

Australians at War Film Archive

Clement Guilfoyle (Clem) - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:35 **The first thing we want to do as I said is to get an overview of your life so I'll ask you a couple of questions but we'll just go in point form**

01:00 **where you were and what you did and get through to your war experience and after your life. So to start with can you tell me where you were born and what your family was?**

I was born in Cooktown, North Queensland, which is on the Endeavour River renowned in history for Captain Cook's predicament that he had on the Barrier Reef, and he careered his Endeavour on the Endeavour River and that's where I was born so

01:30 Cooktown's in history twice. In Cook's time and my own. But the position where Cook had his ship was almost exactly in front of where my residence was and of course the residence was the police station in Cooktown. My father by that time was sergeant of police but when I was born my father was constable and stationed in

02:00 Maytown and my mother came to Cooktown to have the birth of both two boys. The older boy was born before we got to Maytown but Phil and I were born in Cooktown, having a mother come from Maytown for the birth each time and of course in those days Maytown was

02:30 most remote, it was inland from Cooktown on the Palmer Goldfield and by the time of our being there it was all practically a dead town and of course today it doesn't exist. The population of Maytown even in our time was down to about 30 people I think and of course before radio and those things were general and

03:00 there was very little to do in Maytown at night time and that sort of, you provided your own entertainment. My mother was a mainstay and that because she had singing ability and piano playing and things like that but poor Maytown wasn't very good as a place of entertainment at night time except for one couple. They solved that but they ended up with

03:30 15 children and they were the chief identities in the town. But there were remnants of mining days, Chinamen and so and so on like that who were attracted there for the gold prospects.

Was it Maytown?

Maytown, M.a.y.t.o.w.n.

How long did you live there for?

04:00 **How old were you when you finally left?**

I was five when we came away from there and I think my memories of Maytown would be in about the last six months or so because obviously I would have been too young to, however I do remember quite a bit of it.

Where did you go after that?

We came back to Cooktown and my father was the sergeant of police by then. We were in Cooktown for about four years

04:30 I think. There was quite a lot, we had a lot of adventures there because it was on a good river, plenty of life around and when I say life, wildlife, billygoats galore, and fish and birds and so on.

It seems a fantastic place for a young man to grow up?

Yes, yes we were a bit too adventurous actually but I can't really recall

05:00 exactly what we did but I know for one thing Maytown, Cooktown on St Patrick's Day they had to close the town virtually and the main street which was about the only street that had any life in it very little of

- that in the way of traffic. But they closed off the town and we used to have a billycart goat race and the
- 05:30 talent for that of course, one of our wise heads amongst the boys reckoned a wether was better than a billygoat, you know a full goat, and there were numerous around Grassy Hill which was the hill behind us. So we decided we must castrate a goat and convert him into a wether and he would be talent for the race. Which we tried to do but
- 06:00 the agility of the goats that we caught on Grassy Hill was a bit on our technique, anyhow the point was we never won a goat by using wethers from Grassy Hill. I remember one day we not only had the St Patrick's Day rejoicing in the town but at the end of the day,
- 06:30 there was a young man who came to Cooktown as an auditor, he was only there temporarily. And he borrowed my father's dinghy, they used to use and went away hunting and unfortunately as he got out of the boat he accidentally caused the gun to fire and he was shot
- 07:00 right in the chest and by the end of the day of course they brought the boat back and there was our boat almost filled with water and much blood. Anyhow it was fatal, but my mother.

How old were you at this time?

I would have been about six or seven I suppose.

It must have been a very strong memory for you?

Oh yes, yes. We had lots of special little things.

- 07:30 In those days it was unusual for aircraft of course and we had the great glory of a squadron, five aircraft actually, as they flew out from Great Britain and on their way back they called into Cooktown and there was this wonderful experience of having these wonderful aircraft which was a great novelty on the river and it was wonderful to see
- 08:00 and also the first baby Austin I saw there. This enterprising fellow came up from Sydney and a baby Austin car. They were big events for those times.

Cooktown is a fascinating place. We'll go back to talk about that in some detail because I think that's very interesting. Did you spend all your teenage years in Cooktown? When did you leave?

- 08:30 No, we left probably 1929 and we came south to Brisbane then and were in Brisbane for a short time and then my father who didn't like cities requested a transfer and we went to Harrisville which is not far, only about 40 miles out but the point was once again roads and things like that.
- 09:00 A visit from Harrisville to Brisbane was a big event. Only quite seldom actually, a couple of times a year.

It's a rural area outside Brisbane?

Yeah that's right and that's where our father was in a station and that went up to about 1935.

How old were you when you left Harrisville?

- 09:30 I was 14.

Were you working at this stage?

No, still at school but when I came to Brisbane I went to the Christian Brothers College up there at Gregory Terrace and it was from there that I had my first employment which was with an accountant, two accountants actually, one office and then another

- 10:00 but it was accountancy that was my. I was a clerk of course I wasn't qualified and I never qualified because I joined the army and never went back to it you see.

So you were doing this job when war broke out?

Oh yes.

Did you decided to join up immediately?

Yes, I did. I had tried before. I wanted to be a pilot, a fighter pilot, but I did a fair bit of reading of that nature so

- 10:30 I'll make reference to it in a moment. But I had pneumatic fever in my school days, not long before I left school but that affected my heart reading and I didn't qualify for the air force you see. However I was reading. I had read well a lot of books of the war and
- 11:00 such as Erich Remarque's, All Quiet On The Western Front and Ion Idris's Desert Column and so there I was sort of keenly interested in serving in the military. I then decided to be in the military and people would say "What are you going to be when you go in?" and I'd say "An infantry man"

11:30 because my reading had influenced that and the point was that evidence of World War 1 was still very evident. And lifts in those days weren't automatic, entirely automatic, and there used to be a lift man and in most cases the lift man was a veteran from World War 1 and it was quite evident that he had a limb absent or he was victim of

12:00 gassing and something like that. So there was a lot of evidence that joining the infantry wasn't a good idea. However I persisted and those who enlisted with me chose other things such as transport or something like that but I still stayed with the idea of serving in the infantry and that's what sort of happened except at the end, towards the end of the war I joined the paratroopers, transferred

12:30 to the paratroopers but by nature my activity was only being transported by parachute or air and dropping down and I was infantry after that anyhow so actually my full service was in infantry.

You saw some pretty impressive battles in the war?

Yes, well they were mainly quite important yes, yeah.

Where did you end up

13:00 **-serving? What battalion did you join?**

Oh I actually, I had joined the 1st Australian Paratroop Battalion but by the time I went in I had been seconded to the British Army and the purpose being that they wanted to drop persons behind the enemy lines you see. You would be well aware that they did that in Europe

13:30 before the invasion there. The purpose of that was to find out various things about the enemy disposition you see in particular prisoner of war camps because they wanted to both rescue them and not mistakenly bomb them you see. So our purpose was to send back intelligence on those

14:00 matters and I was confined in, operated in the jungle with the Chinese guerrillas, oh well mainly Chinese, there were a few Malays, but mainly all Chinese. There were various areas where these Chinese guerrillas were situated and of course they were moved around, didn't stay too long in any one spot

14:30 obviously. And that's where I was when the war ended of course. I was still behind the lines and came out and told the Japanese that they'd lost the war.

It must have been a very difficult job?

As a matter of fact you know we had no force with us at that time and had to convince the Japanese that they'd lost the war which was well a

15:00 difficult thing to do, particular with the Japanese because they always pretended that they didn't understand what you said and therefore it took a lot of time of negotiating with them. And then after that, after the forces came in and took over, I was in Singapore for a short period and did a run around trying to catch up to Japanese

15:30 personnel, army personnel who had been accused of various atrocities. From there I came back by ship to Australia.

Did you stay in the army?

No I didn't. I did for a short period but the army didn't have any attraction then it was just for, the people who were coming in were

16:00 men who didn't want to be in the army anyhow but not conscription, I've forgotten what term they use. Anyhow they were called up.

National Service?

National Service, yeah. That was the intention of most of them. I wouldn't say most of them but generally they weren't keen because the war had been fought.

So did you go back to accountancy after the war?

No I did not.

16:30 I went back, became a sales representative and that's how I spent the rest of my life both as a representative, direct selling out in the country, and later internally at the office but nothing adventurous or wonderful about all that.

Did you

17:00 **get married before the war or when you came home?**

Well after the war. I met Margaret at Wagga. She was a teacher and we married and lived in Wagga for 14 years and then came to Sydney and ultimately within about a year we had this house built and we took root here.

So the longest residents in this area almost?

17:30 40 years, yeah.

Did you have children?

Yeah we've got two. The first one was a daughter, Kathleen, and Philip is a boy and they've now married and we've got two very nice in-laws and plus several grandchildren. Two boys with Phillip and Imogen is Kathleen's

18:00 baby, only a year old, so other than that we've had dogs.

You've still got dogs now. That's great that's your entire life except for one area. Before you joined the paratroop battalion you were an experienced soldier before that. Can you just tell us about where you served before you arrived in New Guinea? Just go through the places you were in.

Well we departed from Australia via Sydney on the Queen Mary and

18:30 we eventually ended up in the one voyage but transferred from the Queen Mary at Sollum and we went up into the Suez Canal and than disembarked half way through El Kantara and went into Palestine. I mentioned Ion Idris earlier, one of his books I read he served in the Light Horse in World War 1

19:00 and Gallipoli and the Light Horse in Palestine itself, renowned for their attack on Beersheba and went on for the ultimate victory in 1918. By that time they were up at Damascus and as we disembarked from the ship,

19:30 the Indrabarah, which took us into the Suez Canal. I was wonderfully taken by the fact that I was covering the very ground that Ian Idris wrote about and it was just a wonderful experience. Amongst the first things I did I went to a two-inch mortar training school and there I saw in the hills, you know just mounds,

20:00 were the traces of the dugouts that the Australians in World War 1 made, you see, and the same when I got up to Beersheba later in the war about 6 months later. There again were these spots where, well in this case the Turks occupied.

20:30 It was a wonderful experience coming back you know on the historical things like that.

You must have felt very much part of the Anzac tradition?

I did yeah.

And then you went on to create more of that Anzac tradition? Where did you serve after Palestine?

Well I went with Wavell, General Wavell of the British Forces, allied forces we called them. With his

21:00 force they raided, I should say the Italians when they first started in the war there was no armament around the borders of Egypt and that sort of stuff in their direction, that's Libya, and Marshall Graziani was the Italian commander and with some success they entered into Egypt and then Wavell, the allied commander, his

21:30 forces took after, then engaged the Italians and chased them right back fighting on the way back to Bardia and through Tobruk and Benghazi and right back to the Gulf of Tripoli, Gulf of Tunis?, anyhow right back to the and then we from Palestine, that we've just mentioned. I should say with Wavell's

22:00 forces was Australia's 6th Division and they did all these wonderful things as I just said there, and by the time we got there we were to relieve the 6th Division, the 6th Division went off to Greece, was to go to Greece and Crete and so on which they did and of course they had a very hard time there and they were beaten. So they were all chased back to Africa and we of

22:30 course relieved them in Libya but we'd gone as far as Mersa el Brega which is up towards the other end of their territory. We were in that position when Rommel came and took our command and we handed over, my particular section were handed to a small force of Free French

23:00 and I think they were the French Foreign Legion. The French Foreign Legion split up, they were, some went to Vichy France, or allied themselves to Vichy France. Another portion of them came over to the allied side and they relieved us there. We went back, took back a short distance and took up position again and Rommel

23:30 then, we kept beating our way back.

The tables had very much turned at that stage?

That's right, quite reversed. We took up position behind Benghazi, there was a place there El Regima, and this is a particular memory for me and we were there behind sangers, which are stone improvised by ourselves you know and took up place there, and the British at the time were very

- 24:00 early in the retreat and they still intended to hold our prisoners so they put them in trains and took them back towards Egypt you see and there were these mass of Italian prisoners and the train went past us of course. They were in a happy mood, they saw us, they were doing it anyhow, but as they passed us, they were singing these operatic pieces and my
- 24:30 memory, my opinion of the Italians was that they sang opera all day because of this.
- That was quite a surreal experience in a way?**
- Yes like I said Osolomeo and La Traviata. That used to come from these trains and they enjoyed the fun of it and so did we but later on of course the irony of that of course was very
- 25:00 strong but later as the war went on and shortly after this actually. The Germans of course, there were quite a few Germans who spoke English and they at night time used to come, several experiences I had this way, come up fairly close to our situation, our site, and they'd sing one of our songs. Say at that time We'll Hang
- 25:30 Our Washing on the Siegfried Line, Roll Out The Barrel and Lambeth Walk, any of those that were popular with the British people. So they rubbed it in that way. Then many times we took up positions like that but one position I remember quite well was at
- 26:00 Barce, the looking down, mostly we were in sparse desert sort of country but at Barce looking at the, what we call the pass, but it was only a, well it wasn't all that threatening as a mountain piece, but it was unusual and it was oasis-like as far as looking down on it, was really pleasant to see and anyhow we were there waiting for them
- 26:30 to come and then we got up again and this went on time and again until we took, entered Tobruk you see but during that retreat of course we had sparse food even when you know we first went there just bully beef and biscuits mainly and well when we were in this retreat and by this time there were great masses of
- 27:00 personnel on foot and in trucks and things like that retreating and we came to a spot that we found, recognised as being an army dump, so we got out of our vehicle. They were all run down pieces of flats and things like that, most of these vehicles and we raided this dump anyhow and found wonderful things there that
- 27:30 we had never been supplied with such as what do they call it, meat and vegetable and some desserts and Canadian carnation milk and things like that. Anyhow we helped ourselves to these things then got on our way. The fact was that while we were doing this the rest of the battalion went on, a large part of the battalion went on, and Rommel
- 28:00 staged an ambush and we lost most of our headquarter company and quite a few others. Were probably about I have to look it up but about 250 men you see and quite a lot of my particular company and they spent the rest of the war prisoners of war in Italy mainly and also Germany and the part of Poland that the Germans had taken
- 28:30 and we of course we went into Tobruk and in quick time of course Rommel came along and we had a fight there and of course and from then on we were besieged in Tobruk and he made an attack on us there. Well, we had a mighty fight then. At that time we still had a
- 29:00 little bit of air force but after this act we had no air force for quite awhile but above us were these aircraft in combat, and down below were the infantry engaged and the machine gunners and the artillery tanks were so close that they were at point blank and that's how, that was our real introduction to the
- 29:30 big fight. And one little bit there, A Company had, Kev Robby tells the story, he became our regimental sergeant major, at this time he was company sergeant major and the tanks turned and pulled out you see and the infantry not supported by the tanks,
- 30:00 that's how we got our prisoners of course, and this day that Jack Edmondson won the VC [Victoria Cross] for his bravery. But A Company was the one that took the most prisoners, ultimately about nearly 120 I think. And Robby tells the story you see we came back in this retreat and we were running out of ammunition, right down with a fight like that we were right down
- 30:30 and almost out of ammunition and Robby took a reckoning, by signalling the, he took a reckoning from the platoon commanders what their ammunition position was and it was grim in all respects so Robby who was a big man, massive, you know strong looking man, stood up and called out to the Germans to surrender and
- 31:00 nothing came from them and then each of the commanders, platoon commanders, that's three men, they were lieutenants, each stood up and called on them to surrender, the same act you see. Each of these fellows was a very big man. One was 6ft 7 like yourself. What are you? 6 ft 7?

6ft 4, the archive doesn't need to know that.

It won't go on record. They were big men you see.

31:30 That's got no significance until later. They surrendered and were taken prisoner. Years later, well after the war the Africa Corp people invited people from AIF [Australian Imperial Force] over to a reunion and Robby was impressed by this host who spoke English so well you see. He said "You speak English well.

32:00 How was that?" He said "I learnt it as a prisoner of war when I was in Australia" and so they checked on their activities on that day, how he was captured and so on, and it turned out that Robby was the bloke who captured him and he spent his rest of the war in Australia.

So he took the prisoner back to Australia.

Yeah.

I did not know that.

32:30 **What happened to you after that? Let's just go through to the end of your Middle Eastern campaign?**

I was wounded in Tobruk during the siege. There's a little tin there that I've got that I had in my haversack and as an example of, a souvenir of my being wounded I've keep it, and it's crushed up by the percussion of the bomb

33:00 and there's a piece of shrapnel still embedded in it. I'll show it to you later.

So you were wounded by a mortar bomb?

A mortar bomb. Yes, there's a map of Tobruk in there. The Germans had cut into our defences and at this stage we were winning back what they'd cut out of Tobruk from their point, effort,

33:30 and we'd done this several places and of course when the Germans discovered what we've done they applied a lot of wrath to us and this happened several times of course and out of those various fellows were killed but I wasn't at this stage but then again there was this one and I was caught in that one and wounded then. And

34:00 my concussion was so strong I woke up a week later. Well during that time of course I was on a stretcher and so on pulled out of Tobruk by the destroyer. The destroyers used to serve Tobruk at night time and they'd go through a terrific barrage of being attacked at various ways and then they'd go back with the wounded you see.

34:30 Well I was on that and although I was unconscious the ship was copping all this and still in danger and then I went back to El Kantara where I got off the ship from Australia and then the hospital was there and I recovered there and then I went back to Palestine and the process of coming back to the unit to you know rejoining the unit.

35:00 **Was the siege still on at this stage?**

It was still on but they got out of it before I got to them. I was held back in reinforcement camp. I protested very greatly but it turned out I was still "Bomb happy" you see and they wouldn't let me go back into action till that was passed but I eventually got back into action.

We'll talk about that later on because

35:30 **that was very interesting as well. You ended up serving in El Alamein after that? Was that the next battle you were in?**

Yes, by the time I rejoined the unit up in Syria and I got my, while I was delayed as I said, I was taken off reinforcement and I was very angry about it. The reason being that I was really bomb-happy that's why they pulled me off,

36:00 so I was given instructional jobs in the reinforcement depot, reinforcement camp I should say. And I became a sergeant there. I didn't want to retain my rank because it kept me from rejoining my unit so I had myself demoted and went

36:30 back to the unit. By this time of course Japan was in the war and we were anxious to come back. But suddenly, Rommel. Once again by this time over this period there were fights between the allies over who would win one round and the Germans Italians would win the next, so there's this retreating two and from and then the big threat came

37:00 and Rommel was really threatening Cairo and so on and I had by this time rejoined the unit up in Syria and we suddenly called back to the front down in Egypt. And we got there and just managed to be successful in holding it and while there we stayed

37:30 for some months of course while we regained our strength and so on and by this time of course, Rommel, ah Montgomery was the commander and chief of this area and we prepared for what became the Battle of El Alamein. It was the second Battle of El Alamein as far as we were concerned because we

fought when we first got

38:00 back into Egypt and we held the line until we were ready for what is known now as the Battle of El Alamein which was on October 23 it began. That's where we were and from there we went back to Palestine and embarked and came back to Australia and from then on we went into action in New Guinea. But of course the New Guinea campaign had been on from

38:30 December '41 no '42, 41, 41, and I mean the Kokoda Trail had already been fought and Milne Bay action which stopped the Japs action, stopped the Japs coming back to Australia and then we went into action there. We were in action at invasion of

39:00 Lae which we did from the sea and the 7th Division did it from Ramu Valley.

It's a debate over who arrived there first?

Yeah, Yeah. Actually the 7th really take the credit there. And then we had the Finschhafen invasion and participated in that and once again I was wounded and

39:30 by the time I convalesced I got back to. What happened? I'd been promoted to a lieutenant by then. I'd been to various schools and so on that they have and I qualified there and I was at Canungra camp which was a jungle training camp up at Queensland of course

40:00 and from there I joined the paratroops. From the paratroops I went into the other action.

In Malaya?

Yeah Malaya but I went to my base in Sollum, from there I went into Malaya.

Those later parachute behind the lines activities you did were under British command? Were you with other Australians at that time?

No they were all under British command

40:30 yes. There were quite a few Australians though. One chap was John Leak, he had been 8th Division and he was at a school in Burma when the Japs came into there so he wasn't caught you see, so he was doing action that way then and several other Australians.

41:00 That bring us completely up to date that's fantastic. We know where those things were and we're going to go back and talk about them all in detail.

Tape 2

00:30 **Alright Clem I'd like to talk a little bit about your childhood in Cooktown and in Maytown if you can remember any of that? Because it's a unique place to grow up I think. Can you tell us a little bit more about growing up in those places?**

Yes well I went back many years later of course in the 70s so my infant memory has

01:00 been supported a bit by a later visit you see. I have, firstly Maytown I've already remarked on the Parsons having 15 children.

It sounds like it was a very Irish Catholic community. Is that fair to say?

It was yeah and that applied also in Cooktown. As a matter of fact

01:30 we must have been surrounded greatly by Irish people you know the nuns and so on because we acquired Irish pronunciations and it showed up when we went into South Queensland. We went to Harrisville and when we registered for the first day at the state school at Harrisville the wife of the head teacher, there were only two teachers, the wife of the head

02:00 teacher said she was so entertained by our Irish brogue that she kept us talking considerably instead of being (UNCLEAR). We arrived late and she sort of intercepted us as we came into the school grounds and when she found that we had this Irish brogue it entertained her so she kept us longer than she generally, she told

02:30 my mother this of course, than she would have if it had just been another sort of person in the same situation. So she was quite entertained and your remark about being an Irish background, yes.

Was your family Irish?

Australian born but 100 per cent Irish you know genetically or whatever you want to call it.

Did they talk about Ireland as home?

No, not at all. A little reference but

03:00 it wasn't a big subject amongst them. We did a fair bit of exploring in later life but about being Irish it wasn't big in our growing up just the environment I'd say.

When you say your parents were Australian born had they lived their lives in North Queensland or had they come from other parts?

Well Queensland really. My mother was

03:30 in North Queensland up until the time of her marriage and further on but my father came from Warwick and as a police constable he went up into North Queensland and he did the Cape York area all. He was doing a lot of work around those parts and my mother was a young girl in Cooktown.

04:00 When he came there as a police constable that's how they met. And from there of course they went up to Maytown and so we began.

The population you mentioned up there before was very small. What type of people lived up there at the time?

Well in Maytown, firstly there Percy Parsons gained some income

04:30 from dingo hunting and that sort of stuff and sandalwood they did a lot, Sandalwood of course was a worthy sort of an export at those times until they chopped it all out unfortunately. China of course made great use of Sandalwood. I can remember he used to

05:00 get great numbers of brumbies and I really don't know what income he got out of it. I don't think he got a bounty or anything like that but anyhow these brumbies were a great sight stampeding through, there were various ways until they were put into a big yard, you know a big strong yard. They were quite ferocious, quite threatening actually.

05:30 But the mainstay of those who were there was actually mining, still looking for gold and there were a fair number of Chinese doing that and one memory I have of that is I was with my father who was going around his duties and we came to what seemed to be a well and with my father of course went up to it and

06:00 shouted down the well and there I was as you know just an infant really and suddenly out of this well came this head which was that of a Chinese and it gave me the biggest fright in my life and that's the sort of thing that went on you know.

Did your father have his hands full as a policeman up in that kind of community? Was there lots of crime?

Yes, they used to go on big patrols you know.

06:30 Remember right back in the horse and buggy days and in fact it was hard work for the buggy because no road or very little road and it was all very rough. When we went from Maytown to Laura was the head of the railway. From Cooktown to Laura just a rail line it doesn't connect up anywhere else and when we go from Maytown to

07:00 Laura to catch the train to Cooktown that would be by sulky and we'd have to stay overnight on the way that is outdoor camping not stay at a hotel or anything like that, and we'd go to Laura and catch the train which I think was once a week, down to Cooktown. In one of these instances when we were the last trip actually mother

07:30 was advanced in pregnancy with a sister who came, Leila, but in the sulky my brother, younger brother he was two years older than I, and our situation would be to sit on the floor of the sulky which was quite close to the tail of the horse pulling it. He used to make

08:00 lots of smells of course. We got the full gust of them and my brother who was one to fiddle with anything that looked a bit mechanical. There was this handle below the seat it was for adjusting the seat too and he used to turn it like fast and slow and so on and made the adjustment and of course mother heavily pregnant was in

08:30 the sulky and a black maid and they were the two. My father would be riding a horse and so on and any furniture or anything like that was carried in a special heavy wagon. Anyhow my brother was playing with this thing and he twisted and twisted until the seat went right off and mother and the

09:00 black maid tumbled out of the sulky and onto the very rough track below. And poor, I think her name was Mary, she broke her arm and mother of course was in an anxious state because of being pregnant but we got going again and so on got back to Cooktown. I don't know whether that led to an early delivery of

09:30 Leila or not but it was quite a startling experience.

What was the terrain like up there?

Very rough, very sparse. I think they describe it as Savannah country. I don't say sparse but not a close jungle. There were parts but the part I am referring to

- 10:00 it was very rough and spindly sorts of trees in the main, there would be very big ones too. When we got to Laura of course the pub there was the only part of place that had any business actually and as the police railway station master or something like that and there was a bridge just beyond the
- 10:30 station that was never, the line was never extended beyond there. Of course the gold gave out. In the general way gave out but the Chinese people had their more industrious methods and they still extracted a living out of gold there and there were quite a few, not an intense population but quite a few about.

So in the Cooktown area

- 11:00 **there were Irish people, Chinese people. Were there any other ethnic national groups?**

Not in any great number but the harbour, the river, where the wharfs were and that, that area of the river there would be quite a few sailing ships, sailing boats moored around because it was the

- 11:30 port that was the main port for the Japanese luggers. In those days of course the business was getting troker shell from the reef area and the luggers were manned by Chinese, no Japanese captains and the general crew was usually, they used to call them,
- 12:00 Murray islanders but now Torres Strait islanders was the general cover of that population. Torres Strait islanders would be the way to describe them today but we used to call them Murray islanders you see. That was a particular island that was better known in those times.

Did you ever come into contact with any of the Japanese people on these boats?

Oh, yes.

- 12:30 Yes, see there was another duty my father had business, you know, I don't know what that would be but various ways he had business and they'd call on us too. I remember one Japanese captain gave me a, I'd go with my father you see, gave me a pigeon. He said "You take it home", you know. Of course I got home it flew away of course. I imagine it went back to the Japanese as a
- 13:00 homing pigeon but at home in Cooktown and he probably had it ready there to stew it. He gave it to me so nobody gained out of that transaction except I was angry with Japanese for a while. And but that's the point, these luggers, troker shell luggers, of course they'd find a pearl or two occasionally they were
- 13:30 quite a scene in the river then. The river was quite broad at that part, a very pretty river.

How did these different groups relate? Was there any ill feeling between them?

No, no occasionally, not occasionally fairly regularly really when these ships came in the crews from the ships would fight probably the local

- 14:00 Aboriginal or something like that. They'd be drinking and fights like that. That's the only real conflict around the place. The rest of it was you know quite neighbourly and quite pleasant. We had a good time as kids because we were always, frequently on the harbour. We did other things too of course.
- 14:30 I remember in one particular case the police station there was sort of a mall; it was our residence which combined the office of the station and our own residence and then there was the gaol which was rather a, well wouldn't hold any of the people of today confined very well because they would get out of it. Anyhow
- 15:00 there was this area that was government property really, such as the court house and things like that, and we found plenty of time there but I have in mind in particular there was a store room which we used to use to have pictures. We had a magic lantern and things like that and but also kept there were exhibits such as
- 15:30 skeletons and things like that so we generally had to make our fun with various things. Frightening people who came to see magic lantern and suddenly they had a skeleton sitting beside them or frightening them somehow or other. In this warehouse too it was close to, were really low to the ground, so the fowls used to lay eggs and we could never get them you see. But after a period of course eggs accumulated and
- 16:00 I'd go under. They'd send me under because I was the smallest, and a little Aboriginal who was the son of the police tracker and he was similar size to me, so we used to go in and get these eggs which were largely rotten by that time, tropical heat and so on and we'd distribute them amongst the boys and then we'd stage a fight, you know an egg fight. That used to be quite
- 16:30 an occasion because the eggs used to stink like anything. When we ran out of ammunition and had the pleasure of our fight we'd ducked into the river and tried to clean ourselves up. I think the smell stayed around a long time.

How was the general relationship with the Aboriginal communities?

That was very good actually. They were very

- 17:00 friendly. And my mother and father and so on were as generous as they could be in various ways so my mother did quite a lot of sewing for them and things like that. It was all very good actually. They were treated well too you know, they weren't treated like anything inferior or things that did happen later on by various people but they were given their position quite
- 17:30 well. Actually they were very close to being the tribal style you see. A couple of times a year they would assemble. They would come into town, Cooktown, of course most of them were still tribal in their living and you see and they'd get a handout of blankets and things,
- 18:00 blankets, tobacco and things like that. But it was only a, it wasn't all that they used throughout the year, it was a contribution, a help of course but they'd. I remember the Aboriginal widow. One of the things was if she was a widow they used to get clay or something like
- 18:30 that and have little balls of clay around in their hair and that would denote their position as being a widow. But there were they weren't, the group I'm talking about weren't really urbanised or anything like that and the north shore of the Endeavour River that was not covered by any
- 19:00 housing or anything like that. The Aboriginals at certain times of the year used to congregate there and their huts there were genuine bark huts, not galvanised iron or anything like that. They used to congregate there and we used to go over there and play around with their piccaninnies as the term was in those times.
- 19:30 So we had a lot of time with Aboriginals and then of course the black tracker and his family and as a matter of fact my mother acted as a midwife for one of her children and she acted as a midwife in Maytown too for, I told you about Mrs Parsons with 15 children, she helped with a couple of those actually. That just about covers that area.

20:00 How did you... school up so far in an isolated place like that. How were you educated? Was there a school?

Oh yes. Only in Cooktown didn't have correspondence or anything. We went to the convent in Cooktown. The convent at the centenary of Captain Cook's experience in the Endeavour River, it was by that time no longer a Convent and they saved it as

- 20:30 and converted it into a museum and a very handsome building and it's very pleasing to know that they made further use of it like that. When we went back in the 70s it was rather a great experience to see that what had been my mother's school and so on
- 21:00 had been converted to a museum. Our mother went there and of course ourselves so there we were back in a museum.

How much did you know of the rest of the world and the rest of Australia?

By these standards of today very little. Ourselves as a family we were fairly well informed,

- 21:30 comparatively I mean. Because most of the residents weren't so conscious of the rest of the world I think. I mean that's a memory that stays with me anyhow but we sort of knew a fair bit of general things. I mean the name Theodore was one that would come up. Theodore had been a premier of Queensland and there was a
- 22:00 scandal about Theodore after he became treasurer in the Labor Government in 1929, Scullin's government. But that sort of thing was our knowledge but it wasn't the sort of information that most kids would have come across. But then again being the policeman, the police station, we received
- 22:30 more news than the ordinary resident you see. Incidentally, the big feature as far as Cooktown was concerned was the only contact at that time with the outside world was the motor launch that used to come from Cairns once a week. It came up on a Tuesday and stayed and departed back to Cairns on the Thursday morning
- 23:00 and that was the big social feature of each and every week was to meet the boat as it came in on the Tuesday and such news and anything that was good to be expected, a present or a purchase from one of the bigger firms, that would come up on that boat so it was the magical thing the arrival. It was called the
- 23:30 Morinda in those days. Charles Hailes of Cairns. The Hailes company became quite big in boating in later years, you know war time and so on. I don't know what the situation is there now but they've probably disappeared by now.

You were living in a very different community to most of Australia at this stage.

Yes.

The rest of Australia was a very firm part of the British Empire. As in an Irish community in

such a far flung part of the

24:00 **country, did you feel any ties to the Empire?**

No not at that time. Later on in my personal experience I think I became more of that frame of mind than most other members of my family. I was inclined to read information or books

24:30 dealing with that. As a matter of fact as I said before I read Idris's Desert Column with wonderful fervour and the other one. Also I should mention Lawrence's Seven Pillars of Wisdom was another one and quite a few others but I can't recall them quite now. Sorry I recall the one about the Foreign Legion, PW Wren's

25:00 about the foreign legion anyhow. I was well and truly international by then because that was about the Foreign Legion. Oh yes I was fairly conscious of the, you know British Empire and faithful constituent from my point of view. But I don't think it

25:30 was quite that way with most of the others. When we talk of Cooktown my activity as kids I just remember the presence of the flying foxes. We used to have great fun amongst, they used to in the day nest in the mangroves along the river and of course we used to we had our Daisy air rifles and so on,

26:00 and we used to go up there and shoot at them and so on. That's another thing I recall about the Daisy air rifle all the birds there were fig trees and things like that a great number, mangoes, and the birds used to come in great numbers. Ida Jenkins who had the hotel quite close to where we lived she told us

26:30 that "She would like some pigeon pie", you see, so we said "We'll get the pigeons for you" and we shot like anything and gave them to her. She couldn't use them because they had some many wounds from our previous shooting. They were covered in wounds. Shows you how effective a Daisy air rifle was.

Did you ever when you were playing with your air rifle and reading about the Desert Column

27:00 **and the Western Front, did you ever imagine yourself being soldier?**

I didn't think it was necessary. I thought all the soldiering was covered already. Britain and the allies had won the war and everybody was back in their place you see. So I didn't put myself into that future, consideration of the future. It was

27:30 not a thought for me. I would have loved to have flown those British sea planes that visited us and things like that but that would be my imagining. If I want to fly a plane I'd have to be a, join the air force sort of the thing but as for soldiering in the other sense of winning glory for Empire or whatever that was not a feature of my

28:00 experience at all.

Was there much talk about past wars in your childhood?

No the first memory of anything of that nature that I had it was an Anzac Day and there was this chap who was very drunk and of course we had pretty good measure of the drunks in the town because again in the police background and here he was on the wharf that I just

28:30 mentioned. The Morinda had just come in and so on and here he was going crook and I could hardly understand him because he had a Scottish accent you see. There was this fellow Scotty on the wharf terribly drunk and extremely red faced. His entire appearance, skin area, was absolutely red. He was a bloke who shouldn't have been

29:00 in the tropics at all because he was a fair person and I think he used rum or something like that it was a very strong drink, anyhow that was my first acquaintance of Anzac Day actually, the first memory of it.

Was there a march or something in Cooktown?

I can't remember, I don't think so. The marches took place further down but if it did

29:30 occur I've got no memory of it, no.

What were the big local celebrations?

Well St Patrick's Day as I've already said about there.

Can you tell me a little bit more about St Patrick's Day? It sounds very interesting.

Well St Patrick's Day, everybody seemed to be in it and the approach of St Patrick's Day I think it must have been from the beginning of the year. We were doing all these things to prepare for the big billygoat race and therefore it lived with

30:00 us very greatly because we probably, when school started at the beginning of the year, we probably got down to the subject of the billycart goat race. That was the main thing. But the town actually did have musical occasions and the town station master had a brass band, was in charge of the brass band and so on.

30:30 And St Patrick's Day was the main celebration but I can't remember any of the other days that were specially organised, any in the big way.

No memories of Empire Day?

No memories of that at all. I think Anzac Day was observed but not to the extent that it is today or later years I

31:00 should say. There was some recognition of it but I can't remember any big parade or anything like that.

When you moved from Cooktown to Brisbane you said you were 14 years old. Was that a sad move for you?

No, I wasn't 14 by this stage I wasn't fourteen.

How old were you?

About eight.

Sorry but was that sad for you to leave Cooktown as an 8-year-old then?

No I was

31:30 looking forward to the new sights you know. Up to then I'd only been to Cairns and up on the Atherton Tablelands and that area and Brisbane of course was a magical picture for me to see you see. So we went down and the trip down on the train was quite a wonderful experience going through the cane areas and so on. I remember in those days they used to,

32:00 they probably still do, but the fettlers were a big thing. They'd spend their week out doing their work along the train lines. Whereas now they get in a car and go out and come back and sleep at home but in those days they used to have camps along the way and sometimes they had their wives and family with them. This is right beside the rail line you know. So it was quite a hazard for infants and so on although the trains were so noisy I think they got

32:30 plenty of foreknowledge of us coming but when we were on the trip down for instance the fettlers who would be away from home. There were many cases away from home they used to sing out "Papers, papers" and what was the latest would be thrown to them. We used to as kids as we'd hear this "Paper, paper", we would have a paper bag

33:00 full of water or something like that and used to bomb them. Poor fellows, so we were bastards in that regard.

Can you tell me more about the fettlers? What did fettlers do?

The rail lines were maintained or built by people who were called fettlers. They were labourers on the rail line. Fettlers also

33:30 operated on the cane farms too but they would do all the preparation and that you see on the rail line. That would be done by fellows with a pick and shovel and horse and dray and that sort of thing, not the mechanical things that they have today or intervening years. They were hard working people.

Can you describe Brisbane for me in those days?

In those days well

34:00 in those days the Victoria Bridge across Brisbane was our big feature and the building under construction that dominated the city was the Brisbane Town Hall and the tower of the Brisbane Town Hall was something marvellous from our point of view. Of course, insignificant by today's standards. It turned out to be a wonderful building actually.

34:30 The Story Bridge was just about under construction when we arrived there and that was a thing that we found as something wonderful crossing this big river as we thought, and of course later on was the Story Bridge but those bridges were the pride of ourselves and of course the things are crossing the

35:00 river many times now in various ways now, don't they.

Did you live in the built up area of the city when you were living in Brisbane?

We were quite close. Well Petri Terrace, it was quite close there. A shoot out occurred there, a shoot up I should say, only one body quite close to where we were. This jealous fellow shot his girlfriend or something like that.

35:30 Once again we were amongst the adventures.

This was when the Depression started to set in. Do you remember anything about that particular?

Oh very much. The Depression really began in 1930. Of course the banks crashed in 1929 and it trickled into '30 and the big troubles started from then on.

- 36:00 And there was great unemployment. Eventually before long we were transferred to Harrisville and they had a rule. They issued families with a ration ticket which provided some food for the week according to the size of the family. It was adjusted that way but most inadequate of course and the other thing
- 36:30 was that people collecting ration tickets, they would at least, the government and various other people said that "They were sponging on the state" you see so they made the rule that the person to qualify for a ration ticket they had to walk, not walk, make their way from where their home was, say Brisbane, to other places and by the next ration
- 37:00 ticket next week or fortnight I think it was a week, they would be another town picking it up there. They couldn't be picking up got the last one. That meant they were supposed to permeate throughout the population and if there was no work for the poor beggars they'd get out to somewhere say Cunnamulla and there'd be no work there and son on and it went on and on for years. And it was most conscious,
- 37:30 evident to me because we lived at the police station. Once again my father would be issuing these ration tickets to these people you see and they'd queue up. I mean a remote town there would still be a queue of several people. The usual thing was that mum stayed back in Brisbane or wherever the home was and the father used to collect the ration tickets and send something to the mother
- 38:00 and she looked after the family. But the thing about it was the very heavy retrenchment on the rail services you see. And in those days the people on staff would wear a particular uniform or type of clothing that meant them all the same, uniform in that sense, not a braid sort of thing not like a soldier would, anyhow the
- 38:30 point was that because of this act of having to all dress in that you'd look over at say where my father would be at the courthouse and he would, there'd be this line of men who wearing black hats and dark clothes similar to what you've got there now. So it emphasises the fact that the railway people were really
- 39:00 hit by the Depression so hard that of course there were many others as well as that.

What did these ration tickets look like? Were they big things?

They were say about the size of a playing card or something like that. I can't remember what was on them at all.

What did they entitle you to?

Food really and they usually got

- 39:30 things that they could carry about or send home I think. Of course if they sent any food home postage would kill the size of the ticket you see. So I can't remember how that worked out, whether mum at home got the ticket at her local place and father had the ration ticket to himself he got, but I think that would
- 40:00 be the better way to do it but I couldn't say exactly that how it happened.

What other work did your father have to do as the policeman in Harrisville?

Well He was also a CPS [?] so what he didn't do as a policeman he did as a CPS. There was a lot of clerical work with the CPS. It was quite awful actually. Mother used to help him but the workload was very heavy.

- 40:30 I'll tell you a few instances. Well as a policeman he was a very conscientious man and I don't think this would happen to anyone else but my father but he'd go to bed in the normal way, at about 1 am he'd get up and put on his uniform and practical wear, and go and check on the town then to see that no villains had done anything
- 41:00 or were doing anything and he'd come back and go to bed and he was wonderfully conscientious. But even so the local general store, in between the time he went to bed and got up and went back to bed, and while he patrolled the town somebody came and robbed that store, so all his good industry was
- 41:30 lost. Another one was where he did the same thing and AE Moore was the premier of that time. He was the Nationalist, I think he was the United Australia Party but anyhow he was premier and of course everybody was angry about the hardships of the depression so he used to stir the police up and
- 42:00 make them do.

Tape 3

- 00:32 **Could we just continue and pick up that story?**

About father the policeman yeah. Once again of course at different time of course but as an example of his conscious service he was out patrolling the town having got up out of

- 01:00 bed and so on, went down town and when he came to one of the hotels he saw, in these days there wasn't an electric light in Harrisville you see, which was an ordinary light, ordinary kerosene lighting, he saw under the doorway of the back of the hotel the emergence of lights under the doorway. And of course a certain amount of
- 01:30 chatter obviously there were people in there playing so he raided the place and of course there were these people gambling and he went about his business about taking their names and all that sort of thing that happens and amongst them was of course the sub inspector or inspector of police who in charge of his own district, my father's district, and who was
- 02:00 stationed at Ipswich. And of course he came to Toohey, Inspector Toohey it was, who was already known to be quite a gambler who used to go to the various country places and find his gambling cronies and I don't know play some gambling game with cards. Anyhow, he raided this and found Toohey amongst them. Toohey being a senior officer he said "I'll take charge of this
- 02:30 sergeant" and sergeant said "You will not", so of course he finished off whatever duties that were required and he knew that next day he had to report to Inspector Toohey of Ipswich. And he found this chap Toohey gambling and charged him again with this act of breaking the law. Anyhow so it became quite a heavy brawl
- 03:00 that went on. Toohey was a very influential man too as you would probably expect having these social talents, he would have made lots of friends so there was a lot of influence thrown around and Toohey was very strongly in the lead of course but he also answered to his gambling instincts just the same. Within a short time
- 03:30 he was motoring back from, I think it was Rosewood, back to Ipswich early morning in the heavy fog and at Ambly his proud Buick car which was a prestige thing in those days in our area as the Cadillac came later, so driving this he hit the wrong area of road. It was called
- 04:00 corrugated something or other. Anyhow, it was quite dangerous and he should have known better and he turned his car, great damage to the car and he was killed. So later on of course, there was this high official funeral with all the band and glory that they carry on with which we attended. We as a family attended, mother and the kids, but Sergeant Guilfoyle did not
- 04:30 and that's how Toohey closed off his gambling career. Other situations like that. Another instance was that you know talking about the duties of a policeman. This ice works a bit out of town. Machinery and that had a lot of ammonia in it being ice works. Some part of machinery blew up and of course the bloke in it
- 05:00 who was a workman in the ice works; he was both scalded with this ammonia and whatever, other chemicals were there and of course he was quickly killed. On this particular day by that time my father had my brother collect this corpse and brought him into the courthouse you see and
- 05:30 there was the corpse, skin peeling off him and of a terrible sight. I came home from school for lunch, heard about this, I wanted to see what it was all about. I went over there, terrible sight, oh it was terrible, anyhow I didn't go back to school I can tell you.

Was that the first time you'd seen a dead person?

Ah yes, it was the first time. I saw many later of course but yes

- 06:00 that was the first time. I saw my aunty some years before but that didn't make an impression, same horrible because she was calm in the (UNCLEAR).

Was your father a very authoritarian figure?

No he wasn't. He was very firm but he wasn't sort of bawling out instructions to people. He wasn't that sort of man.

What about with you?

He was always very good with me. I should have been told off many

- 06:30 times and he didn't do it.

Did he leave most of the rearing of you to your mum?

That was right yeah. But I remember once that I did all the messages. I must first say this. My brother did the work on this chap, fellow, and he was only a kid then too, so I mean he was

- 07:00 firm about some things and rather, well we'd be critical of that sort of authority, telling your son to help in a situation like that. Anyhow he was overall a very good, generous person.

Were you a good

07:30 **student at school?**

No, I wasn't no. No, eventually I wasn't actually. I got too far behind with putting things off to study later or whatever.

But you loved reading?

Yeah.

Where did you get that love of reading from do you think?

I think it was a fairly family thing but can't say that my parents went into it too

08:00 strongly, very strongly, but the fondness of it was there and the discussion of results of whatever was happening in the news was always there.

During your adolescence did you go to confession and mass?

Yes, the other two brothers, although the first one had been an altar boy but he dropped his religion rather quickly and so did

08:30 Phil, my second brother. I carried on for of course I went to the Brothers in the latter stages of my education too and I carried out following religion until well into the army and then later on I was fairly active because of having the children, educating them.

09:00 We observed our religion. It's lapsed now of course.

Do you remember something you had to confess to?

Nothing, I can't remember it in that sense. I have a pretty rough record though. One particular memory, when you said was your father strict or whatever you said there earlier, reminded me that

09:30 I should have been really told off on this occasion. I used to do the family messages pretty often. We need some butter or something like that and I'd trot off down to the local shop and we used to run an account and pay at the end of the month, so all I had to say whatever's wanted and of course I'd run back home with it. I got so well known by the shopkeeper of course that

10:00 if I wanted I say a lolly in the order it was put in for me and I had that liberty you see, that understanding. Well I was making a bit too much use of this particular and it got that way that my immediate neighbour's kids would come along with me and have the same privilege as I. Then my philanthropic

10:30 reputation grew so the kids from the other end of town came too, so the order got bigger and bigger until the greengrocer who should have curbed it in the beginning was afraid by this time to give the bill to my parents. So of course, here I was playing cricket at this time well down the road. The pitch was well down the road and

11:00 I still heard this call from mother and I came to her and we were still in our big paddock. We lived in the centre of a big paddock and she by this time had picked up a bit of dry broken branch of something and she was going to admonish me and discipline me with a smack with this.

11:30 She was crying, fancy going to tears over this now and she was crying showed me a. Anyhow,

12:00 I felt so guilty about this. She said "How can I tell your father?" Sorry this is silly.

12:30 **This is probably the first time you felt guilty in your life.**

The load of guilt hit me so strongly.

I'm sure your family was looking after you and your home life was stable.

They were very good really.

13:00 **What news of the world were you receiving around this time?**

When we were in Harrisville well we had a radio eventually, but in the beginning we didn't in our time there and of course years previously there was not general circulation of news. I'm thinking of compared to

13:30 things today and even say by the beginning of the war things improved very quickly.

I'm thinking specifically on the war were you aware of the build up of tension?

Yes but only very close to the declaration of war would the general population be really alive to it you see. I can remember following considerably

14:00 the access of Hitler and various things like that. I am thinking of overseas news and things like that. The overseas news as far as I'm concerned with any regularity and high interest was the period of

- Roosevelt taking over in America, becoming president there. He was a figure that impressed me greatly and impressed most people greatly. Similar to the way when Kennedy took over we had great expectations of Kennedy.
- Had you left home at that stage?**
- Oh no, I was still at school actually. Sort of my final period at state school that's a primary school
- and all that sort of news. The photographs in the news in those days, say Hitler and all his bombastic performance and sort of big interest throughout the world. We'd just see a little head piece in the say Ipswich paper, the Queensland Times I think it was called,
- so the photography wasn't playing a big part at that stage.
- At school did you discuss current events like the war?**
- No. I can't remember. I think we did a little bit but not a big thing.
- Of course you wouldn't have been at war then but did you discuss current events in Europe?**
- Current events in Europe? No I don't think so because mostly those things if there was a question asked or something like that I was the person who was best informed in those days. I think generally it wasn't a big thing in most families you see.
- You were paying attention to these things yourself?**
- Oh yes, yes. I used to do quite a bit of reading of the news.
- Just one thing, when did you read Seven Pillars of Wisdom around this time?**
- No, I correct myself then. I didn't read it until after the war.
- Alright OK. It's an amazing piece of literature. I imagine someone young reading it would have been impressed.**
- Yes that's right. I had read about it because you see Lawrence had taken it with him to Paris.
- You were aware of TE Lawrence?**
- TE Lawrence yes I was aware. Of course I read of the book it was so greatly praised
- and TE Lawrence was writing it whilst the Treaty of Versailles was taking place. He was on the staff you see. He had a motive of course because he made promises to both, well to the Arabs about what became of their country you see.
- But you didn't become aware of that until after the war though?**
- That would have been, I
- can't place it but I think it would have been just after the war.
- When you were growing up at this time what were your personal ambitions?**
- I can't, they weren't strong. What I mean to say I don't think I would have been more inclined to think of some things, service say like a policeman or a military man or something like that. They weren't high with me. I didn't
- sort of dream of being that and follow life right through being that no.
- Where were you when war broke out?**
- I was in Brisbane. I should say that I was very conscious of joining up. As a matter of fact I went up to do the banking. I used to do the banking for the firm and that is take the money to the bank I mean and the preparation of course but
- doing the banking was the act of taking it to the bank. Coming back from having gone to about four or five banks there was this great queue, when I say great queue, probably about 100 men, and they were I could see this was near the GPO [General Post Office]. I could see that they were intent on joining up, giving their names for joining up. So I joined the queue
- and I was there quite a while and incidentally my office was right beside the post office, so the staff looking down would have seen me there. Anyhow I stayed in this queue for quite a while and then a bloke came to me and said "I think you're too young for this queue" and it turned out up to that moment I'd stayed in this queue to give my name and they were collecting names from First World War
- veterans and here was this kid amongst these old men and of course I got out of that queue and joined up much later.

It was a spontaneous decision you just saw the queue and decided oh?

It was in the back of my mind that it was about time I found out how to present myself for action.

Was this a considered decision? Had you been thinking about this for a long time?

Oh yes, yes, it was sort of

20:00 within my intentions but I didn't know how to go about it sort of thing.

Had you discussed your intentions with your parents?

Oh no, no. Eventually when I did enlist I had quite a bother convincing my parents to let me go you see. I was underage, I was 18 by the time, and they, I had to,

20:30 I produced an enrolment form or whatever it was and threatened to forge their signature and get in that way you see but they eventually relented and I got in.

Had your older brother enlisted?

No neither of them. They were in exempt occupations, no what was it?

Restricted occupations was it or

21:00 **restricted job?**

Yes, my brother was already in police and my other brother was with the Shell Company. They were you know not permitted to enlist. They used to get them out again if they enlisted, so neither of my brothers had enlisted.

You said you were first trying to get into the air force. Can you talk about your initial attempts to join

21:30 **the armed forces?**

Yes, I was already working and as soon as war broke out I turned up at the enlistments place for the air force and they didn't act very immediately but eventually I got in front of an enlistment officer and all that and they gave me a

22:00 medical and it turned out my heart showed up a bit of trouble because I had as a kid, I'd say about three years before this, I had pneumonic fever and that put some strain on the heart or something like that. Anyhow the heart wasn't performing properly and they didn't accept me you see. But years later I did the same

22:30 physical test for the paratroops and I got through that you see, but when I applied for the paratroops I'd already been several years in the army. I'd been in all that overseas part too so it was. The time was quite great between those two acts.

23:00 **After you were rejected by the air force what did you do then?**

I immediately took on the infantry, the army you see. I went over and enlisted in the army and even then they didn't take me immediately, about a fortnight later, and I lined up and entered camp then with several

23:30 other of my acquaintances.

Can you talk about how you discussed this with your friends and did you go along collectively to join up?

By that time the war wasn't. By the time I entered camp the war was raging. I actually took my application form right on the day of June 22nd when Paris

24:00 surrendered, because I remembered this as an argument with my family. They said you know "Paris had just surrendered" and the headline was "Hitler has a secret weapon", so my argument that was right at the very day sort of thing. My argument was so has Britain. So from there after I used to call myself Britain's Secret Weapon incognito.

24:30 After my name I used to put "BSW" and in brackets incognito. You know how they have incorporated in company names. From then on even the letters home from overseas I mostly wrote my name, "Love Clem and BSW incognito", so the family thought that was quite a good joke and it sort of won

25:00 the argument regarding giving authority for me to enlist.

You were enlisting to fight for the empire. Can you explain that?

Well yeah I had the feeling that the First World War fixed up how things were and

25:30 Britain won the war, Britain and America or the allies won the war, we should let things be that way and we'll carry on throughout the world in that situation. Well of course that made the prospect if Hitler

won the war, we'd lose what privileges we had. And incidentally I was quite conscious of Hitler's villainy record

26:00 although could not imagine what did take place further such as the death camps and so on like that. I had no knowledge of anything like that of course. It hadn't occurred then of course but I don't think I could have imagined what did happen, so we apparently made the right decision because he was a terrible villain and I think we made the right decision going to war anyhow.

26:30 **It seems you were very clear in your motives for joining up?**

Yes, it was just that I, I think I, because of my father's occupation which was one of service really. We saw it was service and

27:00 therefore a soldier serving sort of matched it. It was born with my attitude of my father's occupation I think. So giving service was basically in my mind and I thought I was capable of doing the job. In any character I read of in a book such as

27:30 I remember one biography Bishop VC. He was a Canadian pilot in World War 1 who had great success. When I read a character like that I used to be envious of his courage and skill and things like that.

You read this prior to joining up?

Bishop VC, yes. It's the only one I can remember now by name.

Do you think

28:00 **that particular book influenced you to join up?**

Yes, a big contribution to, yes. There were others but I just don't recall them now. Even the fictional ones of that theme had their point too. You know their point I mean, their influence on me. But I don't think I had a,

28:30 as say the Russians are said to have fed their youth with propoganda that built up their ambitions to be soldiers as Germany did too. I don't think it was as strong as that at all.

You can't remember a big propoganda campaign in Australia?

No. There

29:00 wasn't any. I'd have paid attention to anything like that but there wasn't any great preparation, campaign like that. There was various advertisements that encouraged one to join the air force and things like that but they were only small things in the trams you know. You had to be very interested to read them

29:30 you see, which I did read of course. But I wouldn't say there would be a big effort comparing to our style of a big effort in these times to get our story over. There wasn't much like that at all. Before the war one of my friends joined the army and he eventually, when I say joined the

30:00 army, joined what we used to call militia not the professional army. He persuaded me to, encouraged me I don't say persuaded me, it didn't take all that effort, to join the militia. He said "Well come along and have a look at what we do". Drill night they used to call it. We got there. I went a few times, probably three times. I used to get to the drill shed where

30:30 these fellows would be and instead of doing any drill they'd sit down talking all the time you see and the corporal didn't come or the sergeant didn't come and they were all so casual about it and they did nothing and they talked about how they went and did a camp down at Redcliff and bashed up somebody and talked about their girls and things like that, but they didn't do anything, any real exercise. And I put up with

31:00 it about, three times I think it was and I three, three attendances, that would be one night per week for about three times and then I thought "Oh damn this is no good" and it nearly stopped me from. It wasn't until war really broke out that I turned to giving service, yeah.

At the time you joined up did you have any female friends that you discussed that with?

Yes, I did,

31:30 quite several actually but I really didn't discuss it. I can't remember but there weren't any great influences in that matter anyhow.

Women weren't encouraging you?

Apart from that, it wasn't really socially high acceptance. If I'd been an air force fellow, enlisted in the air force, I would have had a different status to being a

32:00 soldier because the social standard was pro air force. Soldiers were not all that regarded at that stage anyhow.

Did this cross your mind at the time?

I don't remember. Oh wait a minute, yes the air force being senior you mean?

I think how you may be regarded by

32:30 **girls or women?**

Yes I was, certainly was aware that the air force fellows were favoured, you know had a better situation, standard I suppose but I don't think it worried me very much.

Can you talk us through your journey through the training period? Any memorable moments?

As a matter of fact there is a

33:00 little story in this one. July 15th 1940 was my day of entry into the army and I turned up at Kelvin Grove in Brisbane camp. That's where the acceptance took place and there I met, also about to go in, were several friends. So of course we

33:30 were a group from then on and enlisted there, went out to Groverly and at Groverly issued with our army equipment, dress equipment at Kelvin Grove went out to Groverly. By that time in army uniform, very sloppy of course and I'd just

34:00 surrendered my civilian things to go back home and the point was that I had never worn boots before, always shoes you see. I got into these heavy boots and clothing that was unfamiliar to me and when we got to Groverly of course, immediately they couldn't occupy.

34:30 They didn't have the force or the arms or anything like that to do any real training at Groverly. They just accepted a group of raw recruits you see each time, so to occupy us they kept us marching. There was I with these new boots, never worn boots before and suddenly put into a lot of marching. That's the only way they could keep so many troops occupied. Well the boots played hell with my feet and I was

35:00 quite crippled but I still had to try to march. That went on and on and eventually of course I grew accustomed to my boots and throughout the war they were wonderful friends of mine wearing boots. But also at this camp the food was so terrible. They used to give us stewed rabbit and sometimes it was beef but the beef was so rough that what

35:30 they call the pistol in the penis of a bullock was also in the stew you see sometimes. Most of the personnel or new recruits were largely fellows from the country. They were horsemen and stockmen and so on and many cane cutters too. Many cane cutters came from down this part of the

36:00 world up to Queensland looking for employment you see. So we had people from all directions but the point was that this food was so terrible they eventually had a riot and things improved a little bit but by that time I'd departed from the camp.

Where were they getting the rabbits from?

Plenty of rabbits around then in those days. There'd be swarms of rabbits. They were the cheapest food.

36:30 People during the Depression ate a lot of rabbit and but they were so roughly done. I mean people could make quite an acceptable dish out of rabbit but not the army of course. But the point was on that on this first day here I was suddenly swapping over civilian suit and things like that

37:00 which was you know quite smart, and got into this drab clothing. The entertainment in the area for the various camps, they'd be troops of young entertainers you know, they'd be going from, they'd get performance experience and many were very good. They'd go from camp to camp and that's how a lot of the entertainment took place you see

37:30 and was provided. I remember here I was in this fresh uniform and I went to the entertainment of that night which was in a hall within the camp. I was so bothered by looking so shabby in my over large uniform and sore feet from the boots and so on. And there was this

38:00 pretty girl as I regarded, doing a performance and I admired her greatly but then somebody nudged me and gave me a piece of paper and on it was this girl's name and address you see. But I was so shocked by being spotted that I left the place in an embarrassed hurry you see.

38:30 Of course I never made any contact.

So she wanted to get in touch with you?

Yes, they apparently did that. They'd pick out somebody in the audience they thought they'd like to meet and they'd send their address along you see. You'd go up and ask for her name or something like that and introduce yourself. That's what they did other times but I was too embarrassed.

Was she a singer?

39:00 She did a song and dance sort of thing which was very popular act in those times. Tap dancing and

looking cute and what do we call those ballet dress things, tutu or whatever it is. That sort of thing was the style of course. So from then on of course, this camp,

39:30 various officers selecting for forming up the units, say a battalion or something like that. They'd come along and pick out the personnel whom they wanted, regarded as suitable and that so I was picked out of a group and become a member of the 2/15th Battalion which was at Redbank, which was rather close, between Ipswich and Brisbane, and there I began my training as a serious soldier.

40:00 But my battalion at this time it had already departed for Darwin and I didn't join the battalion until it came back after five months, four months I think it was, and we departed for the Middle East on the Queen Mary.

Tape 4

00:34 **Can you take us through your training of the 2/15th at Redbank?**

Yes, well were selected. I was in the, what was called the first reinforcement, and this was in camp in Redbank and

01:00 when we joined that as I said the battalion had already departed for Darwin, so I didn't go up to Darwin at all and they went to the Zealandia and came back in the Zealandia. As soon as we got to Redbank and started to soldier on, of course did a lot of marching of course, but also

01:30 various exercises that general drill and so on that's physical drill, not with weapons at this stage. Quite shortly of course we took on rifle training and getting to know various mechanical things such as assembling and disassembling

02:00 machine guns, Lewis guns I should say, which were machine guns. They were on issue then but they were antiquated and they didn't serve us later in the war of course. But at this stage the gun to use as a machine gun, a light machine gun was the Bren gun, which we used, wonderful, faithful weapon for us throughout the war.

02:30 So we did all this, spent the day doing various types of I think we called it bulldogging, I've forgotten now, anyhow the point was we were in squads and did our training and bayonet training. I'll tell you a little story about Groverly, oh we're at Groverly yes, about bayonet training my initiation.

03:00 The point was emphasis on physical fitness and target and knowing weapons, cleaning weapons and all that sort of thing plus a lot of cookhouse duty and guard duty and all those things that are supposed to build a soldier into a soldier. But talking of the bayonet, I had a little bit of that at Groverly

03:30 before I was selected to go to the 15th. Here we were on guard duty, my first acquaintance with guard duty and Sergeant McNamara who was our instructor, and he was a wonderful example of a sergeant you know. Impressive as a good man and a man of ability you know, physical ability I mean.

Do they yell at you to intimidate you?

04:00 **Did he yell at you?**

No, he didn't. Not he. He was just a good, I had plenty of that later, of course yelling out and that he was very good. And he prepared us for this we were on duty for the guard and he prepared us well, but of course that was my first acquaintance with the 303 rifle and this particular place that I was put on duty was just

04:30 a, Groverly at that time was just a lot of tents of course and there was a paddock and in the paddock was a car parking area but the cars weren't a common item with people in those days. They were very privileged persons able to afford a car but there was this parking area. Well the position that I took up at this time of night near midnight was right up where the cars

05:00 were parked. Sergeant McNamara said now "Your duty is to go where cars can go, people can enter where you are", this sort of a moat gate it was right out in the bush and "They can enter that way but at midnight they've got to come through down to the main gate, don't let them in, make them come down to the main gate" and it was after hours, actually after midnight and "Report to me and I'll look after them".

05:30 So off I went and the guard went around the whole squad of guards. You'd relieve a person already on duty at that spot you see. So here I was having learnt how to be a guardsman during the day, at night of course I was on this spotting duty and I was sloping arms and coming to attention and so on,

06:00 just as if I was the Coldstream guard in front of Buckingham Palace. I just went up and down and eventually the point was I was very raw at handling a weapon. Midnight came and this car load of fellows came along and of course

06:30 they stopped when they came to me and told them "I can't let them pass" and he tried to talk me into it. It was a very simple thing to let it go but my duty was to hold him and send him around the other place and he started to talk to me and of course there was much encouragement from the rest of the car you can imagine on a Saturday night, they were all primed up. And

07:00 he was talking to me and he suddenly let the clutch out and started to rush forward. I brought my rifle down, it had the bayonet in it you see, down in front of him and suddenly I found the bayonet was right at his throat. By that time he just stopped and of course he quickly went into reverse and did what he had to do.

07:30 But crikey it was my initiation and it was very close. I'd learnt my guard duty but what happened of course was I didn't know how to come out of the on-guard position. My tuition for the day didn't register well with me. So I had a very quick experience with the bayonet.

How does bayonet drill

08:00 **work? What is on-guard and off-guard? Can you describe or just go through the motion?**

I came from this position. I had it on slope like that and I was standing up just as much as a policeman would be talking to someone like that and I'm talking about somebody in uniform. Of course suddenly he moved forward so I brought

08:30 down the bayonet like that. I had him there and it was right at the, it was really touching his throat I think. So it gave me a big fright. I can't remember after that what happened. I know he obeyed me and I was very happy to be relieved of that duty.

Did you never cross paths with him again?

No, I didn't.

09:00 I don't know what happened to him. I hope he learnt from my stern attitude.

What other weapons were you trained in apart from the bayonet and the rifle?

Oh the Bren gun, the Tommy gun, sub-machine gun I should say, and of course 303 Lee Enfield rifle. I picked up some sub-machine guns over there, German standard.

09:30 And of course we had grenades and 2 inch mortar.

Can you tell us how you were trained in grenades?

Well they'd take you to a pit. This is the training part of it. And you'd practice bowling a grenade you know, throwing a grenade. We got good skill with it.

10:00 Had to use it in action too. We wounded ourselves quite often with the grenade, throwing the grenade.

In training? There were quite a few accidents in training?

Oh yes, quite a lot of accidents in training yeah. When I say a lot, over considerable experience. You don't come back from one session and say "We've got five wounded or something like that".

10:30 Over a period of some experience you'd find that quite a few fellows had been hit in various ways but usually when we threw a grenade just as a training act we did it from a pit so therefore it would be you know you'd be protected fairly well. After I'd been wounded I had trouble

11:00 accepting, making myself throw the grenade for a while but I was in a nervous condition. This is I'm talking about Middle East years later.

What about in training, did anybody freeze on the grenade and not throw it?

No, but there was a chance of that happening because quite a few people would be very close to doing that. As a matter of fact I was afraid I might do that in the situation I just said.

11:30 The officer who was in charge of me at that time, I was by this time I was at, I was training to be an officer and this was my first real acquaintance of throwing a grenade. I was at Woodside in South Australia.

This is after you'd come back from the Middle East?

This is after I'd been wounded at New Guinea and so on and reacquainting myself with soldiering

12:00 and that sort of thing. And they test you in various ways you see and this was a grenade throwing business and I was so shaken that I had trouble letting go as you say there, but it was all right but I had to regain my confidence.

12:30 **Were you enjoying the training process at Redbank?**

More or less. No, I wouldn't say enjoying but I knew I had to do it. I mean it was probably like if you're learning a new instrument or a musical instrument, you'd be saying 'Oh damn this practice but I've got

to do it if I want to be good at it'. Well that was my attitude for most of the training.

Did you understand what you were being trained to be good at?

13:00 Oh yes, yes, quite well.

Essentially what were you being trained to do?

Basically to well fight an enemy of similar accomplishments and try to make your training so much better that you'd be very good at it. Because after all you life's at stake eventually,

13:30 even at that stage you think the situation is remote but time catches up rather fast.

You understood the seriousness of it that you may have to use these weapons against the enemy?

Oh it wasn't a big factor in our everyday existence, whatever we did, we did it as sort of preparation like when you're preparing for a sport or something like that.

Were there any particular training

14:00 **techniques to get you to work in a team as a unit?**

The fact that even the marching people don't realise what marching does. Even in the marching that builds you up into sort of a team spirit, sort of a rhythm. Here we are all together and the fact that you're marching in step and the regular thing and there's a binding factor in that.

14:30 It's not just filling in the hour and making you physically fit. There's an undermining, not undermining, developing a team attitude which surprised me. I mean it's never been said to me that that is the case but you become aware of it eventually.

How do you

15:00 **break down training aims to break down the individual's response just to follow orders implicitly?**

I don't know. Just similar to if you're given instructions to do a job, any job, you know what's required and you sort of build yourself up to doing it. But it's much like doing any job I think.

15:30 The personal later on...

Discipline would have been a very necessary thing? It's a bit more serious than any other job. You have to rely on each other and your training. How long were you at the training camp for?

16:00 Five months we were. No five months, yes, five months through that stage that I talked to embarking.

Did you have aspirations to become an officer at that stage?

No, I never intended to be anything but a

16:30 private, actually I demoted myself many times, as a matter of fact I had 17 changes of rank actually. Because I resisted it but the first time I was the leader of a section quite a lot without being, having corporal's rank or anything.

At the training camp?

At the training camp and in action. I did the work quite often without the rank you know.

Why

17:00 **did you resist taking the rank?**

My initial time I thought I should be better trained as a soldier you know. Mostly later on after I'd been wounded in Tobruk and I didn't want to become a corporal at this stage. Wait a minute. I had been promoted a corporal in Tobruk

17:30 but the point is you're an acting corporal or an acting sergeant for a period you see and then it becomes confirmed because on the strength of the 2/15th Battalion in my case, but if it's not confirmed you're still an acting corporal and it will go off the strength of the battalion. You go back to whatever rank you were which in my case I was a private. And so I was a corporal back to private.

18:00 Well as soon as I rejoined my unit the CO [Commanding Officer], the colonel, promoted me immediately back to corporal, but I didn't want that because I know I was bomb-happy and I didn't want to.

Maybe we can stay with the training period because I think was interesting how the esprit

18:30 **de corps or the morale of the unit was built up. How was the esprit de corps, the spirit of the 2/15th by the time you finished your training?**

It grows very high esprit de corps. That training, as I mentioned, even the marching, it all I don't know whether they ever worked it out that way but it is a fact. Working together doing all these exercise whatever they be,

19:00 you sort of more the team than the individual. I mean you're conscious a team member a little more than being an individual, so both effects take place at the same time I think with the team member being just a bit higher in feeling.

Did you know you were going to be deployed overseas?

Yes, yes,

19:30 definitely.

Did you know where?

No. In fact we had the feeling it was going to be England because members of the 6th Division who went ahead of us were directed towards England and of course anticipated that it would be in Europe but that wasn't us. We had a notion it would be England but it wasn't long before we knew it would be Middle East.

And do you remember getting those orders to

20:00 **embark or be deployed?**

Yes, we did because when they came back from Darwin we immediately went on pre-embarkation leave. Well that of course we anticipated, we were going overseas but exactly where we did not know.

What did you do on your pre-embarkation leave?

Mostly went around various, more or less

20:30 as I was a civilian looking up friends and having various entertainments or going to dances and things like that.

Did you take particular opportunity of this leave to...?

Ah not really. I just mostly appreciated home and being at home and so on. I had a very friendly dog who stood guard while I was away.

21:00 When I went to school like at the end of college we brought him from Harrisville into Brisbane all the time that he was with us he always sat on the front steps. When I was due to come home from school or college he'd give me a welcome you know the tail wagging and he'd run down to the front gate and as I took employment the same action went on. As I

21:30 became a soldier the same action used to happen. I used to go bike riding and he'd trail after me. The point was that after I departed overseas he used, as a soldier he used to welcome me. As I departed overseas he used to sit up there looking for me and of course by this time there were quite a few soldiers coming along and he'd look in the

22:00 distance and see this uniform and he'd wag his tail...down to the gate and be disappointed as a soldier walked past...

22:30 **You must have had a lot of other preparations at the time?**

Yes...

23:00 I was nearly home and he died before I got home. He wagged his tail right to the end.

Dogs don't understand goodbye do they.

23:30 **They are very difficult things to say goodbye to?**

Yes that's right.

They think you're going to be there all the time.

It was so, he was such a companion. I always regretted that he didn't get the satisfaction.

What was his name?

Snowy.

24:00 He was close to ginger but he had so many freckles on him that he was tan. A white base with many tan freckles on his fur, or hair or whatever. He was a wonderful companion.

How were your mum and dad feeling about you going away?

Oh they were very worried. Mother used to try and persuade me even when I came

24:30 back from the war. Of course I could have got out every time I was wounded.

On your embarkation leave what sort of things did you pack?

Oh a little point there in that story too. Going away of course, the previous Sunday to going away the camp was open and the friends and relatives of the various men were invited to come

25:00 to camp and see open-camp which meant going away and of course all my visitors, each one brought me a present you see a little thing which helped me on my way. We had to, as we marched, as we marched down to the station and we carried that was our personal thing.

25:30 Well family and friends had brought me tins of food, largely tins of food and other things like that and of course that meant I had a heavy pack to carry. I had to find room for that in my kitbags, we each had two kitbags. Well of course they were so kindly they gave me all these presents but that meant I had to put them in this kitbag and march

26:00 along with this extra weight. So I had to march from the camp at Redbank down to the railway station with this terrible heavy bag and every time we changed trains or anything like that I had two terrible kitbags to lumber about. By that time, by the time we got to Palestine,

26:30 they'd cost me so much effort, because I was determined that I'd keep them for the time when we became critically short of food and Clem would therefore provide the food for everyone. But as we were sent up to the desert all these kitbags were taken from us, put into a storeroom and after I was up in the desert and came back

27:00 wounded and so on and requisitioned for my kitbags. The kitbags came back, the food was taken out of them, stolen out of them. I lost my camera and all things, so I provided food for some dishonest Arab who was living in Alexandria comparatively rich for a few days I suppose.

What other personal effects did you take?

Ah, only the camera

27:30 that's all, I think. I can't remember. A little bit of writing paper I think. Nothing much, just the rest was military uniform and so on.

Photos of your family?

Oh yes, I had photos yes. They were with my wallet of course. I had photos yes but

28:00 everything else was military.

Can you describe seeing the Queen Mary for the first time?

As a matter of fact I saw photographs of...the thing I told you about the tin that's crushed up it's still got a piece of shrapnel stuck in it. Well I looked at that yesterday and there's my first sight of the Queen Mary, my first sight of the

28:30 Harbour Bridge. We came from what is now of course, the wharf? What's the entertainment place called there?

Circular Quay?

No, the wharf.

You're talking to the wrong person, I'm not from Sydney. Darling Harbour?

29:00 The train came in at Darling Harbour and of course that was a well and truly a functioning wharf then and we got into a tug boat, tug, and went over to Athol Bight and that's where the Queen Mary. Yesterday, I looked through an old negative that was in that tin I've told you and I took a photograph of the bridge and that was my first sighting of the bridge. And then of course we went over to Athol Bight

29:30 which was over near Taronga Zoo and that area there was a tremendous Queen Mary. It was already crowded with waving, shouting troops and we boarded it and around the Queen Mary all the time were constantly running were sailing boats and motor launches and so on crowded with people waving goodbye to

30:00 some member of their friend or family, and of course the troops threw back tins of, in those days people had roll your own cigarettes you see, and tobacco tins were very popular because they put notes into these tins and threw them out to people in the launches and those people of course posted them to

30:30 these numerous addressees. So it was quite a lovely time actually and of course getting on this wonderfully large ship that was a really great experience and of course the journey in it was a great experience too.

Was this the first ship departing for the Middle East?

No, no, no they'd been quite a lot. Of course the 6th Div of course preceded us.

31:00 Yeah, 7th Div too. We were part of the 7th Div but we changed over in the Middle East, so when we left Australia we were part of the 7th Division but as soon as we go to the Middle East, by that time they had formed the 9th Division or were forming it and we were part of it.

Was there anyone there to see you off?

Not in Sydney, but in Brisbane yes.

31:30 I had relatives in Sydney but I hadn't advised them of anything like that.

Your mum and dad saw you off in Brisbane? Who saw you off in Brisbane?

Yes, they saw me in Brisbane. Cousins and school teachers and so on. I had a great number said goodbye to me. Each one brought something along as I said.

You were loaded up

32:00 **with all your stuff.**

The articles in the kitbag improved in value due to the effort I had to put into carrying. They were not only heavy but the edges of tins and so on were piercing into my back you know.

Obviously you told them about the bad food you received before you left.

I think they must have known it themselves I think. I think they would have assumed the stuff

32:30 would have been eaten by the time we got to Europe but from my point of view it was getting too expensive due to my efforts, so I was going to keep them for this great crisis but I was never been able to use it on.

Can you tell us, describe to us the journey, the departure leaving Sydney?

Yes it was quite spectacular. The mother ship of course was the Queen Mary and

33:00 it went out of harbour but preceding it were several ones. I can't remember which ones. The Aquitania was one and another big ship I can't remember what it was. The big ships and there were lots of small ships, the Auwetera from New Zealand and Dominion Monarch and I can't remember any others by name. And this proceeded from the harbour in lines

33:30 sort of thing and formed up outside the heads and set out south. They went down very deeply into the Southern Ocean down towards the Antarctic.

Can you remember the date of the departure?

December 26th. I just saw that in a book yesterday.

What was the route?

We went down past

34:00 Tasmania down into the Southern Ocean and then travelled along there and the lovely albatross escorted us you know. The dignified albatross, a beautiful bird, and they stayed above us practically all the way I think and we turned in towards Fremantle.

I think you mentioned before the interview that you really liked birds. Did you have a

34:30 **love of birds developed at Cooktown.**

Yes.

So you knew your birds fairly well?

Oh yes, I liked them. I liked everywhere really. Everywhere has its charm.

After arriving in Fremantle?

We went from there towards Ceylon which is Sri Lanka these days

35:00 and the Queen Mary pulled in at Trincomalee, which is the naval port in Ceylon, and there we transferred then to a Dutch ship and the Dutch ship was a much smaller ship of course it was one that plied through the Indonesian area which was Dutch East Indies in those days. And on the Trindapeera we went into and around

35:30 Colombo. Trincomalee's on the east coast of Ceylon and Colombo is on the west coast, south west coast.

What was a day like on the Queen Mary?

The cabin which we occupied, I occupied with several others, about six I think. See at that stage the

Queen Mary

- 36:00 had not been converted into a full troopship so many of the cabins were still there but they were occupied by people of rank, mostly you know officers and so on. In my case I happened to be given, we, about eight fellows I think there were, a cabin so it was fairly well set up from our point of view.
- 36:30 Our activity of course was plenty of drill, physical drill, not rifle, not weapon drill. I can't remember if we had weapons on the Queen Mary. I don't think we did. No, I'm pretty sure we didn't but we did a lot of physical exercises and so on. Of course we were put on sentry duties
- 37:00 so you couldn't get into the cookhouse and that sort of thing. Very impressed by the kitchen area of the Queen Mary. It was quite massive and it was very nice being put on duty down there. One could sneak an odd morsel or something or other. Somebody handing out the food would look after you.

The food was very important

- 37:30 **to troops even at this early stage. Is that right?**

Yes, there'd be various sports of course. We did fairly well. We had some good boxing talent in our group so, our unit, and they won credit for us of course.

Were you a boxer?

No, I used to attend a gym with boxers and so on but I wasn't anyway a boxer. I never

- 38:00 officially became a boxer. I had enough knowledge of punch drunk situations. There wasn't a chance of converting me into a boxer. During my youth period you know when I was in employment, I used to at the end of a day's work I used to go off to a gymnasium nearby, exercise a lot and of course in those days these
- 38:30 boxers would come from overseas and so on and they'd look for sparring partners and they'd persuade you eventually "I won't hit hard I just want to keep in trim sort of thing so come in and be with me, you know, be my sparring partner". Once they got you into the ring they'd spar for a while but eventually they'd go back into their
- 39:00 habit of punching hard. You got fairly knocked around.

Why were you transferred off the Queen Mary at Trincomalee?

Because the Queen Mary they didn't want to take it too close to the Suez Canal. Too vulnerable, too big, easy target at the approach. Have you been over that way at all?

No I've never been to the Suez Canal.

- 39:30 Well it's not just the straight canal. There are two big lakes they call them. Small harbours really prepare to get you into the canal you see. So we lined up. The boats that arrived there lined up to take their turn to go into the canal. Well they were accommodated during this period in these lakes which were the entrance to the canal you see. While we were waiting there
- 40:00 several days, close to a week I think it was, we did numerous things such as using the life boats and having races and swimming and diving off the ships and so on. That's how we occupied ourselves and it was quite good.

Tape 5

- 00:34 **Can you take us back and of your first sight of Palestine and landing in Palestine and tell us a little about your time there?**
- Yes, well I'll say right at the beginning that when we arrived at Palestine or saw Palestine in various ways, various parts I mean, it
- 01:00 is just like looking at illustrations from the bible. There were these you know traditional dress and there were the asses and the camels and things like that. It was just like well seeing an illustration in the bible and now days you look at the same areas on the TV and they're in the modern dress of European and the scene has sort of changed so
- 01:30 greatly. So when we got there I was quite amazed to see this traditional scene say and as I told you my experience reading Desert Column by Ian Idris was a special bonus in that regard. I both had some foreknowledge
- 02:00 of the place by reading that and other things of course and it was just wonderful to see the names of places that he mentioned. And another thing about early arrival there was the, when I first saw this group of women whom were doing roadwork you know. They would get a

02:30 fair sized stone and tap it into position in the road you know. That's how the roads were being made. Of course it confounded me for a moment to see women doing that sort of work but of course in Australia not long before that the women did heavy manual work anyhow you know on farms and settling in

03:00 Australia was a difficult thing, but to see women road works as they did there was a bit of a shock to me. The other thing of course was where we built our camps and nearby there were still the dugouts and that from the First World War and that again was a well very interesting point for me

03:30 and I should say that somebody even in that situation there was still someone who had the luck to pick up a roman coin and that was I thought we were going to be finding those things quite easily, but that's the only instance I heard of a roman coin being picked up. I expected seeing the traditional pieces as I reckon from the bible

04:00 made me expect anything that was centurion or roman or traditional Arab but they got us to work rather quickly so we settled down to see our own life rather than observing so much.

Can you tell us about the setting up of the camp there and some of the exercises you were going through?

04:30 Yes. The camp to which we, my battalion I'm referring to now, my brigade actually 20th Brigade was quite close to Gaza itself. Gaza in these years would have covered that area by the modern spread of the city of Gaza. But we, Carlo 89 as it was called,

05:00 and when we first arrived there we lived in tents of course. The new instruction for us was that you take care of your rifles, which of course is a natural thing and you don't just leave your rifle say on your bunk or something like that you had to chain it up because the Arabs and the

05:30 Jewish people who intended to be opponents they were too eager to steal our weapons and there was always a guard about you know in the company area, a sentry keeping an eye on all those things.

06:00 We invariably had to chain the rifles in a group in the centre of our tent and of course most times we took out the bolt of the rifle too. That was extra precaution and of course other than that the tent to which we went at this time they were made with strips of bamboo and we each had a stretcher of

06:30 bamboo. They were frail things and they soon broke down and we went back to our normal experience of camp life and that was on the ground you know and using a ground sheet and things like that. The tents were, I think there were eight to a tent. Quite tight fit actually, however we got by that and

07:00 once again there wasn't a great deal of weapon supply for we were about to enter the fighting area, the British army still had not had an abundant supply of weapons, so there was always this problem of whatever you had to do you quite likely use a substitute for the weapons you would ordinarily used. But

07:30 as we assembled or congregated for the departure into Egypt to join the successful activity by Wavell's offensive against Marshall Graziani, the Italian commander. By that we would go up there and relieve the 6th Division.

08:00 As I said before they went into another campaign in Greece and Crete.

Were you aware at the time that you were being prepared to go there?

Yes, only by rumour, not officially but because the 6th Div was there we naturally expected to be somewhat together and you know a bit of fair guessing.

Were you very aware that you

08:30 **were following in the footsteps of the first AIF?**

Oh yes, we were very proud of that and as we went up you know we should explain that. The Italians, the British were not in fighting position when the war broke out in that area I mean and the Italians suddenly invaded

09:00 Egypt, which wasn't a great big effort because the Egyptians weren't very much on-guard in regard to that and therefore the Italians came over the frontier of the boundary quickly and made considerable gain and then Wavell stopped them you see. They were more or less in a similar position to what

09:30 Rommel was in the later part. He was held approximately to that area and the Italians had advanced to that area.

Before you were sent over there how long were you in Palestine for?

Oh it would only be about a month I think. Probably less.

Do you have any other strong memories of Palestine?

Ah yes.

- 10:00 Palestine as a countryside there was, it was a very pleasant appearance. The mimosa hedge, the mimosa was used as hedges in many parts and so were the cactus, the prickly pear, which of course horrified us to see the prickly pear growing in huge
- 10:30 plants more or less in hedge like. And here in Australia of course it was such a big problem. The wheat fields were the prominent things from our point of view. We were in that part where the wheat farms were and the other
- 11:00 strong experience I had was we went to firing at the range and I was quite pleased to see, we got to the range and in that area, not just at the range, but there was a great amount of gum trees, the eucalyptus tree, which they used very much as a soil binder and
- 11:30 reforestation idea, but it was lovely to see the eucalyptus.

Did it make you homesick?

Yes it did, yes. I already had great admiration for the eucalyptus. It was like meeting an old friend. Anyhow, so that's another activity we carried out was firing on the rifle range of course and then of course we

- 12:00 set out, we were assembled. Menzies visited us too, he was on his way over to London and all that sort of stuff.

What did he say to you?

I can't remember. I know I was on duty as part of the time but you know he said things, praising the army and so on, but of course the only ones who had done anything up to that time were the 6th Division.

Did you have any particular views about Menzies

- 12:30 **as leader?**

Not in a strong political way. This was his first time as a Prime Minister. I didn't know if you were ever conversant with that part of the Australian life but he became Prime Minister when Joe Lyons died [Sir Earle Christmas Grafton Page actually preceded Menzies as Prime Minister in 1939]. He was Prime Minister before and Menzies took over and there was quite a controversy about him becoming Prime Minister and therefore he

- 13:00 didn't have the confidence of the Australian population at that stage and likewise with the army. When he got over there, there were probably more people against Menzies than for him amongst the soldiers. Anyhow he came back and there were changes. He lost the Prime Ministership and so on. John Curtin eventually succeeded him [Arthur William Fadden succeeded Menzies as Prime Minister in 1941, then came Curtin, 1941-1945]. When we

- 13:30 got by train back into Egypt, we crossed the same point of the canal that I mention, El Kantara, which comes into my life again after I was wounded there. We went by train to as far as, near I can't remember the name of it, near Alexandria anyhow. There we got

- 14:00 into types of trucks, sort of an improvised sort of thing and went off towards Libya and of course we were going to replace the 6th Division. What pleased me was of course we were following very much the 6th Division's activity and it was good as we got to the first notable place which was not a very large village, was Sidi

- 14:30 Barrani, oh no Mersa Matruh before that, then Sidi Barrani. There was this village, their dwellings were adobe sort of things made out of sand and mud and that in it. A native dwelling would be of that make and here this Sidi Barrani was absolutely raised.

- 15:00 All the buildings were shot down by explosions and so on, shells but there standing right in the middle of it was the Italian monument with an Italian fresco on it the symbol of the fascist party in Italy at that time.

- 15:30 It was typical of Mussolini. Wherever they went they crossed the, as soon as they got into a town Derna or whatever town they were in, suddenly there was this statue, a sort of a symbol the Italians had been here.

I think Libya was an Italian colony or something wasn't it?

Well Sidi Barrani was not. It was in Egypt of course. But before that we had come to Mersa Matruh too

- 16:00 but I didn't see the same sort of.

This would have been your first encounter with battle damage.

Yes it was the first area. And of course we went into Egypt and Fort Sollum was right at the border. We were on the coast part of Egypt and we went up this steep roadway that was at Fort Sollum,

- 16:30 the border of Egypt and Libya, and then we followed on and from then on there was much evidence of

the route of the Italian army such as broken down vehicles and fiat. The name fiat was everywhere. There were all these trucks broken down having been shot of course.

What were your impressions of the deserts of Libya? These initial impressions,

17:00 **these first impressions?**

As we first arrived there? Well it was sort of from my point of view a featureless place, but actually as more acquainted with it there were things that contradicted that. I was very eager to see everything and invariably every time we pulled up we

17:30 did a great search around and picked up souvenirs and so on like that. Of course there were plenty of souvenirs because I don't know how the Italians carried so much in terms of the rubbish as far as a moving army was concerned. You'd find magazines and all things like that and plenty of wine. Of course their drinking would be

18:00 likely to be wine rather than tea or coffee or something like that. Anyhow those who were interested in sampling the wine got many examples of it.

Did you try some of it?

I did try to taste it but I wasn't a drinker. I never have been a drinker except on a social occasion but even then I was very restrained. Have been right through but it was awful as far as I

18:30 was concerned. It was flat and just unpleasant to me. Most things that I found that were new I always experimented with anything, which used to terrify people, because I examined mines and things like that when I shouldn't have you know. I'll probably tell you later about one particular story of a mine.

19:00 Anyhow, on we went to Bardia, and so Tobruk of course and Derna, Barce, these are places we are still going up towards Benghazi. Benghazi, it was an impressive town. The other ones were just villages you know. Nothing marvellous about them but quite reasonably good you know.

19:30 Derna was an attractive little town and Barce was too and then Benghazi was much more impressive. It was the main city of Libya, Cyrenaica, I can't remember, I think it was in Cyrenaica, just another State part of the Libya nation. And on we went to up to the Gulf of, I forgot whether it was Tunis

20:00 or Tripoli, I'll have to look that up.

Was the atmosphere one of an advancing victorious army?

Not really. No we were just a crowd of chattering people. There wasn't anyone to strut about; the civilian population was almost entirely out of sight and no girls to be

20:30 very inspiring about you know, we didn't. They all took off. I don't know where they went; anyhow they took off. We saw an occasional shepherd or something like that but no, nothing really thrilling about it.

Knowing what was to come or knowing now what was to come at that time did you, do you have any feeling that you maybe eventually having to retreat down these places and fight your way back or was there any

21:00 **sort of premonition?**

No, not really. By the time we got to Mersa el Brega yes, we were there a while. We relieved as I said the 6th Division. They pulled back.

That was the front line at the time?

Yes that was the front line. And they pulled back but we had no enemy in sight at this stage, but actually the Africa Corp were transferring across to Africa from, and being formed as the Africa

21:30 Corp by the Germans you see.

At this time as you were moving into the front line the Italians were being replaced by the Germans? Is that correct?

Yes, that's right.

Were you aware of that?

No, no. We weren't aware until the retreat. But we had our first casualty at this Mersa el Brega. There was a salt pan and the Italians of course had of course mined everything, laid mines and one of our

22:00 patrols went out and this young fellow by the name of Croker was a member of the patrol and in this salt pan area which was mined he had the misfortune to stand on a mine and was blown up. He was our first casualty. That's my company and then we were.

Were you on that patrol?

No, I wasn't no. It was another

22:30 platoon actually 12 Platoon, whereas I was in 10 Platoon.

How did the company take the news of its first casualty?

Oh, you know worried. Hurt us really because by this time we hadn't been knocked about at all and we were a great group of men, who were men, who were friends you know. That was our first casualty there and

23:00 it bothered us a lot. Then we were pulled out of there and the retreat started you see, but at this stage we weren't conscious, we the forward platoons and they weren't advised or anything like that, we just thought we were changing position, which of course happens all the time.

Over what period of time did that changing of position take place?

The change itself would take over just a few hours you know.

23:30 But notice of changing would be immediately, mostly you know. We'd pull back to another position and by this time we were in reverse you see.

What was the purpose of the patrols at that time?

The patrols, well it's always been that way, but in the first war and the Second World War and of course subsequent wars.

24:00 It's a way of keeping your eye on the enemy, in that, say there's no mans land of course, one force is one side and the other and there's a no mans land and patrol it and make sure they don't sneak up on you. That's what happens of course and there are other patrols that raid the

24:30 enemy but there's always going to be somebody, a forward patrol or a listening post or something like that, that gets notice of the enemy coming. It applies to all sides, all armies of course.

What was your rank at the time?

At this time I'm private. I was private for until Tobruk and then I was an acting corporal that's sort of

25:00 a promoted corporal, but you don't have your rank immediately. You have the stripes and whatever it might be, but you go through a period where you're acting invariably. In my case I was an acting corporal and I was wounded. Well once you go off the strength of your unit, your battalion, you go back to whatever you were previously. The acting part is only a period of say

25:30 three weeks or something like that but.

I'm particularly interested in this period of time before you went into retreat. What was going on in this time and what were the plans effectively that you knew of at that time?

But if you went off sick like that, as I did, wounded, when you came back as you say well I would resume

26:00 my rank. So I was wounded and therefore I was back to private. I was brought back to hospital of course which was in Egypt, in El Kantara again.

At this time when were you attacked by the Germans. When did you have first notice that you were facing the African Corps?

Within about half a day.

26:30 We were relieved by the Free French, my particular part of the battalion. When Germany defeated France in Europe, the Free French or they formed the Free French, but the Foreign Legion split. Part of the Foreign Legion wanted to be with Vichy,

27:00 France, loyal to Vichy, France and the other part formed up to support General De Gaulle. Well, the fellows who relieved us were General De Gaulle's followers and they came from Chad, the country called Chad, which is in central Africa down near the Congo, but a bit further north

27:30 from the Congo.

They relieved the Australian troops at the frontline?

Oh yes they relieved us. I don't know what happened to them but most of them were captured I think.

This was before you started the retreat? Why did they relieve you?

I don't know why the Free French. I think they just wanted to get into the fight. The Germans weren't looking at Chad or that. They wanted

28:00 to support real fighting you see. They came up from there, which amazed me because I didn't think they'd get across the desert you know. I was quite surprised to hear they came from Chad because up to that stage Chad as far as I was concerned was just a country right in centre Africa and didn't expect them to be able to get up to where we were.

Did you meet any of them?

Oh yes. We

28:30 did some work with them you know to get them acquainted with what was happening in that part of the world and they were very impressive people. I often think of several faces amongst them that I still remember. And the next position of course we went or one of the next positions we would have had a couple of others, I can't remember

29:00 but, I think I already told you about taking up a position behind Benghazi where the trains were full of prisoners of war. The British still wanted to keep its prisoners rather than let them escape and fight again. They were entirely Italians at this stage because the Germans hadn't presented themselves and they were 6th Div captors

29:30 or Wavell's army, of which the 6th Div had been part, and as we were in this position ourselves very close to the railway line and these trucks full of prisoners were passing us and they were on their way actually back to Egypt.

Had you started any action at this stage?

No, this

30:00 is very close to the time we first had a bit of action. Actually our first closeness to the enemy was at Barce which was later on, not much later but about 48 hours later I suppose. While we were in this position overlooking Benghazi or in the direction of Benghazi

30:30 these trains passed by and they were filled with prisoners of war who were Italian and of course they were singing these Italian opera pieces or pieces that were like Osolomeo and La Traviata.

Did you know about opera at the time?

No, I knew of opera of course but I wasn't a buff for opera. My education of opera or my closest acquaintance with opera was

31:00 the Donkey Serenade which is a picture from Hollywood and Alan Jones was the singer of it.

They were pretty happy to obviously be singing opera?

Oh yes.

They must have known.

They were happy to be prisoners you see, most of them.

What was the atmosphere at the time? Was there some tension?

No, not really. We were quite happy you know. We'd say things to the

31:30 Italians that would be just as two sportsmen say football followers who are opposite teams would just say, jokes against each other but there was never any bad treatment, violence I mean, to prisoners of war. As a matter of fact we were talking

32:00 of this subject. I think it was about the time the Yugoslav recent war, you know the Yugoslavs and the Serbs anyhow, the recent wars. Well that brought up the subject of soldiers, armies, maltreating the prisoners of war and we as a group were

32:30 reminiscing and we said "Gee, we have no instance of where that happened amongst our forces."

Were you trained what to do with prisoners of war at the time?

Oh yes. All that, yes. The first thing of course is to make sure you don't drop your guard and they get away and then of course you really take some, when you get them first you pass them back to

33:00 the following army or soldiers behind you see because the forward troops, it applies to everything, soldiers you know were fighting and if a soldier wants to surrender they throw up arms and so on. Well OK, you let him surrender but you don't get particulars from him, you just let him go back a little bit and only a short distance and somebody sees him of course but it's the followers of

33:30 the platoon or whatever company who take care of the details of the prisoners. If the forward people were stuck taking details and that the enemy would overwhelm them the forward troops would be engaged in just making him surrender and then the back troops, following troops would be

34:00 taking care of any particulars such as you might wonder about their names and so on.

When was your first indication that you were facing a different, more aggressive enemy?

Oh well, just about the time we pulled out. You know when the Free French. About that time.

Can you describe what happened?

No, well we were just pulling out of a position

34:30 which was a routine you see. We could be going that way or that way as far as our feelings were concerned, but when we by our alignment of vehicles and so on, we looked to be going the wrong direction to be victorious you see. Then word passed through use what was happening and from then on we were

35:00 ready to engage the Germans you know.

Can you describe that first encounter with the Germans?

Ah well, it's just, it's difficult to say.

35:30 I'll break down if I talk here. Yes, it's quite fierce some. You've got to do your...

36:00 you've got to change your... You suddenly become another creature.

36:30 I think for most people it's you change from a person to a vicious beast or something and it's only the fact that the other person is just as fierce, some that you engage that's at the initiation of course. As the war goes on you change over

37:00 instinctively. Oh it's terrible. You can never revive that memory. You can only remember yourself as a beast

37:30 really.

You were all with your comrades as well. You're with you colleagues as well, weren't you? You were operating as a unit at the time.

Oh yes. You rush at each other and splatter with fire

38:00 and of course there's machine gun fire, rounds in all directions, there's fire, firing. It's hard to, it's hard to somehow...

It's very chaotic I'd imagine. The Germans first attacked you, is that correct?

Yes the first Germans

38:30 we had seemed to be quite experienced too. The later ones in some were less so in the spread of experience and new recruits amongst the later ones but the first ones they were quite experienced. You can tell by the approach of one soldier to

39:00 another whether that soldier, your opponent, is an experienced person or a new recruit. Not a recruit but less experienced.

You were quite inexperienced at the time weren't you?

Well, not at this time we're talking about. I didn't get real field experience until Tobruk.

At your first encounter with the

39:30 **Germans you were quite (UNCLEAR)?**

Hand to hand, yes.

It was hand to hand?

It really was, a really, a fierce engagement at that time because it was as if... it was on April 14th and the planes overhead were in a dog fight. They knocked our air force out of the sky that day

40:00 and we, the infantry, were engaged and the tanks were coming up and artillery was firing at point blank at the tanks. That's where Edmondson won his VC that day.

Was that near to where you were?

Very close as a matter of fact. Our

40:30 other company, A Company took over from that unit. We were right by them and the tanks pulled back because they got frightened and they pulled out. They left the infantry fighting out. Well, we were that way ourselves so it wasn't any, it was infantry

41:00 against infantry and the artillery and the machine gunners were all fighting fiercely. It's an awful experience actually. I mentioned wine. We'll talk about the wine. This memory I'll just talk about.

41:30 The day before when we got back to Tobruk after this retreat and I told you how we lost so many as prisoners of war and we got back to into Tobruk and I was moving around somewhat because we were

trying to find out forces and so on.

Tape 6

- 00:39 I was going to say you mentioned the wine. When we were back in Tobruk and we'd lost so many prisoners of war. They called on fellows who were the youngest people amongst them and I was 18 you see so
- 01:00 I was always a bit on tender hooks about being pulled out and sent back in the rear lines instead of forward as a soldier you see. When we got back to Tobruk, this is the day before the action that I just mentioned. They called on me and several others and the
- 01:30 reason was that I was a two inch mortar man as well as being rifle man and so on. A two inch mortar man, a two inch mortar man, that was the reason they called us back but I wasn't to know that point was that they'd lost so many as prisoners that he wanted to form up a mortar platoon again and the ones who had this two inch mortar training at least had some
- 02:00 knowledge of how to start you see, so the purpose was I had to report up to headquarter area which was just being formed because the real headquarters had been taken as prisoners anyhow and they left me standing there and I was wondering what was going to be and I walked out on them. I went back to my platoon and my company and I rejoined you see, rejoined the platoon. I was angry with
- 02:30 my officer, because I thought he'd put me in you know. He didn't explain but the point was as I told you, they were forming the platoon and as I walked back to my company there was this chap in the slip trench and he was completely covered in sand you know and it was a dust storm and the only part you could see that was a man, a living being, was his eyes and his
- 03:00 lips were moist and therefore the flies were ganging up around those moist parts. There he was in this trench and he of course had got to some of this Italian wine. There was a lot of it around you know and there he was and I remember having a thought "How useless you are". Well then next time when we were
- 03:30 in El Alamein, which is about a year later you see, there was this fellow whom I cast aside in my mind, at a machine gun fighting it out with a Stuka and he coughed coming down like that and of course he was killed, but I mean how you judge a person by
- 04:00 the wrong indicators really. I often think of...his name was Neville. He'd proven to be a wonderful soldier and there he was fighting it out with a plane that was firing massive bullets at him. But that's the sort of thing.
- 04:30 **Can you remember being given an order to retreat from Barce?**
- Oh not really. Things came on. Yes we spent the night in the pass there waiting for the Germans and it was so cold. It
- 05:00 was the month of April and it was a reasonably, that would in the summer really, but anyhow this night was so cold I thought "Oh gee, I can't put up with this much longer". Anyhow, the point was of course the morning came and somebody else took over from us and we further back and so on. You'd hop over each others' position.
- 05:30 Your friend or maybe part of your own company or another company, part of another regiment or battalion but that's the point. You don't sort of dash back, right back at all. You do it in stages and you support the other company, other group and you go back in steps and stairs sort of thing. Therefore we, yes I do remember
- 06:00 I was quite glad to get away from Barce. It was so cold for me.
- It was a fairly well disciplined retreat?**
- Oh yes, well it was although the fact that we weren't captured. It was an act of ill-discipline that saved us but...
- What was that, sorry?**
- We were in retreat in com in retreat, the whole battalion at this stage.
- 06:30 We would have taken up another position quite shortly but the point was that we, the battalion proper plus numerous other retreating armies, they went on this particular road directed by a military policeman. They were British policeman. They used to call them Red Caps. They used to wear red on their cap as part of their uniform.
- 07:00 And they, this Red Cap directed the battalion one direction whereas we later on, because we raided a food dump, we lost our position in the retreating column and therefore to catch up we took another

road. By the fact that we did that saved us from being captured you see, because the rest of the battalion stayed with the headquarters

07:30 and fell into an ambush by Rommel. That's why as I've said about Tobruk they were forming up another mortar platoon. That was the reason because we lost about a quarter of our battalion that way.

Can you tell us about the raid on the food dump?

Well, yes. Throughout our time we were always looking around for things to

08:00 pick up and if it was something of curious appearance or something, we always picked up souvenirs and so on, so we were quite on the alert. As we got to this spot it was quite evident it was an army area but it was just a warehouse with certain grounds.

08:30 It was obviously a shed, several sheds of storage you know. So we took our chance and went in and there were no guards on it. They knew damn well they better get going, they got out early. There we found food that we hadn't seen before. By today's reckoning it was nothing special but

09:00 from our point of view we always had bully beef and biscuits you see. Well this depot, food depot, had meat and vegetables. That's canned meat and vegetables, which we thought were absolutely delicious. That was our first experience with it and then some fruit, pineapple or something that we got very sick of

09:30 rather soon but at this stage. Food, salad, it was awful concoction actually but from our point of view at this time we picked up some of that and carnation milk. Always remember the carnation milk because it had labels on it. You know attractive labels. Well, most of the other things were just tins or something. Also the quality of carnation milk wasn't very good. After no time

10:00 in the desert you opened it up and it was sour almost immediately you see. So we didn't have any milk even when the army thought they were supplying us, because carnation milk went sour. So from then on we had good supply until right back until we provided that as our supply, until we eventually got back to Tobruk. But right through the

10:30 supply was always poor you see because we were in a siege state.

But that decision saved you from capture though. That decision saved you from capture though as well as gave you a food supply.

Yeah, yeah.

At that stage were you aware of how many men you had lost or were taken prisoner?

No. It took a while to find out because people do get lost. We got back to Tobruk and there were quite a few,

11:00 many more than were finally captured found their way back into Tobruk and so we didn't know who was going to come and who was lost you see. There was one bloke, what's his name? Rose? Porter. He, by the time, he walked all the way from Benghazi, I think it was.

11:30 Anyhow, he was in a very bad state but he had no assistance whatever. He never, some of the inhabitants assisted some people and others got a rough time from the inhabitants.

Was he part of your company?

How do you mean part?

Was he part of the 2nd?

You mean Porter? No he was part of the battalion yes, but not my company.

So can you describe seeing Tobruk

12:00 **for the first time under these fairly dire circumstances. I wonder what sort of impression it made on you.**

Tobruk the town. The main impression is a church and most buildings. I mean are virtually villages you know most of these places we're talking about Tobruk now although they've all grown greatly. Benghazi was already a city of course but Tobruk and Derna

12:30 and so on were just villages but they had a special sort of dignity about them. Many of the dwellings in Tobruk and also Derna were white. People over that part and like other parts of Egypt and the Mediterranean, their fondness for white buildings is a white spread there. And they do

13:00 look attractive. As I said earlier about the fresco, the symbol, most of these buildings it's also invariably in a place of note, say on the buildings. There'd be this special symbol of the fascist, that fascia I can't quite remember the name, fresco. Anyhow the point was

- 13:30 it was the fascist symbols, so Mussolini used to put this up rather promptly every time they came to a town or village. So Tobruk had a fairly or very good harbour but too small for the passage of traffic that was going to come there, and a white church and several other buildings that were white. One being used as a hospital,
- 14:00 a clearing station rather than a hospital, because they couldn't look after anybody in Tobruk for long. It was constantly being raided you see from the air and we had no air support after the Good Friday attack that I've mentioned. So the Germans had a good
- 14:30 uncontested opportunity to raid and it was going on all the time because sea water traffic couldn't get in there very easily because the aircraft, German aircraft, were always bombing them and things like that. When I came out, wounded of course, I was brought out by a destroyer and
- 15:00 it was raided all the time.

While you were in retreat from Barce to Tobruk were you under air attack?

Oh yes. Not greatly though. They used to fly along the columns of the retreating army and spot us and shoot at us and so on.

What did you do when the planes were coming?

Oh go for cover. In that case,

- 15:30 most of them you could see the aircraft coming quite a distance, a fair distance more so than later experience. It was fairly open sky and there'd be this string of vehicles on the road below and of course the plane would just come along that. You got fairly good notice because it was rather open and clouding wasn't a big, wasn't
- 16:00 frequent. It was fairly clear sky and so you could see the plane coming. You just had to identify which it was and of course it was mostly German. I can only remember Wellington flying over us once and then again we were in a position, we weren't on the road. The rest were Germans, German aircraft.

How did you go

- 16:30 **about organising the defence of Tobruk at that stage?**

Well Tobruk, the Italians were rather prompt at digging holes and making themselves safe you see, so Tobruk had around it. Imagine a circular type of layout and right around in a circle was this set of

- 17:00 fortifications. They were built of cement, underground and at three points in each post we used to call them. Each post was a firing position and of course that's where we had our machine guns and ourselves while the, I'm talking about the forward position here not the further inland,
- 17:30 and they took up position in these firing positions on this post. Well then that wasn't good enough cover. I meant that there were big gaps in the perimeter and we built extra posts in there and we engaged the enemy from there too. Of course we were firing at them fairly
- 18:00 frequently later on when they made the raid and tried again to take Tobruk and pierced our defences somewhat. We call it the Salient. It was at Salient that I was wounded.

Can you describe your job in the mortar team?

I didn't become a, I came back to rifle platoon but the mortars would

- 18:30 come up to us, the mortar team, and they'd be fairly well back from the frontline. Not far back, a little bit further back than say the infantry would be and they would of course pick their targets amongst the German/Italian. The other side would reciprocate and give us a hiding you see.
- 19:00 Their mortars, the German mortars, were better than ours as an explosive doing damage. During the day, mostly in my case in the late afternoon due to our position in the perimeter, they would give us a hiding one way or another. They'd probably see one
- 19:30 of us who had diarrhoea or something like that and had to expose himself during the day. Well, if you did that many times you would be sure to, if you expose yourself many times, you can be sure that by when the sun got in the right position from their point of view you'd get a pounding from their mortars you see.
- 20:00 It used to be a real bother.

Can you give a specific example of what you mean by that? Do you remember one particular incident?

Well yes, I was a victim of the mortar eventually but before that I'll pick on any number.

- 20:30 There was one of those posts that I just mentioned and it was right out into the middle of the, it was very much the exposed position as far as these posts were concerned. And in the evening, in the

afternoon, late afternoon,

- 21:00 the Germans used to give us a pounding on that post because of course we have to be on guard, you have to be watching, you can't just say "Oh he's coming down I'm going to get down in this cement place and be protected", because obviously if they've got anybody on guard they are going to come up and take the position, so we used to get a hell of a hiding there.
- 21:30 One of these outposts, which is what I said we made ourselves and while I was there of course, morale was dropping very much and the only morale raiser we had at this situation was to make a pot of tea. I thought "I'd do this for the sake of my friends who were in the post with me". I think there were four, four
- 22:00 or six, I'm not sure. I think it was four and by this time we had some bits of Italian equipment and so on and I had this Italian Dixie. A dixie of course is a container. You know what a dixie is, yeah. And I was going to boil some water which we know was a risky thing to do because once you'd start a fire,
- 22:30 the heat of the fire, although it's only a modest little fire, the heat of the fire, you can see it in the mirage you see. However these Germans were rather close and there I was with this dixie Italian, Italian dixie and I'm making the fire, I put this Italian dixie up on the
- 23:00 sandbag you see and just had my hand, just putting it there, and a sniper smacked it out of my hand. We still made the tea because it was you know a fairly common incident. Then another one, the mortar activity again. We went from there, a short rest and when I say short rest, just
- 23:30 another section would have taken over from us from that spot. When I say a section, 10 or 11 men you know. They were small as part of a platoon. I went into another one and once again got this pounding from the mortar and remember by this time we'd had a lot of
- 24:00 this and nerves were going by fellows one or the other. There is always someone strong, someone could support them sort of thing.

How long had you been in Tobruk at this time?

Probably a month, I think. Anyhow we were in this other position which was near there but on the other side.

- 24:30 We called them dugouts, covers with various things and this day the mortar was giving us a hell of a time. Picked on our particular post you see and I was in one with Sam Abrahams and the corporal was in another one and so on but there were three of these
- 25:00 little posts and we were joined by a shallow trench, connecting trench you see. I said to Sam "I'll go and see how everybody is" and I went around to these fellows, the other fellows, and said things to encourage us and that sort of thing. I wasn't a corporal but
- 25:30 I was usually given responsible positions as I just got back to where I had. Sam Abrahams was in there and this one had a direct hit, this position and of course Sam was killed. His whole chest was knocked out. Well I would have been in with him if I hadn't
- 26:00 done that. Anyhow that's more or less say about a few months after that. The same thing happened but in another position of course and that's when I copped it of course. Well, when I was wounded I'll explain why we were in this position. When I was wounded I told you about that, they took me out
- 26:30 by boat. I was unconscious for a week.

I'd just like to stay a little longer in Tobruk and just find out the details of it because it's a very well known time for the Australians. How close were the frontline troops to the Germans?

They weren't close because you've got a desert, you see. A desert situation, quite open country. Oh

- 27:00 mostly, it'd be about 500 yards I suppose. The position where I was wounded, that was the Salient where Rommel cut into our Tobruk defences, and it was heavily mined and just before I went into that position that I was just talking about when
- 27:30 I was wounded, what we were trying to do was straighten up the line. In other words, push him back out you see and in the night a digging party and engineers and so on would go out into no man's land and we'd dig a position for ourselves and be there in the morning and if the Germans made any attack on us well of course we were
- 28:00 a little bit forward. And we thought we were doing something that was winning but rather stupid actually because the little bit forward we got would be covered by rifle fire anyhow. If you gain a 100 yards in a situation like that it doesn't achieve much really but the point was of course casualties, obviously. I remember
- 28:30 engineers would try to clear the mines and the mines were not just for a heavy vehicle to go over. They had little arms on them that you screwed in and through that arm you would attach a wire that would go from that mine to another mine and so on. There'd be this network of mines and then these wires

with that arm in it were anti-

29:00 personnel so even if you stood on a big mine it needed a tank to set it off. These trip wires attached to the mines would cause the mine to detonate and of course you'd become a victim of the mine. The engineers would clear these mines and we then, we would, they'd put a tape for us to follow, so

29:30 you had to stay on that tape, otherwise if you went right or left, only inches mind you, you would probably set off a mine you see, so then there'd be a string of mines set off and everybody would be probably wounded you see or killed. And trying to carry a wounded through that is so difficult.

Did you ever have to carry wounded people

30:00 **back?**

Yeah, some of the engineers who had cleared and doing the clearing work of the mines became victims of course. Have to bring them in on a narrow stretcher. The tape guided us in you see.

Was that your job or the medical team?

It was our job bringing them in you mean. Oh yes they were our own people you

30:30 see. You brought them in; you couldn't attend them there because you had such a confined area. You had to pick them up wounded and get them a certain distance before you could attend them really.

Where were you sleeping at the time?

In these same places that I mentioned. The posts you know the. Well we worked all night you see,

31:00 doing things either out patrolling or doing varying things such as the mines I just mentioned. It was complete heavy activity all night. We tried to sleep during the day, but of course then again that was difficult because of flies and heat and so on. So it was rather strenuous that way. We really didn't get true rest until we pulled

31:30 out of our position and into the rear you see. By that time we'd have our first bath by going into the sea. There's a nice little beach quite close to Tobruk itself, so mostly got into that sort of position. But if you were in one of these positions, close obviously someone had to be right up to the sea,

32:00 otherwise the Germans could be creeping along there and doing damage to us but the people who were in positions near the sea of course, so they had a chance to swim more than we did. This beach that we went to was very close to the Tobruk harbour, so even when you were

32:30 resting at the beach there'd be this shrapnel coming down from the anti-aircraft fire you see, so it was keeping us occupied all the time.

How else did you keep up your morale?

Well, they used to have concerts there but I never saw any of that. Only did it occasionally you know. When I say occasionally, very

33:00 seldom but that did help the morale quite a bit. The only activity I did with any real relaxation connotation to it was the swimming as I just said there. And oh the desert rats, they were called "Geebowers" actually. They were sort of a rat of course,

33:30 but they had a little bit of a tuft on the tail, you know hair, used to be quite fast. You would only see them very seldom but oh yes we'd try to catch them and it took a lot of running and chasing. I never caught one of course but that was one relaxation and that I can remember. That's about all.

34:00 Didn't have good reading either. Had no preparation for that, so anything that was a piece to read; how trivial it was one was apt to pick it up to read it just for the relaxation of reading something you see.

How long did this go on for you in Tobruk?

I was wounded on

34:30 the 1st July, I think, yes July, so it was from April to July. But Tobruk itself as a besieged place it took nine months or ten months. No eight months I think, eight. And Tobruk was relieved by Major General Ritchie. He was in

35:00 charge of the British army and of course we were under the British but we stayed as a unit as they called them, a force as Australians, whereas the British tried to break us up into small groups but the Australian government wouldn't permit that.

Up until the time you were wounded are there any other specific events that stick in your mind before you were wounded? Are there any other specific

35:30 **events that stick in your mind?**

- I don't like to refer to the casualties but one gallant thing that I can mention,
- 36:00 the others I can't speak about them. But this one, the Germans used to raid, air raid bombing the harbour, and this was going on constantly and of course our main supply came in at night.
- 36:30 But even during the day there was this fighting going on but when they made a raid very often they would then come around and machine gun the infantry positions, artillery position and so on like that. This particular day the Dawnia [?], I called it a Dawnia, I think it was a Dawnia, I was a bit of a
- 37:00 specialist in identifying aircraft. Anyhow this Dawnia came quite low around the rim of the Tobruk - the four parts that I mentioned. And he was quite low and you could just see their faces and of course they'd smile at you and let you know you were in a miserable situation. As they passed us there was this
- 37:30 Jack Hall, we were all firing at it you see, but as it passed us this Jack Hall, on the machine gun, remember the aircraft was very low he poured it into this Dawnia and smoke came out of it and so on and it landed. It crashed but it didn't break up entirely. It landed as a
- 38:00 complete plane but it was put out of action though, but that was quite a thrill for us to get back at the aircraft, airways. We had a similar experience later on in Alamein too. We brought down one aircraft there with rifle fire. That's where I told you about the fellow with the, Neville finding him drunk in Tobruk and later on at
- 38:30 El Alamein how he took on this Stuka that was pouring bullets into him. The other things that stays in regard to that post and it was just about the same time the air force again raided us and amongst the bombs that were dropped, there was one very big one, about 500 pounds it was. And it dropped right
- 39:00 where our latrine was so when we went to the latrine we had this big bomb beside it. It was a dud you see, so we used to have fun tempting the dud to go off. It stayed there for our entire time. And the other one, in the same position was the
- 39:30 2/10th Battalion, which made their raid through us on this area, the same event I mentioned before. This was within a few days of Rommel gaining this position they made their attack through us and when I say through us we were in these posts and they set off their starting line to attack Rommel's forces from the side
- 40:00 and it was quite ferocious. We took the wounded in and had to leave the dead there and brought in wounded and wounded. When we fired at the planes we started to get into this
- 40:30 post we jumped from the top down into, onto sandbags and went in. We were doing this time and again and in the morning
- 41:00 found each time we jumped in, we were jumping on a man's corpse. It wasn't a sandbag at all. Just one of the 10th, 2/10th Battalion.
- 41:30 It was a very unsuccessful raid too. They didn't get anywhere.

Tape 7

- 00:34 **Can you tell us about the day you were wounded?**
- Well actually the day I was wounded I've got no memory, but the day before I speak about. Actually I was hit direct. I was in the dugout as I've said before about Sam Abrahams when he was killed well. He and I shared this one. Well,
- 01:00 my position was a similar position but in another part of the Salient you see. And as we had been, as I've told you, attending the wounded in the, as we trying to advance in the Salient and pinching parts of no mans land to get further up and closer to the Germans and so I was in a similar position but this day he gave us a hiding
- 01:30 in the same way, routine performance for him. And this time the bomb hit directly onto the one I was in but I was in alone. Therefore, I was the only casualty and that tin that I've got in there that the piece of shrapnel still stuck in it, that was, I had my head on that. This was my routine in this situation so I would have had it that day.
- 02:00 My head was on the haversack and that was in the haversack. The haversack of course it is a, you know what a haversack is? The bomb landed, hit the position that I was in and went, the haversack I used to use as a pillow in that situation.
- Can you please just explain the**
- 02:30 **tin? What was the tin?**

The haversack was part of my belongings you know that I took with me. Just a few personal things of course such as a toothbrush or something like that you know but I did chance to have a collection of photographs in that tin.

What was the tin sorry?

It was a chocolate ration actually but it was an empty tin as far as...

03:00 and I put these photograph negatives in the tin and that's how I was carrying it in my haversack. The bomb hit directly this position I was in and my haversack, that tin was in it, the haversack itself was absolutely shot to pieces and I didn't know that of course. When I was in hospital in Egypt in El Kantara as

03:30 I've already said, that was returned to me, the haversack was, and of course it was a shattered haversack, so I just threw it in the rubbish bin and kept the tin as a souvenir because it was a terrific indication of how much hit around me and that tin of course still has the, is all bent up by the percussion of the bomb and a piece of shrapnel still embedded in it.

04:00 So, of course I was rescued and they attended me until nightfall and then they took me out. This was the procedure. This is what happened to me. I don't even ask. My friend Wesley Vesalley was the main person rescuing me but he was killed later in Finschhafen and they looked after me to dark and the wounded were taken out

04:30 when night came of course and I was taken out and put on the destroyer which was the Vendetta, Australian destroyer, and brought back to Egypt. Mersa Matruh was the landing point at that time.

Do you have any memory of that journey?

No, I have no memory. I woke up in bed in hospital a week...

In Mersa Matruh?

No, in ah.

05:00 They took me off ship at Mersa Matruh because they wanted a short run to Tobruk you see. Sort of halved their time at sea and they brought me back to the Suez Canal at El Kantara there was a hospital there and in the morning I woke up and there was this hazy image of a red veil and a white, you know the sisters

05:30 were standing beside me. I woke up of course and having a Catholic background I thought, gee the Virgin Mary standing by me, but of course it wasn't, it was a sister Dalton.

Did you think you'd been killed?

I thought I was suddenly in heaven. Anyhow she was an angel. She wasn't the Virgin Mary but she was a good woman, wonderful woman. Sister Dalton was her name. Anyhow I stayed there for a while.

06:00 About a month I suppose.

How were you wounded?

How? The only flesh wound now is in the back there. There's a scar there and the concussion. You know I was very bad bomb happy case as they say.

What does bomb happy mean?

Bomb happy, nervous you know, shattered nerves and so on.

06:30 I had quite a few small cuts on the face and other parts of the body there - no sign of that now. This one there is a scar there and it's diminished greatly too.

Can you talk to us a little bit, what are the symptoms of being bomb happy as you call it?

Yeah well. I'll stretch ahead.

07:00 After being in hospital of course I'll go to the symptom of bomb happy there too. Right, then I thought I was quite well. It was sort of the end of the period in hospital. I was about to be discharged and amongst the sisters was this young

07:30 and very charming person whom I was going to contact later at first opportunity. I asked her her name and all those things that I needed to make contact and off I went, discharged. That meant I was going back to a convalescent camp and of course ultimately I would go back to Tobruk.

08:00 But I got the particulars of this charming nurse whom I hoped to contact again and off I went to the convalescent camp. I was hardly away half an hour you know on my way and I'd forgotten her name, forgotten everything about her so I never made any contact. That's how the brain gets knocks around and I went off to

08:30 convalescent camp which is up near Haifa in Palestine and about 11am each morning a mail plane used

to fly over. It was a regular thing and it was only an air defensive mail plane. Immediately, I was conscious of this aircraft flying over. From day one

09:00 while I was there as it was near 11 o'clock it passed over, I would be terribly nervous and I'd resort to getting into a slip trench and letting it fly over and to me it was a terrible feeling. Of course, no one else knew it. I never reported this. It wasn't observed

09:30 by anybody but it was pretty obvious because later it showed up and every time the plane was due to fly across our camp there would be this nervous expectation and by the time 11 o'clock I was very, very frantically nervous you see. By that time I was in a hole which was dug as an

10:00 air raid shelter but of course that was never noticed by anybody, so it was never on record. Ultimately, having had this convalescence I went back to the depot from which people went back to their units and so on.

How much did you know about this condition that you were experiencing?

In what sense?

10:30 **Did you know what was happening to you? Did it have a history that was explained to you by doctors?**

Well general knowledge of the First World War was our knowledge as far as this situation that I'm talking about now, because they used to call them "Shell shocked" you know, those people. We use the term bomb happy but it was the same thing really.

I guess what I'm asking is, was it a diagnosis? Did somebody come and tell you that this is what was wrong with you?

11:00 No, never. I never complained about it as a sickness like that and I don't think it was on my record at all. The wounding was you know the flesh wounds but I don't think the concussion and that which is the shell shock thing was ever on my record. In fact it contributes to my,

11:30 the fact that's not on the record, contributes to my, to the fact that I've got Parkinson's Disease and they don't observe it. They don't, the Veterans' Affairs don't observe it but had that been recorded those days at that stage I suppose it would be recognised but they say that Parkinson's Disease could occur and be caused by something else, but actually

12:00 the time was when I was wounded I am sure of that because the x-ray of my brain shows I had a trauma and it's supposed to be about that time.

Were there other tests that they put you through before they put you back into the front line?

Not really. The point was I was back in Meegazi [?], which was a reinforcement camp and the

12:30 people who had been wounded and ready to go back would be sent there and so on and the new recruits who came from Australia would be there too and so on. And I was anxious to get back to Tobruk. That's where all my friends were and I reported to Meegazi and I was on shipment to Tobruk and I lined up for it and they suddenly pulled me off the parade you

13:00 see. And it turned out that the colonel of the camp, in charge of the camp, identified me as being bomb happy or too knocked around to be going back into action, but next morning I was put on duty and he came along and I, a fairly timid sort of character, and being approached by somebody of

13:30 rank would not be angry or rude to such a person especially when he had the power to retaliate and more. But this day the colonel came along who was looking at the various people who were on duty in various ways and he came up to me and he obviously knew more about me than I thought he knew

14:00 and I went crook at him. I really had a temperamental, abusive session with him. He sent me on leave. Oh the other thing, when I was blown up my pay book was lost in it you see. It was all shattered, they eventually gave it back to me but the fact that I had no pay book I got no pay.

14:30 The fact that I'd lost my pay book when wounded didn't matter to them. I got no pay because that's one of the things I abused the colonel about you see. He gave me some money and sent me on leave again. He himself provided the money. Of course, I found out later the colonel had a fund, a special fund for that,

15:00 but I didn't know that. I thought he was making this personal contribution to me. And he sent me, so I was pulled off the embarkment and I was put on staff at that camp and I was an instructor there for a period again. I was promoted to sergeant and I was still there when the Tobruk

15:30 siege ended so I didn't go back to Tobruk. My battalion came back to Palestine and they went up to Syria and I arranged to be demoted again and went up to Syria.

How was your health during this period?

It was quite good. I can't remember any bad. I did have a few cuts and things but

16:00 I mean health in the sense of the constitution, I think I was quite good. Very nervous of course and I didn't want to be. When I got up to Syria I reported to my company and immediately the sergeant major said "I'm a corporal rank you see and go to such and such platoon".

16:30 I argued that I didn't want to be corporal because I didn't say this to them but the fact was I was afraid that I'd break down as soon as I got in the firing position you see. And I went back to the unit and eventually I faced up to because we were called down to what became El Alamein and I went into action again. I wasn't any worse off than anybody

17:00 else as far as control went but I thought I shouldn't be in charge of men while I'm in that condition. It took a lot of control work.

17:30 **How did you control the condition?**

I don't know, constant correction to myself I remember. I was pretty well in apparent control because nobody else thought I was, none of my associates thought I was any worse than they were anyhow. They gave me full confidence.

18:00 One of the hardest things to do is when you go in to attack and you're waiting for the moment of the gong to go to make the attack - controlling yourself in those

18:30 minutes approaching. One battle at El Alamein we, two fellows tried to get away but they had to come back. We just caught them in time. They were getting over that barrier.

19:00 They couldn't take it.

What was the signal you'd be waiting for when you're waiting to attack?

Well they'd say the battalion attack would be at 0300 hours or something like that. Of course you'd be lining up ready for 0300 hours. And minutes closer to that 0300 you'd be at the ready there and

19:30 they'd be, by that time there'd probably be a barrage and much fire to loosen up the enemy, and at the very minute of whatever was arranged to be the hour would be a, you'd go on, you see. It was hard to hold yourself that way.

How would you hold yourself at the ready?

Just hold yourself determined not to let anything

20:00 take you. You feel you're not able to do it, you know, but when that moment comes the gong goes and you're into it. Yeah.

What would you have to do when the signal came?

Well you'd

20:30 know where your enemy target is and in this case we're talking about say El Alamein, not the big battle there, smaller ones. You'd just go forward. You would have studied a map of course and you'd go forward and hope you're not bowled over by the time you get up to the enemy position as the fighting men, I don't mean the mine field. You go through the mine

21:00 fields and so on and hope you don't get hit or you might go on the back of a tank. If we had the tank support we'd do that but we did an operation whose code named was "Balimba". The tanks pulled back. They didn't support us right through and that colonel was in a Bren gun carrier and struck a mine and he was badly wounded.

21:30 He survived it though and we got over to the Germans and had to fight them.

When the tanks weren't supporting you like at Balimba would you have to march forward in formation?

Oh well, you virtually did but as a rough sort of thing. Obviously you've got to watch mines and watch this and go to ground because of some fire and all this is very different because of an experience you more or less keep roughly in line.

22:00 The idea was in that particular type of fighting you were in a line, sort of a line abreast say, and then as troops behind came filling in those gaps and you sort of approached the enemy that way. And of course by this time there was much machine gun fire coming and shell fire and things like that so

22:30 they, it's a very frightening time but the actual combat is not frightening once you, as I said earlier once you change into the mode of fighting, that part is not so difficult providing you're winning of course. And I've forgotten what I was going to

23:00 say.

You'd march forward in loose formation?

Yeah. I remember taking on the enemy individually then. I was going to say that earlier. I talked about we didn't treat our prisoners of war badly. This just reminds me of this fight that I'm remembering now which was the "Operation Balimba". This chap Doug Devony.

23:30 The two Devony brothers were in the fight with me. Harry Devony was killed and Doug who was a gentlemanly sort of a fellow you know, very polite and so on, and of course he had to find anger too to fight the enemy, but as in this fight there were Italians and Germans to take on and he was just about to take a prisoner of war, two of them

24:00 actually. And he said, we were talking about the Yugoslavs a while ago and this is where this remark came from him. He said "You know I remember I was always sympathetic to them, I remember during Balimba, I was going to, these two Italians and I felt like saying to them, "Don't be worried I'm sorry that I've got to do this", and suddenly Doug was hit. He didn't make this expression but I know he really

24:30 meant it he was really. He would have killed those two men if they had done the wrong thing from his point of view. But he said he'd say "I'm sorry I've got to do this" and he would have. That's just the way he would have spoken to them. Of course he was wounded, very badly wounded and his brother was killed and my other close friend

25:00 was Noel Collins. He was killed there too. Yeah.

Can you take us through what happened at Balimba?

At Balimba? Well it was called Balimba because we were a Queensland battalion and Colonel Ogle who was our colonel, who was leading. This was a battalion attack on the Germans you see and the position was

25:30 that Rommel was expected to make a thrust down well into the south of the Mediterranean you know, right down there. When he did that it was expected anytime. Once he started we were to raid on their flank and it was code named "Balimba". Balimba of course is a

26:00 Brisbane beer and was a favourite of the troops in those days of course. Not that they got any over there but there was always nostalgic talk about Balimba and so on, so the colonel code named this particular battle Balimba. So we lined up of course well before dawn and we made this raid.

26:30 Mention Roy Donnelly to me shortly because he's characteristic for this type of fight. Ok, we're crossing no man's land at the ready to fight the Germans and there were minefields of course. Engineers had been through gradually over a period of a few days making

27:00 a break in the mine field by delousing the mines and we entered through that way but of course there is always a big chance that not all mines were found by the engineers. Very often they can't do their job because of enemy activity against them. Anyhow we, that is my people, my platoon company and the other rifle companies; by this time

27:30 there was a fierce exchange of fire. We were fighting like anything and we got Germans and Italians, mostly German. We held the position for something like four hours I suppose and then we had to. We were given command to withdraw. We went back. By this time of course the colonel had been

28:00 badly wounded in a Bren gun carrier they called them. They were track vehicles. They weren't much protection. Anyhow we thought they were when we first saw them. The colonel had that; I was on foot of course, we were fighting. And he was badly wounded and his 2IC [Second in Command] came into action then and we withdrew and we were pelted by the Germans of course but

28:30 we won the fight but it was only a short fight.

How does a rifle battalion work in that kind of combat? Is it all about team work or is it more individual?

Oh no, it's both team and you need a team because while you're fighting this fellow there's a bloke over there who's going to help his mate and you know. It's a sort of a rough and tumble between two individuals,

29:00 between a group of fellows and things like that. Mostly, the essential act is individual but there's always. If I'm fighting you, I've also got my eye over there and if I've beaten you I'll go and help my mate there sort of thing.

Explain how you would be communicating with the people next to you?

Oh there'd be a lot of shouting and groaning and all sorts of things. You sort of know

29:30 each other by your general living together and training together and then fighting together, so what they say is much like in a game of football or something like that. A fellow may make strange remarks or something like that but you sort of understand each other's something. It's much like a football team in that regard.

Like in a football team are there positions?

30:00 **Would you be next to the same person in different (UNCLEAR)?**

Oh you'd make your own choice yes. It does happen but sort of well pal up or something like that. Yes there is that. I just made a remark about two fellows who tried to get away. Well they were pals you see, that sort of thing yet they fought

30:30 together and they were a good partnership. Yes, it's a very strange, terrifically strange experience. I mentioned about the liftmen, didn't I?

In the First World War?

And how they talked about the camaraderie in the infantry. Well that's the example, that

31:00 this camaraderie is there but we don't talk about it really but it's there and it's really the big factor in an infantry engagement I think, very big people don't realise it actually.

Did you have pals yourself that you were particularly keen to work with?

Yes, I had very loyal

31:30 friends, actually.

Can you tell us a little bit about them?

Oh, I mentioned Roy Donnelly there. Roy and I were very good friends, supported each other all the time and went on patrols and so on. And Roy was so good at patrols; by this time I'd been wounded and so on, so we didn't get back together as closely because we

32:00 had different positions you see. The point was Roy became such a good man with these special patrols. Did I tell you about when I was on patrol, the fellow took the first pressure? Anyhow, this is a similar situation but this is Roy Connelly. There's a photo. He was so good at patrols he

32:30 used to get in right behind the enemy and get all detail and all that. Well eventually of course, this battle of El Alamein was what was being planned and patrol activity was very much in action because we wanted as much information as possible and all that and Roy used to get in quite close, right in the German area where a post

33:00 was I mean and on this occasion, best example of course. He went out on patrol and ascertained where the listening post was. You know what a listening post is? It's a sentry soldier; you have a hole dug in a protective set up right out into no man's land and

33:30 he's there to foretell if any enemy activity is happening and he sends back a message to there, so the company or platoon or whatever is at the ready. Well, Roy of course found where the listening post was and noticed, already knew of course, but noticed that as the tucker truck came up for the Germans.

34:00 Tucker truck is they carry in our case and similar to Germans say company headquarters which is still behind the line and bring out say a hot stew or something for the soldiers. Of course the people in their platoon position would be further back and the fellow in the listening post, he would be by

34:30 this time he'd know about the time the truck would come and he would be more intent on listening, he's still got to stay in position, but he'd be listening for the tucker truck to come with the food. Because everybody was rather hungry and the food wasn't all that choice either, so a little bit of food made it very welcome and worth listening for. And this happened of course and Roy noticed the activity or inactivity of the

35:00 listening post individual and he, because he was listening more for the sound of the truck coming which wouldn't be, it would carry in the desert situation but wouldn't be all that noisy. And he calculated that the listening post man would be listening for the truck rather than looking out the front where he'd look for hours anyhow and he crept up on him and

35:30 grabbed this bloke by the scruff of the neck and frog marched him right through the mine fields and he'd just come through, so he more or less had an idea of a safe track through it and marched him right across no man's land and right up to battalion headquarters. By this time the bloke had shit himself and here he was with his full pants. They slammed him down on the ground or something like that, I don't know

36:00 that, and interrogated him and so on and got worthwhile information and it contributed to their preparation quite well. But that's the sort of, he was a great fellow Roy and he was killed up in New Guinea. His brother was killed a week later I think it was, and then his other brother died as a prisoner of war. He was only 18 too.

36:30 **Were acts of heroism like that common do you think at the time?**

A lot of heroism occurs and it is not officially recognised, yeah, and the fact that somebody boosts another person's morale is a big contribution and yet of course it doesn't get recognition.

- 37:00 I don't see how one could but you make a big contribution by doing things like that. But we used to say, the chap who was a good friend, we were very good friends. We had a cabin together on the Indrabarah on our way across to the Middle East. We changed from the Queen Mary onto
- 37:30 this ship and Wes was my sergeant and in Tobruk when I said I was angry with them for when I reported up and after the retreat to Tobruk, well of course, knowing he was a friend Wes, it was from there that position down to his platoon that I went to come back to the rifle company. He
- 38:00 supported me there but of course he would have needed me anyhow because we were short of people but that was his friendly act you see. Anyway Wes was eventually killed in the engagement that I had, that I was wounded in later.

In El Alamein?

No Finschhafen, New Guinea. He was killed. The same gunner that killed him I

- 38:30 had engagement with the following day. He, that gunner, killed our company's commander, the intelligence officer, Wes Versally, all in about half a minute in a burst of machine gun.

Did you fight alongside him?

Yes in Tobruk and

- 39:00 there too, but we were in the same company there too but I wasn't up with him at that moment.

Can you explain, I know it might be a difficult thing to think about but it's very, very important and I think it should be on the archive because it's something that only you have experienced that front line fighting, how is it done? Are you working with your rifle?

Oh yes.

How do you use your rifle?

Or a sub-machine gun. In that operation

- 39:30 at Balimba, I had a sub-machine gun which we called a Tommy gun, an American weapon, made in America. It was a very important weapon for us and in New Guinea I still had a sub-machine gun. At that time it was the Owen, an Australian gun. But the Thompson sub-machine gun in the desert was a good gun
- 40:00 but you had to be very careful because there was so much grit and dust in the desert. You had to keep it operative and also if you took it on patrol, I experienced all of these things of course, it had two types of magazines and the smaller magazine held 12 shots and bigger on which
- 40:30 is like a round magazine and it, although it carried about 45 shots I think, bullets, well bigger calibre bullet, about 45 or 48 calibre. The big,
- 41:00 it wasn't any good on patrol the big magazine because the bullets in the magazine used to make a rattling noise, so you had to use the, a small one in a patrol engagement but in a fight like the Balimba one you use a round one because you had more shots you see.

How long could you fire a gun for with that magazine on it?

Only about five seconds. Oh no,

- 41:30 you wouldn't, that would be the period you'd shoot. You wouldn't empty the magazine in that time. But you don't sort of grab your trigger and blast away. That's very important. I mean when I was engaging this machine gun I had to be careful about that.

Tape 8

- 00:30 October early, first week in November that's our period there, it was 1942. Of course, we were engaging the Germans holding our line and while they, Allies that is the British, gathered material and built up their strength and of course became the Battle of El Alamein, but we were already fighting
- 01:00 at El Alamein all those months. Lost quite a few good fellows.

Clem, I think what we might do is we might move forward to Papua New Guinea and if we have a chance we'll come back to El Alamein? Do you feel that's all right?

- 01:30 Yes that's good. Yes.

Can you perhaps talk us into your New Guinea experience and how you arrived there and what the situation was?

Right, well actually the battle of New Guinea, that is the big risk of losing New Guinea to Australia, was already held up by the activity of the Kokoda Trail

02:00 forces and also at Milne Bay by the 18th Brigade and when we came back from the Middle East, it was intended that we would, Curtin and the Australian Government intended to send us directly into action up in the Indies and so on, but by the time we got there, all that was over you know Singapore had been

02:30 surrendered and so on. We came back to Australia and went to Atherton Tableland and trained there and it was to be trained for an invasion from the sea of course and therefore we spent a lot of time at Trinity Beach down near Cairns and we had invasion craft there.

03:00 They were supplied by America and we did a lot of exercise there and of course up in the jungle area on the Atherton Tableland and that was our preparation for New Guinea against the Japs there. As it turned out, it was New Guinea but it could have been other parts of the jungle. We shipped up to Milne Bay and we were there I don't know, a couple of weeks I suppose,

03:30 and then it was planned that the Battle for Lae would be taken. Salamaua still occupied by elements of the 18th Brigade, that's an island all the way up to Lae, and we were to bypass that and take Lae from the sea and at the same time from inland would come the 7th Division

04:00 and that would come down the Ramu Valley and take Lae from that direction. This is what happened and of course we landed out of Lae and turned in.

Where did you land?

Well at a beach at Lae just out of Lae, but there was a river, a very strong river, that was between our landing point and the town of Lae you

04:30 see. We, that was my part of the battalion, couldn't get across the river it was too strong.

Were you in landing craft?

We had landing craft that brought us to Lae but not at this stage. However, they brought back the landing craft and we did another landing at Lae itself but the fight was taken out of the Japanese by then by the 7th Division

05:00 and it was a rather easy job for us.

Was it an opposed landing?

Not, well it was, but not a strong opposition and then we just finished that and were sort of settling down and we suddenly found out we were going to do another invasion you see, and this of course was to be at Finschhafen which was the next prominent place,

05:30 prominent by that standard further up the coast of New Guinea and therefore we again got into these invasion craft landing craft and it was more or less late in the day, late in September too.

How long had you been in Lae?

Only a few days, two

06:00 or three days I'd say. Anyhow we were on this landing craft and went out to sea and there landing craft from several directions assembled and that's how they got ready to come in on Finschhafen.

Can you describe that trip into the beach in Finschhafen for us?

Yes the landing craft

06:30 was different from the one we'd trained on mainly but anyhow it was a bigger one and better one from our experience and it had planks down each side, which they would drop as they got to the beach and we would run down those planks and engage in fighting right away. Well of course landing craft was full

07:00 of troops all ready for complete action and the first wave of these landing craft came in. They had another two battalions in the brigade, see there were three battalions in the brigade. The Two battalions that went ahead of us were the 2/13th and the 2/17th and we of the 2/15th came in following. Well they, the ones ahead of us, struck

07:30 reef, rocks not coral, and they were a bit off course and things went a bit wrong that way. They got in and secured the beach head and we came in and we also struck reef and were not so much off course but a bit off course, and we had to come down there with a boat having hit the reef.

08:00 We came running down to engage in the fight. Of course we had heavier equipment. The motor struck the reef and from my personal experience, there were quite a few casualties, drowning you know over the mortar plates and things like that they were carrying and they were too heavy and drowned.

You had to carry this equipment off the landing craft/ You had to do that personally?

Oh yeah. I didn't, I had to

- 08:30 but I still had weight, I had ammunition weapons you see. The rifleman had that but the mortar men had these heavy weights too. The machine gun, Bren gun's a heavy thing in that situation and when I went in of course the water was right over my head but I did the sort of a kangaroo action, you know down and jump ahead like that. Each time I jumped my head came up and I got a bit of air.
- 09:00 I did that towards the beach and we all probably did that. I can't remember whether I checked with them but they must have because they wouldn't have got in otherwise. Anyhow, it was sort of a natural thing to do. Anyhow we got into there. We had more fighting up towards Cateeka [?], the native village that was in a bit. That settled down so we headed off to Lae, oh not Lae, Finschhafen.
- 09:30 Well, we were north of Finschhafen by this time. We went down south towards Finschhafen but the Japs held the bridge there and we were directed, this is B Company on our case, to go in up the Hell's Back [?] or Hell's Back range, I've forgotten. Hell's Back I think it was. One is sort of a tributary of the other one range. I might have the names
- 10:00 wrong. We went up there; we had to climb this range and it was very wet and very sodden, no rocks or no. It was real thick mud sort of thing. These fellows with the big load again. We had to help them, of course it was too much for one person to say carry a mortar, a mortar plate, had to pass that up and so on. All that sort of equipment you see.
- 10:30 Anyhow, we got up there and we went on our way towards Finschhafen. We were sort of up on the crown of the range then.

Were you involved in the battle to take the bridge?

No, the other part of the battalion was. No, not personally I'm in the forthcoming action and we eventually got down to the river again. It wasn't a deep river and it was beautifully clear

- 11:00 but it wasn't a strong river.

You were with all you colleagues from the desert campaign?

Oh yes, largely but reinforcements too. There would probably be about 50/50.

It must have been strange for you to come out of the desert and suddenly find yourself fighting in the jungle?

Oh yeah, quite different although we'd had a lot of training by then you know. The jungle training and so on so we would have

- 11:30 been perhaps the most experienced troops. That's the ones who did the full desert period and so on. I think we would have been about the most experienced troops in the AIF. Anyhow, down we went and we eventually got to this river which was the one, which was further down, stopped by our forces down there and we engaged a patrol, a
- 12:00 Jap patrol, just before the river. When we got to the river the company commander, the intelligence officer and the company sergeant major, they went to the edge of the river making a reconnaissance to see what they would do about getting across it and whilst they were doing that a machine gunner
- 12:30 shot them. By that time there was one fellow killed, Tom Kid. He was killed by mortar fire. These others, Wes Versally, my good friend, and the company commander was Allan Kristie the captain, and the intelligence officer was Ian Harpom, He was a lieutenant.
- 13:00 They were shot by this gunner. Whilst that was going on I was, not whilst that was going on, immediately after, I with a crew of my men and Col Logan who was a lieutenant, we cut our way back in through the Kunai grass to make a track for us to get supply up
- 13:30 and take wounded out and we did that and came back. One incident. I got up a tree to make an observation and I had to share it with a green python and I decided then I'd rather face a Jap than the green python. And we came back and incidentally I was taken down that same track a couple of days later in the
- 14:00 wounded. Came back the brigadier decided we would try to make a beach head there and attack the position where the machine gunner was. Of course he had a supporting force around him carried out, lined up for an attack there and the bloke
- 14:30 who shot my friends - I took him on. And of course they were so hidden. The fact is he'd been shooting considerably the day before, so I could see the cover that gave him, support and hide him
- 15:00 had been shot away largely because it was thinned out by machine gun fire and I could see that there was a certain protection, so I stayed on the edge of those machine gun fire. It stayed in the thick growth and it was very difficult country and
- 15:30 we went and fought that way. The machine gun of course sat up there like a cone, like a funnel I describe it in that. The machine gun has a sharp point up there and fire spreads out like that. Well I

- went up that way just where I could see his field of fire was not catching on. Got right up to him
- 16:00 and I had to get across his fire. I couldn't throw grenades because they would roll back on me and by some miraculous situation which I couldn't calculate but it just happened, there was a pause in his fire and I've managed to get across. I was right up to him, by two yards away fighting
- 16:30 him of course and he got me in the chest but I got him in the forehead. And I must have got him directly because I fell in his path and my presence would have been known to him because I was instructing my fellows what to do, shouting to them and
- 17:00 they went on, they had a great victory. I brought back, as a matter of fact I found my way by the cable of the signal man who carried it past me. I wouldn't let him look after me because it delayed his work.
- 17:30 I used the cable to get back to headquarters. They went on and it's written in that history there. It's got there that I was only two yards off. That history was written by somebody else. I didn't tell them that. I was hit in the chest. I was right up on. Well,
- 18:00 when a machine gun fires, each burst has at least five shots in it, so I should have been hit by five bullets but I was right up on him and I don't know why I was hit by one bullet. It went in there in the sternum, came out through the lung there, lung cavity. And we didn't lose, we lost a few there.
- 18:30 A lot of the, the other company got more Japs than we got, they were Marines but supposed to be crack troops too and Fred Fink had caught the others around there. They killed over 50, I think. He said they killed more but they were lost in the grass and
- 19:00 they only notified their presence a few days later. I was evacuated down to Lae on a barge overnight. Anyhow the Japs counter attacked by the time I was back in Port Moresby hospital. The Japs counter attacked and they had another big fight at Scarlet beach. They nearly won it that time.
- 19:30 Well the fight went on and our forces got up to Sattelberg and won that. Diver Derek was awarded the VC [Victoria Cross] for that. One of our chaps should have got the VC too but they mucked up his you know recommendation. He was awarded the VC and I was awarded the MM [Military Medal].

For that

20:00 **action at the machine gun?**

Yeah.

And you killed the machine gunner?

Oh yeah.

With a grenade or you had your gun?

Gun. An Owen gun. There again, there's another thing. I told you we were in the water there and we had to keep our weapons functioning and such oil as we had I passed onto the machine

20:30 gunner, the Bren gunner, to keep it functioning. Well, therefore the Owen was coated with rust in a couple of days you see and yet it went into action like that and still performed well. Then I went down to, I was in hospital at Port Moresby. I came back to the unit again a bit up,

21:00 they were up at Sio by then, but then I was sent off to officers' school, so then I never got back to the 15th.

At that time with the machine gunner, were you fighting a very personal battle at that stage or were you?

Yeah, well actually each battle becomes personal. I mean if you didn't put all your person into it. In other words if it wasn't yourself entirely,

21:30 you wouldn't get results actually. So at the final moment, yes it is personal but generally as I was serving I never had any strong hatred of the enemy at all. You know people in the enemy. I was always sympathetic to prisoners, which was typical of most of us I think. There were a few who

22:00 you know were rather fierce but generally speaking we were not that way.

Did you regard the Japanese enemy as different to the German enemy?

Yes, we did somehow yeah. Yes, we although I suppose I had a better memory of Japs

22:30 than most of my colleagues because I told you earlier about Cooktown. The Japs were you know regular there but most other people hadn't seen a Jap before who were engaged in that. I went to officers' school and then came back and did some jungle training at Canungra Queensland. Whilst I was there, there came an opportunity to

23:00 join the paratroops. The colonel of the paratroops battalion came down and picked, I think there was 17

of us, to join as reinforcement officers to join the paratroops, but I never actually got into the battalion of the paratroopers. I was doing qualifying and other things down in Richmond NSW. Here, that was our base

23:30 and whilst I was there I was taken off to do the action in the Malaya you see. A colonel recommended. They only wanted one person but the colonel recommended four or five, I've forgotten now, to the director of military intelligence, so we went down to

24:00 Melbourne. The headquarters was there and we were interviewed by the Brigadier Rogers himself, who was the director of military intelligence. I was the one chosen and so I flew off to Colombo and got there almost on the Victory in Europe day.

24:30 A couple of days before I think it was. We lived in cottages around, there's a well known holiday spot, what's it called? Cape Lavinia. Lavinia anyhow.

Yes it's Cape Lavinia, I think yeah. How did it make you feel when you heard the news of victory in Europe?

Oh, we had a great time.

25:00 We, in Gallface Hotel down in Colombo.

Yeah it's an amazing place.

We celebrated there. It was a wonderful night that. But then I got scrub typhus and they didn't go forward with my program. Somebody else substituted for me and then I dropped in later after I recovered

25:30 from that and I did another job you know as I've already said there were agents dropped into various parts to do jobs of intelligence for them such as locate prisoners of war camps.

Can you describe that operation?

Yes, well firstly.

26:00 It's very, quite simple actually but I've thought how wasteful war is. There was this big bomber, a Liberator, taking off for Malaya with a crew of, I don't know how many, but probably about six. A loaded bomber with one little fellow in it, me, and my interpreter and we went all the way to Malaya. It must have been

26:30 terrific cost.

Who was your interpreter?

He was an Eurasian, we called them of course in those days. He was a part Portuguese and part Malayan and he was from Kuala Lumpur area. He escaped from Singapore before the surrender

27:00 and of course he came back as a interpreter with the British forces you see. Lasaru was his name. The thing is you want a description of it. Well, I reported into Colombo from Australia of course and there wasn't much to do immediately

27:30 so I helped with various little chores. They used to pack things for the persons like myself, who would be dropped behind the line, so there was these little pouches that had MA on them which was money for Malaya. British printed money the Malaysians were afraid to touch anyhow, because if they were caught with any of it on them they would

28:00 be executed so we had to have an alternative and they issued us with gold. Gold of course, all the Asian people are very familiar with the trucking with gold, of course and even the humblest peasant will take gold. He wouldn't in this situation take a British note or anything like that. And that was how they supplied us

28:30 to prepare for our activity behind the lines you see. Well I prepared packs like that for parties that were going in and did various other helping things like that while filling in the time virtually. I tried to learn some Malay but didn't get anywhere with it. I'm a dull character with foreign languages. Anyhow,

29:00 eventually I was put on a particular operation which turned out to be well down towards Singapore. Dropped into the jungle there.

Can you explain the objective of the operation?

The objective of the operation, number one as far as I was concerned, my

29:30 particular representation was information about the area in regard to location of prisoners of war camp and anything that could contribute to saving them and also avoiding bombing them you see. The offensive was intended to carry on as in Europe where there could have been an invasion,

30:00 but of course atomic bombs changed all this. And just as in Europe they dropped people behind the

lines who passed on information back about locations and various things like that. That was what I was to do.

You had a radio with you?

Oh yes. Well I dropped and joined a group of Canadian

30:30 soldiers, a party dropped in there previous to me you see. And there was one French Canadian, two French Canadians; Pat Hanner was an Irish Canadian of course and one Chinese fellow, a Canadian, Canadian born. They sent him to be for language purposes, he was a fine fellow but of course his

31:00 difficulty with the Chinese language, as in Malaya was just as bad as for him as it was for us you see. His Chinese knowledge was not all that fluent either. So they were there on the ground and with a few guerrillas who were Chinese. There weren't many Malayans, Malays who joined the guerrilla forces. Anyhow there was this party to receive me

31:30 when I dropped in from the Liberator.

Can you describe that mission before you and got out of the aircraft and take us through that jump?

Well, actually before I was sent on this mission I spent about a week I think it was, in a special camp. Supposed to be security but there wasn't all that strict about it. I was there entirely isolated

32:00 and then I got in the aircraft of course. It had a load to drop on various places for troops behind, parties behind the line as I was to be and myself and my interpreter. When we got over the target, my location area, which was at dawn.

32:30 During the journey of course I slept largely because we were way up high and there wasn't anything to see at night time. Anyhow, I slept very largely and as the time approached a bloke gave me a cup of coffee or something like that, one of the crew, and then I dropped by going out the chute through which they throw the loads out when you know they're dropping

33:00 supplies to people below.

Was it night time?

Night, first light it was yeah. I came down and there was a patch in the jungle you know that was clear, naturally cleared by lalang grass you see. It happens throughout the jungle in New Guinea and other places too. You know it's not an intensely trees all the way, it's an odd patch of this lalang area.

33:30 **Do you have all your equipment attached to you too or has that gone separately?**

Oh yes. What equipment?

The radio?

No, I didn't have the radio. That was already on the ground, but yes the other stuff I had with me. As I came down I didn't get into this area, the patch that I said. Instead of that I hit a tree and I was caught in the tree you see.

Could you steer the parachutes?

Oh yes, yes.

34:00 You could but not wonderfully. It was very slow acting. Only partial direction that's all.

Can you describe your descent there, the view you had?

Well it's very busy adjusting things because you drop at a low height. You drop at a low height in that situation of course

How low were you?

I don't know but about 1000, I think. Between 1000 and lower than that,

34:30 feet that is. Then you look around and say "Where am I going to land?", and you pick out the spot that seems to be clear and I directed for that which was, the pilot of course, navigator, found that spot for me. It was already prearranged. Down I came but of course I didn't get quite into that area and I hit a tree and was quite hurt but I couldn't do much about that but keep going.

35:00 We had to move on pretty fast.

Were you stuck up in the tree?

I had to climb up and slip out of the harness and leave the harness there. The harness was all tangled in the branches.

How far off the ground were you?

Probably only about 20 feet. That would be about all and you dangle down considerably and parachute and we

35:30 cut off into the jungle with the party that was already there, they had the directions of course and I, we, joined up with the Chinese guerrillas. I should say the guerrillas who were mainly Chinese because there were some Malays but they were very few. In my particular group I think there was one but in the entire forces throughout the Malay area

36:00 the various parties similar to this they had an occasional Malay. There weren't many but the Chinese were very determined and they weren't all that friendly. Later, by the time peace came I had two Australians who had never been caught, run. They had spent their time with the guerrillas all the war. And they,

36:30 you know, instead of being wonderfully friendly with them they were quite angry about it you know.

Towards you or towards the Australians?

To the Australians who were given sucker by the guerrillas weren't all that enthusiastic about the guerrillas because during their period they were treated very hard you know. And

37:00 there was this resentment shown by the Australians.

Did you meet them?

Yes, yes my word they surrendered to me. They came out of the jungle to me but we obviously asked the guerrillas when we first joined them about any Australians or any troops in your knowledge about. They never

37:30 admitted it. They were going to keep these fellows as hostages. Later on of course you might remember, oh you wouldn't remember but you might know after the war, World War Two ceased, the guerrillas tried to take possession of Malaya, the Chinese forces, and of course the British once again went in and it was tidied up that way

38:00 for them.

Can you go back to that moment after you were on the ground? You were a little bit hurt but what did you do next?

Well we got as much knowledge as we could and used the radio. That party I mentioned one of those was a signal radio man, Robert Cazer,

38:30 a French Canadian. I think he was actually Spanish, Spanish ethnicity but I used to think of him as French Canadian. Well, he used his radio you see. All we could hear up to this stage was we didn't know where any prisoner of war camp was. That

39:00 turned up after but we had a fair amount of information to pass back you know, troop movement or activity rather than movement and things like that you know. That took us, it was very difficult putting that in code and so on. That took a lot of time and later on of course after we found out there

39:30 were two prisoners of war camps but by that time I'd come out of the jungle. This was right at the end of the war really but no forces had arrived. By the time I'd come out of the jungle it was just ahead of the peace being declared.

How long were you in the jungle?

Probably six weeks I think.

Can you take us back

40:00 **to the time you first joined the forces on the ground after your parachute drop. Can you remember introducing yourself to them and what you did next?**

There's a funny little piece about that. The head of the Canadian party. His name was Andre Benwa and he had already served in Europe doing the same sort of thing dropped behind the lines and he was this little,

40:30 what would you call them? A little man very proud of his, "Nobody's going to boss me about", that sort of style. And here he was in the jungle going to meet this bloke from AIF. He presented himself, you know when I hit the ground. He stood up in a very formal way and he had his campaign medals all ready on his chest

41:00 and he had been awarded the MBE [Member of the British Empire] and that was there. He was doing this in the jungle and I thought it really tickled me to see this fellow prepare, all this proud preparation, to show who was who about this. Anyhow it turned out alright. He was never all that glad

41:30 handy, he was always a sort of a serious but he did his work fairly well.

You were the ranking officer? You were the commanding officer?

No, he was actually. He was a major but I was an independent you know. We were together for the radio purpose you see but actually I was independent.

Tape 9

00:33 **Can you take us back to that time when you were with the Canadians and what happened next and up to the point where you might have met those two Australians who had been there? Can you talk us through that stage?**

I'm a bit vague about this but I'll tell you what I can. Well any information we sent at night time we got in touch by radio

01:00 and that was passed that way. We had to put it in code of course. That was done mostly by the signal man and Left. Cazer as I said and we did all this preparation.

01:30 Lots of pieces of information that I can't remember exactly what but anyhow we sent back all we could about what we knew. All the time the relationship or friendliness of the guerrillas was a difficulty. In the jungle they didn't really associate with us. They stayed in their little area and

02:00 they wanted us to stay in their area. I thought this was wrong. In between us was this, this was in one particular camp but this was typical of their method, in between us the cook with his stew pot and so on was placed and he was a sort of intent on this stew, but he was always watching us you see, which didn't worry us at all. It did worry us in that we weren't

02:30 achieving any friendliness. This applied to other guerrilla parties, other parties similar to ourselves. They had this same attitude from the Chinese guerrillas because they really had in mind as I said before, to take command of Malaya and they were our allies only for this period, as well we had a common enemy.

03:00 Of this I am referring again to the cook. My memory of their cook's situation was, of course he was always sitting there stirring a stew but the stew was so full of a lot of small fish like white bait and it was so stinky the Japs if they came anywhere near us they would smell this quite easily. It used to bother me but anyhow

03:30 they'd had all this success for so long and that's how he kept his eye on us if we were about and of course as we moved around with the guerrillas, each one was sort of, was sort of, in charge of us. And I'm talking about reporting back to their headquarters not as an operating team. And that went on all the time and

04:00 it was a sort of touchy feely all time. In regard to the two Australians who had never been captured. I should have looked up their names but one was Ross McKuir and the other fellow's name was Sheperd. I've got it there recorded somewhere and then a third one turned up later but these fellows came out while the war was still on. Peace hadn't been declared,

04:30 the guerrillas shifted them around apart from us you see. In other words the aim was to keep them away. They never told these fellows that they had two fellows from, never told them that present amongst them these parties from, dropped in from headquarters. They just kept them in ignorance of that and they kept us in ignorance of

05:00 the fact that there were two fellows around you see. Instead of rejoicing, having a meeting they just kept us aside. That and for other reasons these former refugees, or whatever you might call them, escapees, they had this resentful feeling towards these guerrillas. It wasn't a complete act of happy friendship because

05:30 they had this feeling, not only on that matter but treatment while in incarceration you might call it.

Can you tell us the story of you meeting these men?

Meeting them? They passed. They were not demonstrative because they were so weak you see. Physically weak from starvation or short food supply.

06:00 They just came up and a very low voice, serious look. They more or less looked as if they couldn't believe that they'd found a friend you know. We sent back news about them over the signals and so on.

Can you recall their first words to you?

No, I can't.

06:30 It was something like, "We've never been captured" or something like that. They had this, they were very serious, each one was very serious. He already had a big load that's. I should have kept in contact

with them because I wondered how after coming back to civilisation how they developed. I had a few letters early after the war but

07:00 I never really kept in contact with them.

They must have been a little bit overjoyed to see?

They were, they were. In fact one fellow Ross McKuir he was that way almost struck silent you know. He could hardly express himself. They were both that way really. Marvellous how subdued they were. You'd expect them to throw their hands up and hat up or something like that,

07:30 dancing around but they were too weak for that.

How did that make you feel?

Oh wonderful, wonderful. That's exactly what I was looking for really. And so I told the director of military intelligence when he said "We want to locate the prisoners of war camps and things like that" and I said "Every Australian soldier would be, this would be an ideal job, that's what they aim to do and

08:00 that's really what did spur us". Later on there was a third man but by that time they held him for quite a while after the war and then he turned up. By that time I was, that was about a month away. He was an English soldier, one of the Guard regiments I've forgotten what it was, but he. The Chinese guerrillas kept him

08:30 hidden for quite a while. They apparently intended to have these as hosts as a way of bargaining with the British.

Can you tell us the story of how you located the prisoner of war camps?

That's rather funny. The first part I always think of my action, my situation reminds me of or

09:00 Maxwell Smart reminds me of my situation. When we came out of the jungle we took up our position in Batu Pahat which is

Who were you with at that time?

The same party. We just came out of the jungle you see.

With as well as the Australians you'd found?

No, they haven't come yet within more or less minutes after this they do come.

09:30 Oh no a bit longer than that, a couple of days.

Sorry to interrupt you?

The interpreter had by this time, was one of the residents of Batu Pahat or at least he was supposed to be but he was actually an agent of the guerrillas you see. But he was a town man and he was dressed very well and a very smart knowledgeable man. I don't know what his true profession was but it would have

10:00 been something quite official, maybe say a lawyer or something of that status. He was fluent in both Japanese and Chinese and so on. I said we were going off to, had to find out the locations of the prisoners of war camps. It turned out later, I'll cover rather quickly, there were two that were found

10:30 and I'll report that back in a moment. Anyhow by this time the Japs are supposed not to know that they've lost the war and all the areas such as warehouses and whatever, this is a small town remember, any place that had any pretence of might at all such as warehouses and they were all guarded by sentries and they

11:00 of course were Japanese soldiers.

And you'd found now by this time that the war had ended?

Yes, I had yes.

You were in the jungle?

Yes, got a message over the radio you see and they told us "To go out and take possession of your own particular country". That meant of course the Japanese had to be informed. So how were we going to do that? Well the senior Japanese

11:30 in my area who was a colonel, who was in charge of not only the prisoner of war camp but Kluang airport and so we went off up to there. We haven't informed them that we're coming. We commandeered a car in Batu Pahat and to Kluang where the airport was.

12:00 **Who did you commandeer the car from?**

Someone in town. I don't know who it was.

How do you do that? You have to do that at gunpoint?

No well no, no, no. It was a very grateful and happy Chinese resident who was rather prosperous but he got it back almost immediately because we got one from the Japanese, but we went up to, drove up to Kluang from Batu Pahat and

- 12:30 incidentally this area, oh I'll say that later. Up to the airport and the entrance of course had this guardhouse at it and got out of the car, strolled up to the guard and he was quite nonplussed and I said, I made my remark about who I was and so on and "I wanted to let you know that peace has been declared, you lost the war"
- 13:00 and the guard didn't know what to do but then he, instead of showing fight at all or threat to me he turned and went to the command of the guard who was a lieutenant or something like that and the lieutenant then of course sent messages to the colonel at headquarters. While I was waiting there one of the men,
- 13:30 one of the soldiers told by the lieutenant of course, came up to me and said "Would you like a cup of tea?" When I'd seen Maxwell Smart in later years of course I always think of this situation. He's a bloke going in to win and what's he going to do - drink a cup of tea. I thought I gave it some consideration and I thought it rather funny when you think about it.
- 14:00 I thought "This could be doped", you see. It made me reconsider but of course, obviously I'd have to have a drink of something at some time in the near future, so I said 'Yes', so that gave me rather a strong front that I didn't really have.

Do you remember that cup of tea?

Yeah, I do. It was awful. It wasn't any good. Anyhow the point was the colonel had to report immediately you see

- 14:30 and instead of coming down, various officers came, say a lieutenant, a captain, a major. They all came one by one you know and they'd go back with the message. Nobody could believe that they'd lost the war and so on. They'd heard nothing about it. Eventually instead of the colonel coming down to where I was at the guardhouse, we were escorted up to where the colonel was and there was this headquarters. The
- 15:00 colonel was in the middle of the, and all his various officers were lined up beside him you know. So we had this combination of authority in front of us and anything you'd say to him would be referred to number 1, number 2, number 3 who knew a bit of English and something like that. And it took a whole day to negotiate that he had to acknowledge having lost the war
- 15:30 and it took another day to negotiate that he had to surrender his car and that sort of thing went on all the time.

Why did they believe you that the war was over?

They didn't actually. They pretended they didn't know and they had to get word from head quarters that it was over but they probably knew anyhow you see. Anyhow that went on, we took his car. I

- 16:00 took his car. I had an accident with it very shortly after this. Instead of being one prisoner of war camp we found another one. Each prisoner of war camp that we found was housing Indian prisoners of war and they were much better treated than the British or Australian prisoners of war because they were trying to cultivate
- 16:30 them to convert to joining what they called the Free India Army and fight the British to independent India. But that was the spiel that the Japanese told them. We made arrangements to free these Indians and so on. Got a special train up from Singapore
- 17:00 and got them on it because they weren't as sick as the Australians all those.

Did you meet any Australian POWs at that time?

Not as a camp no, there were none there. They were either in Singapore or Thailand you see. The point was before I had to make arrangements to get a train up to take them down to Singapore and they were

- 17:30 taken back to India either by ship or by plane you know. But the captain who, they were Sikhs, and the colonel was, and his brother, who was a captain. The colonel was a, you know, have the name Singh after their name.
- 18:00 I've found his name there a few days ago but it's too hard for me to pronounce. His brother and then a few others, they wanted to go back to Kuala Lumpur before they departed for India because pre-war they were stationed there of course and there were a lot of Indian people in Kuala Lumpur and they had special friends they wanted to see. I, by now, had the Japanese car, the Japanese colonel's car. He gave us the previous day
- 18:30 an old bomb that was on the strength of his, an old bomb and we'd lost so much time that we couldn't

and the way they parlayed our demands. It was too late, so I had to accept this little shaken up model and the next day came back and got the other one and that meant coming back from Batu Pahat.

19:00 Anyhow the point was these people wanted to see the friends in Kuala Lumpur. So this captain, he hadn't driven a car for so long, so I gave him the chance to drive this car and it was a Ford Mercury. It was a prestige car of those days you see and Ford had a factory, an assembly factory in Singapore. Of course the Ford name was big as far as

19:30 that part of the world was concerned. Anyhow we got in this car and we were going up to Kuala Lumpur. This, pre dawn, and we came to, the highway was really quite good but there were bridges blown out you see, so you'd take a bypass sort of thing. And we came to one point and the captain newly at the wheels of a vehicle, you know in control, was speeding

20:00 and we came to this spot where the bypass was and instead of that he went straight ahead and we went straight across the bridge area, where the bridge was broken and got to the other side. Of course the car was damaged quite a lot in the braking area and the recoil springs, what do you call them? Shock absorbers

20:30 and things like that. Anyhow, well we did this tour and looked at these friends and we were heading back. We had to head back quickly. This was the next day.

Where were you heading?

Kuala Lumpur. We were returning to where the camp was. And they'd go back to Singapore you see. On the way back, by this time the Indian forces were landing on the coast

21:00 at Penang and so on and coming in and taking over that area and we met up with some of these forces and of course these fellows knew each other and the captain and so on. We stayed there the night with these officers of the Indian regiment and this is where I had a colour experience. The officer, one of the officers in the occupying

21:30 force, the new force, he by this time had been told by the captain you know my part in the performance and these Indian officers were ignoring me and treating me, not outwardly rudely, but they were ignoring me and so on. And the captain fellow, my friend he told them about me you know, what my part was so this young officer said

22:00 to me "I hate you, I hate you. I'm grateful that you were brave and rescued my friends but I hate you because you are a white man" and that was right back then you know. Of course he knew what we'd been fighting for and of course I had to sleep on that one. Then we got back to

22:30 Kluang, where the camp was and we made preparations for their repatriation. There was something else I thought of while I was saying that. I can't remember what it was. What I say next is not it.

23:00 I was going back to Batu Pahat where the rest of my party was and as I went along the road of course I had no, hardly any brake power, and it took me a while to pull up but I saw this Chinese woman in a cooly hat and black dress as they wore and she was carrying some load, I forget what it was, but it was a bundle of twigs or some humble article

23:30 and I thought "I'd pull up and offer her a lift". I just remembered what I wanted to say too. As soon as I got out of there, of course a car went right past her because of the lack of brakes. As soon as she saw me, I had a slouch hat, soon as she saw me she went "Ooh ooh ooh" and ran in the other direction. Of course I thought she was frightened because she has seen me, a soldier

24:00 but it turns out I think, I think, she was afraid of being raped, but I only thought of that years later. But they'd gone through so much of that treatment that as soon as she saw this man.

An Australian? Maybe it was the Australian uniform do you think?

The fact that I was a man rather than the uniform. The uniform wouldn't have registered with her. I'll come to the point of the uniform in a moment.

24:30 So she ran off you see but I think I thought I'd be friendly. The point was I wanted her to see that the British were back, which was the way they saw it, and instead of that is, took scare and ran away but then consideration later made me realise she may have thought I was going to intend raping her. Anyhow your point about uniform there. When we came out of the jungle

25:00 and we went to this town Batu Pahat, the crowd of people, the whole population were excited and surrounding us and doing all sorts of cheerful acts. The kids of the town saw me and I was the only one with a slouch hat but because I had the slouch hat they picked on me because that's just where the Australians had been you see. They'd say "Hello Joe, hello Joe"

25:30 and they were doing various signs "V" for victory and various signs like that and for a moment I didn't realise that "Hello Joe" was a call to the Australians you see. I did realise eventually but they favoured me, the kids of the town, favoured me because of my slouch hat you see and of course everything I did they'd follow. They'd be like a group of

- 26:00 teenage people who follow around a prominent star or something like that. But the other thing is in regard to the slouch hat. This is what I was trying to recall a moment ago. The Malay people were encouraged by the Japanese to raid them, you know knock the Chinese around, and there were a lot of them who were actually
- 26:30 injured. They used to attack them with perangs and things like that. A perang was a tool of their farming very much in use you see, so they always had this weapon. So because of the Chinese being picked on so much and we wanted to let everybody know that the war was over. There was only myself and several Canadians who'd
- 27:00 showed ourselves at this stage. I went from Batu Pahat again to the town further up the coast which was called Muar and this was in late daytime, later afternoon and of course showed ourselves around there and then coming back. This is also to tell these Malays to stop slicing up the poor Chinese
- 27:30 which was happening so frequently then. And on the way back by this time it was dark and they knew the car was coming and apparently the only person driving the car would more likely be Chinese rather than Malay. Each time when these people virtually set up an ambush but of course they only had these weapons they didn't have
- 28:00 really lethal weapons for those times such as revolvers or rifles and things like that. They'd come out of the bush and stock the proceeding. There was another person driving of course but it was my job to stand out very quickly, get out, and let them see the slouch hat and tell them off for doing what they did and the British are back that sort of thing. And of course they'd be very contrite
- 28:30 and they'd disappear into the woods and so on and that was the beginning of the renewed presence of the British forces over there.

What became of the two Australians?

They were taken down to Singapore very quickly.

Had you met up with the regular Australian forces?

- 29:00 The prisoners of war? Had I met up with them? Not at that stage. Eventually I got down to Singapore and I was at Changi camp and most of them had been evacuated by then but there were still some around. The Brigadier Gallagher who was in charge of them he was still there. I don't know whether he'd been home and come back I don't know, I think he might have been, but he was a very quiet and rather sick man of course. I had
- 29:30 dinner with him of course and I got a load of wheat to take back to the population up where we were. They could only supply wheat because they didn't have enough rice and everybody wanted rice of course. And we had a drop from an aircraft. A couple of aircraft came over and dropped food and medicine and things like that. By that time we'd marshalled the talent in the
- 30:00 town and they'd helped in that thing. That was it. We got the two prisoners of war camp, we found two, they were all Indian prisoners of war as I said. They were quite well treated. Their equipment and clothing was still their issue but it was in good nick.

How long did you stay in Singapore?

- 30:30 It wasn't long probably three weeks I think. About that anyhow.

You must have been thinking about going home at this stage?

Yes, I was actually but I should have stayed really because they were trying to catch up to Japanese who had committed atrocious things against prisoners of war and I helped on that for a while.

- 31:00 **Can you describe what you did on that?**

Well see, as soon as the war was ending the Japanese dispersed these people who had bad records as far as atrocities and they tried to catch up to them. Well I and various members we were marshalled or whatever you might say collected by Cyril

- 31:30 Wild who had been a prisoner of war himself. A man of great repute. He had been with the British embassy in Tokyo for quite awhile. He was quite fluent in Japanese, Japanese speech, yes. As a matter of fact his photograph. I've got a book there. I can't pick it up.
- 32:00 He was so good that he was the real person to use for that job. Of course he'd been prisoner of war all those years and they couldn't spare him to let him go home after the war. He was a tall thin man, quite sick really, obviously he would be and he applied himself with great tenacity to catching these fellows and of course he carried out the interrogation,
- 32:30 but he needed a bit of help and several of us did that but we had to use an interrogator. I wasn't very good at that because I didn't have the language and bit difficult using an interpreter when the person whom you're questioning is a tricky character anyhow you see. I wasn't very good at it but at least I was helpful you know.

33:00 And we went to Sumatra and caught up to one bloke in particular who. I later read a book and he was the executor.

Do you remember his interrogation?

Only enough to identify him, that's all and then we took him back to Singapore. He had, a, instead of having his original

33:30 name, his proper name, he was under another name but we caught up to him. You know Aceh that is in the news at the moment. A village up there we found him. Of course we got word about it. We didn't do it on all our own talent.

How were you travelling around?

Well that time by plane, a Douglas it was. The Douglas was picking up Dutch people and so on to repatriate them and

34:00 another time I went on patrol boat. I've got a photograph of one of the accused on a patrol boat but I didn't look for it. I might find it somewhere. I don't know where it is. I'm getting uncomfortable, now I'm better.

34:30 Can you describe coming back to Australia for us?

Yes, well of course whilst in Singapore I did various jobs of helping at the headquarters as

35:00 I've already intimated. Well, Cyril Wild was on that job of catching up to various Japanese force members who had a bad record, accused of being atrocious with their directions of looking after the prisoners and other

35:30 people like that and there were quite a few accused of execution using the sword. Incidentally once again I go back to the area where I was at Kluang, Batu Pahat that area there. That's where the Australians met the Japanese and had their biggest fight with

36:00 the Japanese at that area. After the Japanese took over, you know won that area and went on to Singapore, they executed quite a lot of Australians right in that area. The ferocious persons whom I'm talking about, some of them were accused of participating in that so,

36:30 Cyril Wild being fluent in Japanese he was too precious to let back to the United Kingdom to take leave after being in prison so long. So he had to get straight into work and do what he could to catch up to these people who had a bad record, Japanese personnel. So that's what we were engaged in.

37:00 And of course, the prospect of going back to Australia while I could have taken it any time, somehow I decided when to go. And I think the ship, I came by ship and once again I can't remember why. I could have flown back. I think the ship was the Sicarcia [?], I can't quite be certain of that. I've got that name somewhere.

37:30 I came back by ship and I served a, I'll have to go back on the matter. Whilst in Singapore, by this time there was a lot of celebrating and lots of parties and there were the company of Australian paratroops sent over so I joined up with them and met them and

38:00 engaged in their festivities. Whilst there at one party, a person of Singapore had a toy snake that had segments cut in it and it used to wriggle quite convincingly as a snake would if you observed a snake. So I used to use this as my trick toy.

38:30 One of the Singapore people went down to the markets and got one for me. I used to use this as a toy and on the trip coming back from Singapore to Perth I used this many times and tricked many people with it and it was quite an item as far as the ship as concerned. The ship was already filled with a lot of people who had been prisoners of war,

39:00 either civilian or service people. And of course this snake was, I never let on it was a toy. It was invariably taken as a true snake. There were certain others on the ship who had monkeys or something like that to as a pet. Well as we got close to Perth there was a notice given out that "Anybody who had a pet

39:30 such as monkeys or so on must surrender them" and they would be executed. They wouldn't land in Australia. So I had these stewards and so on getting my food for Freddy, this was the snake, so as this notice went out I had to stop feeding Freddy and the stewards ceased to bring me raw egg and things like that that I pretended Freddy had.

40:00 When I got back into Australia I got off the ship at Melbourne and I was with one of my colleagues who did a similar drop and knock with me, separate part up near Kuala Lumpur. And he, the ship pulled into the wharf and John Leeth is this chap and his fellow at the wharf meeting him was

40:30 an old friend of his. So we went off. By this time they hadn't permitted passengers to get off the ship, so we jumped off from the top deck down to the wharf and buzzed off and to this fellow's home you see.

When did you get back to Australia? What was the date?

I don't know I can't remember.

'46?

Late '45 I think, be late November '45 I'd say. Anyhow,

41:00 we jumped off and this fellow took us to his mother's home for breakfast and he was a doctor of renown down in Melbourne. I can't remember his name. The point was that Mrs, his mother was preparing breakfast and I thought I'd introduce again, Freddy, and put him into action as he was before. I said to say Mrs

41:30 Smith, I don't know it wasn't her name. I said "Mrs Smith", she was at the kitchen getting breakfast things "Could you give me a raw egg for Freddy?" And she said "Freddy raw egg" and she turned to see what Freddy was and I had this snake. He was curling around my belt area there and his head would just come out of the shirt and wriggle around you see and of course

42:00 it looked quite real.