seen by the sergeant of one of our companies who put them on charge-sheet. And they went up before our CO. and our CO, who got killed later, wiped it off. He said, "You young buggers. I admire you in many ways. Forget about it."

07:30 So they weren't charged. But further to that, when we got to Adelaide, this young red-headed Jewish boy went across the road at Dawes Road. Cased out the hospital.. And found an officers' changing room for the theatre.

08:00 The doctors would use it in the theatre and he found it. The change room with all their uniforms hanging up. So he fitted himself out with an army officer's uniform and disappeared. We never saw him again. And years later somebody saw him. He was an engineer, a Sergeant Engineer under a different name. Now the same fellow

08:30 showed up at a Myer's General Meeting. And he was the fellow that caused merry hell for Myer at their Annual General Meeting. It was the start of the rot for Myers-Coles. And the same fella did a law course after the war and he became a QC [Queen's Counsel] in Sydney. He and his wife went to America and bought a twin-engine aeroplane.

09:00 Flew back to Australia. And when the Coonawarra, I think, was stranded on Gabo Island, ran ashore or something. And it was a naval ship. No other ships were allowed to go near and Australian Naval ship in trouble. And he was flying around it taking photos,

09:30 this QC fellow. And he got fined 20,000 quid for that, can you believe it?. That was the red-headed Jew boy. A real character.

So when you had recovered from your second bout of malaria, you're back in Adelaide. Where were you posted after that?

I then went up to Strathpine, just north of Brisbane.

10:00 And I was there when the Centaur was sunk out from Bribie Island. That was a hospital ship sunk out there.

That was sunk by the Japanese submarine?

Submarine it was thought. They haven't found the boat yet. There was a bit in the paper some weeks ago.

There was a memorial to it wasn't there?

Hum.

10:30 Anyway that's when we were at Strathpine. Then from there and we're now...

This is obviously prior to you being sent up to New Guinea.

Yes, yes that's right. And this is May 1942.

11:00 The Battle of the Coral Sea. The Japs came right around the bottom, the tail of New Guinea and it was the Battle of the Coral Sea. And we were shipped on a ship from Brisbane up the, inside

11:30 of the Great Barrier Reef, up through Whitsunday passage and out to the gap at Cairns. Across the Coral Sea. Went like hell. And that's right, I was on a Liberty Ship and she went like hell.

Very dangerous waters then.

Of course they were. Yes. And it shivered and shook. And we landed at

12:00 [Port] Moresby. We were straight on trucks, up into the high levels of the Plateau above Rona Falls in New Guinea.

Had you had training to prepare you for jungle warfare?

No, no, no, no. None at all. This is New Guinea

12:30 The Battle of the Coral Sea was in May. We went up the beginning of August. And we went up to the higher levels. And we were only there a couple of days and I was with about 20 other Field Ambulance fellas, were picked out to form part of Maroubra Force.

13:00 Maroubra Force -we were all picked out for specific reasons. We were fit, we had specialised knowledge in different things.

Was yours the blood transfusion knowledge?

No. I stated it as a fact but there were no blood transfusions in New Guinea. No, just didn't exist because it just couldn't be. And I suppose

13:30 I better start the New Guinea campaign now. The Kokoda campaign. There was about 20 of us. And I've got photos of us all prior to going because I didn't think we were going to come back.

Did someone say that to you?

Oh yeah. Yes. We were told, you know, "Your chances are not very high."

14:00 **What had you heard?**

That the Japs were really getting a move on from Kokoda. They had landed at Buna and Gona. They'd race across that northern plain. All Australia had was that 39th Battalion, which was militia boys who had only been in the army about 6 weeks. And they were facing the Japanese up the hill from

14:30 Kokoda. And we were going up at as a force. I was going up with the 2/16th Battalion again. Anyway when I did go up I was in 6 days of fog.

But how did you feel to be told you probably wouldn't come back? What was going through your head then?

Say goodbye and bugger you!

15:00 We were just facetious about it all. It didn't greatly concern us really because that's what you join the army for anyway.

Did you think you were invincible?

No we didn't think about it. You put your hat and pants on. When you were really in trouble you didn't hang around and say 'g'day' to the Japs through the bushes.

15:30 **Before you went to New Guinea you obviously had some information about what to expect?.**

No we didn't. It was pretty well unknown. See that track. There was 6 days and you were going up to 7,000 feet and you were up to your knees in mud. And there are hills like that. And going upwards is bad enough but coming down was worse. Your bloody legs just gave way

16:00 all the time. Your legs started to shake and wouldn't hold you. And you're going down hills like this. And the mud. And you're sleeping in it. And the rain. Jesus, you know. You've got the jungle.

You've come from one extreme to another.

Yeah. That's right. And there were all sorts of things that some of us had wrong. For instance we had

16:30 the wrong sort of gear, the wrong sort of boots. The boots had green hide soles in it, slippery as a butcher's what you call it. And everything you touched with your boots would skid from under you. Not that you found anything solid to step on, but. It was, well 6 days of

17:00 it, village to village. You'd start off at Imita Ridge, Ioribaura, Nauro, Menari, Efogi, Kagi, Myola, Templeton's Crossing. And each of those are a day between. And what our unit did, see when they were leaving a couple of fellows at every one of those villages

17:30 so they could look after the wounded as they were coming back. There was no other way of getting back but to walk at this stage. And fellas with a bullet through their leg. A stick tied to the end of their legs and broken, shot up legs and

18:00 limbs. Anyone with a broken arm, with a bullet in, he had to walk. He had to do it himself.

Where were you left?

I went right up to the top, to the last. I went up to the infantry base battalion regimental aid post. And we had to collect and hand over

18:30 to the Fuzzy Wuzzy Angels and track some of the way to Myola with them. Templeton's Crossing's as far as I got.

So you were very close to the front line?

Oh yes. It was 'boom-boom' in the ear-hole all the time. It was,

19:00 You know, pretty bloody horrific stuff. And you couldn't see anything half the, but you could smell them. I was reading my bloody books here and I started to smell the Japs.

What did they smell like?

Oh bloody terrible. You got that way. You could smell them in the jungle. And you see, you

19:30 can't see them. You could hear their rifle. And a lot of them could speak perfect English you know. They had, "Say, are you there mate?" "Can you give us a hand here?" Or something like that. You know, all these sort of tricks would be played on us all the time.

So you'd be tired, the conditions were very difficult plus all these other things going on with the Japanese. It must have been extremely trying?

It was. Oh Christ yes. And you never got any sleep.

20:00 And you're on hard rations. See, we headed off originally, on that 6-day trip, 5 days hard rations: bully beef and biscuits. And see a lot of those young lads of the 39th had never seen any action. We had seen action in the Middle East. These lads had not

20:30 seen any action. They were absolutely raw.

And they were in the front line?

They were in the front line until that 2/14th Battalion came up to supposedly relieve them. But they wouldn't be relieved. They reckoned they had to stick it out. But they were relieved but not immediately when they were supposed to be.

21:00 Digressing a bit, passwords. See the Japs can't say 'L'. Their passwords were 'Woolloomooloo', 'Coolangatta'. Anything with a combination of L's in the password.

So when things happened like you'd hear out of the darkness, "Hey mate

21:30 **can you give us a hand?"**

Oh, no you wouldn't fall for that one.

Were you told about that before you got there?

No. I initially found out about it from the wounded.

That they had fallen for it?

Well they said, "Along the track you'll hear these fellas say 'Hey, give me a hand or something or other

22:00 I've got a wound here' or something." I don't know. And they would fall for that. A few other things that

were rather interesting. Jap bullets were smaller calibre than Australian. And the Australians although they were wounded were not diminished. Their wounds weren't, I don't think, as severe as we were giving the Japanese. Japanese with a big 303 bullet

22:30 make a much bigger mess than a Jap much smaller bullet.

You know when you said before you could almost smell them? That smell when you're reading your war books. What reminds you of that smell now?

A rotten sort of a sausage made with old pork.

23:00 **Certainly not a sweet smell.**

I've got rid of it now but I did a bit of reading; 'Retreat from Kokoda' and a few other books. I just glanced through then the other day and it got too much for me and I had to stop doing it because I was becoming bugged up.

Memories can become overpowering can't they?

Yes. Some of them.

23:30 These. There's a book: Recollections of a Regimental Medical Officer. And he was the doctor in the Second World War in the 16th Battalion. And his name was Stewart, Bluey Stewart. And he wrote this book. And oh, Jesus, it's too much for me because I knew the fellas.

24:00 You've heard of Keith Goldsmith, here in Adelaide. He was a stockbroker. He was in the 2/16th. And I used to see him at the neighbourhood military, where I'm a member. And I saw him in the war. I didn't know him very well in the war.

24:30 **It seems like your African war was very different to your New Guinea war.**

Yes. Different altogether. You know, you were sleeping in the rain. See we were armed. We were issued and told to arm ourselves. We were Field Ambulance. I had hand-grenade s

25:00 in both the Bren pouches you had on your front. And some of the fellows used to carry a rifle. But I found a rifle was too tangly in the jungle. And I had a couple of hand-grenades. And the reason being that I was caught, badly caught. Because the Japanese weren't taking any POWs. There were no POWs being taken.

How did

25:30 **you know that?**

It was generally propagated that they weren't. And you never saw, you never heard of any POWs being taken. And anyone really. It was all so bloody horrific.

On both sides.

Well I wouldn't say as a hundred has said on the,

26:00 I've seen Japanese POWs being marched back and I've also seen plenty of dead Japs. All sorts of funny situations with dead Japs. I can remember once at Efogi, I was absolutely bugged and I sat down on the side of a crystal clear looking stream at Efogi.

26:30 Squatted down to get a drink. And I was kneeling down like this. And I was looking and I thought: Jeez, they're bloody Jap boots there. And I looked and I was sitting in the middle of a Jap on the muddy wash of the river and here I was...

It sounds like

27:00 **Hell on Earth.**

Well, we'll change the subject for a while. We thought we had the game under control at one stage in the Owen Stanleys [ranges], in the Kokoda bit. There was a

27:30 kunai lake: high grass, it was about that high, right at 7,000 feet. And surrounded with moss forest. No undergrowth at all, just moss. And this moss is covering up the trees and all the fallen

28:00 trees are covered with this moss. And it's very, very dangerous because you walk in there you don't know whether it's a tree that died 50 years ago and is hollow underneath and you fall straight through the moss into these big holes. Anyway, the lake itself we thought we could get planes to land there. And they were at one stage in

28:30 retreat, dropping supplies. By parachute from DC3s onto this lake. Parachutes. Dropping it. We were pretty well supplied for a little while with the dropping onto the lake. Remember you had to pull it out of mud and so forth but nevertheless it

29:00 was available. And then we teed up a tri-motored Ford. A very old tri-motored Ford that was part of

Guinea Airways, which supplied all the goldfields of New Guinea. And the pilot, Tiru Dave, was a pilot.

29:30 And we thought that we could clear a strip there. We could get this tri-motored Ford to land on the lake and take out all these wounded that were accumulating there. Because a lot of the wounded, with gut wounds, had no chance at all. 5 days with a gut wound up

30:00 in there, it was, you couldn't do anything for them. They were just a matter of making them, or praying for them really. Anyway, this tri-motored Ford landed and took off 15 gut wounds. And came in again to take another load and was flying out. And it was

30:30 only a quick in and out because the cloud was coming in all the time on those mountains. They had to in and out quickly. The second time he came in he turned over on his face. Wiped the whole thing off. Wiped the whole possibility off. And a lot of those fellas died

31:00 because there was just no point in trying to send them back. It was just best to give them a handful of morphine and you know, hoping

The Fuzzy Wuzzies helped you get a lot of them, the men out?

Oh yes. The Fuzzy Wuzzies they were very good with the wounded there's no doubt about it. With the wounded they'd

31:30 sort of take an interest and do the right thing but give them a load of stores to take or bring back anything (it would take 5 days to bring back anything) no they'd piss off and leave you without coming back.

Why did they do it at all? Why were they helping you at all?

Because they were shit scared of the Jap. Because the Japs were

32:00 so brutal with them. The Japs used them out on the plains on the northern side of the Owen Stanley Range towards Gona and Buna; the Japs used a lot of native bearers and carriers.

But most of them were on the Allies' side.

Yes. Yes.

32:30 See on the Eastern side of the range the Japs landed. The Japs had Rabaul. And they had a big force in Rabaul, a couple of stone throws from New Guinea.

33:00 And they were in control at Rabaul and they were just rowing across, as it were, across to New Guinea. And they were uninhibited, and they had supplies and everything. But once they got into the hills they had a supply problem.

33:30 Were the Japanese quite competent in the jungle conditions?

Initially they were but in the finish... well line of communication was really the factor that defeated the Japanese. It was the biggest factor. The biggest factor of all was their line of supply. And

34:00 problems with food. As we retreated, and we were just retreating as, "Righto, you've got to be out of here in an hour and get rid of all your wounded with it." And the fellas who were wounded, if they could possibly walk they had to whether they had a bullet in their foot or what. It was that or be caught by the Japs.

Did you have to leave wounded

34:30 men behind?

We pride ourselves that we didn't. But there undoubtedly were fellows that were, not that they were left behind, but there had to be fellas we didn't know about.

So there were times when you had an hour to get out?

Oh it was less than that.

35:00 I mean I haven't got time now to show you but extracts of what was said, "We've got to be out of here by 5 o'clock in the morning and you've got 20 minutes to do it fellas." And you'd go.

And you'd go pretty quickly then wouldn't you?

Oh yes. And gone through mud up to there.

35:30 How did anyone have the energy to fight?

They didn't. They were bugged really and truly. I remember on the occasions when I slept one night in front of the bloody Jap Line. And I didn't know it until the next morning. I got up, I didn't get up, I rolled over. I was absolutely exhausted in the night.

- 36:00 And I thought this was a good spot to lean against the tree and try to get a bit of shut-eye [sleep]. Jesus, and I didn't wake up until daybreak the next morning. And I found I was virtually in the Jap line. And our fellas were standing to only a few yards from there. They couldn't do anything about waking me or doing anything. And Jesus, did I get out of that in a hurry.
- 36:30 **So on the Kokoda, do you call it the trail or the track?**
- Track.
- On the Kokoda Track what was the furthest that you went before you needed to turn around and come back?**
- Just between Templeton's Crossing and Isurava.
- And it took you 6 days to get you that far?**
- Yeah.
- And how long were you positioned**
- 37:00 **there before your retreat?**
- Oh maybe 6 to 8 days.
- Very different conditions from what you had experienced before.**
- You slept in the mud, when I think about it, and cold because you've got the altitude there too.
- 37:30 You're sleeping in rain, mud and sleeping in pouches with your hand-grenades, they were your pillows. It was really very rugged stuff. I saw the 27th Battalion, 2/27th were the re-enforcement battalion. There was the 2/14th, 2/16th,
- 38:00 the 53rd and the 39th. Now the 39th were the young boys. The 14th were a Victorian battalion who were very good. That fellow Kingsley got his 'pips' [lieutenant's rank] from there; he got his VC. The 16th Battalion were the Western Australian battalion. They were very good and Hank Potts was their CO
- 38:30 He was very well thought of. That's the 21st Infantry Brigade. Now when the Japs got right down to Iorobaiwa, Imita Ridge is the next one. And I was camped just below Imita Ridge for a week or so while the 25th Brigade came forward on our right.
- 39:00 And they brought up 25 pounder guns. They were firing from a sort of a road head there, right over the top of us and lobbing them on the Japs at Iorobaiwa Ridge. And then, at this stage this is a fully extended, the Japs as far as they got was Iorobaiwa Ridge. But in getting
- 39:30 to Iorobaiwa Ridge they had captured and had the availability of lots and lots of stores that we had left behind in our retreat. And those stores we'd punctured, shot up, contaminated, as we retreated.
- 40:00 You know all about this do you? And they were infected. And what really did the Japs to the finish was disease. Stomach dysentery, amoebic dysentery, stomach poisoning from our supplies. They couldn't get food supplies right from over
- 40:30 on the Kokoda area. They couldn't get their own supplies forward to their forward troops. They were relying on our stores that we'd left behind.
- Had you poisoned them?**
- Well sort of yes. On contamination. They'd gone rotten, see? And also a lot of that front was only tracks like that. Through the jungle. And of
- 41:00 course defecating and all sorts of things either side of the track as we were going. Hygiene was not there. And the Japs copped most probably our unhygienic departure.
- Are you saying you shat on the Japanese?**
- Yeah that's right. Virtually.

Tape 6

- 00:43 **We were talking about the Kokoda Track. And how many times did you go up and back?**
- Four. And I'm one of the few fellas who did. I did it four times. I went up with the advanced Maroubra Force. We
- 01:00 were the original ones up to face the Japs. Got retreated right back to the road head. Then went forward with the 25th Brigade right up to Myola. I didn't go as far as Templeton's Crossing the third

time but it was still 5 or 6 days. And then I walked back by myself.

You walked back by yourself?

There were other people on the track by

01:30 that time. There were other people going up and it was much more occupied for the last, fourth trip. I was under 8 stone and as thin as a Broken Hill rabbit. And it was quite amazing what salt and sugar do for you.

02:00 As hungry as hell. I foolishly started to drink water and as you know down the gully there's water every where. Up in the hilltops, no. And I foolishly started to drink too much water and got quite weak. And I had to, I had an elastoplast [bandage] tin about that size,

02:30 of sugar and a little tin of salt. And I'd take some of each of those and it was like putting petrol in a car. It was quite incredible what a difference it made.

Because you were pretty much running on empty.

Yeah, that's right.

What supplies did you have to be able to aid the men,

03:00 **the wounded? What was available to you?**

Well at those staging posts on the way back they had organised someone to cook or make something hot for them. But see, I wasn't there. It was all hard rations. A tin of bully beef between 3 fellas and biscuits and maybe a bit of rice boiled up. That was all really.

What about medical supplies?

03:30 **What...?**

Medical supplies, there were quinine tablets dropped. There was, sulphanilamide powder had been brought in at the beginning of the war. It was called M&B693 - May and Baker 693.

What was that for?

Wounds.

04:00 It's like penicillin. An antibiotic.

And you had morphine?

Oh yes. Morphine was your stand-by. You see, you can get a lot of morphine in a very little packet. And quite often there was no time to give morphine as an injection. You would just drop morphine under the tongue.

04:30 And double the dose you'd do by injection under the tongue.

So were most of your wounds gun shots wounds and broken limbs?

Yes. Gun shot or rifle shot wounds. Most of them. And a lot of the stomach wounds

05:00 were blown. Were flyblown.

Not a lot you could do for those people?

No. But quite often flyblowing was a Godsend. It kept them clean. Eventually it caught up.

So if they got somewhere where they could be treated really quickly then...?

Yes but a massive stomach wound was nothing

05:30 they could do about really.

So you went up and back four times?

Yeah, four times. I went up, the last time went up I was told, "Well Rusty you've had your chop. Put your hat and pants on and head back." And it took me 4 days to do it.

You must have witnessed a lot of bravery

06:00 **in that time?**

Oh, infantry fellas, Jesus. You know they talk about endurance, Jesus. Those fellas. What they went through and what they did defy all description really.

You've seen a lot of terrible things but that kind of thing must have made you feel

06:30 **very proud?**

Yes. You can't honour them and be amazed at their endurance enough really.

You said earlier, what did in the Japanese, finally?

Oh the disease in the finish.

07:00 Because their lines of communication were five days and they didn't have anyone to do it. And they were all emaciated with dysentery, stomach problems and they were incapable of fighting further. And they gourmandised themselves. They went mad when they saw all this tucker and they

07:30 were starving, whether it was good or bad or rotten or what they just into it. And this they did time and time again. Right through that track.

What feelings did you have about the Japanese?

Ooh, I suppose they were the enemy. That was it really. You didn't

08:00 think about them too profoundly really. They were the enemy and that was all. But you found that people that put on a big act about the enemy were often, you wondered whether, the

08:30 genuine thing to do really. Not genuine. Whether it was really there with them to go on cursing and swearing and carrying on about it.

They were there with a job to do?

Yeah.

You must have been in the unenviable position of

09:00 **having to treat a lot of friends?.**

Yes there were. There were times. People I knew quite well or were acquainted with. Yep. Anyway, there is a few more things I should talk about.

09:30 Cannibalism. The Japs were notorious. When we were at Myola and when the Japs were in the second dance, pushing the Japs back, where the lake was and where the plane had crashed and all that. And there were

10:00 lots of reports of wounded with lumps of meat cut off their buttocks, wrapped in banana leaves. And Japs, you know, cannibalising. And also at Buna and Gona, right over on the coast there was cannibalism

10:30 reported. The Japanese were indulging in cannibalism. On the Australians. And in fact some of those books speak of diaries being taken off Japs and the Japs talking about cannibalism and talking about the Aussie meat being quite edible and quite good really.

11:00 I suppose it often happens with people in desperation. That they indulge in cannibalism. You were talking about people you know, well just out of Menari

11:30 When I was in the evacuation. I must have gone through the Jap lines and didn't realise it. And the Japs didn't give themselves away by having a go at me because I had a couple of wounded with me or something like that. And I got a couple of hundred yards up the road and

12:00 all hell let loose behind me. Rifle fire. And then when I went to this second advance, when I was going through that same spot I found, I couldn't help but find it, lying on the side of the track was a couple of our dead with their 'dead meat' tickets [identification tags] still on.

12:30 The main idea being identification. Tag. Or two tags. One that you cut off and put with their personal belongings for their identification and so forth. And the other one stays with the body. Well these were fellows, by the name of Cavendish. I knew him. Another fella that I

13:00 knew, he was in a shallow grave only a few yards off the track. But I had a job to do and I had to keep going forward. There were people coming behind to clean up from the previous actions. So there was no point in me trying to dig a hole with

13:30 the helmet or something because it would be done officially and properly and recorded by the fellows coming behind doing this.

Somebody had this specific job did they?

Yeah. In the 2/14th Battalion there were 65 killed that day.

14:00 And at the Bomana Cemetery at Port Moresby has 3,000 graves. And all these graves, all these deaths occurred in a six-month period, in terms of Kokoda and those at Gona, Buna and Milne Bay.

14:30 So it was horrific. And those battalions - from being 800 were down to 140 men left in them. All those

sorts of figures are recorded in that 'Retreat from Kokoda' by Paul. Where he recorded the number of active, effective soldiers

15:00 left after so many days.

Did the men talk about it?

Oh yes. See, our fellows had to go out and collect. Not only did they have to go out and treat them

15:30 they had to collect them. A lot of fellows had to go. There were two fellows wounded out a couple of miles from here, "Can you go out and do something about it?" and they would go and bring them in.

So a heavy loss of...

Oh yes. A very, very

16:00 heavy loss of Australian personnel in the Kokoda campaign. Very heavy. The 2/14th Battalion and the 2/16th Battalion were losing dozens a day in that.... fighting action.

You wonder how people kept going

16:30 **really?**

Yes. Well they jolly well had to, didn't they?

So when you finally got out of Kokoda and that campaign had finished, did you get a break?

Yes. I think I had a touch of amoebic dysentery. In fact I had amoebic dysentery in the Middle East. I didn't mention this but I had amoebic dysentery in the Middle East. That's

17:00 blood and pus. And I had my 21st birthday in Palestine in hospital for a few days with amoebic dysentery. And I had a touch of it after Kokoda campaign I think. And I came home on leave fairly soon after. See, it was

17:30 basically about Christmas or November, December 1942 that I was relieved and came home on leave.

A very changed man?

Well when I used to come home in the summertime I know I used to spend a certain amount of time here in town playing up.

18:00 But then I used to spend some time down on the farm with my old man. And I didn't get paid for it. Pitching hay or building haystacks, that sort of thing.

So when you came back from Kokoda you were sent back to Adelaide for some leave...

I could have had a month's leave then. I don't know for sure. I

18:30 can find it in my diary.

So you were about 8 stone when you came back?

Oh yes. I've got photos of myself: as thin as a Broken Hill rabbit. I've got photos of myself sitting on the rocks in the middle of a stream.

It must have been quite heartbreaking for your parents to see you that time around.

At least I was alive.

19:00 I haven't really dealt in too much detail of the Kokoda campaign but it was horrific to say the least. You know, went on for days. You didn't really get any sleep or rest and you were buggered and bewildered. Anyway that was that and I went home on leave I think and I then

19:30 went back.

Did you put your weight back on? Get your health back?

I did I suppose. And that brings me then to the next campaign. Was one in the Ramu Valley where we were airborne. I was in New Guinea, I'd been home on leave and went up to the Atherton Tablelands, which is

20:00 high ground above Cairns. A beautiful climate up on that Atherton Tablelands. And from there

20:30 went up to Port Moresby again. And we were camped on the beach near Port Moresby. And we were all set to go by plane from one of those 7-mile strip just out of Moresby to fly up to Nadzab, just outside of Lae.

21:00 Now this was deferred a bit because the 2/33rd Battalion, of which I was with in the 25th Brigade in the

Owen Stanleys, Kokoda. The plane crashed at take-off and 33 fellows were killed out of the 2/33rd Battalion. As they were taking off to fly to Nadzab.

21:30 So we were held up with going. But we eventually got away and flew over the Owen Stanleys to Nadzab, an airstrip just outside of Lae. And I think we flew up there in a DC3. We certainly didn't fly on a Liberator. I think it was a Liberator that crashed and all those boys were killed.

22:00 At Nadzab, after a few days somewhere adjacent to the airstrip we prepared ourselves to fly up to the Ramu Valley because it was so far and it was much easier to fly us up than it was to march us up there. And we

22:30 Flew from Nadzab and hedge-hopped up this big, wide valley with these two, big, huge rivers flowing through them. And the kunai grass was as high as this room in most of the places. And as we flew over we hedge-hopped. We were flying very low. Most probably

23:00 only 10 or 12 feet above the ground, above the grass. And as we flew the grass would flatten out each side of the plane as it was flying over. And the plane would lift its wings like this to go over any trees forming outcrops. Now the reason we were hedge-hopping was to stop the Japs, the Japs had fighters about, stop the

23:30 Japs from coming in to strafe us in flight. Generally in strafing a flying plane they had to get underneath them and shoot upwards. By flying down low like that the Japs could not get under them...

That's an extraordinary piece of piloting.

Yes.

24:00 We flew, oh I don't know, 2 or 300 miles up to a place called Kaiapit where we landed. And then I think we then marched from, well we didn't march, walked from Kaiapit to a place called Dumpu, which was right up at the head of the valley. This is at the

24:30 Southern side of the Finisterre Ranges in New Guinea. Finisterre Ranges are barren bare hills with razor backs coming up into them. And it was on these razor backs that our troops were fighting the Japanese who were trying to get back through there to get to Madang and those places on the north coast of New Guinea.

So were the

25:00 **Japanese trying to retreat?**

Yeah. They were trying to retreat. Weren't retreating very fast but they were being pushed back by, here again, the 21st Infantry Brigade and the 25th Infantry Brigade. And it was a terrible area up there for

25:30 disease. There was cerebral malaria, which was a quite high percent fatal, scrub typhus and dengue; are the three of them. And the Natives seemed to know about all of this. And there were certain areas they wouldn't go into because of the

26:00 tick or the insect carrying germs that those areas seemed to be prone to. Now, I copped, what I copped I don't know but I was unconscious for days anyway. My unit kept me there

26:30 with them so that they could look after me rather than try to evacuate. And we had an airstrip. The engineers had built an airstrip adjacent to our headquarters. And the DC3 could come in and land on that airstrip, if they didn't crash in landing (because there was about 3 or 4 of them had crashed in landing). Rather than evacuate me I stayed with my unit. And I was unconscious I know

27:00 because I don't remember, I think they told me they had me on morphine because I was so bloody crook. Anyway I recovered. I was emaciated for a while. And that campaign, we were strafed there quite a bit. The Japs coming over

27:30 and strafing our positions. And there were quite a few heavy casualties but there was a lot of sickness because of these insect-bearing diseases.

Did the tablet you were taking for malaria make any difference at all?

Yes they helped. But apparently they were not 100 percent effective. They were supposedly to be 100 percent effective.

28:00 And people who got malaria were initially charged with getting malaria because they hadn't taken their Atebrin. But later proved that this was not so. There was an incident of malaria where people had fully complied with restrictions. Now talking about this very fact,

28:30 insect-bearing things. In there and in the jungle you were subject to rats. Now many times I had rats chewing my hair. Woken up at night with rats chewing my hair because they were after the salty sweat and they're chewing your hair and

29:00 tasting the salt out of your hair. And no doubt the incidents of these diseases of which I've spoken of,

could have been well associated with rats and ticks on rats. Something else that was rather interesting up there, well interesting in a way I suppose, was all that north coast of New Guinea has

29:30 got sea volcanoes, sea volcanoes out of the sea. And later, I'll come to my next campaign directly. In the Ramu Valley for days we were covered with ash, volcanic ash. That had blown in over the mountains of the Finisterre Ranges and had

30:00 deposited right up those valleys. In the morning you would wake up and you were covered with ash. We used to virtually sleep, you know, in the kunai grass. But the ash was quite heavy. And we quite often slept on the ground. And when you sleep on the ground

30:30 you're very conscious of the earth tremors. And not infrequently you'd feel the earth trembling under you. And this was quite a common experience.

Did you have any religious belief?

Oh I'm an

31:00 irreligious-ite. I think Jerusalem fixed me for all time. I wouldn't come at that. I went around Jerusalem with a little Roman Catholic boy, gee whiz. He crawled. Grovelled and crawled the whole hard time, counting his rosary.

How did you hold onto your sanity in the times when things were really tough?

31:30 I don't know. Some of the fellows got battle debility. But there were never any counsellors or anything. never knew what a counsellor was. We did hear of a psychiatrist fellow, towards the end of the war, who committed suicide. And that was always a joke.

Well he wasn't going to be much help was he?

No. But there

32:00 was never any counsellors.

When you were up there, say for example at Ramu Valley, would you talk to each other or would you instead talk about things that weren't related to your situation?

Oh, I don't know. We talked to each other. Played a lot of cards. Jesus, got sick of cards. I'd never play cards again. I used to play poker and bridge, 500.

32:30 **How else did the men keep up the morale?**

No, a lot of fellows played cards. A lot of them. I didn't tell you about when we were up on the Atherton Tablelands and brumbies. Did I mention those? Yeah they used to put the

33:00 horses in races at Mount Garnet.

It was probably easier to have a bit of fun when you were back in Australia.

Yes.

Was it ever possible to have a bit of fun in New Guinea?

Not really. Just drink yourself silly, when you got the opportunity. When we came out of Kokoda we were given a rum ration. And

33:30 that was the only time. And we were given rum. And on this particular occasion, it was only a couple of days that we got it, it was flowing. Drinking out of tin pannikins. And it was spilt all on a wooded crate. Playing cards on a wooden crate and they spilt the rum on the wooden crate.

34:00 Only had shorts on, no shirts. The arms on the wet, rum spilt table, case. Cigarette went 'bouffe': third degree burns right down their arms. Two-up was another occupation. I used to play Two-up.

34:30 But I disciplined myself. I either won ten dollars or I lost five. Whichever I drew first, I put my hat and pants on and called it a day for that day. And I came out of it, time is the essence of the contract, well it was just more arse [luck] than good judgment really.

Did you make good friends?

Oh yeah,

35:00 I made, they've all gone now though. Yes I had lots of friends I've kept up with since the war. But only about one or two are... We had our Unit Luncheon last Tuesday at the Ambassador Hotel. None of us could get up the steps. We had it downstairs because we couldn't get up to it. We used to have it at the

35:30 CTA in Wakeville Street: Commercial Travellers' Association. But no, there's only about 5 of us left. And they were all bugged and bewildered really. A couple of them I've known for a long time. All of them I

have. They were all originals I think.

How long was the Ramu Valley campaign? How long were you there?

36:00 Well we had Christmas 1943 in the Ramu Valley. And I think it started about August or September and we had Christmas there. It was

36:30 yeah, that would be about right. But it was a fairly short, sharp, shiny show. It wasn't that rugged. It was the mildest I suppose of the campaigns that I was in.

Must have been kind of a strange Christmas?

Yes. Oh yes, there was

37:00 another thing I must tell you of. We used to make homebrew. Have you tried your uncle's homebrew up there? Whatever it was? He's making it up there. Anyway we used to make homebrew. If we couldn't get bottles we used to get lengths of bamboo and put it into bamboo. And

37:30 brew it and put it into these lengths of bamboo. And, I told you I used to work at Fauldings, and I used to keep in touch with the fellas at Fauldings. And they used to send me up hops, feather hops not the extract, the hop leaves and extract of malt. Which

38:00 you know is heavy, quick thick syrup. Thick, gooey stuff. And I used to make home brew. Brew up the hops and add the extract of malt and sugar. And our supplies were dropped by plane. Our mail was dropped by plane.

38:30 You can imagine what would happen. They would drop the parcel with the extract of malt and hops and stuff in and all the fellas letters. And the whole lot finished up, you know, all stuck together with extract of malt and the hops tarred and feathered right through it all. I wasn't a popular boy. And there's another occasion...

Did you make some in the end?

Made some, it wasn't too good though.

You would have

39:00 **regained your popularity then.**

Yes. But then I made a batch of spirit. We got tubing out of a crashed plane and made a condenser coil with it. And got dried raisins and fermented them

39:30 and then distilled the fermented dried raisin mix. And got out what we thought to be alcohol. But lucky I had a bit of chemical knowledge. The alcohol was one of those extraneous, complicated alcohols, like amyl alcohol or isopropyl alcohol, a methyl alcohol, which are deadly poisonous.

40:00 And it was lucky that I recognised it by the smell, that it wasn't right. That it was a nasty mix. Because if we'd drunk that all sorts of blindness and funny things happened. So it was lucky that I recognised the impurity. We'd made

40:30 the still to distil the alcohol or the mixture out of jam tins, tubing and they had plenty of water. And I think we actually used the site of a creek or something to do it, with the water from the creek, running over the coil ...

So that's Australian ingenuity?

Tape 7

00:41 **So you finished the Ramu Valley campaign, what happens next?**

I think I came home on Leave again. And then from leave went up onto the Atherton Tablelands again. And we were

01:00 camped at a place Kuri. Kuri, not far from the Barron River. And it was, as I said before, very beautiful climate up there. And we used to swim in the river, in the Barron. Which was about a half a mile away down the hill.

01:30 And there were platypus. And quite often as we came down through the bushes to have a swim we would see a platypus dive into the water, disappear again when we approached.

02:00 Don't think there was anything else about them but it was interesting to see platypus in the natural state.

Not many people would have seen that.

No. And there too I was shamed into doing a couple of silly things, on reflection.

- 02:30 We had a fella in the unit, he was reputed to be a snow-dropper from the Kings Cross. You know that a snow-dropper is? A snow-dropper generally referred to as people who pinch washing from clotheslines.

All clothing or

- 03:00 **specific clothing? Women's underwear?**

I don't know. Anyway this fellow used to, and his name was Pickford and they used to call him 'Mary'. And he was supposedly under an assumed name. And we could always tell a fella with an assumed name, especially in the early years of the war. A fella with an assumed name or a changed name

- 03:30 was always slow in answering the roll call because they've always got to stop and think before they answer. And when we first joined the army we could pick them. "McRostie"; and if he didn't answer straight away he was doubtful whether 'McRostie' was his right name. Anyway this fellow used to jump in
- 04:00 the Barron and float half submerged, half float down the river, jump out of the water only about 6 feet from where there was a bit of a waterfall. When I say a bit of a waterfall it was about 8 or 10 feet high waterfall. It wasn't the Barron Falls at Kuranda. It wasn't that. But it was a bit of a fall up further
- 04:30 upstream from, I've forgotten the name of the town. Anyway it doesn't matter. And he used to do this and I used to see him do this. He'd get out of the water just before it went over the waterfall. He used to always be doing this. He used to worry me that I wasn't game to do it. And I said, I decided that I'd take
- 05:00 my life in my own hands and do it myself. Which I did and got away with it. But then the river dropped its flow and became exposed. And all that length of the river was in fact logs and rubbish, which you know is quite dangerous to be swimming in really, especially under water. But I fully satisfied my
- 05:30 fear. And that fella wasn't doing it and I wasn't game, I did it.

So you survived Kokoda and the Ramu Valley and North Africa but you still wanted to conquer your fears did you?

Yes. We were talking about how we were entertained. There were fellas that were very entertaining when they'd talk. And one of these fellas with an assumed name,

- 06:00 he'd tell you all the stories about Sydney and the underworld of Sydney. About Tilly Devine and how she was queen of the underworld and what went on in Sydney. It was quite fascinating his story. And I think he most probably was an ex-jailbird. Lots of characters. Some of them not very
- 06:30 savoury but you know, at least they were interesting. And that's one reason why I always like to be an OR [other rank], I didn't chase promotion. A lot of the fellows as ORs were much more entertaining and interesting than a fella that was sort of half up himself [arrogant] with his own authority and importance.

What kind of songs did you sing then? Were there any

- 07:00 **songs?**

Oh dirty ditties and a few songs like that.

Can you remember any?

I suppose I could if I stopped to think about it. But no, I can't relate any over there to you. There was one I remember. It was sung to the tune of the Egyptian National Anthem. When Queen Farida was

- 07:30 Farouk's queen. And , you know, it went something like, "Queen Farida, Queen Farida, How the boys would like to ride her." It was how it went on. And I forget, I've forgotten all the rest of it. But it was a ditty on a play of the Egyptian National Anthem.

Not a song you would share with an Egyptian person?

No, not really, I suppose.

- 08:00 And talking in this vein. When we were in Palestine, early in the war, we were camped adjacent to the 2/24th Battalion, a Victorian battalion had a beautiful band. And they used to every morning march through the lines playing their band. And it was really beautiful music they played.
- 08:30 Also in that same area the little Arab boys, Arabic is a very tuneful, melodious tongue. And with the Arab kids talking it, it is really, almost a musical thing. Anyway that's just in passing.

What did the men whistle?

- 09:00 **Australians are famous for whistling. What were the songs they used to whistle?**

Oh, I don't know that. I don't know. The paperboys, I don't suppose you remember paperboys in the street selling papers and calling out, "Papers!" and the heading in the papers? Do you remember that? Well the paperboys used to walk between the lines of the

09:30 troops. Tent lines in Palestine. And they used to sell the Palestine Post, "Palestine Post. Palestine Post. Tom Blamey's got the pox. Palestine Post." I can always remember these little Arab kids selling papers and calling this out. Yes.

10:00 Now we come to Balikpapan. Balikpapan was the biggest oil refinery of the Far East. It was a very, very big complex. It was on the South-eastern corner of Borneo, on the Straights of Macassar.

10:30 Once again we were camped up on the Atherton Tablelands. And we embarked on an American troop ship this time. It was the General Anderson. And it left from

11:00 somewhere up on the Queensland coast and I can't remember exactly where. I sailed through the Whitsunday Passage during the war. 4 or 5 times sailed through the Whitsundays. And sailed up there through the Whitsundays whale season. And there were literally hundreds and hundreds of whales moving. So I think it was August. And the whales were all going the same direction.

11:30 And I think they were going south.

Heading away from the war?

They'd had their calves and they were moving south again. And anytime you looked overboard you would see whales swimming around.

That would have been a fantastic sight.

Yes. Lots and lots of them. Anyway, this ship the General Anderson

12:00 was an American troop ship. And we used to lay in the sun on deck, playing cards, two-up, housie-housie, which is bingo, and the Americans would sound the alert,

12:30 "Battle Stations. Everyone move to their battle stations." Well the Australians didn't jump to that. They took their time. They reckoned, you know, it was undignified to jump up and run to your battle stations so they took their time. And we went from Bowen or somewhere along there. I think it might have even been Townsville. Through the gap at Townsville, out past Magnetic Island,

13:00 around Bombay and up to Morotai on the north coast of New Guinea. At Morotai we disembarked and went onto the island, where we reprovisioned and re-organised. And then we got onto a landing ship tank. A landing ship built especially for tanks.

13:30 All steel decks.

Was that quite a new kind of a ship?

No. They were generally used during the war for landing tanks, for taking trucks and things ashore, you know, invasion. And we were put on board this. We were on deck. Now we went from Morotai

14:00 along the North coast of New Guinea, which is directly under the equator, right around the top of the Celebes, down the Macassar Straights, off at Balikpapan. Now that trip, under the equator, on a steel deck, you could definitely fry an egg on it.

14:30 And we were on deck with only a groundsheet. Trying to stretch groundsheet to groundsheet over the top to try and get out of the sun. It was frightfully hot.

And yet you had water all around you.

Yeah. Right. And there again, at night the whole of the

15:00 ocean, practically in any direction you'd see the reflection of volcanoes in the clouds. Because all that was a very volcanic coastline. And although you couldn't see the volcanoes down, the volcano light shone up into the clouds and lit the clouds up.

15:30 And you would see all these clouds with the volcano reflection in them. It was very interesting. And then we came down the Straights of Macassar and assembled off of Balikpapan. Now there were 33,900 troops involved in that landing. There were big time cruisers booming over

16:00 all of us. There were lots of destroyers and corvettes. And there were hundreds and hundreds of landing craft and landing ship tanks.

So this was the Australian and the Americans?

Australians yes. The Australians. 33,000 there were. Now that would have included I suppose

16:30 navy personnel. Must have been included in that figure. And the morning of the ashore bit we had a

grandstand view. Standing about 3 or 400 yards off the landing beach. We had a grandstand view of the whole operation.

17:00 The operation included Mitchell bombers, fogging with DDT Fog [insecticide] the whole of the beach head. From miles up the beach, both ways, up and down. Fogging it with DDT to kill mosquito bugs,

17:30 malarial mosquitoes and bugs and that sort of thing. And also we could see, now we were very, very frightened that the Japs might... there were oil tanks on the escarpment.... frightened those oil tanks would be run down the escarpment onto the beach and set alight.

18:00 But this had all been done previously. Oil tanks there were empty because in the state of the war the pipe lines supplying those tanks had been bombed and fractured. So there was no lighting of the beach as we were frightened of. But from our grandstand view of the whole thing the Japs

18:30 had dug in their gun emplacements into the escarpment. And our troops were using flamethrowers and you could hear the roar of the flamethrowers 'whoosh' as they were directing their flamethrower fire into

19:00 these guns. Now over there in the corner you'll see a shell. See that big shell? That was one of the Japanese gun shells. I had to cut about 6 or 8 inches off the top of that with a hacksaw so that I could get it into my sausage kit.

So you could hear the flamethrowers?

Oh you could hear the roar of the flamethrowers.

Could you hear the Japanese?

No. You could hear the Japanese guns. The Japanese would run their guns out on railway lines, put

19:30 their nose out and fire at us, well fire at the invading forces. Now the whole of the beach for miles and miles was fortified with logs. Logs of posts. Every few yards of the beach had

20:00 coconut trunks sticking up about 8 or 10 feet. And this went on for miles and miles and miles of beach. The beach had a tidal backwards and forwards movement of about 3, 400 yards. And came in and out about 3 or 400 yards. The casualties we had were quite heavy. But

20:30 all the action was on those 50 or 100 yards of flat ground from the beach to the escarpment.

So you were still on the troop ship were you?

I was still on the landing ship tank.

And were you watching the infantry...?

Yes, that's right. You could see the whole thing.

So you could see the men running onto the beach?

Yes, wading onto the beach and then proceeding up with their rifles

21:00 at the ready, up the beach head. Yes.

Sounds a bit reminiscent of Gallipoli.

Yes it does.

Were many men falling in that situation?

No, they weren't. But there were casualties. Quite a few casualties.

And so you had a dressing station back at the landing ship?

Well, in due course we did. But not at this stage we didn't. No. We didn't.

21:30 When we did go ashore we moved to the right and established a dressing station or something up along the beach-head where there was resistance or further action. And our CO, Colonel Humphries, who was a quick thinker because he had a three figure number. A quick thinker because

22:00 he was NX: New South Wales. NX900. So he was the 900th person to join the AIF in the World War. Anyone that had more than 5 figures in their number was a deep thinker, you know, took a long time joining.

So he was a quick thinker. What happened to him?

He got killed. He got killed in the action. In the action getting

22:30 on the beach. Now there's uncertainty as to how he was killed. He was killed with a tree on top of him. Now whether the tree was hit by shell and fell on him or what happened. He didn't seem to have any

wounds but he was killed by the tree on him. And it was thought that a shell hit the tree and the tree fell on top of him.

23:00 **Was the sky lit up? Was it all very bright?**

Oh yes. You could hear rifle fire and gun fire the whole time. And besides, the big cruisers, naval cruisers, they were behind us to our left. They were firing, pounding the beach-head before the troops.

23:30 **So they were aiming at the escarpments where the Japanese were?**

Yes, that's right. So we had a real grandstand view of the whole operation. It was quite a spectacular event. We had quite a few casualties.

24:00 Yes there were quite a few casualties. I won't say they were heavy casualties but there were casualties. And after the action it was then revealed that it was really quite unnecessary for that whole invasion to be performed. It was really showing off Australian participation in the war at that stage. It was not really necessary.

Unnecessary because the Japanese

24:30 **were already on their last legs?**

Yes that's right.

That wouldn't have been too good for the widows to hear that?

No, that's right. Yes I remember one little engineer fellow, when I say little engineer fellow, he was in the engineers repairing or involved in some bridge work. And he fell and he skewered himself on a

25:00 big stake sticking out of the bridge and killed him immediately. And this was after the cease-fire. And after the war had been finished actually. And that's where the war finished. It must have been September, was it?

How did you get the news? Where were you? Were you still in Borneo?

Yeah I was still in Borneo. And we got news that the war had finished. And then a few weeks after that

25:30 we got told that anyone who had had 5 years overseas and who was an original member of the unit, if they so wished, they could be discharged from the army. So I caught a ship called the Cheshire. And sailed between

26:00 Lombok and Bali, where the current is very, very strong between the two of those islands. Where the China Sea's to the North and the Indian Ocean's to the South and the current just twirls and swirls there. And this is sort of a troop ship I was on. Got turned around and faced the other way a couple of times.

There wouldn't have been too many soft

26:30 **places on a troop ship.**

No.

What was your reaction when you're in Borneo and you hear that the war has finished?

Oh, yeah, there were tears to the eyes I suppose. Then I was discharged on the 25th of November 1945.

So that was 5 years of your life.

Five years of my life.

27:00 Rather funny, well it wasn't funny, I had to be medically examined. And the fellow that medically examined me at discharge was Magarey, the fellow that was the CO of us at Maroubra Force in New Guinea, Kokoda. And he said, you know:

27:30 "Well I'm going to put you on an Invalid Pension, McRostie." He gave me a token invalid pension because I had, you know, all sorts of funny things during the war. But anyway, and he said, "For your effort."

He obviously had a great respect for what you'd done.

Yes. I've got letters from him here. On another matter

28:00 too. Which I haven't told you about but I'll tell you about in a minute. The reserves of the unit went to the Celebes. They went over to Celebes where they were receiving POWs. Prisoners of war of the Celebes were going through them. They went to Macassar, I think it was Macassar.

That would have been a terrible job.

28:30 I saw a lot of POWs in transit in Borneo.

You are talking about our POWs that had been released?

Ours that were being freed in Borneo. They came through us en route to going down to the wharves at Balikpapan

29:00 to be sent somewhere or other, to be sent home.

What impression did that leave on you?

Oh yes, they were just skin and bone. Then again I've got photos here somewhere of them. How thin their legs and faces were.

Was there any life in their faces?

No, no life in themselves or their faces. The Macassar Straights were, here again,

29:30 beautiful climate. The temperature never got above 95 during the day and never less than 85 during the night. Beautiful seas. And we got a native dugout, dug out of a big coconut log. Put a keel on it and a sail. And we used to sail right out. I didn't do it

30:00 too often because I was a bit scared. But we were right out into the Straights of Macassar. There was lots of stingrays. Stingrays as damn near as big as this room. Damn they were big stingrays. And we used to catch a lot of fish. Fish trap we used too. Because the tide was going in 300 yards we'd build ,

30:30 with camouflage netting that had been previously on guns, we'd build a fish trap right up at the high tide mark. And when the tide comes in it would cart the fish in and then of course they'd be caught in the trap as the tide went out. And we'd get not crayfish but lobsters, they didn't have, no they had the claws and not

31:00 the feelers crayfish have got. We got swordfish, big swordfish. Lots of stingray.

So was there a feeling of jubilation?

Oh yes.

And freedom on the ship on the way home?

Yes, yes. The ship went to discharge us in Melbourne. The Cheshire discharged us. And I don't remember much about it. Really I don't.

31:30 I was a bit stunned. It was a period when my brain didn't work very well.

I'm not surprised. It was probably overloaded. What kind of homecoming did you get when you got back to Adelaide?

Everyone was overjoyed to see me back. The other thing I was going to tell you about, I built

32:00 and had built a camp a Woodside camp as a tribute to the members of our unit. And I had it done from woe to go [start to finish]. Organised for the masons to make the freestone and had to have it engraved with and

32:30 printed. Then we had an official opening with Dr Magarey did the opening ceremony. We marched from their old campsite at Woodside that we had in 1940. Marched down in front of the cairn and had an official opening of the cairns.

33:00 Ours was one of a number of cairns sites up there at Woodside. But I had the organisation of the thing. I had a very nice letter from Magarey, Sir Rupert Magarey he finished up, thanking me for my

33:30 organisation and so forth. I've got that on record.

So went off to war when you were 20 years old?

Yes I had my 21st birthday in Palestine with amoebic dysentery.

And you come back as a 25 year old?

That's right, I would have been 25.

And you'd seen a lot of the world and you'd seen a lot of World War Two?

Yes.

How do you think you'd changed in those years?

Oh matured. But I had a bit of catching

34:00 up to do in some respects. In some regards I suppose. Because I lived it up for a couple of years before I got married.

So you did the catching up?

Yeah I did a bit of catching up. Yes it was quite a change in many ways.

34:30 The way people thought and think and lifestyle. And then when I moved here there were none of the houses. The whole area was just olive groves. And I built right behind here. I measured, had this house built in 1966 but it was 1950,

35:00 no, 1949, '50 that I cleared the land and did a lot of the building myself on my original home, which is in Penarth Avenue right behind. All I did was move the furniture with a two-wheel truck from that house into this house.

How was it fitting back into society after being discharged?

Oh I don't know. I was very busy at work. I had,

35:30 I thought a very responsible job as production manager of Fauldings.

Not every man was able to walk back into a job. You had work did you?

Yes. I'd worked here before the war. And then 1978 I went to Fauldings' opposition really. And it was operation manager there.

36:00 And the crowd I moved to where I did a feasibility on Fauldings and this crowd and Fauldings took over the crowd that I'd moved to. And that's when I finished up and I haven't worked since 1978, I suppose.

Was it hard to settle down into a routine job after you'd been used to army life and

36:30 **being in the Field Ambulance and witnessing the things that you had witnessed? Was it difficult to have a normal life?**

Well I had the heebie-jeebies [fears], you know. I used to dream, there were all sorts of funny things in my sleep. And I still do I might add.

Not funny pleasant?

No I sort of see things in my sleep. Wake up and I'm seeing things. And I'm doing it since I've been reading those records. I've been doing it

37:00 again lately. Seeing people at the window when I wake up at night.

People you know?

Well yes, sometimes people I know. They always disappear when I get up and go to the window.

Are they people that are still with us or are they people that have passed on?

No, no, no, they're people, well people I've known, a lot of them, but occasionally I see my wife and daughter in the window at night.

37:30 You know, if ever there's an explosion around the place I jump in the air a bit. And I tend to hit the ground at times when I hear a loud bang that sort of takes me by surprise.

Well that's what you were taught to do.

Yes.

How was your hearing after the war?

Not bad. I have to have

38:00 my ears blown out occasionally but no, it's not too bad. I wasn't in the artillery. I did hear lots of 'bang-bangs'.

Were there any hangovers from the diseases that you had or the illnesses that you had?

I have a blood transfusion every fortnight. I've got to go again next Tuesday. And I have about

38:30 three units of blood put into me every two or three weeks. And this has been brought about by [UNCLEAR] disease. I've got a bone marrow cancer that I've had for 8 or 10 years or more. That

39:00 my blood won't absorb, the haemoglobin in my blood won't absorb oxygen with the result that I'm short of oxygen in my blood. That's why I can't play tennis any more. I get angina attacks.

Is that in any way related to what happened to you?

They think it's possibly.

39:30 my immune system, when I was in the Ramu Valley and had a 'Pain of Unknown Origin': PUO. And I had, had typhus or dengue or cerebral malaria or something, where I was unconscious. They think my immune system might have taken it on. And I've lost

- 40:00 my left eye. My left eye can't see. That's been brought about by the haemoglobin in my blood coagulated and enlarged and it gets into my eye socket through the arterial system, the larger arterial system and can't get out through the finer, smaller
- 40:30 vein system. And with the result my eye blew up and burst. And I've got no sight at all because they had to cauterise the bleeding by 2,000 hits in the eye with laser. So cauterised it and burnt off the optic nerves in my eye. So I've got no sight in my left eye at all. I can't even see hand movement.
- So you trained up to do blood transfusions and**
- 41:00 **you end up now getting them every couple of weeks.**
- Yeah. Well I either have those or chemotherapy.

Tape 8

- 00:39 **You've had a wealth of experience in your service life. When you look back on those years what do you take away from those times?**
- Well I suppose life's experience.
- 01:00 I've had a very varied life really. From the hoi polloi of North Adelaide to a little farm in the south-east, to a state school to a college to a university to army to an OR in the army. I've had a very varied and interesting life. And people have often said to me, "You should write
- 01:30 a book. And your memory's pretty good." But I don't think it's as good as it used to be by any means. I suppose I can't expect it at my age and stage. I pride myself that I can mix with anybody. I know and can
- 02:00 converse with the toughest and the roughest to the hoi polloi. I go into that Naval and Military [Club] every Friday for lunch, you know, there's the hoi polloi in there in many ways. And I notice that Morris was a member there. I've seen him there on several occasions.
- 02:30 And I think that summarises it.
- Where there things that you saw during the war that you wish you'd never seen?**
- I certainly have. Things I've been involved in during the war and things I had to do during the war,
- 03:00 I wish I'd never had to do those things. But they were all part of it and they're the past and I treat them as the past and nothing I can do about. I consider I'm very lucky in many ways to have reached the stage that I am.
- 03:30 When I was 65 I didn't think I'd live to be what I am now. I really didn't.
- 83?**
- Yeah. And I feel, although I'm having this treatment at the moment, really pretty good. It certainly doesn't worry me. I don't worry about myself. I've got plenty of
- 04:00 worries with grandkids and things that keep me fully occupied in the worrying department.
- What would you say to your grandkids if they were old enough, if one of them said, "I'm thinking of going off to war."**
- I'd say, "I think it will do you the world of good. Should be in it." But I've said that many times.
- 04:30 **Go and join the Services?**
- Go and join the Services. Will do you the world of good. Will broaden the outlook and give you a little less inverting outlook on life. Think of somebody else and some other things. But I don't think so. No.
- Would you say that even having experienced the things you did at Kokoda? Is that an experience that you would wish on anyone?**
- No.
- 05:00 I wouldn't wish it on anyone. It was things that catch me unawares at times and really upset me. I haven't been bad today but sometimes I get caught.
- Can you talk about when you went back there with the Prime Minister?**
- I went

- 05:30 with 10 other, no there was 10 including me, Australia wide. And it was quite an honour to be chosen. And even those infantry fellas were very upset at times.
- 06:00 **Was that the first time you'd all been back there?**
- Yeah. The first time. No I think one fella had been back there before and one had been a school teacher up there.
- And this was a dedication of a memorial?**
- Yes a memorial at Isurava on the face of the mountain range facing Kokoda
- 06:30 and the Northern plains of New Guinea. It was a very solemn occasion. We flew in by Chinook from Popondetta to a landing pad at the site of the memorial. And we flew
- 07:00 Hercules from Port Moresby to Popondetta. Flew Black Hawk. Everything was done five-star stuff. We really got the world given to us on the trip. We were
- 07:30 feted in Brisbane. As I said we were all first-class, business-class flights. It was all an experience. I have been in a helicopter in New Zealand and here in Australia but I'd never been in a big Chinook.
- It's a huge honour though.**
- I suppose it was.
- 08:00 I've got lots of photos up there. I don't know whether you want to have a quick look at them or not. They covered the whole trip.
- How was it for you being back there again?**
- It was a bit of a tear jerker at times. I had to
- 08:30 watch it. There was Bronwyn Bishop [politician]. She did a walk of one village to another and a walk up there.
- 09:00 The Prime Minister of New Guinea, the Prime Minister here. Lots of native grass skirt stuff. Plenty pom-pom drums, tom-tom drums greeting us way out on the plains at northern New Guinea.
- 09:30 It was very well done. No expenses spared anywhere on the trip. New Guinea shocked me. The natives and the squalor of New Guinea is nowadays and the incidence of
- 10:00 HIV stuff is very, very prevalent up there apparently. The unemployment is terrible. Port Moresby itself had got 800,000 people in it. When I was there it was only a couple of streets. Now it's a big
- 10:30 city.
- A very changed country.**
- Yes. And I think that's about it. We were very sorry for the people up there. The native population are really struggling.
- 11:00 And yet, you know, they had so much initially. Nowadays what they get they don't seem to be properly utilising.
- Lots of things have changed since the 1940's...**
- It's a long time ago...
- It's a long time ago and even the way war is conducted has completely changed.**
- Oh yes.
- What opinion do you have now about war?**
- 11:30 I don't know whether, you know, it seems problems should be solved some other way but there's no other way. Might is power. I don't think it can ever change. Might is right and it will always be thus.
- 12:00 I don't think we'll ever be without it. I don't suppose I've got much more to say really.
- Well you've said a lot and they're important stories to hear and it's been a real honour to listen to them.**
- Thank you
- 12:30 for your tolerance and patience.

INTERVIEW ENDS

